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HENRY OF GUISE;

OR,

THE STATES OF BLOIS.

VOL. III.

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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.

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HENRY OF GUISE;

OR,

THE STATES OF BLOIS.

CHAPTER I.

The convent of the Black Penitents was a very different building indeed, and a very different establishment altogether from that which the imagination of the reader may have raised up from the images furnished by dark and mysterious tales of Italian superstition. It was certainly intended to be, and was, in some degree, a place of voluntary penitence for women who conceived that they had led a peculiarly sinful life: but there were two classes of nuns confined there by their own good will,—one of which consisted of persons who had mingled long with the world, and really led an irregular life therein; while the other comprised a number of young women of high rank, who had never known any thing, either of the pleasures or the vices which the others now fled from, but who, either by a natural feeling of devotion, or the urgency of relations, had devoted themselves at an early period to the cloister.

In point of diet, fasts, prayers, and penances the order was certainly very strict; but the building in itself was any thing but a gloomy one, and a considerable portion of it, attached to the dwelling of the superior, was set apart for the occasional boarders, who took up their abode there, or for such ladies of high rank and station as might wish to absent themselves for a time from the cares and vanities of the world, and retire to a more intimate communion with God and their own heart, than they could enjoy in such a capital as that of France.

Such was the original intention of these apartments, and the destination of the institution altogether; but we well know how every thing entrusted to human management here is corrupted in process of time. The rooms which at first had been furnished simply, were soon decked with every sort of ornament; the visiter's table, as it was called, was separated from the ordinary board of the refectory; cooks and wine-growers did their best to gratify the palate; and, with the exception of the vowed nuns, those who sought shelter in the convent of the Black Penitents were condemned to but little abstinence, and knew only this difference from the world in general, that they had an opportunity of escaping obtrusive society when they thought fit.

It was in one then of the handsomest apartments of the building—to speak truth, one far handsomer than that occupied by the Queen-mother herself—that Marie de Clairvaut made her abode during the time she was confined in that building. No great restraint, indeed, was put upon her; but the word confinement was justified by the measures taken to prevent her quitting the convent, or holding communication with any one but the nuns themselves.

To this apartment the Prioress led her back again, after putting an end to her interview with Charles of Montsoreau, and though the good lady herself was by no means entirely weaned from the affections of this world, she thought it but befitting to read Mademoiselle de Clairvaut a brief lecture on the necessity of attaching herself to higher objects, and an exhortation to abandon earthly attachments, and dedicate herself to the service of Heaven. She hinted, indeed, that there could not be an order more worthy of entering into than the one of which she was an unworthy member; nor, indeed, one in which so many of the little pleasures of life could be combined with deep devotion.

Marie de Clairvaut was, at that moment, far more inclined to weep than smile; but it was scarcely possible not to feel amused at the exhortation of the Prioress; and certainly the greater degree of knowledge which the young lady had lately acquired of conventual life would have banished from her mind all desire to take those irrevocable vows which she had once looked

forward to with pleasure, even if love had not long before driven all such purposes from her mind.

Glad to be freed from importunity, and left to her own thoughts, she replied nothing to the good mother's words; and, as soon as she was gone, gave up her whole mind to the recollection of the interview which she had just had with him she loved. To her, too, that interview was a source of deep gratification; every memory of it was dear to her; every word that Charles of Montsoreau had spoken came back to her heart like the voice of hope, and giving way to the suggestions of that bright enchantress, she flattered herself with the expectation of seeing him again and again, even if the presence of the Duke of Guise in Paris failed to restore them both to liberty.

Previously to that period, she had been accustomed to see the Queen almost every day, and indeed more than once during the day; but, during the whole of that evening she saw her not again, and though she eagerly asked the next morning to be admitted to the presence of Catherine de Medici, the only answer that she obtained was, that though the Princess was expected again in the evening, she had not yet returned from the palace.

The second day passed as the first had done, but during the morning of the third the excitement of the city had communicated itself even to the inmates of the convent. The portress, the lay sisters, the visitors, obtained the news of the hour from those without, and communicated it to the nuns within. Nor did two of those nuns, who had entered into some degree of intimacy with the fair prisoner, fail to bring her, every half-hour, intelligence of what was passing without.

The first news brought was that the guards in the streets of Paris had been all changed and doubled during the preceding night, and that the Holy League and the Court were in continual agitation, watching each other's movements. One of the nuns whispered that people said, it had been proposed by the Duke of Epernon, to murder the Duke of Guise at the very door of that convent, as he came to visit the Queen-mother; and others declared, she added, that the Duke had vowed he would not rest till he had taken the crown off Henry's head, and put it on that of the Cardinal de Bourbon.

Then came intelligence that a large body of the Swiss guards had just entered Paris, and were seen marching rapidly down the Rue St. Honoré, with their fifes silent, and their drums still. Hourly after that came the news of fresh troops entering the city, and fresh rumours of manifold designs and purposes against the life of the Duke of Guise. His house was to be attacked by the French and Swiss guards, and his head to be struck off in the Place de Grève: he was to be shot by an assassin, placed at one of the windows of an opposite house, the first time he came out; and some said that Villequier had found means to bribe Lanecque, his cook, to poison him that night at supper, as well as all who were with him.

The various scenes, and the dangers and difficulties which she had lately encountered, had given Marie de Clairvaut a far greater knowledge of the world, and of how the important events of the world take place, than was possessed by any of her companions; and she assuredly did not believe a thousandth part of all the different rumours that reached her. The reiteration of those rumours, however, gave her some apprehensions for her great relation; and when towards the evening she was visited by the Prioress, and found that, beyond all doubt, every gate of the city, except the porte St. Honoré, was closed, her fears became much greater, seeing plainly that it was the design of the Court to hem the Duke in, within the walls of Paris, deprived, as they believed him to be, of all assistance from his friends without.

The night passed over, however, in tranquillity; and when, at an early hour, the young lady rose, she was informed, as she had expected, that a great part of the rumours of the preceding day were false or exaggerated. No Swiss, it was now said, had arrived, except a very small body; the Duke of Guise had been seen on horseback with the King; and the mind of Marie de Clairvaut became reassured in regard to her uncle. The Prioress herself--though somewhat given to fear, and like many other persons, absolutely enjoying a little apprehension in default of other excitement--acknowledged that all seemed likely to go well.

But this state of security was soon changed. The report regarding the arrival of the Swiss had only forerun the event by a few hours, for the sound of drums and trumpets heard from the side of the Cemetery of the Innocents towards seven o'clock in the morning, announced to the Parisians that a large body of troops had been introduced in the night, without the city in general knowing it; and in a few minutes after the movements of these forces evidently showed that some grand stroke was to be struck by the Court against its enemies. The Place de Grève was next occupied by a considerable force of mixed Swiss and French guards, favoured in their entrance by the *Prevôt des Marchands*, and led by the notorious *Marquis d'O*. Various other points, such as bridges and market-places, were seized upon by the troops; and the greatest activity seemed to reign in the royal party, while that of the Duke of Guise and the League, remained perfectly still and inactive, as if thunderstruck at this sudden display of energy.

News of all these proceedings reached Marie de Clairvaut in the convent, accompanied with such circumstances of confirmation, that she could not doubt that the intelligence was partly true. But for a short time after the troops were posted, every thing seemed to relapse into tranquillity, except that from time to time reports were brought to the convent parlour, of citizens, and especially women, being treated with great insolence and grossness by the soldiery.

Crillon himself was heard to swear that any citizen who came abroad with a sword should be hung to his door-post, while worse was threatened to the wives and daughters of the burghers, if the slightest resistance was made to the troops. The portress brought news that all the houses and shops in the Rue St. Denis and the Rue St. Honoré were closed; and the Prioress herself thought it was high time to cause the convent gates to be shut and barred, and even that door which led into what was called the rector's court, and which usually stood open, to be closed and fastened with large chains.

At length tidings were brought that the first open resistance of the people had commenced; that blood had been shed; and it was rumoured that Crillon himself, attempting to take possession of the Place Maubert with two companies of Swiss and one of French guards, had been opposed by the scholars of the University and the citizen guard, and forced to retreat without effecting his object.

The terror of the Prioress was now extreme; the sound of horses galloping here and there with the most vehement speed, could be heard even in the parlour of the convent, and towards nine o'clock the roll of distant musketry borne by the wind completed the terror of the poor nuns.

It was evident now to Marie de Clairvaut that a struggle had commenced between the Monarch and the people of the capital, on which depended the safety, perhaps the life, of the Duke of Guise, and, in a great degree, her own fate and happiness. In that struggle she could take no part; and, situated as she was, she could gain no relief even from hearing any exact account of how it proceeded from time to time.

The fears of the good superior of the convent had driven her by this time to the resource of prayer. All the nuns were ordered to assemble in the chapel; and Marie de Clairvaut, feeling that none at that moment had greater need of heavenly protection than herself, prepared to follow, after listening for a few minutes, alone in her chamber, to the distant roll of musketry which still went on; when suddenly the Prioress returned in great haste with a paper in her hand, and apparently in much agitation and alarm.

"There, there," she said, thrusting the paper into Marie de Clairvaut's hands, "that is from the Queen! Do what you like! Act as you like! I would not go out for the whole world, for just through the grating I have seen a Swiss officer carried by, all dropping with blood as they bore him along the streets. I will go to prayers; I will go to prayers!"

The note from the Queen-mother was very brief.

"You know, mademoiselle," it said, "that you have not been kept where you are by my orders. I would fain have set you free two nights ago by any means in my power, if meddling fools on the one side, and cowardly fools on the other, had not frustrated my plan. I have now taken the responsibility upon myself of ordering the gates to be opened to you. The man who brings you this is brave and to be trusted; and what I have to entreat of you is, if I have shown you any kindness, to go with all speed to the hotel of my good cousin of Guise, and beseech him to do his best to allay the tumult, so far, at least, that I myself may come to him with safety. The scenes that you will meet with may be terrible, but you have that blood in your veins which does not easily shrink from the aspect of danger."

Marie de Clairvaut might be more timid than Catherine de Medici believed; but, when she thought of freedom, and of being delivered from the power of those whom she detested, to dwell once more with those she loved, she felt that scarcely any scene would be so terrible as to deter her from seeking such a result. She remarked, however, that the Queen did not once mention the name of Charles of Montsoreau, or allude to his fate. "What," she asked herself, "is he still to be kept a prisoner, while I am set at liberty? If so, liberty is scarcely worth having."

She paused, and thought for a moment, and then the hope crossed her mind of setting him at liberty herself.

"Surely," she said, "I could trace my way back to his apartments. I remember every turning well; and then, by bringing him through here, in the confusion and terror that now reign in the convent, I could easily give him his liberty too."

The more she thought of it, the more feasible the scheme seemed to be; and catching up an ordinary veil to throw over her head, she ran down into the apartments of the Queen, which she found, as she expected, quite vacant. She had no difficulty in discovering the corridor that led towards the rector's court. At the end there was a door which was locked, but the key was in it, and she passed through. Another short passage led her to the room where she had waited for the Queen, and where she had listened to Charles of Montsoreau singing; and then with a beating and an anxious heart she hurried on rapidly to the chamber where she had seen him last.

All the bolts were shot, showing her that he was still there; but exactly opposite was an open door at the top of a small staircase, which seemed to lead to a waiting-room below, for she could distinctly hear the tones and words of two men of the lower class talking over the events that were taking place without.

Gently closing the door at the top of the stairs, Marie de Clairvaut locked and bolted it as quietly and noiselessly as possible. Her heart beat so violently, however, with agitation, that she

could scarcely hear any thing but its pulsation, though she listened breathlessly to ascertain if the slight noise of the lock had not attracted attention. All was still, however, and she gently undid the fastenings of the opposite door.

Charles of Montsoreau was seated at the table, and lifted his eyes as she entered with a sad and despairing look, expecting to see no one but the attendant. Marie was in his arms in a moment, however, and holding up her finger to enjoin silence, she whispered, "Not a word, Charles; but come with me, and we shall be safe! Every one is in the chapel at prayers; orders are given for my liberation; and in five minutes we may be at the Hôtel de Guise."

"What are all those sounds," demanded her lover in the same tone, "those sounds which I have heard in the streets? I thought I heard the discharge of firearms."

"I fear," she answered, "that it is my uncle's party at blows with that of the King. I know but little myself, however; only that we may make our escape if we will. I will lead you, Charles; I will lead you this time."

"Alas!" said Charles of Montsoreau as he followed her rapidly, "they have taken my sword from me;" but Marie ran on with a step of light, taking care however to lock the doors behind them as she passed to prevent pursuit.

As she had never been in the courtyard since the day of her first arrival, she met with some difficulty in finding her way thither from the Queen's apartments: haste and agitation indeed impeding her more than any real difficulty in the way. At length, however, it was reached, and was found vacant of every one but the old portress, who stood gazing through a small iron grating at what was passing without.

"Open the door, my good sister," said Marie de Clairvaut touching her arm. "Of course the Prioress has given orders for you to let me pass."

"Yes, to let you pass, my sister," replied the portress, "for I suppose you are the young lady she meant; but not to let any body else pass." And she ran her eye over the figure of Charles of Montsoreau.

"Why, surely," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "you would not stop the gentleman who is going to protect me through the streets."

"Why, I do not know," replied the portress, still sturdily setting her face against their passage; "there was another person waiting on the outside to show you the way, till just a minute ago. Where he's gone, I don't know, but he seemed the fitter person of the two, for he was an ecclesiastic. I have heard, too, of some one being confined up above, by Monsieur Villequier's orders, and as the rector's court belongs to him, they say I must take care what I am about; so I'll just ring the bell and inquire."

"I will save you the trouble of doing that, my good lady," replied Charles of Montsoreau; and stepping quietly forward, he put her gently but powerfully back with his left hand, while with his right he turned the key in the great lock of the wicket, and threw it open. The portress made a movement of her hand to the bell; but then thinking better of it, did not ring; and Marie and her lover, without further opposition, passed at once into the streets of Paris.

There were very few people in the Rue St. Denis, but on looking up and down on either side, there were seen a party of horsemen, apparently halted, at the farther end of the street, on the side nearest to the country, and a number of persons farther down, passing and repassing along one of the cross streets. Some way farther up, between the fugitives and the party of horsemen we have mentioned, were two figures, one of which was evidently dressed in the robes of an ecclesiastic, and both gazing down towards the convent, as if watching for the appearance of some one.

The moment the young Count and Marie de Clairvaut appeared, the two figures walked on rapidly in a different direction, and were lost immediately to their sight by turning down another street. There was nothing apparent that could alarm the fugitives in any degree, and though distant shouts and cries were borne upon the air, yet the sound of musketry had ceased, which gave greater courage to Marie de Clairvaut. She needed indeed some mitigation of her apprehensions, for the success which she met with in rescuing her lover had been far from increasing her courage in the same proportion that it had been diminished by the very agitation she had gone through. Drawing the thick veil over her face, and as far as possible over her person, she clung to Charles's arm, and hurried on with him, directing him as far as her recollection of the city of Paris would serve. It was long, however, since she had seen it; and although the general direction which she took was certainly right, yet many a turning did she unnecessarily take by the way.

Still, however, they hurried on, till turning suddenly into one of the small streets which led round into the Rue St. Honoré itself, the scene of fierce contention which was going on in the capital was displayed to their eyes in a moment.

Across the street, within fifty yards of the turning, was drawn an immense chain from post to post, and behind it was rolled an immense number of barrels filled with sand and stones, and

rendered fixed and immovable, against the efforts of any party in front at least, by carts taken off the wheels, barrows, and paving-stones. Behind this barrier again appeared an immense multitude of men armed with various sorts of weapons snatched up in haste. The front row, indeed, was well furnished with arquebuses, while pistols, swords, daggers, and pikes gleamed in abundance behind. Several of the persons in front were completely armed in the defensive armour of the time; and in a small aperture which had been left at the corner between the barricade and the houses, sufficient only for two people to pass abreast when the chain was lowered, an officer was seen in command, with a page behind carrying his plumed casque.

The lower windows of all the houses throughout Paris were closed, and the manifold signs, awnings, and spouts, as well as the penthouses which were sometimes placed to keep off the rain and wind from some of the principal mansions, had all been suddenly removed, in order that any bodies of soldiery moving through the streets might be exposed, without a place of shelter, to the aim of the persons above, who might be seen at every window glaring down at the scene below. There too were beheld musketoons, arquebuses, and every other sort of implement of destruction; and where these had not been found, immense piles of paving-stones had been carried up to cast down upon the objects of popular enmity.

Between the two fugitives and the barricade were drawn up two companies of Swiss and one of French infantry; and though standing in orderly array, and displaying strongly the effects of good military discipline, yet there was a certain degree of paleness over the countenances of the men, and a look of hesitation and uncertainty about their officers, which showed that they felt not a little the dangerous position in which they were placed. No shots were fired on either side however, and the only movement was amongst the people, who were seen talking together, with their leaders stirring amongst them, while from time to time those who were below shouted up to those in the windows above.

Without the slightest apparent fear of the soldiers, who were thus held at bay, two or three people from time to time separated themselves from the populace, and coming out under or over the chain, passed completely round the guards to the opposite corner of the street, and appeared to be laying a plan for forming another barricade in that quarter, so as completely to inclose the soldiery.

At the sight of all these objects Marie de Clairvaut naturally clung closer to the arm of her lover, and both paused for a moment in order to judge what was best to do. An instant's consideration however sufficed, and Charles of Montsoreau led her on to that part of the barricade where the chain was the only obstacle to their further progress, passing as he did so along the whole face of the French and Swiss soldiers, not one of whom moved or uttered a word to stop them as they proceeded. At the chain, however, they met with a more serious obstacle. The officer whom they had seen in command at that point had now turned away, and was speaking to some people behind, and a rough-looking citizen, armed with a steel cap and breastplate, dropped the point of his spear to the young Count's breast saying, "Give the word, or you do not pass!"

"I do not know the word," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "But I pray you let me pass, for I am one of the friends and officers of the Duke of Guise."

"If you were you would know the word," replied the man. "Keep back, or I will run the pike into you."

"I could not know the word," answered the young Count, "if I had been long absent from the Duke, as I have been, and were hastening to join him, as I now am."

"Keep back, I say," cried the man who was no way fond of argument. "You will repent if you do not keep back."

Charles of Montsoreau was about to call to the officer he saw before him, but at that moment the other walked on amidst the people, and was seen no more.

"Let us try another street," cried Marie de Clairvaut; "let us try another street, Charles." And following this suggestion they hurried back, and took another street farther to the left.

They now found themselves in a new scene; no soldiers were there, but dense masses of people were beheld in every direction, and barricades formed or forming at every quarter. Where they were not complete the lady and her lover passed without difficulty, and almost without notice. One of the young citizens, indeed, as he helped her over a large pile of stones, remarked that her small feet ran no risk of knocking down the barricade; and an old man who was rolling up a tun to fill a vacant space, paused to let her pass, and gazing with a sort of fatherly look upon her and her lover, exclaimed, "Get ye gone home, pretty one; get ye gone home. Take her home quick, young gentleman; this is no place for such as she is."

These were all the words that were addressed to them till they again reached another barrier; but there again the word was demanded with as much dogged sullenness as ever, and the young Count, now resolved to force his way by some means, determined rather to be taken prisoner by the people and to demand to be carried to the Hôtel de Guise, than be driven from barrier to barrier any longer. He remembered, however, the degree of civility which had been shown to him

by Chapelle Marteau some time before, and he demanded of the man who opposed him at the chain if either that personage or Bussi le Clerc were there. The man replied in the negative, but seemed somewhat shaken in his purpose of excluding him, by his demand for persons so well known and so popular.

At that moment, however, Charles of Montsoreau caught the sight of a high plume passing amongst the people at some distance, and the momentary glance of a face that he recollected.

"There is Monsieur de Bois-dauphin," he cried; "in the name of Heaven call him up here, that he may put an end to all this tedious opposition." The man did not seem to know of whom it was he spoke, but pointing forward with his hand, the young Count exclaimed, "That gentleman with the plume! that gentleman with the tall red plume!"

The word was passed on in a moment, and the officer approached the barrier, when Charles of Montsoreau instantly addressed him by the name of Bois-dauphin, begging him to give them admittance within the barricade, and then adding in a low voice, that he had with him the Duke's ward, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, who had just made her escape from the enemies of the House of Guise, and was so terrified that she could scarcely support herself any longer.

"You mistake, sir," replied the officer; "I am not Bois-dauphin, but Chamois: but I remember your face well at Soissons; the Count of Logères, if I am right."

The Count gave a sign of affirmation, while Marie de Clairvaut looked up in his face with an expression of joy and relief, and the officer immediately added, "Down with the chain directly, my good friends. You are keeping out the Duke's best friends and relations."

The men round the chain hastened eagerly to obey, but some difficulty was experienced in removing the chain, as the barrels--or barriques, as they are called in France, and from which the barriers called barricades took their name--pressed heavily upon it, and prevented it from being unhooked.

Charles of Montsoreau was just about to pass under with his fair charge as the most expeditious way, when there came a loud cry from the end of the same street by which they had themselves come thither, of "The Queen! the Queen! Long live the good Queen Catherine!" And rolling forward with a number of unarmed attendants came one of the huge gilded coaches of the time, passing at great risk to itself and all that it contained, through or over the yet incomplete barriers farther up in the street.

At the barricade where Charles of Montsoreau now was, however, the six horses by which the vehicle was drawn were brought to a sudden stop, and notwithstanding her popularity, which, at this time, was not small, the citizens positively refused to remove the barricade, although the Queen entreated them in the tone of a suppliant, and assured them that she was going direct to the Hôtel de Guise. Some returned nothing but a sullen answer, some assured her it was impossible, and would take hours to accomplish; and Monsieur de Chamois, who apparently did not choose to be seen actually aiding or directing the people in the formation of the barricades, retreated amongst the multitude, and left them to act for themselves.

At that moment the eye of Catherine de Medici fell upon Charles of Montsoreau, and she beckoned him eagerly towards her.

"You are here, of course," she said, "upon the part of the Duke."

"Not so indeed, madam," he replied; "I have but this moment made my escape from that place where I have been so long and so unjustly detained."

"Your escape!" she exclaimed in a tone that could not be affected. "Villequier has betrayed me. He promised you should be set at liberty yesterday morning. And you too, Marie," she said looking at the young Count's fair companion. "You surely received the order for your liberation that I sent."

"Safely, madam," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "and thank your Majesty deeply. But they have refused to let us pass at several barriers, otherwise I should certainly have executed your Majesty's commands."

"This is most unfortunate," said the Queen. But pray, Monsieur de Logères, exert your influence with these people as far as possible. The welfare, perhaps the very salvation of the state, depends upon my speaking with the Duke of Guise directly."

"I will do my best, madam," replied the young Count; "but I fear I shall not be able to do much. I will leave her under your protection, madam, and see."

The Queen made him place Marie de Clairvaut in the carriage beside her: and having done this, he turned to the barrier and spoke to those who surrounded that point where the chain had been lowered to let him pass, with far more effect than he had anticipated. To remove the barricade, the people said, was utterly impossible; but if her Majesty would descend and betake herself to her chair which was seen carried by her domestics behind her, they would do what they could to make the aperture large enough for her to pass.

With this suggestion Catherine de Medici, who had no personal fears, complied at once, and seated herself in the rich gilt-covered chair which followed her. She was about to draw the curtains round her and bid the bearers proceed, but her eye fell upon Marie de Clairvaut; and after a moment's hesitation between compassion and queenly state, she said, "Poor child, thou art evidently like to drop: come in here with me; there is room enough for thee also, and the Queen is old enough not to mind her garments being ruffled. Quick, quick," she added, seeing Marie hesitate; and without further words the fair girl took her place by the Queen.

Although the chairs of those times were very different in point of size from those which we see (and now alas! rarely see) in our own, yet Mademoiselle de Clairvaut felt that she pressed somewhat unceremoniously on her royal companion; but Catherine de Medici, now that the act was done, smiled kindly upon her, and told her not to mind; and the bearers taking up the chair carried it on, while the populace rolled away one of the tuns to permit its passing through the barricade. The Queen's train of attendants pressed closely round the chair, and Charles of Montsoreau followed amongst them as near as he could to the vehicle, the people shouting as they went, "Long live the Queen! Long live the good Queen Catherine!"

At all the barriers a way was made for her to pass, but still the multitudes in the streets were so thick, and the obstacles so many, that nearly three quarters of an hour passed, and the Hôtel de Guise was still at some distance.

At length Catherine de Medici drew back the curtains of gilt leather, and beckoned the young Count to approach, saying, as soon as he was near, "Pray, Monsieur de Logères, go on as fast as possible, and let the Duke know that I am coming. I fear that with all these delays he may have gone forth ere I reach his hotel. And hark, Monsieur de Logères," she continued, "if out of pure good will I once afforded you one hour of happiness that you did not expect, remember it now; and should chance serve, speak a word to the Duke in favour of my purposes. You understand? Quick--go on!"

Charles of Montsoreau hastened on at the Queen's bidding, and having now heard the password often repeated amongst the citizens, met with no opposition in making his way to the Hôtel de Guise. The only difficulty that he encountered was in the neighbourhood of the mansion itself, for the street was so thickly crowded with people and with horses, that it was scarcely possible to approach the gates. Every thing was hurry and confusion too, and the dense mass of people collected in that spot was not like an ordinary crowd, either fixed to one place around the object of their attention, or moving in one direction in pursuit of a general object; but, on the contrary, it was struggling and agitated, by numbers of persons forcing their way through in every different direction, so that it was with the greatest possible labour and loss of time that any one advanced at all. The great bulk of those present were armed, and amidst corslets, and swords, and brassards, heavy boots and long spurs, Charles of Montsoreau, totally unarmed as he was, found the greatest possible difficulty in forcing his way, although, probably, in point of mere personal strength he was more than equal to any one there present.

Long ere he could reach the gate of the hotel, there was a loud cry of, "The Queen! the Queen! long live Queen Catherine!" And the crowd rolling back, as if by common consent, swept him away far from the spot which he had gained, and nearly crushed him by the pressure. At some distance he caught a sight of the Queen's chair, but it stopped at the edge of the crowd, and the movements that he saw in that part of the mass made him believe that Catherine was descending from the vehicle, intending to proceed on foot.

He doubted not that the Queen's attendants, who were very numerous, would keep off the multitude; and even the rolling back of the people upon himself evinced that they were inclined to show her every respect. But still feeling that all he loved on earth was there, he naturally strove to see over the heads of the people. It was in vain that he did so, however, for between him and the line along which the Queen was passing was a sea of waving plumes of every height and colour, and all that he could discover was, how far she had proceeded on her way to the gates, by the rush of the people closing up behind her as soon as she had passed.

Just as she was entering the mansion a considerable degree of confusion was created in the crowd by one of the horses, held not far from the place where Charles of Montsoreau stood, either frightened by the noise, or pressed upon by the people, beginning to kick violently. The man whom he first struck was luckily well covered with defensive armour; but he was knocked down notwithstanding, and all the rest rushed back, pressing upon the others behind them in confusion and dismay.

Charles of Montsoreau, however, took advantage of the opportunity to make his way forward; but just as he was so doing he was encountered by the Marquis de Brissac hurrying eagerly forward through the crowd. He was dressed in his ordinary clothes, and armed with nothing but his sword; but there was fire and eagerness in his eyes, and he seized the young Count by the hand, exclaiming, "I am delighted to have found you, Logères. I wanted a man of action and of a good head. Come with me! come with me quick! or we shall have more mischief done than is at all needful. They have begun firing again! There!--Don't you hear?"

"I hear now," replied the Count, "but I did not pay attention to it before. I would come with you willingly. Monsieur de Brissac, but I wish to see the Duke. He does not know yet that I am at liberty: neither have I a sword."

"The Duke cannot see you now," cried Brissac, still holding the Count by the arm. "The Queen and her people are with him. I will get you a sword. Come with me, come with me. Here, fellow, give the Count your sword." And taking hold of the baldric of one of the men near, he made him unbuckle it, and threw it over the Count's shoulders.

For Brissac, who was well known to almost every body there, the people now made way at least in some degree; and followed by the young Count he hurried on, till they both could breathe somewhat more at liberty.

In the mean time the sound of the musketry was heard increasing every moment, and Brissac after listening for a moment exclaimed, "It comes from the *Marché Neuf*. By Heavens! Logères, we must put a stop to this, or they will take up the same music all over the town, and we shall have those poor devils of Swiss slaughtered to a man. Who is that firing at the *Marché Neuf*?" he demanded at the first barrier they reached.

"Our people," replied the captain of the quarter, "are firing upon the soldiers in the market-place I hear."

"Quick, Arnault; quick!" cried Brissac. "Get the keys of the slaughter-house and bring them after me with all speed! Come on, Logères, come on!" he continued, unable to refrain from a joke even in the exciting and terrible scene that was going on. "The King will find, I am afraid, that he has brought these *pigs* to a bad *market*, as the good ladies of the halle say. We must save as many of them from being butchered as we can, however." And running on, followed by two or three persons from the different barriers that they passed, they soon reached the corner of the *Marché Neuf*, where an extraordinary and terrible scene was exposed to their eyes.

The market, which was somewhat raised above a low street that passed by its side, was a large open space, having at that time neither booths nor penthouses to cover the viands, usually there exposed, from the sun: each vendor that thought fit spreading out his own little canvass tent over his goods when he brought them. On the side by which Brissac and Charles of Montsoreau approached, there was a low wall, not a yard high, separating the market from the street which passed by the side, with some steps up to the former, as well as two or three open spaces to give ingress; and on the other side was a long low range of covered slaughter-houses, with tall buildings overtopping them beyond.

In the midst of this open space, cooped in by barricades on every side, and surrounded by tall houses with innumerable windows, was a body of about eight hundred Swiss. They were standing firm in the midst of the place, forming a three-sided front, with their right and left resting on the slaughter-houses; and while their front rank poured a strong and well-directed but ineffectual fire upon the two barricades opposite, the second rank endeavoured to pick off their assailants at the different windows.

In the meanwhile, however, from those windows and barricades was poured in upon the unhappy Swiss a tremendous fire, almost every shot of which told. The people at the barriers rose, fired, and then bent down again behind their defences, while the men at the windows kept up a still more formidable, but more irregular discharge, sometimes firing almost altogether, as if by common consent, sometimes picking off, here and there, any of their enemies they might fix upon; so that at one moment, the whole sweeping lines of the tall houses were in one blaze of fire and cloud of smoke; and the next, the flashes would drop from window to window, over each face of the square, like some artificial firework.

Such was the scene of confusion and destruction which burst upon the eyes of Brissac and Charles of Montsoreau when they entered the square of the *Marché Neuf*. The fire of the barrier which they passed was instantly stopped, but in other places it was still going on and Brissac, without the slightest hesitation, jumped at once upon the low wall we have mentioned, and waved his hat in the air, shouting loudly to cease firing. Some cessation instantly took place, but still not altogether; and Charles of Montsoreau, rapidly crossing the marketplace to command the men at the opposite barricade to stop, was slightly wounded in the arm by a ball from one of the windows.

It luckily happened that the baldric which had been procured for him by Brissac bore the colours of the League and the cross of Lorraine embroidered on the front; and the defenders of the barrier stopped instantly at his command. When that was accomplished, he turned to rejoin Brissac, and as he went, called to the people at the lower windows of the houses to stop firing in the name of the Duke of Guise, and to pass the same order up to those above them. The Swiss had ceased immediately, very glad of any truce to an encounter in which fifty or sixty of their number had already fallen, while many more were seriously wounded.

The keys which Brissac had sent for had by this time arrived; and, accompanied by the young Count, he advanced, hat in hand, to the officer in command of the Swiss, who met him half way with a sad but calm and determined countenance.

"You see, sir," said Brissac, "that it is perfectly impossible for you to contend against the force opposed to you."

"Perfectly," replied the officer; "every street is a fortress, every house a redoubt. But we never

intended to contend, and indeed had received orders to retire, but could not do so on account of the barricades, when suddenly some shot was fired from behind those buildings; and whether it was a signal to commence the massacre, or whether the people thought that we had fired, I know not, but they instantly began to attack us; and here are more than sixty of my poor fellows butchered without cause."

"There is only one plan to be pursued, sir," replied Brissac, "in order to save you. You must instantly lay down your arms."

"Were the people opposed to me soldiers, sir," replied the officer, "I would do so at a word; but the people seem in a state of madness, and the moment we are disarmed they might fall upon us all, and butcher us in cold blood--yourself and all, for aught I know."

"I have provided against that, sir," replied Brissac. "Here are the keys of those buildings, which will shelter you from all attack, I must not put in your hands a fortress against the citizens of Paris; so that while you retain your weapons you cannot enter; but the moment you lay down your arms, I will give you that shelter, and pledge my word for your protection."

The joy which spread over the officer's countenance at this offer plainly showed, what neither word nor look had done before, how deeply he had felt the terrible situation in which he was placed.

"It shall be done this instant," he said; and returning to his men, while Brissac unlocked the gates, he made them pile their arms in the market-place, amidst a deafening shout from the people on all sides. The Swiss then marched, rank by rank, into the place of shelter thus afforded them; and Brissac, bowing low to the commander, who entered the last, said with a smile, which the other returned but faintly, "In name, my dear sir, the exchange you are just making is not an agreeable one; but I am sure you will find that this slaughterhouse is rather a more comfortable position than the one from which I have just delivered you."

The Marquis then caused a guard of the citizens to be placed over the arms of the Swiss; and turning to Charles of Montsoreau, he said, "Come, let us quick to the new bridge. The King used to say of me, Monsieur de Logères, that I was good for nothing, either on the sea or on the land. I think he will find to-day that I am good for something on the pavement."

Thus saying he led the way back through the barrier; and Charles of Montsoreau, having more leisure now than before to observe the countenances and demeanour of the different people around, could not help thinking that older and more skilful soldiers than the citizens of Paris could boast were busy in directing the operations of the populace in different parts of the city. The scene was a strange and extraordinary one altogether; the streets were absolutely swarming with people, and crowds were hurrying hither and thither through every open space, but were still kept in dense masses by the constant obstruction of the barricades.

Hastening on through the midst of these masses with Brissac, the young nobleman's eye ran hastily over all the crowds that he passed, when suddenly, at the end of one of the largest streets, which rose between the dark gigantic houses on either side, with a gentle acclivity from the spot where he then stood, he saw amongst the various groups which were moving rapidly along or across it, one which attracted his attention more particularly than the rest. It was at that moment coming down the street, but proceeding in a somewhat slanting direction towards the corner of another small street, not fifty yards from the spot where he then was. There were two figures in it, in regard to which he could not be deceived: the one nearest him was the Abbé de Boisguerin, the second was his own brother, Gaspar de Montsoreau; and he could not help imagining that another whom he saw leading the way was that personage who had first called upon him on his arrival in Paris, named Nicolas Poulain.

Before he could recollect himself, an exclamation of surprise had called the attention of Brissac; but remembering how much his brother had excited the indignation of the Duke of Guise, and that his very life might be in danger if taken in the streets of Paris at that time, Charles of Montsoreau only answered in reply to Brissac's questions, that he had fancied he saw somebody whom he knew.

"There goes worthy Master Nicolas Poulain," said Brissac, "and the good Curé of St. Genevieve, as zealous in our cause as any one; but we can't stop to speak with them just now." And he was hurrying on, but Charles of Montsoreau stopped him, saying,

"For my part, Monsieur de Brissac, I shall return to the Hôtel de Guise. The Duke, I dare say, has concluded his interview with the Queen by this time, and I much wish to speak with him."

"Well, you cannot miss your way," cried Brissac. "Take that first turning to the left, and then the third to the right, and it will lead you straight to the Porte Cochère."

Charles of Montsoreau nodded his head, and hurried on, with manifold anxieties and apprehensions in his bosom, which twenty times he pronounced to be absurd, but which, nevertheless, he could not banish by any effort of reason.

CHAP. II.

We must now return to mark what was passing at another point in the capital, an hour or two earlier than the events narrated in the end of the last chapter. The Duke of Guise sat in a cabinet in his hotel, with his sword laid upon the table before him, which also bore a pen, and ink, and paper, and some open letters. His foot was resting on a footstool, his dress plain but costly, and not one sign of any thing like preparation for the stirring events, which were to take place that day, apparent in either his looks, his apparel, or his demeanour.

Beside him booted, and in some degree armed, stood the Count of St. Paul; while Bois-dauphin, who had just had his audience, was leaving the cabinet by a low door, and the Duke, bending his head, appeared listening with the utmost tranquillity to what his friend was telling him.

"Then the matter is done," he said, as soon as St. Paul had concluded. "The Place Manbert is in the hands of the people, and may be made a Place d'Armes. Bois-dauphin tells me that the soldiers under Tinteville, at the Petit Pont, are barricaded on all sides and cannot move. You give me the same account of the Marché Neuf, the same is the case with the Grève, the French guard under the Chatelet are hemmed in all round, the Cemetery of the Innocents is invested on all sides, and Malivaut, I understand, has been driven from his post in great disorder. This being done, St. Paul, you see these troops of the King's are not exactly in fortresses, but in prisons; and how Biron, or Crillon, or the King himself, could have committed the extraordinary error--all of them being men of experience--how they could have committed the extraordinary error, I say, of dividing their soldiery in the narrow streets and squares of such a city as Paris, sending them far from the palace, and leaving them without communication with each other, I cannot conceive. However, they are all in our hands, and what we must think of is, to make a moderate use of our success. Try to keep the people from any active aggression, St. Paul; let them stand upon the defensive only, spread amongst them different parties of those whom we have collected, who may give them direction and assistance if needful. But keep the principal part of our own people in this neighbourhood, that we may direct them on any point where their presence may be necessary."

"Might it not be as well, your Highness," said the Count, "to take one measure more? We have far more people than enough to guard all the barricades. I can undertake to draw ten or even twelve thousand from different spots, and march them out of the Porte Neuve."

"To lead them where?" demanded the Duke of Guise, lifting his eyes to the countenance of St. Paul with a meaning expression.

"To the Tuilleries and to the Louvre," replied the Count. "Every point of importance," he added in a low and meaning voice, "will then be invested."

The Duke of Guise waved his hand. "No, St. Paul, no!" he said, "that step would instantly require another. No; if the enemy misjudge our forbearance, and attempt aught towards shedding the blood of the citizens of Paris, we must then act as God shall direct us. In the mean time I say not, that the barricades may not be carried up to the very gates of the Louvre, for that is for our own defence; but at present, St. Paul, at present, it must be on the defensive that we stand. I beseech you, however, to see that no ground is lost in any part of the city, for you know how soon an advantage is gained. Should it be needful send for me, but not till the last extremity."

The Count of St. Paul turned to obey, but paused for a moment before he had reached the door. The Duke of Guise by this time was gazing fixedly upon the hilt of his sword, as it lay on the table before him, and seemed perfectly unconscious that the Count had not quitted the room. A slight smile curled that gentleman's lip, as he saw the direction that the Duke's eyes had taken, and he opened the door and passed out.

For several minutes the Duke of Guise continued to gaze in deep thought; and his bosom at that moment was certainly full of those sensations which never, perhaps, occur to any man but once in his lifetime--even if Fate have cast him one of those rare and memorable lots, which bear down the winner thereof, upon the stream of fame and memory, through a thousand ages after his own day is done. The fate of his country was in his hands; he had but to stretch out his arm and grasp the crown of France: and what temptations were there to do so to a mind like his!

It must not be forgotten that the Duke of Guise, by every hereditary feeling, by every prejudice of education, as well as by many strong and peculiar points in his own character, was in truth and reality a strenuous and zealous supporter of the Roman Catholic Church. His veneration for that great and extraordinary institution had descended to him from his father, and had formed the

great principle of action in his own life. Even had he merely assumed that devotion for the church during so many years, the very habit must have moulded his feelings into the same form; and he must have been by this time, more or less a zealous advocate of the Catholic cause, even if he had set out with caring nothing in reality about it. But such was not the case: his father had educated him in principles of strict and stern devotion to the faith in which they were born; and though in the gaieties and the frivolities of youth, or the eager struggles of manhood, he might have appeared in the ordinary affairs of life any thing on earth but the zealot, yet still his zeal would have been far more than a pretence, had it only been the effect of early education and constant habit.

There was something still more, however, to be said. The spirit of the Catholic Church was consonant to, and harmonious with, the whole tone of his own feelings, at once deep, powerful, imaginative, enthusiastic, politic, and commanding. Chivalry, feudalism, and the Church of Rome, went hand in hand: all three were, indeed, in their decay; but if ever man belonged to the epoch of chivalry, it was Henry Duke of Guise; and he clung to all the other institutions that were attached to that past epoch, of which he in spirit was a part.

Attached therefore sincerely, deeply, and zealously to the Catholic Church--far, far more than his brother the Duke of Mayenne ever was or ever could be--Guise beheld a weak monarch, whom he despised and hated from the very bottom of his heart, wasting the whole energies of the Catholic party in France in a mere pretence of opposing the Huguenots, and, in fact, caring for nothing but so to balance the two religious factions as to be permitted to remain in luxurious indolence, swallowed up with the most foul, degrading, and abhorrent vices; setting an example of low and filthy effeminacy to his whole court; and only chequering a life of soft and unmanly voluptuousness by bursts of frantic debauchery, or moments of apparent penitence and devotion, so wild and extravagant as to betray their own affectation, by the absurdities which they displayed.

The church to which Guise was attached was thus betrayed; his own especial friends and relations were neglected, insulted, or maltreated; all that were great or good in the nobility of France were shut out from the high offices of state, trampled upon by the minions of the King, and plundered by insolent and fraudulent financiers; the course of public justice was totally perverted; every thing in the government was venal and corrupt; the exertions of commerce and industry totally put to a stop; assassination, poison, and the knife, of daily occurrence; and bands of audacious plunderers tearing the unhappy land from north to south.

The Duke of Guise might well think, as he sat there gazing upon the hilt of that renowned sword which had never been drawn in vain, that, were he to say the few short words which were all that was necessary to bring the crown to his head and the sceptre to his hand--he might well think that he could obtain for France thereby those great objects which he conceived were, beyond all others, necessary to her well-being. He might well conceive too that the cost of so doing would but be little: civil war already raged in the land; the whole south of France was one scene of contention; it already existed in the capital; and would, in all probability, be shortened rather than prolonged by his striking the one great and decisive blow.

The King, who was absolutely at his mercy, and whom he could cast down from his throne at a single word, was no obstacle in his way; the Epernons, the d'Aumonts, the Villequiers, he looked upon, notwithstanding all their favour, and the semblance of power which had been cast into their hands, as a mere herd of deer, to be driven backwards and forwards, like beasts of the chase, between himself and Henry of Navarre. And then again, when he looked to the great and chivalrous Huguenot monarch, what were the feelings with which he regarded the struggle that might take place between them? His breast heaved, his chest expanded, his head was raised, his eye flashed with the thought of encountering an adversary worthy of the strife, a rival of powers equal or nearly equal to his own. When he thought of army to army, and lance to lance, against Henry of Navarre, with the crown of France between them as the golden prize of their mighty strife, his spirit seemed on fire within him, and he had well nigh forgotten all his resolutions, in order to do the daring act which might bring about that glorious result; and then, when fancy pictured him returning triumphant over his rival, with peace restored, and civil war put down, and commerce flourishing, and the rights of France maintained on every frontier, an uniform religion, a happy people, and the strong truncheon of command in a hand that could wield it lightly, the prospect was too bright, too beautiful, too tempting; and he pressed his hand tight upon his eyes, as if he could so shut it out from his mental vision.

What was it that deterred him? There was much reason on his side; there was little if any risk; there was the object of the church's safety; there was the gratification of vengeance upon those who had insulted and injured him; there were the exhortations of the King of Spain; there was almost the universal voice of the people in the north of France; there was his own ambition; there was the certainty that all he did would be absolved, sanctioned, confirmed by the head of the Catholic Church; there was already in his favour the solemn and decided declaration of the highest theological authority in France; and there was many a specious argument, which no one could expect that he should sift and refute against himself.

What was it that deterred him? Was it that there is a majesty which hedges in a King, sufficiently strong to overawe even the Duke of Guise himself? Was it that the habitual reverence, which he had been accustomed to show towards the kingly office, veiled or shielded from his eyes the real weakness of him who exercised it? Was it that he feared himself?--Or was it that he felt the act of

usurpation must be confirmed by murder?

It cannot be told! Certain it is that he dreamt grand visions; that he saw mighty prospects of fair paths leading to honour, and glory, and high renown, and his country's good, and his church's safety; and that he banished the visions and would not take the only step which would have over-passed every barrier to his forward way.

The words of Catherine de Medici rung in his ears--the words which had warned him against the growth of ambition in his own heart; he heard the shouts of the people without, and her warning voice again came back in tones that seemed well nigh prophetic. Almost, it would appear, without a cause, the vanity of all things seemed to press upon his mind at that moment with stronger effect than he had ever experienced before. There was a leaden weight upon his spirits he knew not why. He seemed to feel the hand of Fate, the tangible pressure of a directing arm, selecting for him the path he was to pursue, and forcing him thereon at the very moment when supreme command appeared given to him without a check.

The sun seemed to dazzle his eyes as he gazed from the window, vague figures passed before him, and crossed the dancing motes, picturing, like shadows, the persons of whom he had been thinking. He saw Henry the Third distinctly before him, and fierce faces and bloody knives, and figures weltering in their blood upon the ground. He felt that he had indulged fancy too far, that he had given way to thought at the moment of action, that his course must be shaped as he had predetermined it in calmer hours; and waving his hand, as if to dispel the visions that still haunted his sight, he rose from his chair, leaning heavily on the table, pushed the sword away from him, and murmured to himself, "No, no! I will never be an usurper! Ho, without there!" he continued. "Who waits? What is that sound of musketry?"

"Erlan has just arrived, my Lord," replied the attendant, "to bear your Highness word, that the citizens have driven Malivaut down into the market, and that is the firing we hear."

"Tell Erlan to speed back as fast as possible," replied the Duke, "and bid them cease directly. Let them content themselves with hemming in the enemy without attacking them. But I hear more firing still; I shall be obliged to go forth myself."

"Monsieur de Brissac has just gone out on one side, your Highness," replied the attendant, "and Monsieur de St. Paul on the other; both with the purpose of stopping the bloodshed. But they have not had time to get to the spot yet."

"It has ceased now," said the Duke listening. "It has ceased now towards the Chatelet: but on the other side it is fierce. Go down and see what are those shouts, and let me know! Surely Henry," he added, "would not venture into such a scene as this. Alas, no! He would venture nothing--dare nothing, either for his own sake or his country's."

A moment after the attendant returned saying, "It is the Queen, my Lord; her Majesty Queen Catherine. The crowd of people prevents the chair from coming up to the gates; but she has descended and is coming on foot."

The Duke instantly started up and approached the head of the staircase for the purpose of hurrying down to receive his royal visitor; but Catherine was by this time upon the stairs, with Madame de Montpensier and a number of other ladies, who had passed the morning at the Hôtel de Guise, surrounding her on all sides. The Duke advanced and gave her his hand to aid her in ascending the stairs; and perhaps the aspect of Catherine at that moment taught him more fully than any thing else, how tremendous was the scene without, and how completely the capital of France was at his disposal.

Habituated for more than twenty years to control all her feelings, and to repress every appearance of fear or agitation, Catherine de Medici was nevertheless on the present occasion completely overcome. Her lip quivered, her head shook, and there was a degree of wild apprehension in her eyes, which it was some moments ere her strongest efforts could conquer.

"Cousin of Guise," she said, as soon as she had drawn her breath, "I must speak with you for a few moments alone; I must beseech you to give me audience, even if it be but for half an hour."

"Your Majesty has nothing to do but command," replied the Duke. "My time is at your disposal."

The Queen smiled slightly at feeling how easily the empty words of courts may be retorted upon those that use them. It has been said that it costs nothing to use civil language and say courtly things, even when insincere: but it costs much; for, sooner or later, we are sure to be paid in the same coin to which we have given currency, perhaps even more depreciating than when we sent it forth. She answered only by that smile however; and the Duke led her forward to his cabinet, all the rest of those who crowded the staircase remaining behind.

With every sign of ceremonious reverence the Duke of Guise led his royal guest to a seat, and stood before her; but she paused for a moment, and hesitated ere she spoke. "My Lord," she said at length, "this is a terrible state of things."

"Your Majesty knows more of it than I do," replied the Duke calmly, "for I have not gone forth

from the house to-day; but I hear there is some tumult in Paris."

"Henry of Guise!" replied the Queen, fixing her eyes upon him. "Henry of Guise, be sincere!"

"Madam," replied the Duke, "one must adapt one's tone to circumstances. With those who are sincere with us we may be as candid as the day; but when we are sadly taught the fallacy of words, and the fragility of promises, we must, of course, shelter ourselves under some reserve."

"Your Highness's words imply an accusation," said Catherine somewhat sharply. "In what have I dealt insincerely with you?"

"Your Majesty promised me," replied the Duke of Guise, "that my noble friend, the young Count of Logères, should be set at liberty not later than yesterday morning; and that my ward, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, should be immediately replaced under my protection."

"You have done me wrong, your Highness," replied the Queen; "and attributed to want of will what only arose from want of power. Villequier has formally claimed the guardianship of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut; his application is before the parliament at this hour; and orders have been given on all hands for the young Lady to remain under the protection of the King till the question is decided."

"I will cut his cause very short," replied the Duke of Guise frowning, "if she be not within my gates ere six hours be over."

"She is within your gates even now, my Lord," replied the Queen. "Your Highness is too quick. I sent an order myself for the liberation of the Count de Logères, for that only depended upon the King my son. Some one, however, diverted it from its right course, and he was only set free this morning. He ought to have been here before me, for I sent him on; but I suppose he has not been able to pass the mass of people round your doors. As to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, I have risked every thing to restore her to you; and notifying to Villequier and Epernon that I would no longer countenance her being detained, I liberated her on my own authority and brought her here in my own chair. She would have been freed two nights ago, for I wished to effect the matter by a little stratagem, and have her carried from the convent and brought hither without any one knowing how or by whom it was done; but the meddling burgher guard came up and drove the people that I sent away. But let us, oh let us, my Lord, discuss more serious things. Have I now been sincere with you?"

"You have, madam," replied the Duke, "and I thank your Majesty even for doing an act of justice, so rare are they in these days. But may I know what are now your Majesty's commands?"

"You cannot affect to doubt, cousin," replied the Queen, "that Paris, the capital of my son's kingdom, is in revolt from end to end. Can you deny that you are the cause of it?"

"Though no man is bound to accuse himself, madam," replied the Duke, returning the Queen's searching glance with a calm, steady gaze, "yet I will answer your question, and sincerely. I have in no degree instigated this rising. His Majesty is the cause and not I. We see, without any reason or motion whatsoever, or any expression of the King's displeasure, large bodies of troops introduced into the city, during the night, without drums beating or colours flying, and altogether in a clandestine manner. We see them take possession of various strong points, and we hear them using menacing language--Monsieur de Crillon himself passing through the streets, breathing nothing but menaces and violence; and if your Majesty can wonder that in these circumstances the citizens of Paris fly to arms for the defence of their property, of their lives, and of the honour of their women, it is more than I can do. In truth, I know not what the King expected to produce, but the very result which is before us. I assure your Majesty, however, that it is not at my instigation that this was done; though, even if I had done this, and far more, I should have held myself completely justified."

"Justified," said the Queen, shaking her head mournfully. "What then becomes of all your Highness said upon ambition but three days ago?"

"Ambition, madam, would have nothing to do with it," replied the Duke. "It would have been merely self-defence. Who had so much cause to fear that the rash and despotic proceedings which have taken place were aimed at him as I have had? Who had so much cause to know that the object of all this military parade, was not the hanging of some half dozen miserable burghers in the Place de Grève, but the arrest, and perhaps massacre, of Henry of Guise and all his kind and zealous friends? Can you deny, madam, that such was the cause for which these soldiers were brought hither? Can you deny, madam, that only yesterday, when the King assuming friendship towards me, invited me to ride forth with him--can you deny that it was debated in his council, whether he should or should not order his guards to murder me as we went? Confident in my own conscience, madam, and believing that the King, though misinformed, entertained no personal ill-will against one who had served him well, I came to Paris, walked through the royal guards, and presented myself at Court, in the midst of my enemies, with only eight attendants; and ever since that day, there has not been an hour in which my life and liberty have not been in danger, in which schemes for my destruction have not been agitated in the Cabinet of the King; and I say that, under these circumstances, I should have been perfectly justified in raising the people for my own defence. But, madam, I did not do so; and I am not the cause of this rising.--

What is it, Monsieur de Bois-dauphin?" he added, turning to a gentleman who had just entered, and who now answered a few words in a low tone. The Duke retired with him into the window, and after speaking for a moment or two in whispers, Guise dismissed him and returned, making apologies to the Queen for the interruption.

It may be said, without noticing it again, that the same sort of occurrence took place more than once--different officers and attendants coming in, from time to time, speaking for a moment with the Duke in private, and hurrying out again. Though Catherine de Medici felt this to be somewhat unceremonious treatment, and though it evidently showed her, that whatever share the Duke had had in raising the tumult at first, he assuredly now guided all its proceedings, and ruled the excited multitudes from his own cabinet; yet, in other respects, she was not sorry for time to pause and think ere she replied, knowing that she had to deal with one whose mind was far too acute to be satisfied with vague or unsatisfactory answers.

"My Lord," she said, as soon as the conversation was resumed, "I did not mean exactly to say that you are the active cause of these proceedings, or that you have excited the people. What I meant was, that your presence in Paris is the occasion of this emotion. You cannot doubt that it is so; and therefore, being in this respect the cause, it is only yourself who can provide the remedy."

"Pardon me, madam," replied the Duke of Guise; "I do not see how that can be. In the first place, I have all along denied that I am the cause, either inert or active. The people have risen for their own defence, though, certainly, my defence and my welfare is wrapped up in that of the people. In the next place, I know not what remedy can be provided in the present state of affairs. What have you to propose, madam?"

"What I came to propose, my fair cousin," replied the Queen, "and what, I am sure, is the only way of quieting the tumult that now exists, is, that you should quit Paris immediately.--Nay! nay! hear me out. If I propose this thing to you, it is not without being prepared and ready to offer you such inducements and recompences, both for yourself and all your friends, as may show you how highly the King, my son, esteems you, and at what a price he regards the service you will render him. Look at this paper, good cousin of Guise, signed with his own name, and see what perfect security and contentment it ought to give you."

The Duke of Guise, however, put the paper gently and respectfully from him, replying, "Madam, what you propose is impossible. Either the people of Paris have risen in their own defence, in which case my leaving the city would have no effect upon the tumult, or else they have risen in mine, when it would be base to abandon them. I believe the first of these cases is the true one, and that, therefore, by staying in Paris, I may serve the King far more effectually than I could by quitting the city."

Catherine de Medici had nothing directly to reply to the reasoning of the Duke; but she answered somewhat warmly, "By my faith, your Highness, I think some day you will logically prove that the best way to serve the King is to take the crown off his head."

"Madam," replied the Duke drily, "Messieurs d'Epéron, Villequier, Joyeuse, D'O., and others, have long been trying to prove the proposition which your Majesty puts forth; but they have not yet convinced me of the fact,--nor ever will. They, madam, are or have been those who have put the King's crown in danger; and, as far as regards myself, I have but to remind you that if I had any designs upon the King's person, five hundred men sent out this morning by the Porte de Nesle, and five hundred more by the Porte Neuve, would be quite sufficient for all the purposes your Majesty attributes to me."

Catherine de Medici turned deadly pale, seeing how easily the palace itself might be invested. At that instant one of the Duke's officers again entered, and spoke to him for a moment or two apart. The Queen quietly took up a pen from the table, wrote a few words on a slip of paper, and opening the door of the cabinet demanded in a low voice, "Is Pinart there?"

A gentleman instantly started forward, and putting the paper in his hands, she spoke to him for a moment in a whisper, ending with the words, "Use all speed!" Then re-entering the cabinet, she took her seat while the Duke was yet speaking with his friend.

"Cousin of Guise," she said, as soon as he had done, and the stranger had departed, "you have certainly given me strong proof that you have no evil intentions; but such power is, alas! very dangerous to trust one's self with. Read that paper, I beseech you, and tell me if there be any other thing you can demand--any other condition which will induce you to quit Paris even for a few days?"

"It were useless for me to read it, madam," replied the Duke. "Nothing on earth that could be offered me would induce me to quit Paris at this moment. But believe me, madam, my being here has nothing to do with the continuance of the tumult. I have sent out all my friends and officers and relations already to calm the disturbance. But it is the King who is the cause of it, or, rather, the King's evil advisers. As he has occasioned it, he must put a stop to it."

"What would you have him do?" demanded Catherine de Medici quickly. "How would you have him act?"

"In the first place," replied the Duke, "let him recall his troops; let them be withdrawn from

every post they occupy! Their presence was the cause of the people's rising, and as soon as they are gone, the emotion will gradually subside."

"He has sent the order of recall already," replied Catherine; "but it is impossible to execute it. Hemmed in by barricades on every side, how can they retire, or take one step without danger?"

"That I trust," replied the Duke, "can soon----"

But he was interrupted in the midst of what he was saying by the sudden entrance of Charles of Montsoreau.

"I beg your Highness to pardon me," he said. "Your Majesty will, I am sure, forgive me, when I ask if you know what has become of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut?"

There was anxiety and apprehension in every line of Charles of Montsoreau's countenance, and the Queen's brow instantly gathered together with a look of mingled surprise and apprehension.

"She followed me into the hotel; did she not?" exclaimed the Queen. "I got out of the chair first, and she came immediately after. Surely I saw her upon the stairs!"

"The porter, madam, declares, that there was no lady entered with your Majesty; that two or three gentlemen came in; and that it was some time before your chair, and the rest of your male attendants could come up, on account of the crowd. I have ventured to ask Madame de Montpensier and the rest of the ladies in the house, before I intruded here: but no one has seen Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and she is certainly not in the house."

"Is this the way I am treated?" exclaimed the Duke of Guise, his brow gathering into a tremendous frown. "Is this the way that I am sported with at the very moment----"

"Nay! nay! nay! Cousin of Guise," exclaimed Catherine de Medici, rising from her seat and clasping her hands. "So help me, Heaven, as I have had no share in this! I descended from my chair in the midst of the crowd--knowing terror and agitation, such as, indeed, I never knew before--and I thought that this poor girl had followed. I was too much engrossed with the thought of my son's throne tottering to its foundation to pay much attention to any thing else; but Monsieur de Logères himself can tell you, that I treated her with all kindness, and that mine was the order for her liberation."

"Indeed it was, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "Her Majesty displayed every sort of kindness, and Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was in the same chair with her when I left her, scarce a hundred yards from these gates. I fear, my Lord, however, that there are machinations taking place, which I must explain to you. And in a low voice he told the Duke what he had seen while returning from the *Marché Neuf*.

"This Nicolas Poulain is a villain," exclaimed the Duke after he had listened. "I have received the proofs thereof this very morning. Ho! without there!--Madam, by your leave," he continued, turning to the Queen, "I would fain speak with these attendants of yours, but dare not presume to command them hither in your presence."

The Queen immediately directed all those who had followed her chair, or had borne it, to be called in, and the Duke questioned them sharply, in a stern and lofty tone, regarding what they had seen of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut after the Queen had passed on.

The answer of each was the same however, namely, that none of them had seen any thing of her. Some had accompanied the Queen and kept the way clear, and two others who, had remained with the chair, as well as the bearers themselves, declared that the young Lady, after having descended from the Queen's chair had gone on; that there was an immediate rush of the people, which separated them from the rest of the royal train; and that what between the pressure and confusion that immediately took place, and the kicking of one of the chargers, which made the people run back with cries and affright, they had seen nothing more of the party to which they had belonged, till they had made their way up to the *Hôtel de Guise* and obtained admission.

The Duke paused with a gloomy and anxious brow. "Go, some one," he said at length, "go up to Philibert of Nancy, who was placed above, to watch what was taking place from the top of the house. Ask him what he saw after the Queen's arrival, and bring me down word."

"May I go, my Lord?" demanded Charles of Montsoreau.

The Duke nodded his head, and the young nobleman sprang up the stairs, and guided by one of the servants found the watchman, who had been placed at the top of the house to report from time to time whatever occurrences of importance he might perceive in the neighbouring streets. All the information the man could give, however, was, that he had seen a party separate from the rest of the people, almost immediately after the Queen's entrance; that they seemed to be taking great care of some person in the midst of them, who, he fancied, had been hurt by the kicking and plunging of a horse which he had remarked hard by. The party had turned the corner of the street without attracting his attention farther; but, he added, that a moment or two afterwards he

thought he had heard a shrill cry coming from the direction which they had taken.

With such tidings only, and with his heart more agonised than ever, Charles of Montsoreau returned to the Duke, who was still standing gloomily by the Queen, who, on her part looked up at his dark and frowning countenance with a degree of calmness which did not seem quite so natural as she could have wished.

"Whatever has happened, my Lord Duke," she said, after listening to the young nobleman's report, "whatever has happened, on my honour, on my salvation, I have had no share in it; and I promise you most solemnly, not to rest a moment till I have discovered what has become of your ward, and have made you acquainted therewith. If she be in the Court of my son, I make bold to say, that she shall be instantly restored to you: but I cannot believe that it is so, as it is impossible for Villequier to have passed those barriers without being torn to pieces by the people."

Still the Duke remained thinking gloomily without making any answer. "Logères," he said at length, "I must trust you with this business, for I have more matters to deal with than I can well compass. From what you said just now, and from what the boy Ignati told me, I know how you stand with our poor Marie. You know what I said, and what I promised long ago. Seek her, find her, and wed her! Monsieur de St. Paul will tell you where your own men are; take her, wherever you find her: by force, if it be necessary; and if any man, calling himself a gentleman, oppose you, cleave him to the jaws. I will bear you out in whatever you do: there is my signet: but stay; you had better see Marteau Chapelle and Bussi about it. They know every house in Paris, and I can spare them now from other affairs: bid them go with you and aid you; and tell Chapelle---- What is it now, Brissac? You look confounded and alarmed."

"The news I have will confound your Highness also, I am sure," replied Brissac; "to alarm you is not possible, I fancy. I have just received intelligence from the Porte de Nesle, my Lord, that the King has quitted Paris, and taken the road to Chartres!"

The Duke of Guise turned towards Catherine de Medici, and gazed upon her sternly, saying, "You have done this, madam! You amuse me, while you destroy me!"^[1]

"I *have* done this, cousin of Guise," replied the Queen, "and I have done wisely for all parties. I have removed from you a great temptation to do an evil action--a temptation which I saw that you yourself feared; and while I have removed that danger from you, my advice has put my son in safety."

"Madam," replied the Duke, "I felt no temptation: my resolution was firm, positive, and unshaken; and had I chosen to compromise the King's safety, or do wrong to his legitimate authority, the Louvre would have been invested six hours ago, for the people were already on their march, if I had not stopped them. I wonder that he escaped in safety, however, for they are very much infuriated at the sight of these soldiers."

"He walked from the Louvre," replied Brissac, "on foot to the Tuilleries, I hear, followed by some half dozen gentlemen; he then mounted his horses in the stables, and rode out suddenly; but it is said that they fired at him from the Porte de Nesle. The people, however, as they hear it, are becoming quite furious, and I fear that we shall not be able to keep them from massacring the soldiery."

"You see, madam," replied the Duke of Guise, still thinking alone of the King's escape, "you see, madam, to what danger the King has exposed himself. Had he remained in Paris no evil could have befallen him. He was safe, on my life, and on my honour."

"I believe you, cousin of Guise; I believe you;" replied the Queen, who thought she saw that the tone of the Duke of Guise was not quite so peremptory as it had been, while the King had seemed entirely in his power. "But now, in order to prove your good will entirely, let me beseech you to exert yourself to save the unhappy men who have been placed in such a situation of danger."

"That shall soon be done, madam," replied the Duke; "and as soon as this is done, I too must take means for finding my ward. In the meantime, madam, I will beseech you to use such measures at the Court, as may insure that the people of Paris, and of the realm in general, shall not be driven again to such acts as these, remembering, that as you warned me not long ago, popularity is the most transient of all things, and that mine may not last long enough to save the state a second time from the dangers that menace it."

"I understand you, cousin of Guise; I understand you;" replied the Queen. "It may not last long enough, or it may not be willingly exerted: but I give you my promise, that every thing shall be done to content you; and with that view I have already demanded that the insolent, greedy, and ambitious Epernon shall be banished from the Court, and stripped of his plundered authority.--But hark!" she continued, "I hear the firing recommence. Wait not for further words, or for any ceremonies; I will find my way back to the Louvre without difficulty. Go, my Lord, go at once, and save the poor Swiss from the fury of the people!"

The Duke bowed low, took up his hat and sword, and without other arms walked out into the streets.

CHAP. III.

Passing out by the rooms belonging to the porter, instead of by the Porte Cochère, the Duke of Guise, followed by a number of his officers, presented himself to the people on the steps which we have already noticed. The moment he appeared, the whole street rang with acclamations, a path was instantly opened for him through the midst of the people, and mounting his horse he rode on, the barricades opening before him, as if by magic, wherever he came, and the people rending the air with acclamations of his name.

From time to time he stopped as he went, either bending down his proud head to speak to some of those whom he knew, or addressing the general populace in the neighbourhood of the different barriers, exhorting them to tranquillity, and beseeching, commanding, and entreating them to desist from all attacks upon the soldiery. His words spread like lightning from mouth to mouth; and though he went in person to several of the different points where the unequal contest was actively going on, the assault upon the troops was stopped in other quarters also, by the mere report of his wishes.

Thus, as it were in triumph, totally unarmed amidst the armed multitude, he went ruling their furious passions, as if by some all-powerful charm. The most violent, the most exasperated, the most sullen, uttered not one word in opposition to his will, and showed nothing but promptness and zeal in executing his commands. Before he reached the Place de Grève even, towards which his course was directed, the screams, the cries, the shouts, the firing, had ceased in every part of Paris, and nothing was heard throughout that wide capital but the rending shouts of joy, with which the multitude accompanied him on his way.

On entering the Place de Grève the Duke looked sternly up at the windows of the Hôtel de Ville, but did not enter the building. He said, however, speaking to those immediately surrounding him, "A week shall not have elapsed before we have cleared that house of the vermin that infest it; and the people shall be freed from those who have betrayed them."

Then dismounting from his horse, and ascending the steps leading to the elevated space, called the Perron of the Hôtel de Ville, he lifted his hat from his head for a moment, as a sign that he wished to address the people. All was silent in an instant; and then were heard the full rich deep tones of that eloquent voice, pouring over the heads of the multitude, and reaching the very farthest parts of the square.

"My friends and fellow-citizens," he said. "You have this day acquired a great and glorious victory. You have triumphed over the efforts of despotic power, exerted, I am sure, not by the King's own will and consent, but by the evil counsels, and altogether by the evil efforts, of minions, speculators, and traitors. The real merit of those who win great victories and achieve great deeds, is ascertained more by the way in which they use their advantages, than by the way in which those advantages have been gained. Were you a mean, degraded, unthinking race of men, who had been stirred up by oppression into objectless revolt, you would now content yourselves with wreaking your vengeance on a few pitiable and unhappy soldiers, who in obedience to the commands which they have received, have been cast into the midst of you, like criminals of old, given up naked to a hungry lion. But you are not such people; you have great objects before you; you know and appreciate the mighty purposes for which you have fought and conquered; and though driven by self-defence to resist the will of the King, you are still men to venerate and respect the royal authority; and even while you determine, for his sake as well as for your own, never to rest satisfied till the Catholic Church is established beyond the power of heretics to shake; till the Court is freed from the minions and evil counsellors that infect it; till the finances of the state are collected, and administered by a just and a frugal hand; and till the whole honours, rewards, and emoluments of the country are no longer piled upon one man--though you are determined to seek for and obtain all this, nevertheless, I know, you are not men to trench in the least upon the royal authority, farther than your own security requires, or to injure the royal troops whom you have conquered, when they are no longer in a situation to do you wrong. You will remember, I am sure, that they are our fellow-Christians and our fellow-men, and you will treat them accordingly. I have therefore," he said, "requested my friends and fellow-labourers in your cause, Monsieur de Brissac and Monsieur de St. Paul, to conduct hither in safety the French and Swiss troops from the different quarters in which they have been dispersed. Their arms will be brought hither by our own friends, and in the manner which we shall deal with these two bodies of soldiery, I trust that we shall meet still with the approbation of our brethren."

While thus speaking, the Duke of Guise had been interrupted more than once by the applauses of the people, and in the end loud and reiterated acclamations left no doubt that all he chose to

do would receive full support from those who heard him.

While he was yet speaking--according to the orders which he had given as he came along--the arms of the Swiss and French guards were brought in large quantities, by different bodies of the citizens: some carrying them in hand-barrows, some bearing them upon their shoulders; and it was a curious sight to see men and boys, and even women, loaded with morions, and pikes, and swords, and arquebuses, bringing them forward through the crowd, and piling them up before the princely man who stood at the top of the steps, surrounded by many of the noblest and most distinguished gentlemen in France.

This sight occupied the people for some minutes, and then a cry ran through the square of "The Swiss! the Swiss!" The announcement caused some agitation amongst the populace, and some forgetting that the soldiery were disarmed, unslung their carbines, or half drew their swords, as if to resist a new attack. The discomfited soldiers, however, came on in a long line, two abreast, now totally disarmed, and seeming by their countenances yet uncertain of the fate that awaited them. With some difficulty a space was made for them in the Place de Grève, and being drawn up in two lines, the Duke commanded them to take their arms, but not their ammunition. Two by two they advanced to the pile; and each man, as far as possible, selected his own, when it appeared, to use the words of the Duke of Guise himself, when recounting the events of that day to Bassompierre, that there never had been such complete obedience amongst so agitated a multitude; for not one sword, morion, pike, or arquebuse, of all the Swiss and French there present, was found to be wanting.^[2]

When all was complete, the Duke of Guise turned to the soldiery, saying in a loud and somewhat stern tone, "The people of Paris considering that you have acted under the commands of those you have sworn to obey, permit you for this once to retire in safety from the perilous situation in which you have been placed; but as there are points which make a considerable difference between the Swiss troops in the pay of France and the French troops themselves, there must be a difference also in their treatment. The Swiss, as foreigners, could have no motive or excuse for refusing to obey the commands imposed upon them; the French had to remember their duty to their country and to their religion. The Swiss, therefore, we permit to march out with colours flying and arms raised; the French will follow them, with their arms reversed and their colours furled."

A loud shout from the people answered this announcement; for throughout the course of that eventful day, the Swiss had acted with moderation and discipline, whereas the licentious French soldiery had during the early morning, while they thought themselves in possession of the capital, displayed all the brutal insolence of triumphant soldiery.

The Duke of Guise spoke a few words to Brissac and to St. Paul, and those two officers put themselves at the head, Brissac of the Swiss, and St. Paul of the French guards. Each held a small cane in his hand, and with no other arms they led the two bands from barrier to barrier through the city, till they were safe within the precincts of the Louvre.

Scarcely had these two parties quitted the Place de Grève, however, drawing a number of people from that spot, when information was brought to the Duke, that there were still two bands of soldiers in the city, one in the Cemetery of the Innocents, and one under the Chatelet, but both threatened by the people with instant destruction.

"We must make our way thither quickly," said the Duke; "for, if I remember right, it is the band of Du Gas which is at the Chatelet, and the people are furious against him."

He accordingly lost not a moment on the way; but turning to Bois-dauphin, who accompanied him, he said in a low tone, as they went, "I would have given my left hand to stay and examine the interior of the Hôtel de Ville, in order to punish some of the traitors who, I know, are lurking there. Perhaps it is better, however, to let them escape than that any mischief should be done; and in these popular movements, if we once begin to shed blood, there is no knowing where it will end."

"I fear there is bloodshed going on at present," said Bois-dauphin, hearing a shot or two fired at no great distance. "They are at it under the Chatelet now."

"Hurry on! hurry on!" said the Duke, speaking to some of those behind. "Run on fast before, and announce that I am coming. Command them, in my name, to stop."

Two or three of his followers ran forward, and no more shots were heard; but scarcely two minutes after, just as the Duke had passed one of the barricades, he saw two or three men hurrying up to him, led by Chapelle Marteau, who approached him with no slight expression of grief and apprehension in his countenance.

"I fear I have bad news for you, my Lord," he said.

"What is it?" demanded the Duke calmly. "Such a day as this could hardly pass over without some alloy."

"I fear," replied the Leaguer, "that your Highness' friend, Monsieur de Logères, is mortally wounded. He brought me your signet and orders, which I immediately obeyed. We gained

information which led us to suppose that the persons we sought for, were concealed in a house in the Rue de la Ferronière here hard by. We proceeded thither instantly and demanded admission; but they, affecting to take us for a party of soldiery, fired upon us from the window, when two shots struck the Count, one lodging in his shoulder, and the other passing through his body. He is yet living, and I have ordered him to be conveyed to the Hôtel de Guise at once, where a surgeon can attend upon him. Our people were breaking into the house to take the murderers prisoners, when, hearing of your approach, I came away to tell you the facts."

The Duke of Guise paused, and gazed sadly down upon the ground, repeating the words, "Poor youth! poor youth! so are his bright hopes cut short! He shall be avenged at least! Show me the house, Chapelle."

And he followed rapidly upon the steps of the Leaguer, who led him to a small house, with the entrance, which was through a Gothic arch, sunk somewhat back from the other houses. There were two windows above the arch, and a window which flanked it on either side; but the followers of the young Count of Logères and of Chapelle Marteau had by this time broken open the doors, and rushed into the building.

"This is part of the old priory of the Augustins," said the Duke of Guise as they came up. "They exchanged it some fifty years ago for their house further down. But there are two or three back ways out, I know; and if you have not put a guard there, they have escaped you."

It proved as the Duke anticipated. The house was found completely vacant, and though strict orders were sent to all the different gates to suffer no one to pass out without close examination, either the order came too late, or those against whom it was levelled proved too politic for the guards; for none of those whom the Duke of Guise wished to secure, except Pereuse, the Prevôt des Marchands, were taken in the attempt to escape.

The shots, the sound of which, Guise had heard, proved to be those which had struck the unfortunate Count de Logères, and no difficulty was found in inducing the people who surrounded the soldiery near the Chatelet, to suffer them to depart, as their companions had done.

On entering the Cemetery of the Innocents, however, the Duke instantly saw that the danger of the troops was greater; for, shut up within, those walls, together with the Swiss, he found the famous Baron de Biron and Pomponne de Bellievre, while the people without were loudly clamouring for their blood. They both advanced towards him as soon as he appeared; and the Duke, gazing around him, said with a sigh, "Alas, Monsieur de Biron! those who stirred up this fire should have been able to extinguish it."

"I say so, too, my Lord," replied Biron sadly. "Evil be to those who gave the counsel that has been followed. God knows I opposed it to the utmost of my power, and only obeyed the King's absolute commands in bringing these poor fellows hither, who, I fear, will never be suffered to pass out as they came."

"For the soldiery I have no fear," replied the Duke, "and as for you, gentlemen, I must do the best that I can. But the people look upon you as partially authors of the evil, and they will not be easily satisfied."

The Duke of Guise, however, succeeded, though not without difficulty, in his purpose of saving all. The people yielded to him, but for the first time showed some degree of resistance; and he returned to the Hôtel de Guise feeling more sensibly, from that little incident, the truth of the warning which Catherine de Medici had given him, regarding the instability of popularity, than from all the arguments or examples that reason or history could produce.

We may easily imagine the reception of the Duke in his own dwelling: the joy, the congratulations, the inquiries; and we may imagine, also, the passing of that busy night, while messengers were coming to and fro at every instant, and couriers were dispatched from the Hôtel de Guise to almost every part of France.

Henry of Guise was well aware, that whatever deference and humility he might assume in his words towards the King, or whatever testimonies of forgiveness and affection Henry might offer to him, his own safety now, for the rest of his life, depended on his power, and that his armour must be the apprehensions of the King, rather than his regard.

Up to a very late hour, notwithstanding all the fatigues and agitations of the day, he sat with his secretary Pericard, writing letters to all his different friends in various parts of the country, demanding their immediate assistance and support, even while he expressed the most devoted attachment to the King; and thus, in the letter we have already cited to Bassompierre, he makes use of such expressions as the following:--

"Thus it is necessary that you should make a journey here to see your friends, whom you will not find, thank God! either wanting in means or resolution. We must have good intelligence from Germany, however, that we be not taken by surprise. We are not without forces, courage, friends, nor means; but still less without honour, or respect and fidelity to the King, which we will preserve inviolably, doing our duty, as people of worth, of honour, and as good Catholics."

It was about twelve o'clock at night, when Reignaut, the surgeon, entered the cabinet of the Duke, and bowing low said, "I come, according to your Highness's order, to tell you the state of the young Count of Logères. Soon after I saw you about six to-day, we extracted both balls. He bore the operation well, and has slept since for several hours."

"Is he sleeping still?" demanded the Duke.

"No," replied the surgeon. "He awoke about a quarter of an hour ago, and seems anxious to see your Highness. He questioned me closely as to his state, when I told him the truth."

"You did right, you did right," replied the Duke. "He is one that can bear it. What is your real opinion, Reignaut, in regard to the result?"

"I can hardly tell your Highness," replied the surgeon. "Two or three days more are necessary, before we can judge. The wound in the shoulder is not dangerous, though the most painful. The shot which passed through his body, and lodged in the back, is one which we generally consider mortal; but then, in ordinary cases, death either takes place almost immediately, or indications of such a result are seen in an hour or two, as to leave no further doubt on the subject. No such indications have appeared here, and it may have happened that the ball has passed through without touching any vital part. We must remember, also," he continued, "that the wound was received when the moon was in her first quarter, which is, of course, very favourable; and we shall also, if there be any chance of life being saved, have made some progress towards recovery before any crisis is brought on by the moon reaching the full."

The Duke listened attentively, for though such things may appear to us, in the present day, mere foolishness, that was not the case two centuries and a half ago, and the power of the moon, in affecting the wounded or sick, was never questioned. "Stay, Reignaut," said the Duke, "I will go with you, and see this good youth. I love him much; there is a frankness in his nature that wins upon the heart. Besides, he has saved my life, and has come to my aid on all occasions, as if there were a fate in it; and I believe, moreover, that he loves me personally as much--nay, perhaps more, than any of my own family and relations."

Thus saying the Duke rose, and, followed by Reignaut, passed through the door of his cabinet into the anteroom. His pages instantly presented themselves to light him on his way, and traversing some of the long corridors of the vast building he inhabited, he reached the chamber where his unhappy friend lay stretched upon the bed of pain and sickness. The boy Ignati sat beside him, tending him with care and affection; and at the foot of the bed, with his arms crossed upon his chest, stood his faithful servant Gondrin, with tears in his eyes.

The Duke seated himself by the young Count, and remained with him for nearly an hour; and knowing well what effect the mind has upon the body, spoke to him cheerfully and hopefully of the time to come, talked of his recovered health as a thing certain, and mentioned his union with Marie de Clairvaut as beyond all doubt.

"It is upon that subject, my Lord," said the young gentleman, "that I wished particularly to speak with your Highness. I have not had either time or opportunity of telling you all that has occurred since I left you at Soissons. But from all I have heard, I now judge better in regard to the situation of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut than even you can. Nay, Monsieur Reignaut, I must speak a few words, but I will be as brief and as prudent as possible. In this business, my Lord, suspect not the Queen. It is not in her hands that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut will be found. Neither is she with Villequier, depend upon it; nor in the power of the King. I grieve to say it, but I feel sure my own brother has something to do with the events of this day as far as they affect her so dear to me."

"But you surely do not think," exclaimed the Duke, "that it is your brother's hand which inflicted these wounds upon you!"

"The ball would be poisoned, indeed, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "if I did believe such to be the case. But I trust it is not so; most sincerely do I trust--ay, and believe--it is not so. There is another hand, my Lord Duke; and not long ago I could as well have believed that my own father's would have been raised against me as the one of which I speak. But still there is another hand, my Lord, which--actuated by motives dark and evil--I believe to have been raised against my life. That hand is in general unerring in its aim; and the moment before the shot was fired, I saw the calm cold features which I know so well, at the window just above me."

"But whose is the hand?" exclaimed the Duke. "Whose are the features that you mean?"

"I mean those of the Abbé de Boisguerin, my Lord," replied the Count; "and to him, to him, I think, your Highness must look even rather than to my brother. I believe Gaspar but to be a tool in his hands, and that he uses him for his own dark and criminal designs."

"Have I not heard you say he was your tutor?" demanded the Duke. "What then are his motives? what can be his inducements?"

"Love, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "I have the word of that sweet girl for his having dared to use words towards her, for which he deserves and must meet with punishment. Him I would point out to your Highness as the person to be watched, and sought for, and made to

account for all his actions; for, depend upon it, his are the machinations which are ruling these events."

"He shall not be forgotten!" replied the Duke. "He shall not be forgotten! But now, Logères, speak no more, except indeed only to answer me one question. I have heard that the county of Morly has lately fallen to you by the death of the old Count. These, with the estates of Logères, if properly conducted, may afford me great assistance. You are incapable for the time of directing them at all. Do you authorise me to fill your post, and give orders in your name till you are better?"

"Most willingly, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "I had already thought of it. But your Highness talks of my becoming better: I have thought of that matter too, but in a different light; and considering what may take place in case of my own death, I have requested Monsieur Reignaut here to cause a will to be drawn up, leaving the whole that I possess to the person whom I love best on earth, with your Highness for her guardian. There are a few gifts bestowed on those that love me, and a provision for all old servants: but----"

"But it will not be wanted, Logères," said the Duke, pressing his hand. "I see it in your eye; I hear it in the tone of your voice. You will recover and strike by my side yet--perhaps, in many a well-fought field. Silence and perfect quiet, I know, are Monsieur Reignaut's best medicines; but I shall come to you, from time to time, when I have got any pleasant tidings to bear."

CHAP. IV.

We must now pass over a considerable lapse of time without taking any note of the political intrigues with which it was occupied, and lead the reader at once from the month of May to the end of summer, and from the city of Paris to the distant town of Augoulême.

Under the high hill on which that city stands, at the distance of about a league from the base, was in those days a beautiful park with a pavilion of four towers; and in one of these towers, on a fine summer day towards the end of July, sat the young Marquis of Montsoreau together with the Abbé de Boisguerin: not exactly in conversation, for the Marquis had not spoken a word for nearly an hour; but in dull companionship.

The young nobleman's back was turned towards the light, his eyes were bent down upon the ground, his head drooped forward in a desponding attitude, the nostril was painfully expanded, as if he drew his breath with difficulty, and the teeth were tight shut, as it were to keep down some struggling emotions that swelled for utterance. An open letter lay upon the table, and another much more closely written, and written in cypher, was in the hand of the Abbé de Boisguerin. The Abbé's brow too was a good deal contracted, and his lip was somewhat pale, though it quivered not; but from time to time he addressed the young nobleman with words of consolation, regarding some afflicting tidings just received.

Those words, however, though well chosen, appropriate and elegant, were not of the words that console, for they were not of the heart. He reasoned logically on the inutility of human grief, and still more on the vanity of regretting that which could not be recalled. He spoke lightly of all deep feelings for any earthly thing, and he talked of every deed upon the face of the earth being justified by the importance of the objects to be obtained.

When he had talked thus for some time without obtaining any answer, he was going on to justify the past; but Gaspar de Montsoreau suddenly started up, and interrupted him with a vehemence which he had never displayed before.

"Abbé de Boisguerin," he said, "talk not to me of consolation and of comfort. Is not my brother dead? Is not my brother dead, killed by my own hand? Can you tear that from the book of fate? Can you blot it out from memory? Can you rase it for ever from the records of crimes done? Can you find me a pillow on all the earth, where I can lay my head in peace?"

"Your brother, indeed, is dead," said the Abbé de Boisguerin, without in the least degree trying to relieve the mind of his young companion from the crime with which conscience charged him. "Your brother, indeed, is dead; and it is not to be denied that your hand, my dear Gaspar, took his life; but yet you were in a city where war was actually going on between two parties, one of which you served, and the other your brother. These things have happened every day in civil wars, and always will happen. They are to be grieved at, but who can help them?"

"But I was engaged in no civil wars," exclaimed the young Marquis. "My men were at the

Louvre. I was not fighting on the part of the King: I was not engaged in trampling down the people. But what was I busied with, Abbé de Boisguerin? I was engaged in a scheme for carrying off--from him she loved, and from those who had a right to protect her--one whom I had no title to control, whom I was bound by honour to guard and to defend. I was injuring her; I was preparing to injure her. If I had not lied to her myself, I had caused her to be deceived and lied to; and all that I had previously done made the act itself which I had committed, but the more hateful. Speak not to me of consolation, Abbé; speak not to me of hope or comfort. You of all men, do not venture to mention to me a word like happiness or confidence."

"And why not, my Lord?" demanded the Abbé somewhat sternly. "What have I done to merit reproach in the matter?"

"Has it not been you that have prompted me throughout?" demanded the Marquis. "Was it not you who devised the scheme, prepared the means, got possession of the Queen's letter by corrupting her servants. Was it not your tool, that, upon pretence of assisting her to the other gates of the hotel, got her into our power; and was it not you, when her prayers and entreaties and agitation would have made me yield--was it not you that resisted, and remorselessly bade the men carry her on? Did you not yourself stand by me when the shot was fired; and was it not your warning, that disgrace and death must follow hesitation, which winged the ball that took my brother's life?"

"It is all true, Gaspar," replied the Abbé de Boisguerin in a sad but no longer a harsh tone. "It is all true; and from you I meet the reward, which all men will meet and well deserve who love others better than themselves, and who do for them things that they would not do for themselves. Nevertheless, I still think that there was not that evil on our side with which you seem to reproach yourself. Shocked and mourning for your brother's death, you see all things in dark and gloomy colours. Those things which you regarded before as light, have now become to you heavy and sombre as night. But all this is but mood, and let me call to your remembrance what sense and reason say. You and your brother loved the same person,--you vehemently, warmly, devotedly; he coldly, and by halves. You, as the elder brother and as lord of the dwelling in which she was received, had, if any thing, the first claim upon her; and he himself rendered that claim still greater by leaving her entirely to you, and absenting himself from her. You had every right, therefore, to seek her hand by all means; and when you found that, though he affected generous forbearance, he had gone covertly to forestall your demand, and gain the promise of her hand from her guardian, surely you were bound to keep no measures with him. All I did subsequently was to serve you in a cause that I thought was right, and it is but a few days ago that you were grateful to me for so doing. I said at the time, and I say again, that if at the moment when your brother commenced his attack upon the house in the Rue de la Ferronière, either you or I had been taken, death and eternal disgrace would have been the consequence. We acted but in our own defence, and those who assailed us cannot accuse us for so acting."

Gaspar de Montsoreau heard him in sullen silence, his dark eyes rolling from side to side beneath his heavy eyebrows. In his dealings with the Abbé de Boisguerin he had by this time learned fully how artful and politic was the man who led him. He saw it, and he could not doubt it, even while he shared in the things at which his better spirit revolted. But that very knowledge taught him to doubt, whether the art and the policy were used for his service, and out of affection to him, or whether they were all directed in some secret way to the benefit of him who wielded them so dexterously. The suspicions which Villequier had instilled rose fresh in his mind at this very time; and as his only answer to the Abbé's reasonings, he demanded with a keen glance and a sharp tone, "Tell me, Abbé, was it, or was it not, you who brought the reiters upon us, and who gave the King's forces notice of our passage?"

"I did the one, but not the other," replied the Abbé calmly. "I dealt not with the reiters, Gaspar de Montsoreau, for that would have been dangerous to me, to her, and to you. But I did inform the troops of the King, because I already had learned how deeply the Duke of Guise was pledged to your brother; because I knew that no reasoning would prevent either you or this fair girl from going on to Soissons; and because I saw that there was no earthly chance of your obtaining her hand, but by placing her under the charge of her father's nearest male relation, from whom the Duke of Guise unjustly withholds the guardianship. I own it, I acknowledge it, I am proud of it."

The way in which the Abbé replied was not such as Gaspar de Montsoreau had expected; but dissatisfied with himself, and of course with every thing else, Gaspar de Montsoreau still gazed sullenly on the floor, and then raised his eyes to the open window of the pavilion, where the warm sun was seen streaming through the green vines, with the birds still singing sweetly in the woods without. But it was all to him as the face of Eden to our first parents after the fall; a shade seemed to come over his eyes when he looked upon the loveliness of nature; the very sunshine seemed to him darkness; and the fair world a desert.

"Can you give me back my delight in that sunshine?" he said, after a pause. "Can you make the notes of those birds again sound sweet to my ear? Can you remove the heavy, heavy burden of remorse from this heart? Can you ever, ever prove to me, that for this unrequited love I have not made myself a guilty wretch, bearing the sign of Cain upon his brow, the curse of Cain within his bosom?"

"If such be your feelings," replied the Abbé, "if such--contrary to all justice and reason--is the state in which your mind is to remain, there is one way that will alleviate and soothe you, that

may seem in your eyes some atonement, and put your conscience more at rest. Cast off this love which you believe has led you into evil, yield the pursuit of this fair girl, renounce the object for which you did that whereof your heart reproaches you, and by that voluntary punishment and self-command, do penance for aught in which you may have failed. Doubtless, that penance will be severe and terrible to endure; but the more it is so, the greater is the atonement."

The Marquis gazed him in the face thoughtfully while the Abbé spoke, and then fell into a long reverie. His brow was raised and depressed, his teeth gnawed his nether lip, his hand clenched and opened with the struggle that was going on within, and at length, stamping his heel upon the ground, he exclaimed, "No, no, no! I have paid a mighty price, and I will save the jewel that I have bought with my soul's salvation! That fiery love is the only thing now left me upon earth.-- She shall be mine, or I will die! What is there that shall stop me now? What is there that shall hinder me? Have I not wealth, and power, and courage, and strength, and daring, and determination? The fear of crime! the fear of crime! that weak barrier is cast down and trampled under my feet. Have I not broken the nearest and the dearest ties of kindred and affection, murdered the brother that hung on the same breast, dimmed the eyes that looked upon me in infancy, frozen the warm heart that was cradled in the same womb with mine?--Out upon it! What is there should stop me now? The lesser crimes of earth, the smaller violences, seem ground into unseen dust by this greater crime. Abbé, I will buy her of Villequier!--I know how to win him!--I will force her to love me, or she shall hate her husband! What is there shall stop me now? I will buy the priest as well as the ring, or the wedding garment; and she shall be mine, whether her heart be mine or not!"

While he spoke the Abbé de Boisguerin gazed upon him with one of his calm dark smiles; but upon the present occasion that smile upon the lip was at variance with a slight frown upon his brow. He replied little, however, saying merely, "It is so, Gaspar! It is so, that men seek to enjoy the fruit, and yet regret the means. They will never find happiness thus, however."

"Happiness!" exclaimed the Marquis, with a look of agony upon his face. "Is there such a thing as happiness? Oh yes, there is, and I once knew it, when together with that brother who is now no more, and you also, my friend, undisturbed by stormy passions, content with that I had, blessed with the only friendship and affection that was needful to content, I passed the sunny hours in sport and joy, and scarcely knew the common pains incident to man's general nature. And you have aided to destroy this state, and you have helped to drive me forth from happiness, to blot it out so entirely, that I could almost forget it ever existed."

"No, no, Gaspar of Montsoreau!" exclaimed the Abbé quickly, "I have not done any of these things you talk of. I have not aided in any one degree to take from you the happiness you formerly had. There is but one secret for the preservation of happiness, Gaspar. It matters not what is the object of desire, for any thing that we thirst for really may give us happiness in nearly the same portion as another. Happiness is gained by the right estimation of the means. If a man ever uses means that he regrets, to obtain any object that he desires, he loses the double happiness which may be obtained in life, the happiness of pursuit and the happiness of enjoyment. Every means must, of course, be proportioned to its end; where much is to be won, much must be risked or paid: but the firm strong mind, the powerful understanding, weighs the object against the price; and, if it be worthy, whatever that price may be, after it is once paid and the object attained, regrets not the payment. It is like an idle child who covets a gilt toy, spoils it in half an hour, and then regrets the money it has cost, ever to sorrow over means we have used, when those means have proved successful. Say not, Gaspar, that I disturbed your happiness! While you were in your own lands, enjoying the calm pleasures of a provincial life, knowing no joys, seeking no pleasures but those which, like light winds that ruffle the surface and plough not up the bosom of the water, amuse the mind but never agitate the heart, I lived contented and happy amongst you, believing that, but once or twice at most in the life of man, a joy is set before him, which is worthy of being bartered against amusement. I joined in all your sports, I furnished you with new sources of the same calm pleasures; and as long as I saw the passions were shut out, I sought no change for myself or for you either. But when the moment came, that strong and deep passions were to be introduced; when I saw that your heart, and that of your brother, like the moulded figure by the demigod, had been touched with the ethereal fire, and woke from slumber never to sleep again, then it was but befitting that I should aid him who confided in me, in the pursuit that he was now destined to follow. If the object was a great and worthy one, the means to obtain it were necessarily powerful and hazardous. No man ought to yield his repose for any thing that is not worth all risks; but having once begun the course, he must go on; and weak and idle is he who cannot overleap the barriers that he meets with, or, when the race is won, turns to regret this flower or that which he may have trampled down in his course."

"You are harsh, Abbé," replied the Marquis thoughtfully, somewhat shaken by his words--for though the wounds of remorse admit no balm, they are sometimes forgotten in strong excitement. "You are harsh, but yet it is a terrible thing to have slain one's brother."

"It is," replied the Abbé; "but circumstances give the value of every fact. It is a terrible thing to slay any human being; to take the life of a creature, full of the same high intelligences as ourselves: but if I slay that man in a room, and for no purpose, it is called murder; if I slay him in a battle-field, in order to obtain a crown, it is a glorious act, and worthy of immortal renown."

The Marquis listened to his sophistry, eager to take any theme of consolation to his heart. But any one who heard him, would have supposed that the Abbé de Boisguerin thought his

companion too easily consoled. Perhaps it might be that the Abbé himself sought to defend his share in the transaction, rather than to give any comfort to his unhappy cousin. At all events, after a brief pause, during which both fell into thought, he added, "What I grieve the most for is, that Charles was kind-hearted and generous, frank and true, and I believe sincerely that, but for this unhappy business, he loved us both."

"Ay, there is the horror! there is the horror!" exclaimed the Marquis, casting himself down into a chair, and covering his eyes with his hands. "He did love me, I know he did; and I believe he sought to act generously by me."

The Abbé suffered him to indulge in his grief for a moment or two, and then replied, "But the misfortune is, that, with all this, your object is not yet secured; that though you have once more snatched her from the power of the Guises, you have not contrived to keep her in your own."

The Marquis waved his hand impatiently, saying, "I cannot--I will not talk of such things now. Leave me, Abbé, leave me! I can but grieve; there is no way that I can turn without encountering sorrow."

The Abbé turned and left him; and descending the steps into the gardens, he walked on in the calm sunshine, as tranquilly as if purity and holiness had dwelt within his breast. "I must bear this yet a while longer," he said to himself. "But now, if I could find some enthusiastic priest, full of wild eloquence, such as we have in Italy, to seize this deep moment of remorse, we might do much with him to make him abjure this pursuit; perhaps abjure the world! The foolish boy thinks that it was his hand that did it, and does not know that I fired at all, when his hand shook so that he could not well have struck him. Perhaps there may be such a priest as I need up there," he continued, looking towards Augoulême, "perhaps there may be such a priest up there, of the kind I want. Epernon has his fits of devotion too, I believe. At all events, I will go up and see. The madder the better for my purpose."

Thus saying he called some servants, ordered his horse, and, as soon as it was brought, rode away towards Augoulême.

CHAP. V.

Gaspar de Montsoreau remained in the same position in which the Abbé had left him for nearly an hour, and the struggle of the various passions which agitated his heart, were perhaps as terrible as any that had ever been known to human being. His situation, indeed, was one which exposed him more than most men are ever exposed, to the contention of the most opposite feelings. He had not been led gradually on, as many are, step by step, to evil; but he had been taken from the midst of warm and kindly feelings, from the practice of right, and an habitual course of calm and tranquil enjoyment, and by the mastery of one strong and violent passion had been plunged into the midst of crimes which had left anguish and remorse behind them.

Still, however, the passion which had at first led him astray, existed in all its fierceness and all its intensity; and, like some quiet field--from which the husbandman has been accustomed to gather yearly, in the calm sunshine, a rich and kindly harvest--when suddenly made the place of strife by contending armies, his heart, so tranquil and so happy not a year before, had now become the battle-place of remorse and love.

Sometimes the words of the Abbé came back upon his ear, urging him to abandon for ever, as a penance for his crime, the pursuit which had already led him to such awful deeds; but then again the thought of Marie de Clairvaut, of never beholding that beautiful being again, of yielding her for ever, perhaps, to the arms of others, came across his brain, and almost drove him mad.

Then would rush remorse again upon his heart, the features of his brother rose up before him, his graceful form seemed to move within his sight; the frank warm-hearted, kindly smile, that had ever greeted him when they met, was now painted by memory to his eye; and many a trait of generous kindness, many a noble, many an endearing act, the words and jests of boyhood and infancy, the long remembered sports of early years, the accidents, the adventures, the tender and twining associations of youth and happiness, forgotten in the strife of passion and the contention of rivalry, now came back, as vividly as the things of yesterday--came back, alas! now that death had ended the struggle, rendered the deeds of the past irreparable, thrown the pall of remorse over the last few months, and left memory alone to deck the tomb of the dead with bright flowers gathered from their spring of life.

It was too much to bear: he turned back again to the words, not of consolation but of

incitement, which the Abbé had spoken to him. He tried to think it was folly to regret what had been done; he tried to recollect that it was in a scene of contention, and in moments of strife, that his brother had fallen; he strove to persuade himself that Marie de Clairvaut had been under his care and guidance and direction, and that his brother Charles had had no right even to attempt to take her out of his hands. He laboured, in short, to steel his heart; to render it as hard iron, in order to resist the things that it had to endure. He sought anxiously to rouse it into activity; and he tried to fix his mind still upon the thoughts of winning Marie de Clairvaut. He resolved, at whatever price, by whatever sacrifice, to gain her, to possess her, to make her his own beyond recall: with the eagerness of passion and the recklessness of remorse, he determined to pursue his course, trusting, as many have idly trusted, that he should induce the woman, whose affections and feelings he forced, to love the man to whose passions she was made a sacrifice.

The struggle was still going on, the voice of conscience was raising itself loudly from time to time, memory was doing her work, and passion was opposing all, when, without hearing any step, or knowing that any one had arrived at the house, he felt a hand quietly laid upon his arm, and starting up with a feeling almost of terror, which was unusual to him, he beheld the dark and sinister, though handsome, countenance of Villequier.

The courtier grasped his hand with enthusiastic warmth, and gazed in his face with a look of deep interest. "You are sad, Monsieur de Montsoreau," he said; "I grieve to see you so sad. I fear that the news which I came to break to you has been told you, perhaps, in a rash and inconsiderate manner. You are aware then that your brother is no more. I hoped to have been in time, for I only heard it the day before yesterday, in the evening, from the Duke of Guise, who is now with the King, and, as you know, all powerful."

Gaspar de Montsoreau heard him to an end, and then merely bowed his head, saying, "I have heard all, Monsieur de Villequier." But although he saw that his companion--who had more than once witnessed the fierceness of his feelings towards his brother regarding Mademoiselle de Clairvaut--was surprised at the deep grief he now betrayed, he dared not let him know how much that grief was aggravated by remorse, from the belief that his own hand had cut the thread of his brother's life.

"I am sorry. Monsieur de Montsoreau," added Villequier, "to see you so deeply affected by this matter. Pray remember, that though Monsieur de Logères was your brother, he was struggling with you for the hand of the person you love, and that his being now removed, renders your hope of obtaining the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut no longer doubtful and remote, but certain and almost immediate."

"I see not the matter in the same cheering light that you do, Monsieur de Villequier," replied Gaspar de Montsoreau thoughtfully. "You say, and I hear also that it is so, that the Duke of Guise is now all powerful with the King; if such be the case, what results have we to anticipate? Do you think that the Duke of Guise will ever consent to the union of his ward with me? Do you think that, prejudging the question as he has already done, he will give me the bride that he promised to my brother? Have I not heard from those who were present, that he has sworn by all he holds sacred, that never, under any circumstances, should she be mine?"

"The Duke of Guise is not immortal," replied Villequier drily; "and his death leaves her wholly in my power. Should such an event not take place, however, and the period of her attaining free agency approach, we must risk a little should need be, and employ a certain degree of gentle compulsion to drive or lead her to that which we desire."

"When will it be?" demanded Gaspar of Montsoreau. "Why should we pause? why should we risk any thing by delay?"

"She becomes a free agent by the law," replied Villequier, "on the morrow of next Christmas. If that day passes, it is true, prayers and supplications will be all that can be used, for the Parliament will extend its protection to her, and not the King himself can force her to wed any one she does not choose. Before that period her guardian can, for such is the feudal law of this realm, that she can be forced either to resign her lands or produce some one in her stead to lead her retainers in the King's service. The law has been somewhat stretched, it is true; but on more than one occasion, with the consent of the King, the guardian of a young lady difficult to please, has compelled her to make a choice, and the Parliament has sanctioned the act."

"Are you not her lawful guardian, then?" demanded the young Marquis, "that you should hesitate, in hopes of the Duke of Guise's death."

"I maintain that I am her guardian," replied Villequier, "and my suit is before the Parliament; but I should be much more certainly her guardian, if the Duke of Guise were dead."

"The Duke of Guise dead!" said Gaspar de Montsoreau sullenly. "A thing improbable, unlikely, not to be counted upon. If that be all my hold upon you, Monsieur de Villequier, the hopes that you have held out to me are but slight in fabric and foundation."

"Hear me, my good young friend," replied Villequier. "They are not so slight as you imagine. In the first place, we have for some time held in France that rash and troublesome persons who oppose our progress, or thwart our desires, are to be encountered for a certain time by the arts

of policy and by every soft and quiet inducement we may hold out to them. When we have been patient as long as possible, and find that they are not to be frustrated by any ordinary means, it becomes necessary to put a stop to their opposition, and to remove them from the way in which we are proceeding. Now, the Duke of Guise has been very busily teaching a number of persons, both high and low, that his prolonged life would be extremely inconvenient to them. Biron does not love him, D'Aumont abominates him, D'O. has good cause to wish him a step beyond Jerusalem; Henry of Navarre has in him a bitter enemy; the rash, vain, Count of Soissons an obstacle and a stumbling-block; and though I am his humble servant, and the King his very good friend, yet both Henry and myself could do quite as well without him. Besides these, there are at least ten thousand more in France who would walk with their beavers far more gallantly, if there were a Guise the less in the world; so that I say, on very probable reasoning, that I would fully as soon reckon upon the life of a man of eighty, as I would upon the robust, powerful existence of Henry of Guise even for an hour. But putting all that aside. Monsieur de Montsoreau, taking it for granted that he lives, what can I do but what I propose? You have the King's promise and mine in writing; we can do no more. The cause is before the Parliament, and Henry, restrained in his own court, at war with his own subjects, and driven from his own capital, depend upon it, will never sign your contract of marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut till every other hope has failed; ay, and what is more, till he sees before him a very very great object to be gained by so doing."

"A fresh object you mean, Monsieur de Villequier," replied Gaspar de Montsoreau. "I know that this is the way in which kings and statesmen deal with men less wise than themselves. There must be always one object secured to obtain the promise, and another to obtain the performance. Pray, what is the new object, Monsieur de Villequier? and is it sure, that if an object be held out of sufficient worth and importance, the King will not find some specious reason for drawing back, or that some new irresistible obstacle does not present itself?"

"Consider the King's situation. Monsieur de Montsoreau," replied Villequier, "with the Duke of Guise constantly at his side, dictating to him all his movements, with the question, of guardianship even now lying before the Parliament, he would run the very greatest risk at this moment if he were to do as we both wish, and forcibly hurry on this business to a conclusion. But the aspect of affairs is changing every day,—the Count of Soissons has come to join him; Henry of Navarre himself has sent him offers of assistance and support; Epernon, roused into activity, is levying forces in all parts of the country; every day the King may expect to make some way against the party of his adversaries; and therefore every day is something gained. But even were it not so very hazardous to attempt any thing of the kind at present, you could not expect the King to risk much, and embarrass his policy for your sake, without some individual motive. That this business should take place, is your strong and intense desire. It is very natural that it should be so; but neither the King nor myself have any such feelings, passions, or wishes. Let us each have our advantage, or our gratification, in that which is to ensue, and I will undertake, and pledge myself in the most solemn manner, that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut shall be your wife before next Christmas-day."

Gaspar de Montsoreau paused, and thought carefully over all that had been said. "I thank you. Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "for speaking freely in this matter. Let us cast away all idle delicacy. Things have happened to me lately which have taught me to hold all such empty verbiage at naught. Let us look upon this business as a matter of dealing, a matter of merchandise."

"Exactly!" replied Villequier raising his eyes slightly, but not seeming in the least degree offended. "Let us consider it in such a light. Every matter of policy is but trade upon a large scale."

"Well then," continued Gaspar de Montsoreau in the same bold tone, "I will look upon you and the King, Monsieur de Villequier, as two partners in a mercantile house. Now, what sort of merchandise is it that you would prefer to have in barter for your signature to my marriage contract with this young Lady. Shall it be money?"

"Money!" exclaimed Villequier, with a slight ironical smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "Have you any money? It is indeed a surprising thing to hear any one talk of money except the Duke of Guise, or the Duke of Epernon. Why, Bellievre assures me, upon his honour, that the very dispatch which he was ordered to send to Soissons, to forbid positively the Duke of Guise coming to Paris, was stopped, for what reason think you? Because, when he took it down to the treasury, there was not found fifty livres to pay the courier's expenses. The courier would not go without the money, Bellievre had none to give him, so between them both they carried the King's dispatch to the post, and put it in with the common letters. The letters went to Rheims before they were sent to Soissons, and the Duke of Guise was in Paris, while the order to forbid him was on the road.^[3] Money? Oh certainly, money above all things! But pray do not let it be a large sum, lest, like an apoplectic epicure, the King's treasury and my purse die of sudden repletion."

"Well then, Monsieur de Villequier," said the Marquis, after taking one or two turns up and down the room, "I will tell you what I will do, to show you how dearly I hold the gift that is promised me. On the day of my marriage with Marie de Clairvaut, when it is all completed, the benediction said, the contract signed, your name as guardian, and the King's in confirmation attached, I will place in your hands the sum of one hundred thousand crowns of the sun."

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Villequier in the same tone in which he had spoken before, "I did not know that there was such a sum in France. If I were to tell it to Monsieur d'O. he would not believe me."

"But remember, Monsieur de Villequier," replied Gaspar of Montsoreau, not quite liking the levity of his companion's speech, "this is no jesting matter with me, whatever it may be with you; and I must have such sure and perfect warranty that you will not betray my hopes again, or ask for even the slightest further delay, that there cannot be a doubt rest upon my mind; otherwise---"

"Otherwise what, Monsieur de Montsoreau?" demanded Villequier. "If we do not keep our words, you know we shall lose the great advantage that we hope to gain from you. That is the surest bond! Let the matter stand thus, sir: if this marriage do take place, as I have promised you it shall, the hundred thousand crowns of gold are paid; if not, we are the losers. I see no alternative beyond this."

"By Heavens! but there is, and there shall be one," answered Gaspar de Montsoreau impetuously. "I see that Monsieur de Villequier, who is supposed to count upon every chance and circumstance collateral and direct, has forgotten one or two points, although he has not forgotten that I am heir of my brother's lands, both of Logères and Morly. But I will only put him in mind of what might take place on either side. The King and Monsieur de Villequier might find obstacles of great import rise up against my wishes, or they might find greater advantages in some other quarter; they might think it worth while to keep me trifling in inactivity, or employ me in their service against the enemy. They might do all this, and then forego the sum named for a greater. I, on the other hand, Monsieur de Villequier, might see wavering and hesitation; I might grow tired of waiting and dependence; I might say to-morrow I have no certainty in this business, and I might give my banner to the wind, broider the cross of the League upon my breast, or assume the double cross of Lorraine, and either range the spears of Montsoreau and Logères in the ranks of the army of Mayenne, or marching to Chartres, Tours, or Blois, might bow me lowly to my Lord of Guise, and begging him to forget the past, swear myself his faithful servant."

Villequier gazed on him for a moment with certainly not the most friendly expression of countenance, and was about to speak; but the young Marquis, conscious of his own importance, waved his hand, saying, "Nay, nay, Monsieur de Villequier! on all and on every account the plan I am about to propose is the only one that can be followed. Of course, in dealing with his Majesty, I cannot treat as crown to crown;" and he smiled somewhat bitterly. "But I must treat with you as gentleman to gentleman, and leave you to entreat his Majesty--urgently and zealously, as I doubt not you will do it, to accede graciously to our views. Thus then shall it be, that you and the King shall enter into a bond with me, by which you shall engage that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut shall, with the full consent of both parties expressed by their signature to our marriage-contract, become my wife on or before next Christmas-day, and in default shall be subject to amercement in whatsoever amount the Parliament of Paris may judge that I am damaged by the want of performance. This is merely to secure that the matter be explicit; and in the same bond may be placed my engagement to pay the sum named, upon the fulfilment of the contract. This is fair, and only fair; and you know my last resolve."

"In truth, Monsieur de Montsoreau," replied Villequier, "if you knew but the state of our finances, you would see that we are far more likely to be so eager in concluding this business as even to risk dangerous consequences, than to trifle with you in any degree."

He remembered the curious engagement that he had entered into with the Abbé de Boisguerin, and he paused a moment, in hopes that Gaspar de Montsoreau might show even the slightest sign of hesitation: but, so far from it, the frown deepened on the young nobleman's brow, and he replied sharply, "I will trust to no contingencies. Monsieur de Villequier. These are changing times, as you well know. The cross Fleurdalisée in your arms^[4] may well be changed, by the golden billets dropped around it, into the cross of Lorraine. If what I have offered be as good as you say, there is no earthly reason why his Majesty of France or yourself, Monsieur de Villequier, should object to enter into the engagement with me that I propose."

"Well," answered Villequier; "well, I must do my best with the King; but I dare say, Monsieur de Montsoreau," he said in a lower voice, "I dare say you are well aware that a little compulsion, perhaps, must be used in this instance."

He thought he saw hesitation, and he went on the more eagerly, for he wished to avoid the written engagement. "I must be permitted to use what means I think fit to wring consent from the young Lady herself. Nor must I have one word of objection on your part, whatever you see or hear--no asking for delay!--no yielding to her tears. One word of such a kind, remember, vitiates the engagement upon our part, but leaves you as strictly bound as ever."

Gaspar de Montsoreau gazed down upon the ground sternly for several moments, with his brows contracting, till his eyes were nearly hid beneath them. His fingers were seen to clasp into the palms of his hands, as if the nails would have buried themselves there. But after a short and terrible struggle, the evil spirit maintained its ascendancy, and he exclaimed, "Be it so! Be it so! But in the meantime, sir," he continued abruptly, "there is one thing I have to demand. How have I been led with hopes, and meeting nothing but disappointments, for the last two months. I who dared all, and underwent all, to snatch her once more from the power of the Guises. When forced

to fly, it was under your power and in your charge I left her; and yet, though this is the fourth or fifth time that you and I have met, I have never been able to see her, or to learn distinctly where she is. This must be no longer, Monsieur de Villequier. I need consolation; I need comfort; the only comfort or consolation I can find is in her presence and in her society. Where is she?--I demand to know where she is. I was brought to Augoulême by information that she was in the neighbourhood; but I cannot discover her, and I will be trifled with no longer."

"By all I hold sacred," exclaimed Villequier, not a little surprised by the bold and daring tone and decided manner, which the young nobleman had so suddenly put on, "By all I hold sacred----"

"What is that, sir?" demanded Gaspar de Montsoreau.

Villequier smiled. "Oh many things, Monsieur de Montsoreau," he answered; "I hold many things sacred. But with any oath or abjuration that you think most convenient, I assure you that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut is not under my charge, or in my power at this moment."

"But was so how long ago?" demanded the Marquis.

"About a fortnight," replied Villequier coolly. "The fact is, Monsieur de Montsoreau, that his high and mighty Highness, the Duke of Guise, having come to pay a humble visit to his Majesty--to congratulate him, I suppose, on being driven out of Paris,--gave significant notice to the King, on their first interview at Chartres, that he believed Mademoiselle de Clairvaut to be in my hands, and that he would have her instantly delivered up. I was not present, you know, but every thing passed as the Guises wished. I dare say you have heard all the rest; Epernon was banished, and fled to Augoulême here, stripped of his high posts and manifold emoluments; Guise was created generalissimo of the King's armies; in fact, Guise dictated the law to the King, and Henry was fain to forget all the past, or to cover the bitter memory with a jest."

"But to the point; to the point, Monsieur de Villequier," said the Marquis de Montsoreau. "What of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut?"

"Why, the King told me," replied Villequier, "that the Duke demanded her at all events till the Parliament of Paris had decided our cause. The next day the Duke and I had an interview on the subject; but ere that, I had placed her in the hands of a friend, and begged him to remove her for a time from the house where she then was. The Duke was as imperious and unceremonious as an executioner. He vowed that I should give her up to him at once; and though we did our best to deceive him, exactly as we had done with your wild thoughtless brother, the Duke did not so easily believe us; and both I and the King were obliged to swear upon the mass that she was not in our power, and that we knew not where she was. That was easily done; but Henry's low laugh had nearly betrayed the whole; and the Duke swore loudly, and menaced high, that if he were deceived, he would have vengeance."

"And now, Monsieur de Villequier," said the Marquis, "where is she now? And who is the friend in whose hands you have placed her?"

Villequier paused for a single moment, as if to consider whether he should tell him or not. But a moment after he answered with a smile, "The friend in whose hands she is placed, Monsieur de Montsoreau, is one in whom at that time you yourself placed great confidence. I trust the same feelings exist still towards him. I mean the Abbé de Boisguerin."

Gaspar de Montsoreau started at the intelligence with feelings of angry dissatisfaction, which he could hardly account for to himself, but which he instantly strove to conceal from the keen eyes of the artful man with whom he was dealing. The exclamation of "Indeed!" however, which broke from his lips, was uttered in a tone which instantly showed Villequier that the tidings were by no means pleasing; and while he suffered the young Marquis to digest them at leisure he laid out in his own mind a plan for keeping the Abbé and his former pupil at variance, not with any clear and definite object, indeed, but for the purpose of having a check upon the young Marquis at any future moment, in case of necessity. Villequier felt, too, that the clear, artful, and unscrupulous mind of the Abbé de Boisguerin was far better fitted to deal with, and frustrate him in any purpose that he might entertain, than that of the young Marquis, which, though not deficient either in acuteness or policy, was constantly misled by inexperience, or by the impetuosity of strong passions. He felt that the counsels of the Abbé might under many circumstances, if given sincerely, be a safeguard to Gaspar de Montsoreau against his arts; and he therefore saw no slight advantage in encouraging feelings of doubt and dissatisfaction in the mind of his young companion.

"It is surprising," said the Marquis, "that the Abbé did not communicate to me the facts which you have mentioned, Monsieur de Villequier; but I suppose that you bound him down to secrecy."

"To general secrecy," replied Villequier, "as was absolutely necessary. But you, of course, as my friend, and as the person most interested--you, of course, were excepted. No, Monsieur de Montsoreau, no! In this business the Abbé has acted upon his own judgment. He was then at Blois, you know. I was in great haste, knew no other person to whom I could apply, and therefore entrusted him with the task, thinking him also, at that time, you must remember, sincerely, truly, and devotedly your friend."

"And have you any cause. Monsieur de Villequier," demanded the Marquis, "have you any

cause to suppose now that he is not my friend?"

"Nay, Monsieur de Montsoreau!" replied Villequier. "If you are satisfied, I have nothing to say. I only thought you seemed dissatisfied, and----"

"And what, Monsieur de Villequier?" demanded the Marquis, seeing that he paused.

"I was going to say," replied Villequier, "that it might be as well for you to be upon your guard. We are living in troublous times, Monsieur de Montsoreau. We are both of us placed in a delicate situation; every word and action ought to be guided by policy and forethought; and though I do not wish to wound the delicacy of your friendship towards your relation and friend, Monsieur de Boisguerin, yet we all know that he is a skilful politician, and that when, some years ago, even as a young man he appeared at the Court of France, her Majesty the Queen-mother was heard to say, she was glad when he was gone, for she was confident that he would outwit Satan himself, and therefore might go far to outwit her."

"I should not mind his policy," replied the Marquis. "I should not mind his policy, if you had not insinuated doubts as to whether he was at heart my friend."

Villequier answered nothing, but gazed down upon the ground with his brow somewhat contracted, and then stirred the rushes on the floor with the point of his sword, as if determined not to make any reply.

"You are silent, Monsieur de Villequier," said Gaspar of Montsoreau; "and yet there is hanging a cloud of much thought upon your brow, as if there were intelligence in your breast which you could give, but would not. I beseech you, if you are really friendly to me--or to speak more plainly--if our interests in this business are in some degree linked together, I beseech you to let me know fully and fairly what you think, and what you know, of the Abbé de Boisguerin."

"Thus adjured, Monsieur de Montsoreau," replied Villequier, "I can but answer you, that I do not think Monsieur de Boisguerin is as friendly to you as you suppose. Depend upon it, he has his own purposes to answer first, and you are but a secondary consideration, if not, perhaps, a tool."

"These are grave charges, sir," said Gaspar de Montsoreau, somewhat angry at the term tool. "I should like to have some proofs to sustain them."

"See! you are angry already," cried Villequier. "However, at the present moment I have no proofs to give. At some future time--ay, before the period of your marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, I may give you such proof of what is the Abbé's real character and real feelings towards you, that you will say I am well justified. In the meantime I have warned you sufficiently to put you on your guard. That is enough for the present moment: you must act as you think fit; but still you will be prepared. Farther, I have only to say, that it is not I that keep you from seeing Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. You have my full will and consent to see her whom you will. I would not, indeed, have you visit her too often, lest discovery should ensue, and Guise obtain possession of her at once. But your own discretion must be your guide. I will now leave you, Monsieur de Montsoreau; and, depend upon it, you will not find that I will fail you in any of the promises I have made, and will very soon return to you with the business arranged by the King, in the manner that you desire. We must then wait until further delay be judged dangerous: then if nothing occurs to relieve us from the other obstacles, we must in the end step over them; and, forgetting a little law, conclude your marriage, whether the Parliament awards me the guardianship or not. When once she is made your wife, they cannot easily unwife her."

Gaspar de Montsoreau, full of thoughts rather than words, did not pursue the conversation further. "I have but shown you scanty courtesy, Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "in not asking you to make your home of my poor house. It is not, indeed, such as I could wish to offer you, having been taken from its bankrupt lord in some slight haste. But still----"

"I thank you most humbly, Marquis," replied Villequier. "But I am bound farther to the city on the hill there. I must lodge with Epernon to-night, for I have messages to him from the King."

Thus saying, after various more such ceremonious speeches as the age required, Villequier took his departure, and mounting his horse, which he had ordered to be kept still saddled in the court-yard, he rode on towards Augoulême, followed by his train. As he did so, he once more thought over the alliance between Gaspar de Montsoreau and Marie de Clairvaut. "If I can bring it about," he thought, "I not only gain this sum he promises, but bind him to me for ever. I am her nearest male relation, and I could not well find such an alliance in France. Montsoreau, Morly, Logères; it is a wonderful combination! But even, were it not for that--were it half as good, where should I get the man in France who would give a hundred thousand golden crowns for the possession of such a cold piece of pretty marble as that."

CHAP. VI.

While the conversation just narrated was taking place, and the character and views of the Abbé de Boisguerin were being commented upon in a manner which he could but little have wished, he himself was pursuing his way towards the town of Augoulême, with feelings and purposes varying at every step; though in his case it was not the slightest sting of remorse or regret which occasioned this vacillation of purpose.

Probably there never was a man on earth who wholly and entirely stilled the voice of conscience, and there might be moments when the Abbé's own heart reproached him for things which he had done. But the habit of his thoughts was different. He had been brought up in a school where right and wrong were so frequently confounded for the purpose of maintaining the temporal dominion of the church that, at a very early period of his life, he had arrived at that conclusion, which the sceptical followers of Pyrrho arrive at by a more lengthened process, namely, that on earth there is no absolute and invariable right and wrong.

The Jesuits had taught him, that what was wrong under some circumstances, and marked by the reprobation both of God and man, was right under other circumstances, and even praiseworthy; and forgetting the cautious restrictions under which the wiser and the better members of the order attempted, though vainly, to guard the doctrine, his keen and clear mind at once determined, that if fraud could ever be pious, virtue of any kind could be but a name. If there were no invariable and universal standard: if his thoughts and his actions were to be governed by the opinions, and directed to the purposes of men, the only rule of virtue, he saw, must be the approbation of others like himself; and as every course of action must have an end and object to secure energy in pursuing it, he readily fell into the belief that gratification was the great object, and men's good opinion but to be sought as a means to that end.

It may be easily conceived how far he went on upon such a course of reasoning. It naturally ended in the disbelief of every thing that other men hold sacred: yet he put on all the semblances of religion; for as he believed in no hereafter, to do so, did not seem to him an impious mockery, but merely an unmeaning ceremony required by society. Every thing had become with him a matter of calculation; any thing that was to be obtained, was to be obtained by a certain price; and, as he himself declared, he never regretted giving any price, provided the object was attained, and was of equal value.

It was his passions alone that led him wrong, and made him calculate falsely. They had done so more than once in life, but yet not frequently; not indeed that he sought to subdue them, but that they were not naturally easily roused.

It was no remorse then, or regret, that moved him in the varying state of his thoughts as he rode on. It was doubt as to the means that he was employing; It was doubt as to whether the strong passion, which he felt within his breast, was not blinding his eyes, and misleading his judgment, as to the choice of paths and instruments. He felt that on the present occasion he calculated not so coolly as he was accustomed to do; he felt that the object he had proposed to himself--or rather which passion, and rash passion had suggested--was one so great and so little likely to be obtained, that the means employed must be great and extraordinary also; and that no single false step could be taken without the loss of every hope. His sensations were all strangely complicated, however. He felt and reproached himself for feeling that the passion in his heart had grown up so powerful, so overwhelming, that when he thought of staking life itself upon the issue, not a hesitation crossed his mind, and that he was ready to say, like a love-sick boy, "Let me die, if she be not mine!" But with that passion, he had mingled ambition, both as a means and as an end; prospects had opened before his eyes which had roused in his heart aspirations, which he thought he had put down; and not only to succeed in his love, but to gild that love with pageantry and state and power, had now become his object.

Still, however, he remembered that in grasping at these high things, he might overlook matters which would prevent him reaching them; and after riding on quickly for some time, he drew in his rein, to think more calmly, to review his situation, and to calculate exactly all the important, the critical steps which were now to be taken.

"What am I next going to do?" he thought. "To seek for a priest, who may work upon that impetuous, weak-minded boy, to yield the object of his passion, because, in the pursuit thereof, he has shed his brother's blood. And yet, is it likely that he will yield it? No! I fear not! and yet stronger minds than his have been bowed down by superstition to greater sacrifices. He may, it is true; and it may be as well to secure that chance: but then, even then, only one small step is gained. If one could get him to yield all his great possessions at the same time, that were something! But he will not do that! Two centuries ago we would have sent him to the holy land: but those good times are past. What then is to be done?--To hurry him on into some rash enterprise, and sharing his danger, take the equal chance of which shall live and which shall die?--That were a gamester's policy indeed.--No! we must find more easy means than that."

"However," continued the Abbé, after a pause "in the meantime, I must strike for myself alone. She hates and abhors him evidently. I myself have been too rash and rough with her. My passion

has been too impetuous--too fiery. I know that those women who seem so cold and circumspect are often like Ætna, icy above but with fire at the heart. But I have been rash. She will easily forgive that offence, however, and forget it too, when I can woo her as one unbound by the clerical vows, and companion of the high and great. I must lose no time, however, for events are drawing clearly to a mighty issue. Here is the party of Henry, and the party of the League. I must choose between the two without delay. And yet the choice is soon made. In the first place, it would be long ere Guise would trust me: in the next, he would never love me: in the next, he himself is not long lived. As I have seen a bird, when hit by a skilful fowler, tower high into the air before it falls, so Guise is soaring up with mighty effort, which will end but in his own destruction. I will away to Epernon at once. He is the man whose fortunes will yet rise; his unconquerable spirit, his courage, determination, and activity, his gross selfishness, his insolence, his very weakness, will all contribute to support him still. This is a world in which such things thrive! Epernon must be the man; and if I show him such cause as I can show him, he may well be glad to attach me to himself, as increasing his power and enhancing his importance with the King. It is to him I will go! Doubtless his reverses have humbled him somewhat, otherwise it were no light task to deal on such subjects with Epernon."

In judging of Epernon the Abbé judged by mankind in general, for in almost every breast pride is a cowardly quality, and once depressed sinks into grovelling submission. Epernon, however, was the exception to the general rule, and seemed rather to rise in haughtiness under adversity.

With thoughts like those which we have just detailed, the Abbé spurred on towards Angoulême; but as he began to climb the steep ascent, he saw several indications of popular emotion, which made him hesitate for a moment, as to whether he should proceed or not. There were two or three groups of citizens all speaking eagerly together, and in low tones; and at the gates of the city he remarked a man whom he had seen before, and knew to be the mayor of the place, conversing in a low tone, but in what seemed an anxious manner, with the soldiers of the Corps de Garde. The Abbé contrived to make his horse pass as near them as possible, but at the same time affected to be deeply busied with his own thoughts while really listening attentively to their conversation. He could only catch, however, the end of one sentence and the beginning of a reply:--

"This Duke--a proud insufferable tyrant," said the voice of the mayor.

"Get along; if you were not what you are, I would put my pike into you," replied the soldier; and went on with some observations upon his companion's conduct, not very complimentary, the whole of which the Abbé de Boisguerin did not hear.

As he advanced into the town, however, his keen eye remarked many more signs and symptoms of the same kind, from all of which he drew his own deductions; and on entering the castle, which was then inhabited by the Duke of Epernon, he dismounted in the court of the guardhouse, as it was called, where there were a considerable number of the Duke's soldiery loitering about. Though it was not the usual place for visitors to dismount, they suffered him to attach his horse to one of the large iron hooks in the wall, and in a few minutes after he was in the presence of the Duke of Epernon. Not a trace of humiliation or abasement was to be seen in the Duke's countenance or demeanour. He was as proud, as fierce, as fiery as ever; and although he received the Abbé, having seen him more than once in Paris during the late events, and entertaining that degree of consideration for him which a keen and powerful mind almost always commands, he nevertheless seemed to doubt whether he should ask him even to sit down, and did it at length with an air of condescension.

"Well, Monsieur de Boisguerin," he said at length, "to what do I owe this visit?"

"I come, my Lord," replied the Abbé without a moment's hesitation, "to offer your Lordship my poor services."

The Duke smiled. "They are of course," he said, "welcome. Monsieur de Boisguerin. But the time of offering them is somewhat singular, when all men think my fortunes on the decline, or, perhaps, I should say, utterly down."

"Such it may seem to them, my Lord," replied the Abbé; "but such it seems not to me. There are sciences, my Lord, which teach us what the future is destined to produce; and I own that I am quite selfish in my present act, seeking to attach myself to one who is yet destined to uphold the throne of France, to affect the fortunes of the times, to triumph over all his enemies, and to outlive most of them now living."

"Indeed!" said the Duke thoughtfully; "and am I to believe this prophecy seriously?"

"Most seriously, my Lord," replied the Abbé. "I myself believe it and know it, as I believe and know the great fortunes that are likely to attend myself--otherwise, perhaps, you might not have seen me here to-day."

"That is candid, at all events," said the Duke; "and to say truth, I think that your prophecy, in some things, may be right; for I feel within my breast that undiminished power, that sense of my own strength, that confidence in my own destiny, which surely never can be given to a falling man. But you spoke of your own future high fortunes, sir. What may they be?"

The Abbé paused and looked down for a moment, but then replied, "I tell not the prophecy to every one, my Lord; but to you, to whose services I hope to dedicate those high fortunes, I fear not to relate it. It was pronounced long ago, in the city of Rome, when I was there studying, and as a rash young man had entangled myself in an affair with a fair girl of the city, who suffered our intercourse to be discovered, and consequently well nigh ruined all my prospects. I thought indeed it was so, and was turning my back upon Rome for ever, when I met with an old monk, who from certain facts I told him drew my horoscope, and assured me that I should find my fate in France; that my fortune would be brought about by the death of two relations far younger than myself; and that I should suddenly take a share in great events, and rule the destiny of others when I least expected it. Such was the old man's prophecy now many years ago; and I have seen no sign of its accomplishment till the present time."

"And what signs have you seen now?" demanded Epernon.

"That I have been suddenly led, my Lord," replied the Abbé, "from the calm and tranquil quiet of a provincial life, without my own will or agency, into scenes of activity and strife; and that one, out of the two lives which lay between me and the great possessions of Montsoreau, Logères, and Morly--lives, which in their youth and healthfulness seemed to cut me off from all hope--has already lapsed, and left but one."

"How is that?" exclaimed the Duke. "What life has lapsed?"

"That of the young Count of Logères," replied the Abbé.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Duke of Epernon in a tone somewhat sorrowful. "I had not heard that. He was a bold, rash youth; but yet there was in him the seeds of great things. He was fearless, and proud, and firm: virtues, the parents of all dignity and greatness.--You say then that there is but one life between you and all these lordships."

"But one," replied the Abbé; "that of Gaspar of Montsoreau, in regard to whom you took some slight interest, at the time his marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was talked of."

"Was talked of?" said the Duke. "Is it not talked of still?"

"Why, my Lord," replied the Abbé, "the Lady's evident detestation of the young Marquis has rendered the matter hopeless. You yourself remarked it, when you spoke with her at Vincennes; and he is now convinced of it himself. The grief and depression thus produced have impaired his health; and, indeed, it would seem as if ten years had gone over him, instead of a few months, since all this affair began."

"I hope, Monsieur de Boisguerin," said the Duke of Epernon with a bitter smile, "I hope that you have not been taking too deep lessons of our friend Villequier. I would rather be a prisoner on a charge of high treason, and with Guise for my enemy, than I would be next akin to Villequier, and between him and lands and lordships."

The Abbé's brow grew as dark as night. "My Lord," he said, "I will not affect to misunderstand you; but I am sure that fate will work out its own will without any aid of mine; and had I been disposed to clear the way for myself, who should have stopped me, or who could have discovered any thing I did, when these two youths have been under my care and guardianship ever since their father's death?"

"I did but jest, Abbé," replied the Duke. "But supposing that the events which you anticipate were really to occur, what would be your conduct then?"

"So sure am I, my Lord," replied the Abbé, "that they will occur, that my conduct has been put beyond doubt. I have already demanded of the Court of Rome to be freed from this black dress; and my last letters from the eternal city announce to me, that the dispensation is already granted, and, drawn up in full form, is now upon the road."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Duke of Epernon. "Is it so, indeed? You must have powerful protectors in the conclave."

"I have," replied the Abbé; "and though his Holiness is not fond of relaxing the vows of any one without some puissant motive; yet, when there is a strong one, he does not let the opportunity of unbinding slip, lest his key should grow rusty. But however, my Lord, supposing these things done away, and I Marquis of Montsoreau and Lord of Logères, my first aim and object would be to raise what power and forces I could, and with my sword, my wealth, and my life, were it necessary, serve his Majesty the King, under him whom I hope soon to see directing the state, namely, the Duke of Epernon, if----"

"Ay, there is still an *if*," replied the Duke. "Well, sir, what is the condition?"

"It is, my Lord," said the Abbé after a pause, in which it was evident that he considered the way he was to put his demand, "It is, that the Duke of Epernon will pledge me his princely word, that as far as his power and influence go, he will support my claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut."

The Duke actually started back with surprise; and, forgetting altogether the splendid future with which the Abbé had been endeavouring to invest his pretensions, he exclaimed, in a tone of anger and contempt that chafed and galled the spirit of the ambitious man with whom he spoke, "Yours,--yours? Abbé de Boisguerin? you, a poor preceptor in your cousin's house, an insignificant churchman, unbeneficed and unknown--you, to lay claim to the heiress of Clairvaut, a niece of the Guise, a lady nor far removed from a sovereign house? On my soul and honour, I mind me to write to Villequier at once, and bid him marry his cousin to this young Marquis out of hand, in order to save your brains from being cracked altogether!"

"Villequier can marry his cousin to no one," answered the Abbé, "without my full consent. No, nor can the King either!"

"Mort-bleu!" exclaimed Epernon with a scornful laugh. "Vanity and ambition have driven the poor man mad. Get you gone, Monsieur de Boisguerin; get you gone! I shall not trust with any mighty faith to your fine prophecies."

Though the Abbé de Boisguerin felt no slight inclination to put his hand into his bosom, and taking forth the dagger that lay calmly there, to plunge it up to the hilt in the heart of Epernon, he showed not in the slightest degree the wrath which internally moved him. Nay, the great object that he had in view made him in some degree conquer that wrath, and he replied, "Well, my good Lord, I *will* get me gone. But, before I go, you shall hear another warning, which may enable you to judge whether my divinations are false or not. It is destined that, in the course of today or to-morrow, you should encounter a great peril. Remember my words! be upon your guard! and take measures to ensure yourself against danger! Go not out into the streets scantily attended----"

"Oh no!" replied the Duke with a sneer. "I do not trust myself alone in the streets and high roads without a footboy to hold my horse, like the noble aspirant to the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. I am not so bold a man, nor so loved of the people; and as to chance perils, I fear them not."

"Your acts on your own head, my Lord Duke!" replied his companion. "I give you good day." And turning away abruptly, he passed out of the room through the long corridor, and part of the way down the stairs which led to the court of the guard.

He was scarcely half way down, however, when some sounds which he heard coming from the other side of the building made him suddenly stop, listen, and then turn round; and, with a step of light, he retrod his way to the chamber where he had left the Duke.

Epernon was busy writing, and looking up fiercely, demanded "What now?"

"Fly, my Lord, fly quick!" exclaimed the Abbé. "I come to give you time to save yourself, for the mayor and his faction are upon you. They have come in by the great court, and I think have killed the Swiss at your gate. Believe me, my Lord, for what I say is true! Fly quickly, while I run down to send the guard to your assistance."

His words received instant confirmation, even as the Duke gazed doubtfully in his face; for a door on the opposite side of the room burst open, and a terrified attendant rushed in, while eight or nine fierce faces were seen pursuing him quickly.

The Duke darted to a staircase, which led to a little turret, and the first steps of which entered the room, without any door, just behind his chair. He sprang up eagerly towards the small dressing-room above, and the mayor and his armed companions pursued as fiercely, leaving the Abbé to make his escape towards the court of the guard, without giving any heed to his proceedings. Before the Abbé had passed the door, however, he heard a loud crash, and turned his head to see by what it was occasioned, when, at a single glance he perceived that the very eagerness of his pursuers had saved the Duke of Epernon. Ten or twelve heavily armed men had all rushed at once upon the old and crazy staircase which led to the Duke's dressing-room. The wood work had given way beneath them, precipitating one or two into the story below, and the greater part back into the room itself, but leaving a chasm between them and the Duke, which it was impossible for them to pass.^[5]

Without pausing to make any farther remark, the Abbé ran down hastily and alarmed the guard; and while the soldiers rushed tumultuously up to defend a commander whom they all enthusiastically loved, the Abbé de Boisguerin mounted his horse and rode quietly out of the town. He doubted not, as indeed it happened, that the soldiery would arrive in time to save their Lord, and to compel the mayor and his comrades to make a hasty retreat.

It was not, however, towards the Château of Islay, where he had left Gaspar de Montsoreau, that the solitary horseman took his way; but, on the contrary, crossing the Charente, he rode rapidly onward by the banks of the river, in the direction of that field of Jarnac, where, in his early days, Henry III. had given such striking promises of heroism and conduct which his after life so signally failed to fulfil.

As he rode along, he thought with somewhat of a smile upon his countenance, that his last prophecy to the Duke of Epernon had met with a speedy fulfilment; and he pondered with some

bitterness over the parting words which that nobleman had spoken to him.

"The aspirant to the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut," he said to himself, "without a single footboy to hold his horse! That may be in the present instance policy rather than any thing else, my good Lord Duke. But still we may learn wisdom, even, from such bitter words as those. I had forgotten how much all men value the gilded exterior. But it shall be so no longer. This that I aim at must be soon lost or won. I have staked life upon the pursuit, and all that makes life valuable. And why should I not stake fortune also? 'Fortune buys fortune,' says the old adage; and as the stake is great, so shall my game be bold."

His resolution was instantly taken. He possessed, as we have said before, sufficient wealth to give him competence, and to enable him to mingle with decent splendour in the society in which he was born. But he calculated that the same fortune which put him at ease for life, might afford him the means of magnificence and display, if he resolved to expend the whole within a few years. He did so resolve, saying to himself, "I shall either be at the height of fortune and enjoyment ere two years be over, or I shall be no more. It suits me not to go on playing stake after stake, as many men do, beaten, like a tennis-ball, from prosperity to ruin, and from ruin to prosperity. I have bent myself to one great purpose, and I will attain it or die. That is always within one's power, to shake off life when it is no longer a source of happiness."

As he thus thought, his horse slowly descended a gentle hill by the side of the river, with a meadow down to the Charente on the one side, and a bank crowned with the wall of a vineyard on the other. Built up against the wall was a little shrine, with a virgin and child behind a network of iron, and the votive offering of a silver lamp burning below.

Sitting on the little green spot which topped the bank at that place--after having apparently said his prayers at the foot of the shrine--was a boy of about thirteen or fourteen years of age; and as the Abbé came slowly near, the youth took a pipe out of his pocket and began playing a wild plaintive Italian air, full of rich melody and deep feeling. The music was not new to the Abbé; he had heard it before in other lands, when the few pure feelings of the heart which he had ever possessed had not been crushed, like accidental flowers blossoming on a footpath, by the passing to and fro of other coarser things.

He drew in his horse and paused to listen, and then gazed at the boy, and thought he had seen him somewhere before. The eyes, the features, the expression of the countenance, seemed to be all connected with some old remembrances; and the air which he played too, brought his memory suddenly back to early scenes, and a land that he had loved. As he gazed at the boy, who went on with the air, the recollection of his person again connected itself with different events; and, though now he was clothed in simple grey, he fancied he recognised in him the youth who had been seen with Charles of Montsoreau when he attacked and defeated the small body of reiters near La Ferté, and whom he had also beheld more than once in Paris, when he was watching the proceedings of the young Count in the capital.

This conviction became so strong, that he went up and spoke to him, and found that it was as he suspected. After conversing with him for a few moments, he told him that if he would pursue that road for nearly a league, he would meet with some buildings belonging to a farm; and then, turning again down a road to the left, he would find him at a château upon the banks of the river. The boy promised to come, and the Abbé rode on, while Ignati putting up his pipe followed as fast as possible, and soon arrived at the gates of the dwelling to which he had been directed.

He was brought into the presence of the Abbé by an attendant wearing the colours of no noble house in France, and found him with some fruit and wine before him. But in regard to the subject on which the boy expected to be questioned most closely, namely, the death of Charles of Montsoreau, the Abbé spoke not one word. Notwithstanding all his firmness of purpose, notwithstanding the remorseless character of his mind and of his habitual thoughts, he loved not to touch upon the subject of his young cousin's death, unless forced on to do so by circumstances. He spoke of Paris and of the Duke of Guise; and where he had first met with the young Count of Logères, and of all the accidents that had befallen him while in company with Charles of Montsoreau. But he spoke not one word in regard to the day of the barricades, or the young nobleman's death.

From time to time, while he talked with the boy, Ignati saw that the Abbé's eyes fixed upon his countenance, and at length he asked him, "You are an Italian by birth, are you not?"

"I am," replied the boy; "that is, I am a Roman." And he said it with that pride which every person born within the precincts of the ancient queen of empires feels, although glory has long departed from her walls, and the memory of past greatness is rather a reproach than an honour.

"And what is your name?" demanded the Abbé sharply.

"My name is Ignati," answered the youth.

"Ignati!" said the Abbé, "Ignati!" But you have some other name. What was your father's?"

"I do not know," answered the boy, with his cheeks and his brow glowing. "Why do you ask?"

"Your mother's then?" said the Abbé, without replying to his question. "Your mother's? what

was your mother's name?"

"Her name was Laura Pandolfini," replied the boy, gazing upon the Abbé with a degree of sternness in his look. "Did you know her?"

The face of the Abbé changed from deadly pale to glowing red in a moment; and after a pause he replied angrily and abruptly, "I know her?--I know her? I know a common strumpet?"

The boy's eyes flashed fire; and his hand was in his bosom in a moment seeking the knife that lay there. But he had put the pipe in the breast of his doublet also, and ere he could reach a weapon, which, as we have seen, he was able to use with fatal effect, the form of a lady passing across the two open doors on the other side of the room made him suddenly pause; and after a moment's thought, he drew back his hand and said, "What you say is false! She deserved not the name you have given her!"

He was turning towards the door, when the Abbé cried "Stay!" and as the boy turned, he put his hand to his head and mused thoughtfully. Then starting suddenly he added, "No, no! It would be discovered!--Come hither, boy!" he added; and taking out his purse he counted out some pieces of gold, to no light amount; and giving them to the boy, he said, "There, you have lost your master and seem to be poorly off. Take those, and get thee into some reputable employment."

But the boy gave one fierce glance at his countenance, dashed down the gold upon the pavement, and exclaiming, "I will have no liar's money!" quitted the chamber and the house.

The Abbé gazed after him for a moment or two, fell into deep thought, and ended by pressing his hands over his eyes and exclaiming, "I am a fool!"

After pausing for a few moments more, he said to himself, "Well, I must wait no longer here. This girl seems pleased with my new demeanour towards her. Of my past language which frightened her, it seems that very soon no other impression will remain but the memory of the deep and passionate love I testified. That is never displeasing to any woman; and if I can lead her gently on, the matter will be soon accomplished, now that this her first fancy is at an end, and the grave has taken the great obstacle out of the way. Love him, she did not, with true, womanly, passionate, love; but fond of him she was, with the sickly fancy of an idle girl; and her grief will be sufficient to soften her proud heart. It is a wonderful softener, grief; and she will cling to whosoever is near her, that has skill and power to soothe and support her. I will teach her to love better than she has loved!--But I must write down these tidings. I must not tell them to her with my own voice, and with her eyes upon me, lest she learn to hate me as the bearer of evil tidings."

And seeking for pen and ink he wrote a note, such as few others but himself could have composed. It was tender, yet respectful,--not lover-like, yet through every word of it love's light was shining--sad, but not gloomy--melancholy, yet with words of hope. When he had done he folded and sealed it, and then listening to the distant village clock, he said--

"If I am absent much longer, Gaspar may suspect; and I am rather inclined to believe that some one has roused suspicions in his mind already. Well, we shall soon see; it is no very difficult task to rule a light-brained youth like that."

Thus thinking, and leaving the note behind him on the table, the Abbé proceeded to the stables, chose a fresh horse, caused it to be saddled and bridled, and rode back to the Château of Islay with all speed. Before he proceeded to the saloon to join the young Marquis, he questioned his own servants as to all that had taken place during his absence; heard of the long visit of Villequier; and planned his own conduct accordingly.

Gaspar of Montsoreau, when he joined him, expressed some surprise that he had not returned before, and added, in as gentle a tone as he could assume, "I trust, nay good friend, that you have been pursuing the inquiries which have so long frustrated us in regard to the dwelling of that sweet girl, whom we were very wrong to place again in the hands of Villequier, even though it might have cost us our lives had we either remained in Paris, or attempted to take her with us."

Though the young Marquis spoke quickly, his companion, who knew his character to the very bottom and could instantly see the workings of his mind when he used any of the arts he himself had taught him, perceived at once that Villequier had betrayed the secret of Marie de Clairvaut's abode; and he replied deliberately, "Yes, Gaspar, I have been more successful; and I think now--tamed down as you have been by grief, and requiring some consolation--I think now, I say, that it is not only safe but right, to let you know both that this fair girl is in the neighbourhood of the spot where we now stand, and that she is under my care and guidance."

"In the neighbourhood?" exclaimed Gaspar of Montsoreau. "Under your care and guidance? How happened I not to hear this before, Abbé?"

"Simply," replied the Abbé, "because the state of violence and irritation in which you were when I last returned to you from Blois--the period when I first became possessed of any knowledge on the subject--would have led you into acts of impetuosity, which, in the first place, would have terribly injured your cause with her; and, in the next, would have discovered the place of her abode to every one from whom we seek to conceal it. Now, however, I think you can command yourself, and you will find the benefit of what has been done to serve you. All I require

is, that you would let me know when you visit Mademoiselle de Clairvaut; that you would do so with prudence and caution and forbearance; and though it is not of course necessary that you should desist from pleading your own cause with her, yet let it be as gently as may be."

The Abbé de Boisguerin knew that Gaspar de Montsoreau could not do as he asked him; that it was not in his nature to plead his own cause gently. He felt perfectly confident that the rash impetuosity of the young Marquis would alienate more and more the regard of Marie de Clairvaut, and thus, perhaps, facilitate even his own views and purposes. Could he have prevented it, he would not willingly have let him visit her at all; but it was now impossible to exclude him; and he knew that the secret of Charles of Montsoreau's death gave him the power of destroying at once all his former pupil's hopes, if he saw that he even made one step in removing the bad impressions Marie previously had received.

On his part, though not quite satisfied with being deceived, Gaspar of Montsoreau believed that the Abbé had deceived him for his own good; and the selfish purposes which were most needful for him to discover, were still concealed in spite of the warnings of Villequier.

CHAP. VII.

In the gardens of the Château by the banks of the Charente; which the Abbé de Boisguerin had left to return to Gaspar de Montsoreau, and in an arbour which had been constructed, as is still ordinary with the people of that country, by a number of vines entwined over a light trellis work; with a soft and beautiful scene before her eyes, and the autumn sunshine gilding the glowing waters, Marie de Clairvaut sat and wept, with the note from the Abbé which had conveyed to her the bitterest tidings she ever had received on earth open in her hand. A day had passed since the events just recorded had taken place, and she had now received the news many hours, but her grief had not in the least subsided; and to herself it even seemed greater than it had been at first. Her whole thoughts at first had been bent upon the one painful fact, that he whom she had loved with all the fervour, and the depth, and the devotion of a heart that had never loved before, was lost to her for ever; that she should never behold again that frank and candid countenance, beaming with looks of deep and indubitable affection; that she should never again see those eyes poring into hers with the intense gaze of love, and seeming at once to give and receive fresh light; that she should never hear the tones of that musical voice, which had so often assured her of protection and support; that she should never cling to that arm, which had so often brought her rescue and deliverance in the moment of danger. Then, she had felt only that he was lost and gone, cut off in the brightness of his days, in the glory and strength of his youth, in the full blossom of his hopes, and ere he had yet more than lifted to his lips the cup, which, offered to him by honour, virtue, and sincerity, ought to have been a sweet one indeed.

Now, however, there had grown upon her mind feelings indeed more selfish, but which were the natural consequences of her situation, and connected intimately with the loss of him she loved. A feeling of desolation had come over her--of utter loneliness in all the world. It seemed as if she had never loved or esteemed or clung to any but himself; as if there were no one to protect her, to guide, support, direct, or cheer her upon earth; as if life's youth were over, the fortune of existence spent like a prodigal, the heart's treasury empty, and nothing left for the immortal spirit on this side the grave but penury of every rich and noble feeling, lone solitude and petty cares, and all the dull anxieties of a being without an object.

Desolate, desolate indeed, did she feel: and well too might she feel desolate! for though her grief did some wrong to many who loved her as friends and relations, and would have done much to aid and support her; yet, oh! what is such love and esteem? what is aid and support wrung from the midst of hours devoted to other things, and thoughts and feelings centered upon other objects, when compared with the entire devotion, the pure, single love of an upright, an honourable, and a feeling heart--where the being loved is the great end and object of every thought and every action--where all the feelings of the spirit are hovering by day round that one object, and guarding it like angels through the watches of the night? Oh yes, she was lonely, she was desolate, she was unprotected and unsupported, when she compared the present with the past! Well might she think so; well might she grieve and mourn over her own deprivation, when she wept for him and for his early end!

Some comfort, perhaps, had been indeed afforded her by the change which had taken place in the demeanour of the Abbé de Boisguerin. She could never love him; she could never like him: his society could never even become tolerable to her: but yet it was no slight satisfaction to find that she was no more to hear words which she considered as little less than sacrilegious, or to endure the eager passion in his eye, and hear him dare to talk to her of love. She looked upon him as her gaoler indeed, though he often denied that he had power to liberate her; but yet she felt that

peace and comfort at least depended much upon that gaoler's will, and was not a little pleased to find that during the three or four last visits which he had paid, no word which could offend her had been spoken, no tone or even look that she could take amiss was to be seen, though a certain tenderness and melancholy seemed to have fallen upon him, which she could well have wished removed, or not so openly displayed.

During the very morning of which we are now speaking, he had come there again, and his conduct towards her had been all that she could have desired. He had not spoken directly of the cause of the deep grief which he saw his intelligence of the former day had brought upon her, but all his words were chosen so as to harmonise with that grief; and the object of his visit itself, as he expressed it, was only to see whether he could do any thing to console her, or to alleviate the sorrow under which she laboured. She had thanked him for his courtesy and kindness; but, ere he had left her, he said with a tone of what seemed real regret, that he was sorry to say his own visit would be followed by another, which he feared might, in some degree, importune her.

"The young Marquis of Montsoreau," he added, "will be restrained no longer from seeing you; and you know, Madam, it is impossible for me to prevent him, which I would willingly have done, especially as the view he takes of the recent most lamentable event is not likely to do aught but give you pain."

"Oh, cannot you stay him?" exclaimed Marie de Clairvaut. "Cannot you stay him at this terrible moment, when the very sight of him will be horrible to me?"

"I fear not indeed. Lady," replied the Abbé. "I would have given my right hand to prevent his coming, but he seemed perfectly determined. However, when I return, I will do my best once more, in the hope that he may yet be moved." And after a visit very much shorter than usual, he had taken his leave and departed.

The fair girl he left had gone out into the gardens, as we have seen, once more to weep alone over the sad and painful situation in which she was placed, and over the dark and irreparable loss which she had sustained; but ere she had gone out, she had taken the only precaution in her power to insure that her solitude would remain inviolate, directing the servants--who acted indeed the part of turnkeys--if the Marquis of Montsoreau applied to see her, to state at once that she was not well enough to receive him, and wished to pass some days alone and in tranquillity.

She wept long and bitterly; but in about an hour after she had gone out, the sound of horses' feet reached her ear, and voices speaking at the gateway made themselves heard. She could distinguish even the tones of the young Marquis, and indistinctly the words of the servant in reply. But Gaspar of Montsoreau was hurt and offended by the message she had left, and a certain inclination to tyranny in his disposition broke forth with his usual impetuosity.

"Inform Mademoiselle de Clairvaut," he said, "who it is that desires to see her, and let me have an answer quick. Say that I much wish for a few minutes' conversation with her. What, fellow! Would you shut the gates upon me like a horseboy? Get ye gone and return quickly. I will walk in the gardens till you come back." And striding in he threw the gate violently to, and advanced directly to the water's side, as if he could have divined that the object of his search was there.

Marie de Clairvaut was indignant, and that feeling for a moment enabled her to throw off the overwhelming load of grief. Rising at once she came forth, and crossed the green slope towards the château, passing directly by Gaspar of Montsoreau as she did so, and intending merely to bow her head by way of salutation. He placed himself in such a manner, however, that she could not pass on, although he must have seen the tears fresh upon her cheeks, and her indignation was more roused than before.

"I directed the servant, sir," she said, when forced to pause, "to inform you, if you came, that I was not well enough to see you; and that I wished for solitude and tranquillity."

"Nay, indeed, dear Lady," said the young Marquis, conquering the feelings of anger with which he had entered, and speaking with a calm and tender tone, "I thought, if you knew that I was here, pity, if nothing else, would induce you to see, but for a few moments, one who has languished for weeks and months for a single glance of your eyes--one who so deeply, so tenderly, so devotedly, loves you."

Those words sounded harsh, painful, and insulting to the ears of Marie de Clairvaut--words which, from the lips of him she loved, would have been all joy and sweetness, but were now abhorrent to her ear; and looking at him sternly, with her bright eye no longer dimmed, though her lip quivered, she said, "Never let me hear such words again, sir!--I beg that you would let me pass!--Marquis of Montsoreau, this is cruel and ungentlemanly! Learn that I look upon myself as your brother's widow, and ever shall so look upon myself till my dying day." And thus saying she passed him, and entered the house.

She listened eagerly for the sound of horses' feet after she had entered her own apartments, and was very soon satisfied that the young Marquis had gone back. As soon as she was assured of this, she once more went out into the open grounds--for the load of grief ever makes the air of human dwellings feel oppressive; and again going down to the bank of the river, she gazed upon its tranquil current as she walked by the side; and though her sorrow certainly found no relief,

yet the sight of the waters flowing beneath her eyes, calm, tranquil, incessant, led, as it were, her thoughts along with them. They became less agitated, though still as deep and powerful; they seemed to imitate the course of the river, running on incessantly in the same dark stream, but in quiet and in silence. The tears indeed would, from time to time, rise into her eyes and roll over her cheeks, but no sob accompanied them; and though a sigh often broke from her lip, it was the sigh of deep, calm despair, not of struggling pain.

It is wonderful how, when we are in deep grief, the ordinary sounds and sights of joyous nature strike harsh and inharmonious upon us. Things that would pass by unheard at other times, as amongst the smaller tones in the great general concert of the day, then become painfully acute. The lark that sung up in the sky above her head, made no pleasant melody for her ear; a country boy crossing the opposite fields, and whistling as he went, pained her so much, and made her gentle heart feel so harsh towards him, that she schooled herself for such sensations, saying, "He cannot tell that I am so sorrowful! He cannot tell that the sounds which I once was fond of, are now the most distasteful to me."

A minute or two after a few notes upon a pipe were played immediately beneath the garden wall--a little sort of prelude, to see that the instrument was clear; and unable to endure it longer, Marie de Clairvaut turned to seek shelter in her prison.

Ere she had taken three steps, however, she paused. The air was not one of the country; a finer hand, too, a more exquisite taste than France could produce woke the instrument into sounds most musical, and in a moment after, she recognised the sweet air which she had twice before heard, and both times from the lips of Charles of Montsoreau.

The memory of the first time that it had met her ear was sweet and delightful; but the memory of the second time was as the memory of hope; and, in despite of all, it woke again the feelings it had awakened before; and an indistinct feeling of glad expectation came across her mind, like a golden sunbeam, shining through the mist of an autumnal morning. What was it she hoped? what was it she expected? She knew not herself; but still there was an indistinct brightening came over her heart, and feelings; and when the air was over, instead of flying from the music, she listened eagerly for its renewal.

The pipe, however, sounded not again; but in a moment after she heard some one say, "Hark!" and the sweetest possible voice began to sing:--

SONG.

Weep not, Lady, weep not,
Grief shall pass away;
Angels' eyes that sleep not
Watch thee on thy way.

Heavenly hands are twining
Garlands of glad flowers.
Joy and Hope combining
Wreath thy future hours.

Diff'rent powers are near thee--
Bright Hope, dark Despair;
Let the Goddess cheer thee--
Fly the Fiend of Care.

Son of Sin and Sorrow
Despair by earth was given;
Child of the bright to-morrow,
Hope was born of Heaven.

What could it mean? Marie de Clairvaut asked herself. The words seemed directly addressed to her, and applicable to her own situation: yet the voice, as far as she could judge, she had never heard before. But still every note, every word, appeared to counsel hope. "Can I have been deceived?" she thought. "Can the Abbé de Boisguerin and Gaspar de Montsoreau have combined for their own dark purposes to cheat me, to induce me to believe that the one I love so well is dead?"

But, alas no! The Abbé had left, inclosed in his own, the brief note which he had received from Paris, announcing the event, and that note bore every appearance of being an ordinary matter of business, passing regularly through the post-office of the capital. Could the song that she had heard, she asked herself, again--could it have been accidental; could it have been sung at that moment through one of those strange combinations, which sometimes arise out of entirely indifferent circumstances, to give zest to our joy, or poignancy to our sorrow? She determined, if possible, to ascertain; and raising her voice a little above its ordinary tone, she said, "Who is there? To whom do you sing?"

She did not seem to have made herself heard, however, for a moment after the same voice demanded, "Is there any one that listens?"

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed, eagerly, "I listen; speak on!"

"Well then, hearken," said the voice, and again a new air and a new song began.

SONG.

He goes away to a far distant land,
With cross on his shoulder and lance in his hand;
And news soon comes how his lightning brand
 Has scattered the hosts of paninrie.
His beautiful Lady sits weeping and lone,
And wishes she were where her Knight has gone;
But she grieves not his absence with angry moan,
 For her spirit is full of his chivalry.

But what are the tidings come next to her ear?
Oh! tidings dark and heavy to hear;
How her fearless warrior, her husband dear,
 Has fallen 'neath the lance of the Moslema.
How, gallantly staking his life, to save
From infidel hands, the Redeemer's grave,
He has fought for the righteous and sleeps with the brave,
 'Neath the walls of Hierosolima!

'Tis true, oh, 'tis true!--yet she will not believe,
"Ah, no! e'en in dying he would not deceive;
And he promised, if spirit such power could receive,
 And he fell in his holy chivalry.
To visit my side in the watches of night,
To comfort my heart, and to gladden my sight,
And call me to join him in countries of light,
 And dwell in his breast through eternity."

Years pass; and he comes not. Nor yet she believes!
'Tis his absence, but 'tis not his death that she grieves.
Hope strong in affection, her heart still deceives,
 Lo! she watches yon Palmer how eagerly,
To ask him some tidings of Syria to say--
But what is thy magic, oh, thou Palmer gray?
She is clasped in his arms! she has fainted away!
 And he kisses her fair cheek how tenderly.

As the song had gone on, Marie de Clairvaut could no longer doubt that, though allegorical, those words were applicable to herself. Joy--joy beyond all conception took the place of grief; all that she had suffered, all that she had endured in the past, she now felt, indeed, to be nothing to what she had lately undergone. But the extatic delight which the last words of that song gave, the sudden dissipation of grief was too much for her to endure. It was like the light that blinds us when we suddenly rush from the darkness into the sunshine; and she who had gone through dangers, and horrors, and perils of many a kind, firm and unshaken, fell fainting under the sudden effect of joy. How long she remained so she knew not; but at all events it was not long enough to attract the attention of the people of the house, from the windows, of which she was screened by a thick alley of trees. Some one, however, had been near her, for there were the prints of small feet in the grass, extending from the wall to the spot where she lay, and immediately under her hand was placed a small packet addressed to herself.

Fearful of discovery, she hid it instantly in her bosom, and, as soon as she could, rose, and with a step far slower than her wishes, sped back again to the house to read the paper she had received, in secret.

It was written in a bold, free hand; the date was that very morning; and the first words, "My beloved."

Marie de Clairvaut laid the letter down and gasped for breath. It was sufficient, it was altogether sufficient; every doubt, every fear that had remained was now at an end, and she once more burst into tears; but, oh, how sweet were those tears! how happy! how unlike the past! Soon she took up the letter again, and through the dazzling drops that still hung in her eyes read the bright assurance, that he lived for her who loved him.

"I have feared," the letter said, "I have feared, that a report of my death which has been current in this city of Paris should have reached my beloved Marie, and the more especially as, by the counsel and earnest entreaty of the Duke of Guise, I have myself contributed to the spread of the rumour, and have taken every means to suffer it to be confirmed. The object of this, however, was to deliver you alone by throwing those who so unjustly detain you off their guard; and some days ago I came on into this neighbourhood--where my brother, the Abbé de Boisguerin, and the Duke of Epernon, all are, and to which we have traced Villequier several times--in the confident belief that you were not far distant from Angoulême. It might have been some time ere I discovered your abode, but accident has befriended me, and my page, who bears you this, and undertakes positively to deliver it to you, saw you yesterday morning by a most extraordinary but

fortunate chance. I dare not venture near you in the early part of the morning, but ere night has closed in, I will find some means to see and speak with you. As far as possible, dearest Marie, be prepared for any thing that it may be necessary to undertake. I fear that you have already suffered much; but I will not doubt that even the rash and violent men who have dared every crime to withdraw you from those that love you best, have treated you with tenderness and kindness. I too have suffered much, but far more from knowing that you were at the mercy of those who persecute you while I was lying stretched upon the bed of sickness, than from the very wounds that brought me there. I am now well: I am near you; and that is enough to enable me to say that I am happy, although there may be perils and dangers before us, as we are still in the midst of our adversaries, and must once more attempt to pass through a long track of country with obstacles at every step."

The letter ended with every expression of affection and of love; and again and again Marie de Clairvaut read it and wept, and fell into fits of deep thought, and could scarcely believe that the joyous tidings were true.

She next asked herself what she could do to favour her lover's efforts. The two or three women who had been appointed to wait upon her, as well as the male attendants by whom she was surrounded, were all strangers to her, and she felt that they were her gaolers. There was one of them, however, who had looked upon her during the preceding day with evident compassion, had watched her tears with sorrowful eyes, and had spoken a few words of consolation. At one time she thought of speaking to that woman, and trying to gain her to her interests for the purpose of facilitating any thing that Charles of Montsoreau might do to effect her liberation. She hesitated, however, and judging that if he succeeded in seeing her that evening it would be by passing over the wall at the spot where she had heard the boy singing in the evening; she lingered about during the whole of the evening, listening for the least sound. None was heard, however, and at length the bell at the gates of the enclosure was heard to ring.

Agitated and anxious, fearing that every moment might bring Charles of Montsoreau to the spot, at the very time that other persons were near, she came out from behind the trees, and walked slowly on by the side of the river. Just at that moment a small boat pushed slowly up the current by a country boy, passed by the spot where she stood; but the boy whistled lightly on his way, as he went, and took no notice of her; and in a minute after, she heard steps approaching from the other side, and turned with some anxiety to see who it was that approached.

It was the servant girl we have before mentioned, who came towards her quickly, saying, "You have been very sad these two days, lady, and I wish you would take comfort. Here is a good man, one of the preaching friars just called at the gate, and I'm sure, if you would but listen to him, he would give you consolation."

"Oh no," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "he could give me no consolation, my good girl. My own thoughts just now are my best companions."

As she spoke, however, to her dismay, she saw the monk coming across the green from the side of the gates, and she determined at once to reject all his proffered advice and consolation, fearing that the precious minute for seeing him she loved might be lost by this unwonted intrusion.

"Do listen to him, dear lady," said the girl. "When I told him how sad you were, he said he was sure that he could give you comfort."

In the mean time the friar approached with a slow step, with his cowl drawn over his head, and his hand supported by his staff. Marie de Clairvaut trembled from anxiety and apprehension, and only returned the friar's benediction by an inclination of the head and an assurance that she did not stand in need of the consolation he offered.

"Yet listen to me, daughter," he said, without withdrawing the cowl from his head. But the first tones of that full rich voice proved sufficient nearly to overpower the fair girl to whom he spoke. "If you will hear me but for five minutes, my daughter," he said, "I think and I believe, that I can suggest to you consolations that you may take to heart; and if not, the few words I have to speak can do you no harm at least."

Marie de Clairvaut bowed her head, and took a step or two nearer to the water, while the woman withdrew for a short space, so as to be out of ear shot. But still she remained watching the two, as if she were either afraid of having done wrong in admitting the friar at all, or had suddenly conceived some suspicion of his purpose. The eyes of Marie de Clairvaut and of Charles of Montsoreau turned that way, and both saw that they were watched. Could they have followed the dictates of their own hearts, they would have cast themselves into each other's arms; but now they were forced to stand, ruling every look and every gesture, and assuming the demeanour of strangers, even while the words of love and affection were bursting from their lips. The young nobleman, however, gave but brief course to his feelings.

"This night, Marie," he said, after a few words of passionate tenderness, "this very night at twelve, a boat shall be ready for you underneath that bank, and means prepared for you to descend. It has already passed up the river in order that we may descend swiftly with the stream, for the current is too rapid to permit of our passing up without the risk of being stopped at every

moment. At Jarnac, however, all is prepared for our escape, and though our journey thence may be longer, it will be more secure. Can you be here at that hour?"

"I can," she said, "and will, and, oh! may God grant, Charles, that this time we may not only come within sight of the haven, as we have twice done before, but reach it altogether; and never, never again will I suffer them to separate me from you, as I did on that awful day in Paris."

"Even yet, neither I nor the Duke know how it happened," said Charles of Montsoreau.

"As I was following the Queen," replied Marie, rapidly, "some one pulled me by the sleeve, and on turning to see who it was, the crowd closed in between me and Catherine. The person who had touched me was dressed in the colours of the house of Guise, and he said, 'The Duke expects you Mademoiselle. If you will come round this way, I will lead you to the other gate where there is no crowd.' I followed willingly, and nothing doubting; and he led me round into one of the streets behind, when suddenly I was seized by the arms on either side, and hurried along without the power of resistance. I cried for help as loud as I could, indeed, but they bore me rapidly into the house opposite, where I saw the Abbé de Boisguerin, and could hear your brother's voice talking to Monsieur de Villequier. They then put me into a chair, the blinds of which I could not undraw, and carried me rapidly to another house, where I remained for some time, till Villequier and the rest again appeared. I did all that woman could do, Charles, to make them set me free; but what could I do? what means had I to use?--entreaties, to which they were deaf; menaces, at which they laughed. Your brother, indeed, said something that he intended for kindness, and the Abbé looked gloomy and sad. But Villequier only smiled for all answer; till at length tidings were brought them that they were discovered, and that people were coming rapidly in pursuit of them. I was then once more borne away by Villequier, after a few words between him and your brother; and I heard your brother say as they parted, 'I will delay them as long as possible.' Where they took me I know not well, but I believe it was the Hôtel de Villequier.--But see, the woman is coming near! We must part, dear Charles; I fear we must once more part."

Nothing more could be said, for the girl now approached; and Charles of Montsoreau, assuming the tone of the friar, bade Marie remember his words, and take them to heart; and then, giving her his blessing, departed.

Shortly before midnight, wrapt in a cloak of a dark colour, in order, as far as possible, to pass unobserved if any eye should be watching, Marie de Clairvaut passed through one of the lower windows of the château, and with a light step, sprang into the little cloister that ran along one side of the building, at no great depth from the window. The moon was shining bright and full, and every object around, except where the shadow of the cloister fell, was as clear as if the sun had been in the sky.

She paused and listened with a beating heart. There was no sound but the murmur of the quick Charente; and then, putting her ear to the open window, she listened there to ascertain that all was quiet in the house. Nothing stirred; and, knowing how important it was to leave no trace of the manner in which her flight had been effected, she closed the casement carefully, and prepared to go forth into the moonlight.

There was something, however, in the stillness, and the clearness, and the calmness of every thing that was in itself fearful; and she hesitated for a moment before she went out. At length, however, she ventured across the green and shining turf, and with a quick step approached the edge of the water. Looking down upon it from above, she could see nothing in the deep shadow of the bank; but, suddenly, a bright ripple caught some stray rays of moonlight, and chequered the dark bosom of the water with quick lines of silver.

"Are you there?" said the voice of Charles of Montsoreau from below.

"Yes," she said. "How shall I descend?"

But, even as she spoke, a figure glided out from the shrubs beside her, and, uttering a low cry, Marie de Clairvaut perceived the girl who had given admittance to the supposed friar on the preceding evening. The sound which she had uttered had instantly caught the attention of Charles of Montsoreau; and, springing up the bank, he found the girl with her hand clasped round the Lady's wrist, but holding up the other hand as if enjoining silence.

"You are unkind," said the girl, in a low tone, "when I was kind to you. I have already been bitterly reproached for letting in the monk; and now, if you fly, what will become of me? They will say that I did it."

"Fear not, fear not!" answered Charles of Montsoreau, "and attempt not to detain the Lady, my good girl; for go she must and will; and, as there is no other boat here, any attempt to pursue us will be vain. All you can do by endeavouring to detain her will be useless, and but injure yourself. Here is money for you," he continued.

The girl put it away with her hand, replying, "I want no money, sir; but if she goes, I will go with her. I will not stay here in the power of that dark Abbé. I will come with her if she will let me."

"Willingly, willingly," replied Charles of Montsoreau; "but say not a word, and come quick; and

remember, till the Lady is safe under the protection of the Duke of Guise, we pause for no one, so there must be no pretences of fatigue."

"Fear not," replied the girl; "I can bear more than she can. But how can we get down the bank?"

"There is a short ladder," said the young Count. "Come quick!" And in a moment after he aided Marie de Clairvaut to descend. It was all done in a moment. The girl followed the Lady, the ladder was taken into the boat, and, with joy and satisfaction beyond all conception, the fair girl, whose days had lately passed so sorrowfully, felt the little vessel fluctuating beneath her feet as she seated herself in it; while Charles of Montsoreau, with a man who had been waiting therein, pushed the boat away from the bank, and a boy seated at the stern guided it into the deeper parts of the water. There were but a few words spoken by any one.

"You are sure, Ignati," said the young Count, "that you marked every rock and shoal as you came up?"

"Quite sure," replied the boy; and, leaving the current, which was rapid and powerful, to bear them on, without disturbing its smooth surface by the splash of oars, they glided along quickly down the stream: now in moonlight, now in shade, with the high rocky banks and promontories filled with holes and caverns, which border the valley of the Charente, now seen in bright clear light--now rising up against the silvery sky wrapped in deep shadows and obscurity.

The hand of Marie de Clairvaut lay clasped in that of her lover as they sat side by side. Their hearts were full, though their lips were silent; and the eyes of both were raised towards the sky, filled with thankfulness, and hope, and trust. Thus they went on for about two hours, saying but little, and that little in low and murmured tones; but as they went, Charles of Montsoreau found occasion to tell her that he had luckily effected a new arrangement, and that he had procured means of landing and proceeding on their journey before they reached Jarnac.

At length, after a voyage of about two hours and a half, as the moon was beginning to decline, a rushing sound was heard over the bow of the boat, and the waters of the river were seen fretting against a dyke, which had been built to confine it in its proper course. A couple of houses, sheltered by two sloping hills which swept down to the very bank of the river, appeared upon the left hand, with what seemed a number of living objects gathered about them.

Marie de Clairvaut turned her eyes to Charles of Montsoreau with some apprehension, but he pressed her hand tenderly, saying, "Fear not, fear not. They are my own people, waiting for our arrival."

The boy guided the boat safely up to the landing place, and the question, "Who comes here?" was demanded, as if at a regular warlike post.

"A friend," replied Charles of Montsoreau, and gave the word Château Thierry. The man grounded his arms, and Charles of Montsoreau, springing to the shore, led Marie de Clairvaut and the girl who had followed her, to one of the houses, where every thing seemed prepared for their reception.

He paused for a moment to gaze upon the face of the girl who had accompanied them, and to ask her name, which he found to be Louise. The countenance was good, and frank, and gentle, and the natural spirit of physiognomy, which is in every one's brain, gave a pleasant reading of that face.

"Listen to me," he said, speaking to her. "As you have preferred the service of this lady to remaining behind where I found you, depend upon it every attention and devotion that you show to her by the way will be taken note of and well rewarded; and do not forget, that, if possible, you are never to leave her, but to do every thing in your power, under all circumstances, to enable her to reach the Duke of Guise, who is her near relation, and whom we expect to find at Blois or Chartres."

"Is she so great a lady?" said the girl.

"She is the niece and ward of the great Duke of Guise," replied Charles of Montsoreau; "and the time is rapidly coming when those who have injured and offended her will be severely punished, and those who have assisted and befriended her rewarded far beyond their expectations."

Having said this, he left them to see that all was properly prepared; and in a few minutes more Marie de Clairvaut, with the girl who accompanied her, were placed in one of the rude but roomy chaises of the country, and with six horses to drag it through the heavy roads, was rolling away in the direction of Limoges, followed by Charles of Montsoreau, and a party of five or six servants on horseback.

CHAP. VIII.

The autumn was far spent, an early winter had set intensely in, frost once more covered the ground, the last leaves had fallen from the trees, and looking round upon the thick tapestry that covered the walls, and the immense logs of wood which blazed in the deep arched fire-place, the tenant of a splendid room in the old château of Blois smiled when he thought of where he had last passed a similar frosty day: in arms in the open field against the enemies of the land.

Now, however, the appearance of Henry Duke of Guise was in some degree different from that which it had ever been before. Loaded with honours by the King, adored by the people, gratified in every demand, ruling almost despotically the state, the height to which he had risen had impressed itself upon his countenance, and added to that expression of conscious power, which his face had ever borne, the expression also of conscious success. His dress, too, was more splendid than it had ever been--not that he had adopted the silken refinements of Epernon or Joyeuse; not that his person was loaded with jewels, or that his ear hung with rubies: but every thing that he wore was of the richest and most costly kind; and as he now stood ready dressed to go down to hold the table of grand master of the King's household and generalissimo of the armies of France, at which Henry himself, and all the great nobles of the Court were that day to be present, it would have been difficult, throughout all Europe--nay, it would have been impossible, to match his princely look, or to excel in taste his rich apparel. One single star gleamed upon his bosom, the collars of manifold orders hung around his neck, the hilt of his sword was of massy gold, and thin lines of gold embroidery marked the slashings of his green velvet doublet, where, slightly opening as he moved with easy dignity, the pure white lining below appeared from time to time. There were no jewels on his hands, but one large signet ring. He wore no hat, and the brown hair curling round his forehead was the only ornament that decked his head. There was a jewel in his belt, indeed, a single jewel of high price, and the pommel of the dagger, which lay across his loins, was a single emerald.

From time to time, while he had been dressing;--indeed we might say almost every minute, some messenger, or page, or courier appeared, bearing him news or letters from the various provinces of the realm. His secretary stood beside him, but every line was read first by the Duke's own eye; and then he handed them to Pericard, either with some brief comment or some direction in regard to the answer to be returned.

"Ha!" he said, smiling, after reading one epistle. "There is a curious letter from good Hubert de Vins. Hubert loves me as his own brother, and yet to read that letter one would think he respected me but little. There is no bad name he does not give me down to Maheutre and Huguenot, because I trust in King Henry, who, he says, is as treacherous as a Picardy cat."

"I think with Monsieur de Vins, your Highness," said Pericard, who had been reading the letter while the Duke spoke, "that trusting in the semblances of the King's love, you expose your life every hour as if it were neither a value to yourself or your friends or your country."

"You mistake, Pericard," replied the Duke; "I trust not in Henry's love at all. Whether it be feigned or whether it be real for the time, matters not a straw. If it be feigned, it does me no harm, but, on the contrary, daily gives me greater power; if it be true, I receive the benefits thereof for the time, well knowing that to-morrow or the next day it will change completely into hate. I'll tell you what it is I trust to, Pericard: not to the King's love, but to his good sense; for were I dead to-morrow he could be ten times worse than he is to day. I am he who stands between him and destruction!--Ah! who have we hear?" he continued, as the door again opened. "From Provence;--and taking the letter from the hand of a dusty courier, he read it over attentively and threw it to Pericard, saying, "That is good news surely, Pericard! In the room of the two deputies who were so difficult to manage that we were obliged to stuff them with carp and truffles till they both fell sick and fled, we have got two steady Leaguers not to be shaken by threats or moved by choice meats. If we could dislodge that viper, Epernon, from Angoumois, all would be clear before us till we reached the confines of Henry of Navarre. But Epernon is raising troops, I hear----" he added, although he saw that some one had entered the room and was approaching him.

"Which he will soon disband. Monsieur de Guise," said the stranger, "as I am charged by the King to set out to-morrow morning to give the Duke his commands to that effect."

"By my life, Monsieur Miron," said the Duke, "you will have soon to lay aside altogether the exercise of your esculapean powers, at least upon his Majesty's person. You show yourself so skilful in healing the wounds of the state, and curing the sickness of the body politic."

"Your Highness is good unto me," replied the King's physician, looking humble; "but I came to pay my respects to your Highness now, not having seen you since the exile of Villeroy, Pinar and the rest. I hope your Highness does not think that their disgrace is likely to affect your interests at court."

"Not in the least, Monsieur Miron," replied the Duke: "far from it. I seek to exercise no influence amongst the King's ministers. Those who are good for the state are good to me. On the King's good feeling and good sense I firmly rely."

"Some body," said the physician, "informed his Majesty that you were grieved at the dismissal of Villeroy. I may tell him, then, that such is not the case, for he was pained to hear it."

"Tell him so, I beseech you," replied the Duke. "I know the King would not wish without some good reason to dismiss any one that I especially esteemed."

"Most assuredly," replied Miron; "but might I give your Highness one slight warning as a friend, and a most sincere one?"

"Most gratefully will it be received," replied the Duke. "Speak freely, my learned sir," he continued, seeing that the physician had fixed his eyes upon Pericard. "Our good Pericard is as silent as your friend death, Monsieur Miron, who tells no tales you know to those on this side the grave, whatever he may do to those on the other. What is it you have to say?"

"It is this, my Lord," replied Miron. "I should tell you first, that I do believe the King sincerely loves you, and that if you deal but politicly with his humours, there is none in whom he will place such confidence. But my good lord the King's temperament is a strange one.--I speak as a physician. It is indeed injured by some excesses, but though by nature full of the mercurial character, there was always much of the saturnine in it. The balance between these has been overthrown by many circumstances, and in certain conjunctions of the planets he is strangely and variably affected. Such also is the case in the time of these hard frosts. In soft and genial weather he may be easily dealt with: you will then find him but as a thing of wax in your hands. But I beseech you, my Lord, remember that, when the pores of the earth are shut up and filled with this black and acrid frost, 'tis then that all the humours of the body are likewise congealed, and Henry is at that time filled with black and terrible vapours, which are dangerous not alone to himself, but to every one who approaches him unprepared. I say it advisedly, my good Lord. Any one who urges the King far, at such moments, is in peril of his life.^[6] But I must say no more, for here comes a messenger."

"I thank you most sincerely," replied the Duke. "Who is this packet from? I must speedily descend to supper."

"From his Highness of Mayenne," replied the messenger. "He said it was matter of life and death, and commanded me to ride post haste."

"Ha!" said Guise, as he opened the packets and saw the contents. "Our cousin of Savoy in arms in France. This shows the need of unanimity amongst ourselves. He shall find himself mistaken, however, if he thinks Guise will forget his duty to his country. Write Charles of Mayenne word, Pericard, to bring his troops into such a position that they can act against Savoy at a moment's notice, and tell him that he shall have orders to do so ere three days be over. Send, too, to Rouen, thanking them for their attachment; and see that our agent at the court of Rome have full instructions regarding the Count de Soissons. Ha! here comes our brother of the church. My good Lord Cardinal, we will descend together. We shall scarcely reach the hall before the King arrives."

The person who entered bore a strong family likeness to the Duke, but was neither so tall nor so powerful in person. He was dressed in the crimson robes of a prince of the church of Rome; and his countenance, which had much shrewdness and some dignity, accorded well with his station, Miron had retired quietly while the Duke spoke; a sign had dismissed the messenger from the Duke of Mayenne, and none but Pericard remained in the room. But yet the Cardinal spoke in a whisper to his brother, who merely smiled, replying, "Come, come; we have no time now to jest." And thus saying, he led the way down to a hall, where supper was prepared at the table of the Grand Master for all the most distinguished guests then resident at Blois.

The table was covered, as was then much the custom, with jewelled plate of many kinds, and various fanciful devices. The room was in a blaze of light, and all the guests, but the King and his particular train, had already arrived. They were standing back from the table, and gathered together in the magnificent dresses of that period, formed splendid groups in different parts of the chamber, while sewers and other attendants, hurrying backwards and forwards, brought in the various dishes, and set them in their regular order.

The appearance of the Duke and his brother, the Cardinal de Guise, occasioned an instant movement amongst the guests, and the proudest there bowed lowly to the gallant Prince, whose fortunes hitherto had gone on from height to height. Nobles and generals of the highest distinction eagerly sought a word with him, and bishops and prelates of many a various character crowded forward, but to touch the hand of one who had stood forth so prominently in defence of the church.

In a few minutes the table was covered with the various dishes, and intimation that supper was served was immediately given to the King, who appeared the moment after, while the Duke of Guise advanced to the door to receive him, and with every testimony of lowly respect led him to the raised seat appointed for him. The King was followed by six gentlemen, for whom places

had been reserved, and amongst them the eye of Guise rested upon Villequier. That eye flashed for a single moment as it saw him; but the next instant all was calm, and the Duke noticed him especially by an inclination of the head.

As soon as the King had taken his seat, saying, "Sit, my Lord Duke, I pray you; stand upon no further ceremonies," Guise and the rest seated themselves at the table, and the monarch and his princely officer bent forward to say some complimentary nothing to each other, each at the same time unfolding the napkin that lay before them. As they did so, from the napkin of the Duke of Guise fell out upon his plate a folded letter; and Henry, who was all gaiety and condescension at that moment, exclaimed aloud with a light laugh, "Some letter from his lady-love, upon my honour. Read, read, my Lord Duke! Read, read! Carvers, touch not a dish till the Duke has read."

The Duke opened the letter smiling, while the King bent a little towards that side, as if jestingly, to see the contents. All eyes round the table were fixed upon those two; and it was seen that the colour mounted into the cheek of the Duke of Guise, that his brow gathered into a frown, and his lip curled with a scornful smile. As far as the paint on the King's countenance would admit, he appeared to turn pale at the same moment. But Guise, crushing the letter together in his hand, threw it contemptuously under the table, saying aloud, "They dare not!"^[7]

None but the King around the table knew to what those words alluded: but Henry had seen the words, "Beware, Duke of Guise, your life is in danger every day. There are those round you from morning to night, who are ready to spill your blood."

The Duke seemed to forget the matter in a moment, and by the graces of his demeanour soon caused it to be forgotten also by all those around. Henry resumed his gaiety and tranquillity; wine and feasting did their part; and some short time after the King, with his glass filled with the most exquisite wine of France, exclaimed, "Let us drink to some one, my Lord Duke. To whom shall it be?"

"It is for your Majesty to command," replied the Duke gaily. "Let us drink to our good friends the Huguenots!"

"Willingly, willingly," cried Henry laughing. "To the Huguenots, cousin of Guise: ay, and to our good barricaders, too; let us not forget them."

The King smiled, and many around smiled also, at what they thought would be a mortification to the Duke. But Guise answered immediately, after drinking the toast, "It is well bethought of your Majesty, while you give us the health of your bitter enemies, to give us that of your most faithful servants, who will never cease to defend you against them."

He spoke with such an air of good humour, that none could see he had taken any offence, and this matter was also forgotten in a few moments. Shortly before the dessert was placed upon the table, a page slipped a small scrap of paper with a few words written upon it into the hands of the Duke, who gathered the meaning at a single glance, while his whole countenance brightened with satisfaction. "Come, Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "honour me by drinking with me to a mutual relation of ours. Here is to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, as sweet, as good, as fair a lady as any in France. Let us drink her health, and a gallant husband to her soon."

"Willingly, willingly, my Lord," replied Villequier; "and I wish your Lordship would let me name that husband. But here is to her health." And he drank the wine.

"Nay," answered Guise, "that cannot be, Monsieur de Villequier, for I have named him myself already."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Villequier, with no slight surprise in his look. But he instantly overcame the first emotion, adding, "I suppose, then, that the young Lady is under your protection at the present moment?"

"At which you can neither be displeased nor surprised. Monsieur de Villequier," replied the Duke, still bearing a courteous and affable look. "As you know you swore upon the mass some weeks ago that she was not under your protection, and that you knew not where she was, it must be a relief to your mind to find that she is well cared for."

"Oh, my good Lord of Guise," replied Villequier in the same courteous tone, "no one ever doubts that his Highness of Guise cares for every one that comes within his influence. Have we not an instance of it here, when no sooner is one of the good Duke's friends, and the allotted husband of his fair niece, dead, than another of his friends is raised to the same happy prospect. But, pray, may I ask if the young Lady herself is well pleased with this rapid substitution of lovers?"

"Delighted, I believe," replied the Duke with a smile full of meaning. "Though I have had no particular communication with her yet, inasmuch as, it having been discovered that she had escaped from the hands of some base persons who unjustly detained her, the worthy and respectable governor of Angoumois took pains to guard the country all round, in order to stop her on her journey to Blois. This has much delayed her coming, and would most likely have delayed it still longer, had she not taken refuge with Monsieur and Madame Montmorin, till I sent a force sufficient to open the way for her through all the La Valettes in France. It is thus only this night--

nay, this very moment, that I hear of her arrival in Blois."

"Well, my Lord," answered Villequier with a laugh, "it is evident that he who attempts to strive with the Duke of Guise, either in stratagem or in force, must be a bold man, and should be a clever one. As I told your Highness, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was not in my hands, but how she was set free from the hands in which she was placed must remain a mystery rather difficult to solve. A servant girl, it seems, became the immediate instrument; but the skill with which every trace of her path was concealed, and even the manner in which her flight itself was effected, bespeaks a better brain than that of a peasant of Angoumois. Is it permitted, my Lord, to ask the name of the favoured gentleman you destine for her husband?"

"His Majesty receives his Court to-night, I think," replied the Duke, "and then, Monsieur de Villequier, I shall have much pleasure in presenting that gentleman to you. But, Monsieur de Villequier, if, as your words imply, you have suffered yourself to be out-manœuvred in this business, I will mortify your pride in your own skill by telling you that you have been foiled and frustrated by no efforts of mine, but by the wit of a girl and the courage and stratagem of a mere youth. My Lord the King, may I humbly beseech your Majesty to let us drink better policy to Monsieur de Villequier."

Henry laughed lightly and drank the wine; and the rest of the supper passed off gaily, though Villequier from time to time fell into a momentary fit of thought, from which he was twice roused to find the eye of the Duke of Guise upon him. At length, as the hour for the reception of the Court in the King's own apartments approached, Henry rose and retired, followed by Villequier and the rest of the gentlemen who had accompanied him.

The Duke of Guise paused for a moment after, speaking rapidly to several of those around him; and then, calling a page, he whispered to him, "Go with speed to Monsieur Chapelle Marteau. Tell him to let me see him at midnight. I should also like to see Monsieur de Magnac, one of the Presidents of the Nobles. You will very likely find him in his cabinet at the Palais de Justice. I would fain see them both.--Gentlemen, the King will soon be in the hall, where you had better meet his Majesty. I must be absent for a few moments, and you will therefore pardon me."

Thus saying the Duke left them, and followed by one or two attendants, proceeded to the apartments assigned especially to himself.

In the mean while the rest of the nobles hurried from the château to various parts of the town, in order to accompany their wives and daughters to a great assembly of the Court, which was to be held that night in the grand hall of the castle. In the same hall the meetings of the States-General of the kingdom usually took place, when the three orders assembled together; but, as it was considered probable that they would deliberate separately for some days to come, the hall had been arranged that night, as we have said, for the reception of the Court; and in it soon appeared almost all the splendid nobility of France brought into Blois by the meeting of the States. The Duke of Guise, however, had not yet arrived when the King appeared, and much was the surprise and wonder of all that he did not show himself. In about ten minutes after, however, there was a whisper near the great doors of "The Duke! the Duke is coming! He is in the corridor speaking to Brissac:" and after the pause of an instant, the two wings of the door were thrown open, and Guise, followed by a long and brilliant train, and himself decorated with the collars and jewels of all the first orders in Europe, entered the great hall and advanced towards the King. With him appeared the lovely form of Marie de Clairvaut, leaning on his left arm, while, dressed with all that splendour to which the fashion of the day lent itself, appeared upon his right the young Count of Logères, somewhat thinner and somewhat paler than he had been when he before presented himself at the Court of France, but with his head high, and proud with the best kind of pride, the consciousness of rectitude, and his eye bright with the excitement of the moment and the scene. The eyes of Marie de Clairvaut were bent down, and there was a slight but not ungraceful embarrassment in her manner, from the consciousness that many late events which had befallen her would attract more than usual attention to herself.

Advancing straight towards the King and Queen, the Duke of Guise took Marie's hand in his, saying, "Allow me to present to your Majesties my dear niece and ward. Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and permit me also to present to you my friend----;" and he laid particular emphasis on the word, "the Count of Logères, whom, with your Majesty's permission, and this fair Lady's consent, I destine to be her husband. Were it possible to give him a higher treasure than herself, I should be bound to do it, as if it had not been for him, and for his skill, courage, and determination on two occasions, my head would have been now in the dust, and I should not now have had the hope of serving your Majesty well, faithfully, and successfully, as I trust to do."

From his first entrance, and while he spoke, a low murmur had run through the whole Court, some inquiring who the gentleman was that accompanied him, the few who knew Charles of Montsoreau whispering his name, and all, as it passed round, expressing their surprise at the re-appearance of one supposed to be dead. The Duke of Guise in the mean time turned to Villequier, who had at first become pale at the sight of Charles of Montsoreau.

"Monsieur de Villequier," said the Duke, "you were desirous of knowing the name of the friend for whom I destine my niece. Allow me to present him to you in the person of the Count of Logères, whom I trust you will soon congratulate upon their marriage." And while he spoke he ran the finger of his right hand gently down his baldric towards the hilt of his sword, with a

gesture significant enough, but which could only be seen by Villequier.

Having said this, the Duke and his party retired to a space left for them on the King's right hand, and the various entertainments of the evening commenced, the King, who had been rather amused than otherwise at the reappearance of Charles of Montsoreau, giving himself up to one of those bursts of gaiety, which occasionally ran into somewhat frantic excesses.

We cannot pause here to describe the scene. All was splendour and amusement; and in the light Court of France the circumstances in which Marie de Clairvaut was placed were sufficient to draw around her all the gay, and the gallant, and the idle. Unaccustomed to such scenes--less accustomed, indeed, than even she was--the eye of Charles of Montsoreau turned towards her from time to time, with perhaps some anxiety, to see how she would bear the homage that was paid to her; whether, in short, it would be the same Marie de Clairvaut in the midst of flattery and adulation and that bright and glittering scene, that it had been with him in the calm quiet of country life, in more than one solitary journey, and in many a scene of peril, danger, and distress. Whenever he looked that way, however, he saw the same sweet, calm, retiring demeanour; and more than once he found her eyes seeking him out in some distant part of the hall, and her lips light up with a bright smile as soon as their glances met. He felt, and he felt proudly, that there was none there present who could doubt that her guardian's choice was her own also.

With the irregularity which marked all Henry's conduct at that period, after remaining for half an hour with the appearance of the utmost enjoyment, the King suddenly became sombre and gloomy; and, after biting his lip and knitting his brow for a few minutes, turned and quitted the hall. All was immediately the confusion of departure, and Charles of Montsoreau made his way across to where the Duke of Guise was seen standing, towering above all the rest. The young Count had remarked, that in the course of the evening the Duke had been speaking long and eagerly with a lady of extraordinary beauty, who stood at some distance from the royal party; and he had heard her named as the Marchioness of Noirmontier, with a light jest from more than one tongue at her intimacy with the Duke. When he now reached the side of that Prince she had passed on, and was bending over Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and speaking to her with a look of tenderness and admiration.

"Come on Count, come on," said the Duke, in a low but somewhat sharp tone, as soon as his young friend joined him. And they advanced to the side of the two ladies at the moment that Madame de Noirmontier was urging Marie to spend a few days with her at her beautiful château some way down the Loire. The Duke, however, did not suffer his ward to reply.

"I fear, dear Madam," he said in a decided and somewhat stern tone, "that it cannot be."

The colour rushed violently up into the cheeks of Madame de Noirmontier, and the tears seemed ready to spring into her eyes. But the Duke added, "Logères, escort Marie back to my apartments. If you will permit me, Madam, I will be your attendant to your carriage, and explain why my young ward cannot have the extreme pleasure and honour you intended for her."

"It needs no explanation, your Highness," replied the Marchioness, raising her head proudly. "I intended to have staid some days longer in this neighbourhood; but as she cannot come to me, I shall return at once to Paris."

The Duke looked mortified, but still offered her his hand; and when he rejoined his own party in the apartments assigned to him, he was somewhat gloomy and abstracted.

CHAP. IX.

"His Highness, Sire," said one of the attendants to Henry III. on the following day, "His Highness of Guise is not to be found this morning. His servants say that he has gone forth on horseback, followed only by two grooms: but whither he has turned his steps, no one seems rightly to know."

"Seek him with Madame de Noirmontier," said Villequier, who stood beside the King.

But Henry, however, who was in no mood for jesting at that moment, replied sharply, "He is playing with me! He is playing with me! He mocks me! He will repent it some day! And I think you mock me too, Villequier, to talk of Madame de Noirmontier at this moment. Have you not heard this business of Savoy? He knew it last night, and said nothing of it; and I'll tell you what more he has done, Villequier, which you may like as little as I like the other. He has fixed the day for the marriage of his niece with that bold young Logères. But this business of Savoy is terrible,

and these mutinous States will be the ruin of the realm."

"Sire," replied Villequier, "your Majesty must remember that I am somewhat in darkness, in twilight at least. I have heard a rumour that the Savoyard is in arms in France. But what of the States?"

"Why, they are even now discussing," exclaimed the King, "whether there shall be war or not, even to defend our invaded territory. There are the Clergy now arguing it at the Jacobins, the Nobles in the Palais de Justice, and the Third Estate in the Hôtel de Ville,—all, all showing a disposition to hesitate at such a moment; and Guise, the Generalissimo of my armies, and Grand Master of my household absent. Heaven knows where!"

"The devil knows best, most likely," replied Villequier with a calm smile. "But, perhaps, the secret may be, that the Duke of Savoy is son-in-law of the King of Spain. Now, the King of Spain has been a good friend to the Duke of Guise, and the good Pope used always to say that a Guise never jumped higher than the King of Spain liked."

"By my faith!" replied the King, "I sometimes think that this same gloomy Philip is more sovereign in France than the King thereof. But here come tidings from the Tiers Etats. Come, Monsieur Artau, how have gone the deliberations of the States? What say our good Commons to war with Savoy?"

"They go against it altogether, Sire," replied the officer who now entered. "Chapelle Marteau spoke against it vehemently, declared that it was but a plundering excursion of some light troops, who had carried off a few thousand crowns, while it would cost many millions to carry on a war with Savoy: and then, up got another, and talked of imposts and taxes and the poverty of the state, and said that millions and hundreds of millions had been lost in speculation and extravagance. If your Majesty indeed, he said, would bear two-thirds of the expense out of your domain, and would cut down your tall trees, or mortgage a part of the royal forests, the Commons would see what could be done."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Henry stamping his foot, "when they keep me here, a throned beggar, without a crown in my pocket, to give a jewel to a mistress or a friend, they expect me to carry on the defence of the country at my own expense! On my soul! I have a great mind to cast away the sceptre, to go down into the ranks of a private gentleman, and name my rule-loving mother to govern in my stead: or faith, I care not if it were Guise himself. He would teach these surly citizens what it is to have an iron rod over their heads. By the Lord! he would not spare the backs of the porkers. Hie thee, good Artau to the Clergy at the Jacobins; see what they say to the matter. And what say you, Villequier, to my scheme of abdicating?"

"Why, Sire," replied Villequier calmly, "I think it is an excellent good one. But I hope, in the first place, that you will give a few thoughts to what I told you concerning the young Marquis de Montsoreau and the hundred thousand crowns he promised on the day of his marriage with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. You know your Majesty has claimed the lion's share; and seventy-five thousand crowns at the present moment, or any time between this and Christmas, might serve to give your Majesty a new lace to your doublet, or a new doublet to your lace, for to my mind both are plaguy rusty. Now, though the re-appearance of this young Count of Logères will cut down the amount of his brother's estates most terribly, yet that affects me more than you, Sire; and by having made inquiries I find, to a certainty, that he is quite capable of paying the money the moment the marriage is concluded."

"Seventy-five thousand crowns!" repeated the King thoughtfully. "Seventy-five thousand crowns! Why, my friend, I think that neither you or I have heard of such a thing since we had beards. But how does all this square with my giving the crown to Guise, which you approved so highly?"

"Oh, extremely well, Sire," replied Villequier. "The crown I would have you give him is neither the crown of France nor of Poland: I would give him an immortal crown, Sire. You will fit him better, depend upon it, that way than with a terrestrial one. His aspiring spirit seeks the skies, and, could I deal with him, should very soon find them. However, you will remember that your royal word, as well as mine, is pledged to the young Marquis de Montsoreau."

A dark smile came over the King's face. "We will see, Villequier; we will see," he said. "My word must be kept and shall not be broken. The morning of Christmas-day the Duke has fixed for the marriage. Who knows what may happen between this and then, Villequier. She is then absolutely your ward failing the Duke of Guise, and we will have no hesitation or delay, when we have the power to compel obedience. But we must be very cautious, Villequier; we must be very cautious. We must neither seem pleased with this business of the marriage, for then he would suspect us of some concealed design; nor must we oppose him strongly, because that would put him on his guard; and I fear me, that all the crowns in France could not do me so much good as the Duke of Guise could do me harm if he were offended."

"Without being slain," replied Villequier in a low tone. "Oh no, my Lord, I know well, a wounded boar is always the most dangerous."

The King smiled again in the same dark and sinister manner, but he made no reply to

Villequier's insinuation--perhaps still doubtful of his own purposes, perhaps prevented from speaking openly by the return of Monsieur D'Artau.

"What! so soon come back?" exclaimed Henry. "You cannot judge of the tone of the assembly, D'Artau. You should have heard more of their deliberations."

"There was no more to hear, Sire," replied D'Artau. "The Clergy were all agreed; every body had become wonderfully pacific in a moment. There had not been one voice raised for war, and fifty or sixty were raised against it; so their deliberations, as I have said, were almost concluded at the time I entered. They went to no vote, indeed, upon the subject, but agreed to pass on to another question."

"The villains! the crows!" exclaimed the King. "What did they give us as reasons, did you hear?"

"Why, they said, Sire," replied the officer, "that they had taxed themselves, time after time, for the purpose of carrying on the war with the Huguenots; that they had now again taxed themselves to the utmost of their means, and would not consent that any part of the sum thus raised should be diverted to make war upon their fellow Catholics, while nothing had yet been done against the enemies of their faith."

"The specious hypocrites!" exclaimed Henry. "But what said they all to the absence of the Duke of Guise?"

"It was said, Sire, as I heard, by several people, that he had evidently absented himself from policy, not wishing to oppose your Majesty, and yet unwilling to go to war with Savoy. Some said, indeed, Sire," he continued, "that Chapelle Marteau had acknowledged that this was the case. But that could not be so either, for the Duke sent for the President of the Tiers Etats last night, without being able to find him. That I know from the servants, so that what Chapelle said must have been out of his own head; while, on the contrary, I hear that Monsieur Magnac and the Count de Brissac, who were with the Duke for more than an hour last night, spoke vehemently against the Duke of Savoy amongst the Nobles at the Palais de Justice. Thus the Nobles were as unanimous for the war, as the other two States were against it."

"That should be the foot-fall of a Guise in the antechamber," said the King. "Who is without there?"

"The Duke of Guise, your Majesty," said a page entering almost as the King spoke, "craves audience for a moment."

"Admit him," said the King; "admit him:" and the next instant the Duke of Guise entered hastily in a riding dress.

"Your Majesty's gracious pardon," he said, "for presenting myself before you thus: but I heard tidings, as I came along, which I believed might give you great and exceeding pain."

"Well may it give me pain, cousin of Guise," replied the King. "Well may it give me pain, to find that my subjects are so insensible to their own honour or to mine, as to suffer a foreign enemy to encamp upon our native soil, without doing what best we may to drive him forth."

"It may, indeed, Sire," replied the Duke of Guise. "But the matter has not been properly explained; and neither the Tiers Etats nor the Clergy have seen it in its true light."

"But where was the Duke of Guise to explain it?" demanded Henry. "Where was the Generalissimo of my armies, the Lieutenant-general of my kingdom, the Grand Master of my household, the man whose voice is only second to my own in France--ay, and by Heavens! whose voice is sometimes first likewise? Where was he, I say; and how came he not to be present?"

"From the simplest of all possible causes, Sire," replied the Duke. "The business regularly appointed for this morning's discussion by the States was a mere trifling matter of some petty impost. I had not told your Majesty last night of this affair of Savoy, because I thought it would spoil the pleasure of your evening, and perhaps disturb your rest. I myself, however, neglected nothing. I instantly dispatched orders, in your Majesty's name, to my brother of Mayenne, to advance towards Piedmont with troops from Lyons. Before I rested, I sent for the Presidents of the Nobles and of the Tiers Etats. The latter, however, was not to be found; but I told Brissac and Magnac what had occurred, and begged them to prepare all minds for vigorous measures against Savoy, without disclosing the actual fact of aggression, that fact having only reached me by the excessive speed of my brother's courier. I felt perfectly certain that the news could not be known till to-night or to-morrow morning; and how it happened that your Majesty was informed of it so early, as to send down a message thereon to each of the three Estates, I really do not know."

"Very simply, my good cousin of Guise," replied the King, whose face had now relaxed from the harsh and acrid aspect it had borne throughout the morning; "it was Miron told me."

"I had forgotten, I had forgotten," replied the Duke. "He was in the room when the packet arrived, and I must have given vent to my thoughts aloud."

"Well, under such circumstances," replied the King, "I suppose I must pardon, cousin of Guise, your having gone to pay your homage somewhere else, as Monsieur de Villequier insinuates, when the King much wanted your presence."

"Monsieur de Villequier is, as usual, wrong," replied the Duke of Guise frowning upon him. "Where he seeks for or finds such abundance of evil motives to attribute to other men, I do not know. May it not be in his own bosom? I went, for your Majesty's service, to inspect a body of three thousand men, about to march early this morning from Laucome to join the army of the Duke of Nevers, and it was only as I returned that I heard of this unfortunate business."

"Perhaps his Highness thinks," said Villequier, not unwilling to increase any feeling of ill-will between the King and the Duke, "perhaps his Highness thinks that your Majesty would have done more wisely to have waited till his return, and not to have communicated the news from Savoy at all to the States, till you had consulted him upon it."

Villequier had almost said, "till you had asked his permission;" but he feared that a part of the King's anger might fall back upon himself. The Duke of Guise, however, saw through all his purposes in a moment, and replied, "Far from it, Monsieur de Villequier! I think, on the contrary, that I should have done more wisely if, instead of inspecting the troops at all--although Nevers, who is my enemy, might have reproached me for neglect--I had waited till the King had risen, to convey the expression of his will in person to the States-General, Sire, I humbly crave your Majesty's pardon for this one instance of neglect; and, to prove how sorry I am that it has occurred, I will undertake to show the Clergy and the Commons such good motives for changing their decision, that your Majesty's name and honour shall not suffer by the invasion of your territories unresisted."

"They will refuse you, Guise; they will refuse you," replied the King. "I know them well. You think to rule them, Guise; but the first time you speak of money to Commons or to Clergy, you will find that cabalistic word, money, acts on them as the sign of the cross upon the fiends we read of, and makes the seeming angels resume their shapes of devils in a moment."

"Well, Sire, well," exclaimed the Duke of Guise, tossing his lofty head with a proud smile, "if they refuse us, we will shame them. You and I together will put our lances in the rest, as in days of old: we will call the nobility of France about us; and I will promise, at my own expense, without craving these penurious Commons for a sol, with my own men and your Majesty's good help, in three weeks' time to drive the Savoyard back to his mountain den. But no, Sire, no! They will not refuse me; and I pledge myself before this hour to-morrow to bring you such tidings from both clergy and commons as you could wish to hear."

"If you do, cousin," cried the King eagerly, "if you do, you are my best of friends and counsellors for ever."

"Fear not. Sire; fear not," replied the Duke of Guise; "I will be bold to undertake it. But I must see the presidents and some of the deputies speedily, to know what are the vain and idle notions on which they have hesitated in regard to a step imperatively necessary. I will therefore humbly take my leave, beseeching you to think well of me during my absence, even though my good Lord of Villequier be at your Majesty's right elbow."

Thus saying the Duke retired, and the King, turning to Villequier, asked with some anxiety "Think you, Villequier, that he will succeed?"

"I know not, Sire," replied Villequier; "but I should judge not. They have too far committed themselves to retract, let the question be what it would, but are not at all likely to retract where money is concerned."

"Well, well," said the King; "I will hope the best. And now, Villequier, we must think of what can be done, in order not to lose the seventy-five thousand crowns. Mort Dieu! What a sum! In the very first place, we must call hither your young friend, wherever he may be, without loss of an hour. We must not have him appear at the Court, however. He must lie concealed, but be ready at a moment's notice. Let him bring what men he can with him. But above all, do not let him forget the crowns, Villequier. Let them be prepared.--Nay, smile not, I have a scheme for the purpose, which will mature itself in time. But no good plan should ever be hurried, and it should always be formed of elements as ductile as warm wax, that it may fit itself into the mould of circumstances. It will mature itself in time, Villequier; it will mature itself in time. But now to this other terrible business."

"Pray, Sire, what is that?" demanded Villequier with some alarm, for since his arrival at Blois Henry had shown so much more activity and application to serious matters, that even his favourite had forgotten his character. "Pray, what terrible business does your Majesty speak of?"

"Have you not heard," exclaimed the King, "have you not heard, that the boat was upset in coming down the Loire--the boat with the parrots and monkeys; and my great beautiful black ape, Ridolin-din-din, was nearly drowned, and has caught such a cold, that it is feared he will die!--Sweet creature, he is a beauty, and in his woollen nightcap and long gown is not at all unlike my mother. Poor fellow, have you not heard him coughing in the room beyond? I must go and give him some confection of quinces."

During a considerable portion of the day Henry devoted himself to his ape, but towards evening his anxiety in regard to the States and to the eruption of the Duke of Savoy seized upon him again. This was terribly increased by the arrival of a new courier, bearing more ample particulars than the former. The king slept ill at night, and rose early the next morning; but still all the reports brought him of the disposition of the States made him imagine that no means would be taken to curb the enemy, and that he himself would be left by his subjects the mockery and by-word of Europe, unable to repel the outrages of even the pettiest of all the neighbouring princes. The sneers of many of his favourites and courtiers at the Duke of Guise, too--their ironical smiles at the very idea of his being able to change the announced determination of two great bodies in the State, tended to irritate the King still more, and to drive him almost to madness.

In this state of mind he was walking up and down his chamber between eleven and twelve o'clock on the succeeding day, when suddenly hearing the bustle of many feet without, he himself threw open the door and beheld the Duke of Guise approaching with his usual train and several other persons.

There was in the noble countenance of the Duke the glad consciousness of success; but Henry, eager for confirmation, exclaimed, "What is it, cousin of Guise? What is it? Uncertainty drives me wild."

"Health to your Majesty," replied the Duke. "These gentlemen who follow me. Messieurs Brissac and Magnac, the Presidents of the Nobility, the Archbishop of Lyons representing the Clergy, and my good friend, Chapelle Marteau, President of the Third Estate, humbly approach your Majesty with a petition, that as the Duke of Savoy has committed a wanton infringement upon the territories of France, you would be graciously pleased to pronounce a declaration of war against that Prince, in which your dutiful subjects will aid and support your Majesty to the best of their ability."

The King's joy knew no bounds, and throwing his arms around the Duke of Guise, he kissed him on both cheeks. Recovering himself, however, in a few minutes, he received the deputies from the States with some degree of dignity. His joy, however, was still exuberant; and, in dismissing the petitioners, he said that the declaration should be immediately issued, and that he would trust to his best friend and wisest counsellor, pointing to the Duke of Guise, to repel speedily, with that unconquerable hand which had won so many victories, this new aggression upon the territory of France.

As soon as the deputies were gone, he burst forth again in the same strain, vowing to the Duke that he loved him beyond every thing on earth, that his attachment should be unalterable and inviolate, and that whatever might be said or urged against the Duke, he would never believe it.

"Cousin of Guise," he exclaimed, "there are people who would fain persuade me that you aim at my crown, and perhaps there are others who may try to persuade you that I aim at your liberty or life, I know there are."

"Sire, we neither of us believe them," replied the Duke.

"Let us never believe them," answered the King; "let us never believe them. Let us swear, Guise, let us swear to hold good faith and undoubting sincerity and true friendship to each other for ever! Let us swear it upon the altar even now! Let us swear it by the Holy Communion, by which we dare not swear falsely, and then the insinuations of our enemies will be as empty air!"

"Most willingly, Sire," replied the Duke; "I am ready this moment. It is near the hour of mass, and having nothing in my heart but good towards your Majesty, I am ready this very moment."

"Come then, come to the chapel," cried the King. And taking the Duke of Guise by the hand he led the way, followed by only the two attendants who were in the anteroom. In ten minutes more the King and the Duke might be seen kneeling before the same altar, calling down the wrath of God upon their heads if they ever did one act of enmity towards each other, drinking of the same consecrated cup, and dividing the host between them.^[8]

CHAP. X.

It was a bright clear frost, all the ancient houses and streets of that most curious and interesting old town, called Blois, were seen clear and defined, without the slightest thin particle of smoke or haze, and from the high windows of the chamber of Catherine de Medici the servant,

who sat and gazed out, might see the slightest object that passed along the road below.

As she thus sat and gazed, her eyes fell upon a glittering troop of cavaliers who issued forth from the castle gates, and took their way through the town, and she could see the princely form of the Duke of Guise, and the strong frame of Brissac, and the graceful person of Charles of Montsoreau, riding nearly abreast at the head of the troop.

"The Duke has gone forth, may it please your Majesty," said the woman, turning to the bed on which lay Catherine de Medici, sick in body and uneasy in mind. "The Duke has gone forth, and a large train with him."

"Then the King will soon be here," replied the Queen-mother. "Go into the further chamber, good Bridget, and wait there till he leaves me. If Madame de Noirmontier arrives from Paris before he is gone, bid her wait there too. I will see her after, and be glad to see her."

The attendant had scarcely retired, when Henry III. himself entered with a slow step, a dull frowning brow, and lips turned down, giving his countenance a diabolical expression of sneering malice, which contrasted strongly with the white and red paint which he had used, and the gay foppery of his apparel.

"You sent for us, good mother," he said. "How goes it with you? Has the fever left you, or do you still suffer?"

"My sufferings are of no moment," replied Catherine de Medici. "They will soon pass, Henry, and I shall be well again. But the illnesses of states pass not so soon, my son; and upon your acts, at the present moment, depends the welfare of France for centuries."

"I know it, madam," replied Henry sullenly. "But may I ask upon what particular occasion your Majesty has thus resumed the maternal rod?"

"The occasion is this, my son," replied the Queen: "I find that you are opposing Guise, when you have no power to oppose him; and you are opposing him in things where your opposition will not increase your power, but will increase his. Were you to oppose him firmly but steadfastly on points where reason, and right, and the welfare of the State were upon your side, however blind they might be for a time, the people would come over to your side in the end. But if you oppose him in things where your pride, or your vanity, or your selfishness is concerned, depend upon it his party will every day increase; for Guise having identified himself with the people and the Catholic Church, his foibles will be treated far more leniently by both church and people than yours."

"Guise!--Guise!--Guise!" cried the King in a bitter tone. "For ever, Guise! I am sick to death of the very name. What would you have, Madam? Have I not yielded almost every thing to him? Have not all his demands been granted, till they become so numerous that I have not wherewithal to stop their mouths? Did I not sign the decree of July? Did I not declare old scarlet Bourbon next heir to the Crown? Did I not satisfy the cravings of Nemours and of Mayenne? Did I not banish Epernon; give the Duke all sorts of posts; yield him up towns and cities? Did I not render him king of one half of France? What is it that I have refused him?"

"In many points you mistake, my son," replied the Queen. "You have yielded more than one of these things, not to him, but to the League. You refused to him, too, the sword of Constable; and in that perhaps you were right. At all events he himself seemed to think that you were so, for he has not pressed the demand: but after promising to the League, as one of their towns of surety, the city of Orleans, which both you and I know was promised, you would now persuade Guise and the League that it was inserted in the edict by mistake, and that the town promised was Dourlans, a heap of hovels on a little hill, as if you thought that, by such a trumpety evasion, you could deceive the keen wit of a Lorraine. Guise, of course, set his foot upon the small deception. But what are you doing now? Quarrelling with him because he demands that which has been recognised as a right of every generalissimo in the kingdom; namely, the right of having his own prévôt and guards. Such has ever been the case, as you well know. The matter is a trifle, except to your own jealous disposition; and even were he not right, it would still be but a trifle. But when he is right, and you are wrong, the refusal is an insult, and the matter becomes of importance."

"Madam," said the King bitterly, "in spite of all you say. Guise shall not absolutely be King of France. Has he not here, within these three days, refused me an impost necessary to maintain my dignity as a King, and to provide for the safety of the State? Does he not try to keep me a beggar, that I may have no means of asserting my own rights and dignity?"

"No," replied the Queen; "No, Henry! He did not refuse you the impost; it was the States. If I heard rightly, he spoke in favour of it."

"Ay, spoke!" cried the King. "But how did he speak? Lukewarmly--unwillingly. The States soon saw which way his wishes turned. Had he not been playing the hypocrite, he would have commanded it in a moment. Did he not show how he could command in that business of Savoy? Four-and-twenty hours were sufficient for him to make every man in Clergy and in Commons eat their words. This is something very like sovereign power, madam. It is power such as I never possessed myself."

"Ay, and then you were grateful to him for its exercise," replied Catherine; "and swore eternal friendship to him on the altar!"

"Certainly, but his ambitious views have become far more outrageous since then," replied the King angrily. "Has he not exacted that Henry of Navarre shall be excluded by name from the succession? Has he not forced the Count de Soissons to receive absolution from the Pope? Has not he blazed abroad, throughout all the world, the letters of the Pope himself, thanking him for his efforts to put down heresy, and exhorting him to persevere, as if he and none other were King of France? And now he must have guards, must he! now he must have guards! When will the crown be wanted? His leading staff is already the sceptre, for it sways all things; his chair is already the throne, for from it emanates every movement of the States-General of France. Yes, madam, yes! the throne and sceptre he has gained; and I see the leaves of his ducal coronet gradually changing themselves into fleurs-de-lis, and the bandlets of the close crown ready to meet above his head."

"But to the guards which he demands," said Catherine de Medici, "he has a right, as Lieutenant-general of the kingdom; and why should you oppose him on a point where he is right?"

"Ay, the guards! the guards!" cried Henry. "Let him have them, madam; let him have them. But nevertheless, in a few days, all this will be over." And so saying, without waiting for further reply, the King turned and quitted his mother's chamber.

Following a private staircase, which had been so constructed as only to afford a means of communication between the various apartments of the royal family, the King descended to a large chamber, or sort of hall, with a deep window looking out towards the Loire. He found already in that chamber several of his most intimate and confidential friends and favourites, who, notwithstanding the high degree of confidence which the King placed in them, viewed the gloomy sullenness of his countenance with some sort of apprehension. In truth, when the fit was upon him, it could never be told where the blow would fall; and he often thus deprived himself of counsel and assistance in his moments of greatest need.

There were some, however, then present, whose purpose it was to exasperate the irritation which he suffered, even at the risk of injuring, in some degree, themselves; and the Maréchal d'Aumont, who had been waiting there for his return, advanced, and though the King addressed not one word to him, but walked on sullenly till he had almost touched him, he began the conversation first, speaking in a low tone. At length the King stopped abruptly, and, gazing in his face, exclaimed, "What, without my veto; without my consent and approbation? Do the States propose that their determinations be law without the King?"

"They do, Sire," replied the Maréchal d'Aumont; "and I doubt not they would consider that the approbation of the Duke of Guise would be quite sufficient. They have already made him feel that such is the case, Sire; for one of his creatures offered me not long ago, if I would attach myself to him, to make me Governor of Normandy, declaring that the States, at a word from the Duke, would make your Majesty take it from the Duke of Montpensier, to whom you had given it."

The King paused for a moment, with his hands clasped, and his eyes gazing on the ground. At length he raised them suddenly, saying, "Hark ye, D'Aumont!" and then spoke a few words in a whisper, as the Marshal bent down his ear.

D'Aumont turned somewhat pale as he listened; his brows knit, and a certain degree of wildness came into his eyes; but he answered, the moment the King had done, "I have not rightly understood your Majesty. But it seems to me, that the only way a sovereign can deal with rebellious subjects and traitors, is to cause them to be arrested, and deliver them over to their natural judges, to be tried according to law."

Henry waved his hand with a look of contemptuous disappointment, and then added, looking fixedly in D'Aumont's face, "You will be silent!"

"On my honour, Sire," replied D'Aumont; and bowing low, but with a face still pale, he quitted the chamber.

Without noticing the other gentlemen who were standing at the farther corner of the room, Henry called to a page, and descended by the staircase into the gardens. He looked up for a moment at the bright and cheerful sunshine, and then upon the clear wintry scene around; but the sight seemed only to plunge him in deeper gloom than ever; and turning to the boy he said, "Run back to the hall, and bid Monsieur Crillon come here alone."

He then stood with his arms crossed upon his chest, gazing upon the ground beneath his feet, and when Crillon approached he took him by the arm, and walked slowly on with him to the other side of the gardens. He was silent for some moments; but then turning to Crillon he said, "You are colonel of my French guards, Crillon, and there is a service which I want you and them to perform."

"Speak, Sire," replied Crillon with his bluff manner. "If there be any thing that a soldier and a man of honour can do for you, I am ready to do it."

"Are not kings the highest magistrates in their realm, Crillon?" said the King, gazing in his

face; "and have they not a right to judge their own subjects, and pass sentence upon them?"

"I wish to Heaven I were a lawyer, Sire," replied the old soldier, "and then I would give your Majesty an answer. But on my honour, at present, I have not considered the subject."

"Well then, Crillon," continued the King, "to put it in another shape: I have a subject who is more king than myself; who stands between me and the sun; who grasps at all the power in the realm; and who, day by day, is increasing in ambition and insolence."

"Your Majesty means the Duke of Guise," said Crillon; "I know him in a minute by the description."

"You are right," said Henry. "But this must not continue long, Crillon. Methinks a small body of my guards, with a brave and determined commander, might rid me of this enemy, of this viper. The most learned lawyers of my realm have assured me that law and justice and right authorise me to cause this deed to be done. Will you undertake it, Crillon?"

"Sire," replied Crillon, "I beg your Majesty's pardon for reminding you, that there is a public executioner appointed by law, and I must not interfere with any other man's office. As to my becoming an assassin, that your Majesty does not conceive possible for a moment."

Henry looked bitterly down upon the ground, and then said, in a tone between wrath and anguish, "My friends desert me!"

"No, Sire, they don't," replied Crillon. "There is a way of settling the matter, which your Majesty has forgotten, but which suits my feelings and habits better than any other way. I will now humbly take leave of your Majesty, and going up to the cabinet of his Highness of Guise, I will insult him before his people, tell him that he has wronged his King and his country, and bid him accompany me to the field with equal arms. The Duke, bad as he is, is not a man to refuse such an invitation; and I think I can insure your Majesty, that you shall not be troubled with the Duke of Guise for a long time to come."

The King smiled; "Alas! Crillon," he said, "you deceive yourself. You forget what you undertake. Remember, you purpose to strive with, hand to hand, the most powerful man in Europe--the most dexterous and skilful in the use of every weapon upon the face of the earth--the most fearless, the most active, the most prompt, whose hand never trembles, whose eye never winks, whose foot never slips. He would slay thee, Crillon; he would slay thee in a moment."

"I know it, Sire," replied Crillon calmly; "but not before I have slain him. If I choose to make my body a sheath for his sword, I will make his body a sheath for mine, while my hand holds tight against my breast the hilt of his weapon, to keep in my own spirit till I see his fled. This can be done, Sire, and it shall be done within these two hours. I give your Majesty good day, for there is no time to spare."

"Stay, Crillon, stay!" said the King, "I command you not to think of it. If you attempt it, you will ruin all my plans. I thank you for your willingness. I owe you no ill-will for your refusal. You will find the page at the door: tell him to send Monsieur de Laugnac to me--Montpizat Laugnac, you know."

"Oh, I know him, Sire," replied Crillon. "He is a man of small scruples. I will tell the page as your Majesty bids me." And he retired from the presence of the King with a quick step.

The manner in which the King dealt with Laugnac formed a strange contrast with his manner towards Crillon. The moment that the former, who was first gentleman of his chamber, and captain of the famous band of Quarante-cinq, joined him in the garden, the King seized him by the hand, saying, "Laugnac, the Duke of Guise must die!"

"Certainly, Sire," replied Languac, as if it were a thing perfectly natural. "I have thought so some time."

"Will you undertake it, Laugnac," demanded the King. "You and your Quarante-cinq?"

"I must have more help than that, Sire," said Laugnac, "if it is to be done out in the streets, in the open day, which I suppose must be the case, as he is seldom out at night."

"Oh no, no, no! that will never do!" exclaimed the King. "We must have no rashness, Laugnac. He never rides but with a train, which would set you at defiance; and, besides, the town is filled with Guisards. You would have men enough upon you to slay you all in five minutes. We must put him off his guard; we must lull him into tranquillity, and then draw him to some private place, where you and your good fellows, posted behind the arras, can strike him to the heart before he is aware."

"It is an excellent good plan, Sire," exclaimed Laugnac enthusiastically. "I will speak with my good friend, Larchant, who is a bold man and strong, a mortal enemy of the Guise, and a most devoted servant of your Majesty. We will soon arrange a plan together which cannot fail."

"Swear him to secrecy," cried the King; "and remember to-morrow must not pass without its

being done. If you can find Villequier too, who ought to be returned by this time, for we have much to do together to-morrow, consult with him, for in a matter of poisoning or of the knife you know, Laugnac, he has not his equal in France."

The King smiled, and Laugnac smiled too, at the imputation which they cast on another of the dark deeds exactly similar to those they were both plotting themselves.

"Do you not think, your Majesty," said the latter, "that it could be done just about the time of the Duke's coming to the Council tomorrow?"

"Excellent, good," said the King, "for that will cut him off, just ere this marriage that is talked of. But go quick, Laugnac, and make all the arrangements, and let me know the plan to-night; for look where the very man comes:" and he pointed down the alley that led to the château, where the Duke of Guise was seen approaching alone.

"He is alone," said Laugnac. "Could it not be done now? I and another could make sure of it, if your Majesty would detain him here till I seek aid."

"On no account," said the King, grasping his wrist tight. "On no account, Laugnac. You forget all the windows of the château see us. The rest of his creatures would escape, and I must have not a few of them in prison. No! we will be tender with him. He shall be our sweet cousin of Guise, our well-beloved counsellor and friend. Greet him gracefully as you pass by him, and tell the page to seek, high and low, for Villequier, and bring him to me."

Laugnac bowed low, and walked away, and as he went he left the Duke of Guise the whole of the path, pulling off his hat till the plumes almost swept the ground, but without speaking. Guise bowed to him graciously; but, evidently in haste, passed on towards the King, whom he saluted with every demonstration of respect, and on whom in return Henry smiled with the most gracious expression that he could assume.

"What seeks our fair cousin of Guise?" said the King. "I know this is a busy hour with him in general, and therefore judge that it must be matter of some importance brings him now."

"Not exactly so, Sire," replied the Duke. "There is but little business of importance stirring now, when so many of the multitude, lately collected in Blois, have returned to their own homes for the approaching festival. I came, however, to beseech your Majesty to grant me permission to absent myself for a few days on the same joyful occasion. All business for the time ceasing, my presence will not be necessary."

"Assuredly, assuredly!" replied Henry, turning pale at the very idea of the Duke escaping from his hands. "But do you go soon, fair cousin. I thought that you proposed the marriage of your fair ward for to-morrow; indeed, I heard that every thing was prepared, and I myself intended to be one of the guests."

"We have not forgotten your Majesty's gracious promise," replied the Duke. "Every thing is prepared, and half an hour before high mass we shall all be waiting for your Majesty in the revestry of the chapel. Never yet have I seen two young beings so happy in their mutual love; and as we have broken through some cold forms, in consideration of the many services which the lover has rendered to his future bride, they are always together, and clinging to each other, as if they fancied that something would yet separate them."

Henry smiled, but there was a certain mixture in it, which rendered it difficult to say whether the expression was gracious or ironical. "Well then, good cousin," he said, "as you have such mighty business toward, we had better hold our council as early as possible to-morrow, and not wait till the usual hour. Let it be as near day-break as possible. The god of day does not open his eyes too soon at this season of the year. And yet I fear that the business of various kinds, that we have before us, will occupy more time than one council can afford. Thus we may be obliged to detain you at Blois, fair cousin, longer than you expect, I fear."

"I did not intend to go, Sire," replied the Duke, "till somewhere about twelve on Christmas-day, which would give me the opportunity of being present at two councils; and I shall be also absent so short a space of time--certainly not longer than three whole days--that the interruption will not be great."

"Well, be it so; be it so," replied the King. "We know that your activity makes rapidly up for time lost. As to the marriage, I will sign the contract in the revestry, where I meet you; and I think that, notwithstanding the poverty of my treasury, I have a jewel yet of some price to give the bride."

"I beseech your Majesty think not of it," replied the Duke of Guise. "She and her good husband will be equally devoted to your service without such a mark of your condescension."

After a few more words of the same kind, the Duke took leave, and Henry remained in the garden walking to and fro, and growing every moment more and more impatient for the arrival of Villequier.

"Where can he be?" he muttered to himself. "He promised to be back before nine o'clock this

morning. What can detain him? By Heavens! he will lose the best part of our enterprise if he stays. Can he have met with some mishap by the way--or has some lady poisoned him with champignons or with Cyprus wine--or tried cold steel upon him--or shot him with a silver bullet in honour of his great master. No steel would touch him, I should think, if all tales are true. But here he comes; here he comes, alive and well, with the eye of a wolf and the footfall of a cat.--He is a handsome animal notwithstanding, even now, if he would but paint his lips a little, for they are too pale. Something has gone wrong. He seems agitated; and to see Villequier moved by any thing is indeed a wonder. Why, how now, dear friend? What is it that affects you? I declare your lip quivers, and your cheek is red. What is the meaning of this?"

"Why, Sire," replied Villequier, "I just met the Duke of Guise in the hall of the château, and he not only tells me that the marriage of his niece goes forward, but that your Majesty has promised to sign the contract, and to be present at the ceremony. How you intend to withdraw yourself, I do not know: but to throw, at least, some obstacle in the way, I said that my signature had not been asked; and while my application was before the Parliament of Paris, the marriage could not take place without that signature. He answered haughtily, Sire, not by requesting, but by commanding, me to be in the revestry of the chapel at the hour of half-past eleven; and he added, with a significant tone, that he would teach me the use of pen and ink."

Henry showed no wrath: his mind was made up to his proceedings; his dark determination taken; and utterly remorseless himself, he sported in his own imagination with the idea of Guise's death, and only smiled at his conduct to Villequier, as the skilful angler sees amused the large trout dash at the gilded fly, knowing that a moment after he will have the tyrant of the stream upon his own hook, and panting on the bank.

"You shall be in the revestry, Villequier," said the King; "you shall sign the marriage contract, for the King commands you as well as the Duke of Guise; and surely two such potent voices must be obeyed."

Villequier paused for a minute or two ere he replied, calculating what might be the King's motives in his present conduct. He knew Henry well, and knew his vacillating changeable disposition; and he suspected that he was determined to violate his promise to Gaspar de Montsoreau upon some inducement, either of hope or fear, held out to him by the Duke of Guise. He was well aware, however, that if the means taken had been disagreeable, the King, though he might have endured them smilingly in the presence of the Duke, would have burst forth into passion, almost frantic, when conversing with him. He therefore replied straightforwardly, "I suppose, Sire, the younger brother has outbid the elder."

"Wrong, wrong, good friend," replied the King. "Your hawk has missed its stroke, Villequier. The Duke of Guise wills it so! Is not that quite sufficient in France?"

"I hope it will not be so long, Sire," replied Villequier, now beginning, though indistinctly, to catch the King's meaning. "I hope it will not be so long."

"Ha, René! Do you understand me now?" said Henry. "Hark ye! Are you not this girl's guardian beyond all doubt, were the Duke out of the way?"

"Indubitably," answered Villequier; "for the only thing that affects my right, even now, is her father's will, appointing this same Henry, Duke of Guise to be her guardian: the other brothers are not named."

"Well then," said Henry, "have a contract of marriage in due and proper form drawn out, this very night, in the names of Marie de Clairvaut and Gaspar, Marquis of Montsoreau. Be in the revestry at the hour named, and bring with you your gay bridegroom with all his golden crowns. You shall sign the contract, and I will sign the contract, and we will find means I think to make the fair Lady sign the contract too, while the Duke of Guise's bridegroom discovers his way into a dungeon of the château. You have been so long absent, I feared you would not come in time to hear all this."

"Why, Sire," replied Villequier, "I was forced to be absent; for although your Majesty seems to have forgotten a certain paper given to the Abbé de Boisguerin, I have not."

"Ha!" said the King, "I had forgotten indeed. We must suppress that, Villequier; we must suppress that, if he will not consent to our plans; which, I see by your face, it is not your opinion that the worthy Abbé will do. You must get it from him and suppress it."

Villequier smiled at the very thought. "He will never give it up to be suppressed, Sire," replied the Marquis. "Your Majesty little knows the man."

"Well, then, suppress him!" said the King with a laugh; "suppress him, Villequier, and the paper with him. Under the great blaze made by this business of the Guise, his affair will be but as one of the wax tapers that a country girl, with a sore eye, buys for half a denier to hang up before St. Radigonde. Suppress him, Villequier; suppress him. I know no one so capable of sweeping the window clear of such flies."

"Yes, Sire," replied Villequier; "but he is a wasp, not a fly. He has antidotes for poison, and sureties against the knife. He has, besides, more powerful friends, it seems, than any of us

believed, or at least more powerful means of gaining them. The Pope has been induced to set him free of his vows. I find, too, that Epernon sent for him immediately after that business of the attempt upon his life at Augoulême, and they are now sworn friends and comrades, levying forces together, holding counsel every other hour; and here is the former Abbé now disporting himself as Seigneur de Boisguerin; and, just like a butterfly that has cast its slough, he arrives in Blois last night in gilded apparel, with a train of twenty horse behind him, and a number of sumpter mules. I saw him in his gay attire near Augoulême, and find that he aspires to the hand of the fair heiress himself."

"But what is to be done, Villequier?" said the King smiling. "It seems to me that all the world are seeking her. Suppose we send for an auctioneer, and set her up *aux enchères*. But, to speak seriously, what will you do with this cidevant Abbé?"

"I have done with him something already," replied Villequier, "that with all his art he could not prevent nor know. I found this young Marquis of Montsoreau somewhat stubborn to counsel. He loved not the plan of coming and lying concealed at Blois. Though he is politic and artful at seasons himself, yet now he was all passion and fury. Nothing would serve him but he must come to Blois in open day, with a hundred lances at his back. He would fight his brother, it seemed, and cut his throat. He would beard the Guise; and he would compel your Majesty and me to fulfil our promise to the letter. That the girl had escaped he attributed to my connivance; and, by Heavens! I almost feared he would have laid violent hands upon me. In short, Sire, by a little skilful teasing, I found that this same Abbé de Boisguerin, whose credit I had once greatly shaken, had resumed the mastery, and was urging on his former pupil to every sort of rash and violent act, probably with the hope of getting him killed out of his way. I soothed the good youth down, however, and told him I would give him proof of his friend's regard. I hid him where he could hear all that passed, and then entrapped the Abbé into talking of the paper that we had signed for him. I told him that the person for whom your Majesty and I destined this fair Helen, was the young Marquis of Montsoreau. I reminded him that he had obtained that paper with an absolute and direct view to that marriage; at least, that he had told me so; and I asked him immediately to sign his consent to the alliance. Your Majesty may imagine his answers; and the youth's rage was such that most assuredly he would have broken in upon us, if I had not stationed two men to stop him. However, he became afterwards as docile as a lamb, was convinced, by what passed, that we had throughout been dealing sincerely with him, and will be ready at the hour to-morrow. When the good Abbé, perhaps, hears that the whole affair is concluded, that Guise is gone, and your Majesty powerful, he may judge it more wise to be silent and resigned. We can tempt him, first, with some post; we can alarm him, if that will not do, with some peril; and lastly, if we fail in both, then we must find some way of putting an end to the matter altogether."

"That will be easily done," replied the King, his mind reverting to the Duke of Guise. "But come, Villequier, let us go and consult with Laugnac. I told him, before you came, to seek for you and consult with you. We must trust as few as possible in this business, and I must see to the whole myself, for this is a step on which, if we but slip, we fall to inevitable perdition."

CHAP. XI.

Was the Duke of Guise unconscious of the dangers that surrounded him? Was he unaware that the power which he assumed, and the power which the States also put upon him, could not but render him obnoxious in the highest degree to the King, who, though weak and indolent, was jealous of that authority which he failed himself to exercise for the benefit of his people? Was the Duke ignorant that the Monarch was as treacherous as feeble, was as remorseless as vicious? Was it unknown to him, that to all the creatures who surrounded the King he was an object of hatred and jealousy; and that there were ready hands and base hearts enough to attempt any thing which the royal authority might warrant?

He was not so ignorant, or so unaware: he had been warned sufficiently, days and weeks before; but even had that not been the case, on that very night he received sufficient intimations of his danger to put him on his guard.

He had presided at the supper-table as Grand Master of the King's household, and he had received his guests with easy courtesy. The meal was over somewhat sooner than usual; and, the business of the State being considerably slackened, in consequence of the approaching festival of Christmas, he sat in his cabinet with Charles of Montsoreau and Marie de Clairvaut only, enjoying an hour of refreshment in calm and tranquil conversation upon subjects, which, however agitating to them, was merely a matter of pleasant interest to him.

Charles of Montsoreau sat by his side making some notes of various little things that the Duke told him, and Marie de Clairvaut was seated on a stool at his feet, while he looked down upon her, from time to time, with the sort of parental tenderness which he had displayed towards her from her infancy.

A pleasing sort of melancholy had come over him,--a sadness without grief, and mingling even occasionally with gaiety. It was that sort of present consciousness of the emptiness of all worldly things, which every man at some moment feels, even the ambitious, the greedy, the zealous, the passionate. Perhaps that which had brought such a mood upon him, was the contrast of all the arrangements for his fair ward's marriage and the deep and intense feelings which that event excited in the bosom of herself and Charles of Montsoreau, with the eager and fiery struggles in which he had been lately taking part, while engaged in the dark fierce strife of ambition, or tossed in the turbid whirlpool of political intrigue. And thus he sat, and thus he talked with them of their future prospects and their coming happiness, sometimes speaking seriously, nay gravely--sometimes jesting lightly, and smiling when he had made Marie cast down her eyes.

As he thus sat there was a tap at the door of his cabinet, and the Duke knowing it to be the page, bade him enter; when the boy Ignati appearing, informed him that the Count de Schomberg was without.

"Bid him come in," replied the Duke, keeping his seat, and making a sign for his companions not to stir. "Welcome, Schomberg," he said; "you see that I am plotting no treason here. What do you think of my two children? Joinville will be jealous of my eldest son. But, jesting apart, I think you know the Count de Logères. My niece, Marie, I know you have had many a time upon your knee in her infancy."

Schomberg bowed to each, but gravely; and replied to the Duke, who held out his hand to him, "My dear Duke, I wish every body were as well persuaded that you are plotting no treason as I am. But I come to speak to your Highness upon a matter of business. I have a warning to give you," he added in a whisper.

"Oh! speak it aloud; speak it aloud," replied the Duke. "If it concerns myself, you may well speak it before these two."

"Indeed!" said Schomberg, apparently hesitating, and running his eyes over the tapestry, as if calculating how he had best proceed. "My good Lord Duke," he said, at length, "I believe you know that there are few who love you better than myself, though I neither am nor affect to be a zealot, but rather what your people call one of the Politics."

"I know Schomberg, what you mean," said the Duke; "you are my friend, but not my partisan. I can make the distinction, Schomberg, and love the friend no less. What have you to say?"

"Why this, my Lord," replied Schomberg. "Look up above the door there, just before your eyes. Do you see how beautifully they have carved in the black oak the figure of a porcupine, and how all the sharp and prickly quills stick out, ready to wound the hand that touches it?"

"Yes, I see," replied the Duke. "But do you know the history of that porcupine, Schomberg?"

"Yes," answered the Count, "I know it well, my Lord of Guise. Both in the stonework and the woodwork of this castle, there are many such. They were placed there, I think, my Lord--am I not right?--by an old monarch of France, as a sort of device, to signify that whoever grasps royalty too rudely, will suffer injury in consequence."

The Duke smiled in the same placid mood as before, but replied, "In the next chamber, Schomberg, which is my own bedchamber, you may see the device of Francis the First too,--a salamander unhurt in the midst of flames; which may be interpreted to mean, that strong courage is never more at ease than in the midst of perils."

A grave smile came over the face of Schomberg, to find the figures in which he involved his warning so easily retorted by the Duke of Guise. "I have heard of your Highness," he said, without noticing the Duke's reply, "that not very many years ago you were known to swim against the stream of the Loire armed at all points. You are a strong man, my Lord Duke; but there are other streams you cannot swim against, depend upon it."

"Then I will try to go with the current, Schomberg," replied the Duke. "As long as that is with me, it will bear me up."

"But it may dash you against a rock, Duke," replied Schomberg; "and I see one straight before you."

He spoke sternly and impressively, and Guise listened to him with more attention. "Speak, Schomberg, he said; speak; you may speak clearly before them. But sit, good friend; pray thee sit. Standing there before me, with your sad aspect and warning voice, you look like a spectre."

"Well, my Lord," said Schomberg, seating himself, "I have certain information that there are evil designs against you, ripe, or almost ripe, for execution. Your life is in danger. Guise; I tell you truly, I tell you sincerely, and I beseech you to hear me. Your life is in danger, and you have no

time to lose if you would place it in safety."

"Why, what would you have me to do, Schomberg?" said the Duke in a tone not exactly indifferent, but still showing no great interest in the subject.

"I would have you mount your horse this night," replied Schomberg, "or at day-break tomorrow. I would have you gather your train together, take these two young people with you, and retiring to Paris, inform the King that you had proof your life was not safe at Blois."

The Duke of Guise meditated for a moment, and then replied, "Schomberg, I cannot grasp this fear. Brought up to arms from my youth, cradled in the tented field, with death surrounding me at every hour of life, I cannot feel as other men might feel in moments of peril to myself. Neither will I ever have it said of me, that I willingly fled from my post under the apprehension of any personal danger."

"By our old friendship. Guise," replied Schomberg, "by our companionship in the fields of other days, I beseech you to consider and to judge wisely. Remember, if the vengeance of a monarch, or the instigation of villanous courtiers, were to have success, and you were to fall beneath the blow of an assassin, what would become of your children, all yet in their youth? what would become of your relations and your friends, placed, as you have placed them, on a high pinnacle, to be aimed at by a crowd of idle minions with their bird-bolts? What would become of your son?"

"Joinville must make his own fame," replied the Duke, "and guard his own rights with his own sword. I was left earlier than he is without a parent's care; with a host of enemies around me; with my father's name, giving me a heritage of envy and hatred; and with no support but my own sword. With that sword I have bowed those enemies to the dust, and Joinville must show himself worthy to bear it too."

He paused, and meditated for a moment or two, and then added, "After all, Schomberg, I do not see that there can be much danger. Here, in the castle, I am as strong or stronger than the King. When I go forth, I am so well accompanied, that it would be difficult to surprise me, if they attacked me with numbers. A single assassin might dog my steps, it is true; but I do not know that man upon the face of the earth, who, hand to hand with me, would not have more than an equal share of fear and danger. However, I will think of what you have said, and will take good care to be more upon my guard than ever. At the same time, Schomberg, I thank you most sincerely, and look upon your regard as one of the best possessions that I have."

"Guise," said Schomberg, rising and approaching the door, "I have failed with you. But I yield not my point yet. I will send those to you who may have more influence."

"Stay, Schomberg, stay!" cried the Duke; but his friend passed through the door and would not return.

Charles of Montsoreau then raised his voice in the same cause as Schomberg, and Marie de Clairvaut entreated anxiously that he would yield to what had been proposed. But at them the Duke only laughed.

"Hush, hush!" he said. "Logères, you do not know what you say. There, kiss her and be gone. To-morrow she shall be yours, no more to part. Say no more, silly girl; say no more. You, a child of a Guise, talk to me of fear! Call thy maidens, get thee to thy bed, and rise to-morrow with bright eyes and blooming cheeks. Fare thee well, sweet one. I long to be quit of thy guardianship."

Remonstrance was useless, and they parted; and the Duke of Guise sitting down for a moment, gave himself up to thought. His eyes were fixed upon the dark tapestry opposite, where was depicted a woody scene, the particulars of which could not be well distinguished by the dim light of the lamp.

After he had gazed for a moment or two, however, his eyes assumed a peculiar expression, a fixed, intense, and somewhat bewildered stare. He passed his hand twice before them, as if he felt them dim or dazzled; then clasped his hands together and gazed, still muttering to himself, "Strange, very strange! It is there still!" And starting up from the table, he seized the lamp, and advanced directly towards the side of the room on which his eyes had been fixed, still gazing stedfastly on the same spot. At length, as he approached close to the wall, his features relaxed, and he said with a smile, "It is gone! These delusions of the sight are wonderful!"

He had not yet returned to his seat, when the door on his right hand opened gently, and the form of a woman glided in. It was that of the beautiful being with whom he had parted in some anger at the King's ball, and she gazed at him, evidently surprised to see him standing with the lamp in his hand close to the wall, on a side where there was no exit.

"In the name of Heaven, Guise! what is the matter?" she said. "I heard you speaking as I came in. You are pale; your lip quivers!"

"It is nothing; it is nothing," replied the Duke, putting down the lamp, and taking her hand. "This is, indeed, dear and kind of you, Charlotte. I trusted, I was sure, that your anger for a light

offence would not last long."

"It would have lasted long, Guise," she said, "or at least its effects would not have passed away, had it not been for the warning that I have received concerning you. Guise, you would not have seen me now--you would never have seen me in these rooms again----"

"Nay, nay," interrupted the Duke, "traduce not so your own nature. Say not that a few unthinking words would render her so harsh, who is so gentle."

"They were not unthinking words, Henry of Guise," replied the Lady. "They were words of deep meaning, to be read and understood at once. Think you that I could misunderstand them? Think you that I could not read that Guise would not suffer the pure to dwell with the impure? However," she added quickly, seeing that the Duke was going to interrupt her, "let me speak of other things. I was about to say that you would not have seen me this night, you would never have seen me in these chambers again, had I not learned that your life was in danger; and then my fears for you showed me that my love was unchanged, and I came, at all risks, to warn you, and to beseech you to be gone."

"Nay, nay," replied the Duke. "How can I be gone when you are here, Charlotte? And, besides, there is no real danger. It is Schomberg has frightened you, I know. He came here with the same tale; but I showed him there was no danger."

"It was not from Schomberg!" said Madame de Noirmontier vehemently. "I have never seen Schomberg since I have been here. It was from the Queen; it was from Catherine herself that I heard it. She told me to tell you; she told me to warn you. Her son, she said, had not divulged to her his scheme; but from her knowledge of the man, and from the words he used, she was certain that he would attempt your life within three days."

"Then his attempt will fail, dear Charlotte," said the Duke, holding her hand tenderly in his. "Fear not for me; I am fully upon my guard; and in this château, and this town, am stronger than the King himself."

"Oh Guise, Guise, you are deceiving yourself," she said, bursting into tears. "Twice I have been at your door this night, but the page told me there was some one with you; and now I have come determined not to leave you, till I see you making preparations to depart. Let me entreat you, let me beseech you," she continued, as Guise wiped away her tears. "Nay, Guise, nay; in this I will take no refusal. If not for your own sake, for my love you shall fly. You shall treat me ill, as you did before, again and again. You shall make a servant of me--a slave. You will not surely refuse me, when you see me kneeling at your feet." And she sunk upon her knees before him, and clasped her fair hands in entreaty. The Duke was raising her tenderly, when the page's knock was heard at the door; and before he could well give the command to enter, the boy was in the room.

"My Lord," he said, "there is Monsieur Chapelle Marteau, and several other gentlemen, desiring earnestly to speak with you."

Madame de Noirmontier looked wildly round the room, and seemed about to pass through the door by which the page had entered. "Be not alarmed," said the Duke, "you cannot pass there, Charlotte. These men will not be with me above a few minutes. Pass into that room, and wait till they are gone. I have a thousand things to say to you, and will dismiss them soon."

After a moment's hesitation she did as he directed, and turning to the page, the Duke bade him admit the party who were waiting without. It consisted of Chapelle Marteau, the President de Neuilli, a gentleman of the name of Mandreville, the Duke's brother the Cardinal de Guise, and the Archbishop of Lyons.

The Duke received them with that winning grace for which he was famous, and soon learned from them that their visit was owing to the information received from the Count de Schomberg. Every one then present, but the Archbishop of Lyons, urged him strongly to quit Blois immediately. They had come in a body, they said, in hopes that their remonstrances might have the greater effect. Each had heard in the course of the evening those rumours which generally announce great events; some had been told that the Duke was arrested; some that he had been absolutely assassinated in the gardens of the château; and some that the act was to be performed that night by a number of soldiers, who had been privately introduced into the castle.

Guise listened silently and with great attention, displaying in demeanour every sort of deference and respect for the opinions of those who showed such an interest in his fate. He replied, however, that he trusted and hoped that both the rumours they had heard, and the intelligence given by Schomberg, originated in nothing but mistaken words, or in those idle and unfounded reports which always multiply themselves in moments of great political agitation and excitement. Besides this, he said, even if the King were disposed to attempt his life, the execution of such an act would be very difficult, if not impossible; and that, considering before all things his duty to his country, the very fact of the King seeking such a thing ought to be the strongest reason for his stay, inasmuch as the Monarch's animosity could only be excited towards him out of enmity to the Catholic Church, and a disposition to repress and tyrannise over the States.

"If such be his feelings," continued the Duke, "we must consider ourselves as two armies in

presence of each other, and the one that retreats of course awards the victory to his adversary."

The Archbishop of Lyons, perhaps, was the person who decided the fate of the Duke of Guise; for had the party which came to him been unanimous and urgent in their remonstrance, there is a probability that he would have yielded; but the Archbishop seemed doubtful and undecided. He said that he thought, indeed, it might be well the Duke should go; at least for a time. But they had to consider, also, the probabilities of the King making any attempt upon the Duke. Though weak, timid, and indolent, Henry was shrewd and farseeing, he said. The only result that could follow an attempt upon a person so beloved by the whole nation, and especially by the States, as the Duke of Guise, would be to arm the people of France in an instant against the sovereign authority. This the King must well know, he continued; and that consideration made him less eager upon the subject, though he thought it might be as well that his Highness should retire for a time.

His speech more than counterbalanced the exhortations of all the rest; and from that moment the resolution of the Duke became immovable. His dauntless mind, which might have yielded had he stood absolutely alone in opinion, came instantly to the conclusion, that if there were a single individual who doubted whether he should fly or not, he himself ought to decide upon remaining. He made no answer to the Archbishop's speech, but suffered Mandreville to combat his arguments without interruption. That gentleman replied that Henry, far from being the person represented, though cunning, was any thing but prudent. Had they ever seen, he demanded, the cunning of the King, even in the least degree, restrain or control him? Had the self-evident risk of his throne, of his life, and of the welfare of his people, ever made him pause in the commission of one frantic, vicious, or criminal act? He was no better, the deputy said, than a cunning madman, such as was frequently seen, who, having determined upon any act, however absurd or evil might be the consequences, even to the destruction of his own self, would arrive at it by some means, and go directly to his purpose, in despite of all obstacles. He contended that they had good reason to know that the King devised evil against the Duke; and they might depend upon it that no consideration of policy, right, or religion, would prevent him from executing his purpose by some means.

He spoke truly, and with more thorough insight into the character of the King than any one previously had done; but the resolution of the Duke of Guise, as we have said before, was already taken.

"My good friends," he said in conclusion, "I thank you most sincerely, and I shall ever feel grateful for the interest that you have taken in me, and for your anxiety regarding me on the present occasion. But my resolution is taken, and must be unalterable. I cannot but acknowledge that the view of Monsieur de Mandreville may have much truth in it; but, nevertheless, matters are now at such a point, that if I were to see death coming in at that window, I would not seek the door."

Against a determination so forcibly expressed, there was, of course, no possibility of holding further argument; and after a word or two more on different subjects of less interest--the Duke of Guise replying as briefly as possible to every thing that was said--the party took their leave and retired.

CHAP. XII.

There was at that time a large open space round the church of St. Sauveur, in Blois, where the people from the country used occasionally to exhibit their fruits and flowers for sale; and exactly opposite the great door of the church stood a large and splendid mansion, with an internal courtyard, part of which had been let to some of the deputies for the States-General. The principal floor, however, consisting of sixteen rooms, and several large passages and corridors, had been left untenanted, in consequence of the proprietor asking an exorbitant rent, till two or three days before the period of which we speak. Then, however, the apartment was taken suddenly, a number of attendants in new and splendid dresses appeared therein; and, as we have seen from the account of Villequier to the King, the Abbé de Boisguerin arrived in Blois, with a splendid train of attendants, and took up his abode as the master of that dwelling.

About the same time that the conversations which we have detailed in the last chapter were going on in the cabinet of the Duke of Guise, the Abbé was seated in one of the rooms, which he had fixed upon for his own peculiar saloon. It was very customary in those days, and in France, for every chamber, except a great hall of reception, to be used also as a bed-room. But that was not the case in this instance; for the chamber, which was small, though very lofty, had been used by the former occupants as a cabinet, and had been chosen by the Abbé probably on account of

its being so completely detached from every other chamber, that no sound of what was done or said therein could be overheard by any one.

He sat in a large arm-chair, with his feet towards the fire, and with his right elbow resting on a table covered with various sorts of delicacies. Those delicacies, however, were not the productions of the land in which he then lived, but rather such as he had been accustomed to in other days, and which recalled former habits of life. There were fine dried fruits from the Levant, tunny and other fish from the Mediterranean; and the wines, though inferior to those of France, were from foreign vineyards.

Before him was standing a man whom we have had occasion to mention more than once--that Italian vagabond named Orbi, from whom, it may be remembered, Charles of Montsoreau delivered the boy Ignati. He was now dressed in a very different guise, however, from that which he had borne while wandering as a mere stroller from house to house. His shaggy black hair was trimmed and smooth; his beard was partially shaved and reduced to fair proportions, with a sleek mustachio, well turned and oiled, gracing his upper lip; his face, too, was clean; and a suit somewhat sombre in colour, but of good materials, displaying in the ruff and at the sleeves a great quantity of fine white linen and rich lace, left scarcely a vestige of the fierce Italian vagabond, half bravo, half minstrel, which he had appeared not a year before.

The conversation which was going on between him and the master he now served, was evidently one of great interest. The Abbé's wine remained half finished in the glass; the preserved fruits upon his plate were scarcely tasted; and he exclaimed, "So, so! Villequier sends me no answer to my letter! A bare message, by word of mouth, that the Duke of Guise wills it to be so; and that the Duke's will is all powerful at the Court of France! The King sets at nought his own royal word, does he?"

"He said something, sir," said the Italian, "about his knowing, and the King also, that they must pay a penalty; but that no sum was to be grudged, rather than offend the Duke at this time."

"Sum!" cried the Abbé de Boisguerin, starting up and pushing the chair vehemently from him. "What is any sum to me?" And with flashing eyes, and a countenance all inflamed, he strode up and down the chamber for a moment or two, with his heart swelling with bitterness and disappointed passion. "A curse upon this bungling hand," he cried, striking it upon the table, "that it should fail me at such a moment as that! I thought the young viper had been swept from my way for ever!--My aim was steady and true, too! His heart must be in some other place than other men's."

"Ha! my Lord," joined in the Italian in the tone of a connoisseur, "the arquebus is a pretty weapon, I dare say, in a general battle, but it is desperate uncertain in private affairs like that. You can never tell, to an inch or two, where the ball will hit. But, with a dagger, you can make sure to a button-hole; and even if there should be a struggle, it is always quite easy so to salve the point of your blade, that you make sure of your friend, even if you give him but a scratch. Now the attempt to poison a ball is all nonsense, for the fire destroys the venom."

"At what hour said you, Orbi?" demanded the Abbé, without attending to his dissertation.

"Half an hour before high mass," replied the man, "the marriage is to take place."

Again the Abbé de Boisguerin burst into a vehement fit of passion, and strode up and down the room cursing and blaspheming, till accidentally his eyes fell upon a small Venetian mirror, and the aspect of his own countenance, ordinarily so calm and unmoved, now distorted by rage and disappointment, made him start. A smile of scorn, even at himself, curled his lip; and calming his countenance by a great effort, he again seated himself, and mused for a moment.

"This must not, and shall not be," he said at length. "Orbi, you are an experienced hand, and doubtless dexterous. Will you stop this going forward?"

The man smiled, stroked back his mustachios, and replied, "I thought you would be obliged to take my way at last. Well, Monseigneur, I have no objection; but the time is short. I told you what I expected for such an affair when I offered to do it in Paris."

"You shall have it! you shall have it!" replied the Abbé. "But if you do it, so that no suspicion ever falls on me, you shall have as much again this day two years; for nothing but the lives of these two young men stands between me and immense wealth."

"The worst of it all is," said the Italian, "that there is so short a time. It is to take place in the castle chapel; so there will be no going through the streets. To find him alone will be a matter of difficulty; and though I went over the passages, thinking it might come to this, yet I saw no one place, but at the door of the room called the revestry, where one could strike easily."

"I have seen the place," said the Abbé, "long ago; but I do not remember it so perfectly as to give you any aid. I know that the window of the room you mention looks into the court and gardens, and under the garden wall shall be a swift horse to bear you away. That is all I can do for you."

"I must do the rest for myself," replied the man, "and will find some means, depend upon it.

Perhaps he may not wait for the other if he be eager, but may come first by himself, and then it will be easily done. However, I will now go and get the dagger ready, and I can undertake that the least scratch shall not leave an hour's life in him."

The Abbé de Boisguerin nodded his head and smiled as the other departed. "They know not," he said to himself, "they know not the man they have to deal with. These mighty men, these haughty Guises, may find that every man of strong determination and unflinching courage may thwart, if he cannot master, them; may destroy their plans, if he cannot accomplish his own. But there is another still to be dealt with. There is this proud, unfeeling, contemptuous girl; she who has been rejoicing in the reappearance of this crafty fair-faced boy.--There is now no going back; and why should I not risk life to win her too, and gratify both my love and my revenge?--Yet that seems scarcely possible," he continued. "Closely watched within the castle, never going out but strongly accompanied, she is put, it would seem, entirely out of my power, now that Villequier has fallen off from me.--And yet," he continued meditating, "and yet, there is nothing impossible to the dauntless and the daring.--Could I not bring her to the postern gate of the garden an hour before this marriage is to take place, and then, with swift horses and a carriage ready, convey her once more far away?--We have done as bold and difficult a feat before; and methinks, if I could tell her that I have news to give her concerning her uncle's safety--for rumours of his danger must have reached her ears--she will not fail to come, and come alone.--Oh! if I once more get her in my power, she shall find no means to fly again, till, on the contrary, she shall be more inclined to kneel at my feet, and beseech that I would wed her.--So it shall be! I will write to her that, if at ten o'clock she will be alone at the postern gate of the castle, she will hear news that may save her uncle's life. Then, with the swiftest horses we can find, a few hours will take us far from pursuit!--I will carry her into Spain! Epernon is with me and the way open!--It shall be done!" he said aloud; "it shall be done! But, then, this boy's death is scarcely needful! Why should I mind his living?--It will be but the greater torture to him to know that she is mine!--And yet, it were better he should die. All the tidings, and the rumours, and the bustle of his violent death in the castle will too much occupy the minds of men to let them notice our flight; so that we shall gain an hour or two. There is an eager and a daring spirit, also, within him--a keen and active mind--which might frustrate me once more in the very moment of hope. He must die! I have set my own life upon the chance; and what matters it whether one or two others are swept away before me? He must die! and then, without protection, she is mine. Once into Tourraine, and I am safe!--Ha! you are back again quickly, my good friend Orbi. Is all ready?"

"Everything, sir," replied the man; "and if I could but get into the château, and stumble upon the youth alone, I might be able to accomplish the matter to-night. Could you not furnish me with a billet to this Villequier, or some one? It matters not what; any empty words, just to make them admit me at the gates."

"Not to Villequier," said the Abbé; "not to Villequier. But I will write a few words to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut herself."

"That will do well! that will do well!" replied the man. "I am more likely to find him hanging about her apartments than any where else; and then one slight blow does the deed."

"Bring me paper and pens from the next room," cried the Abbé. "It shall be done this moment." And as soon as implements for writing were procured, he wrote a subtle epistle to Marie de Clairvaut, beseeching her to speak for a moment, at the postern gate of the château gardens early on the following day, to a person who would communicate something to her, which might save the life of her guardian the Duke of Guise. It was written in a feigned hand, and under the character of an utter stranger to her. Some mistakes too were made in the orthography of her name, and in regard to other circumstances, for the purpose of rendering the deception complete. When this was concluded and sealed, he placed it in the hands of Orbi, and after a few more words they parted.

While the Abbé busied himself in causing a carriage to be bought for the proposed enterprise of the following day, and in ordering the swiftest horses that could be found, to be obtained--not from the royal post, by which his course might have been tracked, but from one of the keepers of *relais*, as the irregular posting houses were called, which were then tolerated in France; the Italian proceeded on his task, with feelings in his heart which might well have been received as a reason for abating the price of the deed he was about to perform.

To tell the truth it might be considered fully as much his own act as that of the Abbé, for the same malevolent feelings were in the hearts of each; and he went not there merely as the common hired assassin, to do the work of his trade, as a matter of course; but he went also to avenge a long remembered blow, which still rankled in his heart, with the same bitterness that he had felt at the moment that it was received.

He met with some difficulty in obtaining entrance to the château at so late an hour of the night; but the letter addressed to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut enabled him to effect that object at length, and he was directed towards the suite of apartments assigned to the Duke of Guise and his family. When he had once passed the two first gates, he met with no obstruction, but wandered through the long dimly lighted corridors, scarcely encountering a waking being on his way, and certainly none who seemed inclined to speak to him.

When he had reached that part of the building to which he had been directed, he looked round

for some one to give him farther information, not absolutely intending to seek the apartments of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and deliver the note, but merely to obtain a general knowledge of how the different chambers were allotted. After passing on some way, without meeting any one or hearing a sound, he saw a door half open, with the light streaming out, and quietly approaching he looked in.

There was a boy in the dress of a page, sitting before a large Christmas fire reading a book; but though he walked stealthily, the first step which the Italian took in the room caught the youth's quick ear, and starting up he showed the Italian the face of his former bondman, Ignatius Marone. The man started when he saw him; but recovering himself instantly, he went up and endeavoured to soothe the boy with fair and flattering words.

"Ah, my little Ignati," he said, "here thou art then, and doubtless well off with this young Lord of thine."

"I *am* well off, Signor Orbi," was the boy's brief reply; and seeing that the man paused and kept gazing round him, the boy added, "But what is your business here?"

"I am only looking about me," replied the man in somewhat of a contemptuous tone, which he could not smother, although it was his full intention to cajole the boy into giving him all the information he wanted, and perhaps even to induce him unconsciously to aid his purpose.

"Come, come, Signor Orbi," replied the boy, "I know you well, remember; and I know, that though you may have changed your doublet, you cannot have changed what is within it. If you do not say immediately what you want, I will call those who will make you." And he approached one of the other doors which the room displayed, and raised his hand towards the latch.

"Hist, hist, Ignati!" cried the Italian. "By Heavens! if you do, you shall never hear what I have got to tell you,--something that would make your heart beat with joy if you knew it."

"And what is that?" said the boy, still standing near the door, and looking at his fellow-countryman with a face of scorn and doubt.

"Come hither, and I will tell you," said the Italian; but the boy shook his head, and Orbi added in a low tone, "You know who your mother was, Ignati; but do you know your father?"

The boy gazed at him bitterly and in silence, without making any further answer; and the man added, "He is now in Blois."

Ignati instantly sprang forward towards him, exclaiming, "Where? Where? Where can I find him? I have still the letter from my dead mother. I have still all the proofs given me by the Marone. Where is he? where is he?"

"Come, let us sit down by the fire," said the man, "and I will tell thee more;" and finding the boy now quite willing to do what he wished, the man sat down by the fire with him, calculating the various results of particular lines of conduct open before him, but without suffering any one good principle or feeling to mingle at all with his considerations.

He had spoken the words which had called Ignati to him simply as a matter of impulse, and the first question he asked himself was, whether he should tell the boy more of the truth or not. Various considerations, however, induced him to go on, for he had a little scheme in his head which rendered it expedient for him to embarrass the proceedings of the Abbé de Boisguerin, on the following morning after the deed proposed was done, as much as possible.

"You know, Ignati," he said, "that I always loved you, my good youth."

"You gave me bitter proofs of it," replied Ignati.

"Nay, nay; it was my way," replied the Italian. "If you had been my own son, it would have been the same."

"I dare say," replied Ignati, "you would have murdered your own son almost as readily as you tried to murder me."

"Nay, boy, I tried not to murder thee," rejoined the man. "I was not such a fool; that would never have answered my purpose."

"You did it by halves," said the boy. "But come, Master Orbi, tell me more about this matter you spoke of; and tell me too what brings you here? Where is my father to be found, if, as you say, he is here?"

"He is to be found," said Orbi, "in the great house by the church of St. Sauveur. I remember him well, for when your mother fled out of Rome before you were born, and was glad to get what assistance she could, she sent me three times back into the city to speak with the Abbé of Laurans, as he was then called."

"And what is he called now?" exclaimed Ignati eagerly. "What is he called now?"

"He is called the Abbé de Boisguerin," replied the man, "or the Seigneur de Boisguerin, as it now is."

"Then I have seen him," cried Ignati. "Then I have seen him; and he called her----" But the boy suddenly checked himself, "And now, what is it you want here?" he said.

"No harm, Master Ignati," replied the man, with a look half sneering, half dogged. "You seem as grateful as any one else, and as soon as you get all you want, you turn upon one. I suppose you are waiting for your young master coming back from some gay revel, for the whole place seems as silent as if every body were gone to bed but you."

"Oh, no," answered Ignati. "There are six of the Duke's men sitting up in the next room; and all I fear is, that the gentlemen who are with the Duke himself should come out and find you here."

"Then, I suppose, your master is with them," said the Italian.

The boy smiled. "My master is with them," he said, "for my master is the Duke of Guise; but if you mean the young Count who took me from you, he has been gone to bed an hour ago. Ay, Master Orbi, and has two stout men sleeping across his door. I hav'n't forgot that he struck you a blow one day; nor you either, it seems."

"You are out there, Sharp-wits," said the Italian. "I bear the boy no grudge. I got his money, if he gave me a blow into the bargain; so we are quits."

"I doubt you," muttered Ignati to himself; but the man went on without attending to him, saying, "No, no; what I came for really, if you want to know, was to give a letter to a young lady here, from an old gentleman at the other side of the castle. Here it is! Ma'mselle de Clairvaut is the name."

"Ay, she is gone to bed long ago too," replied the page. "Let me look at the letter."

"It is of no great consequence, I believe," replied the Italian, who fancied the letter a mere pretext. "It is of no great consequence; all about a Persian cat, I believe. So you may take it and give it her to-morrow, if she is gone to bed now. There it is. But how is it you are not with the young Count now? The Duke of Guise!--Page to the Duke of Guise! Why, that is a step, indeed!"

"Hush!" cried Ignati, hearing the door of the Duke's cabinet open behind the arras. "Hush! get you gone with all speed! They are coming out; and if they find you here, I would not answer for your ears, or my own either."

The man started up, and ran out of the door by which he had entered, as fast as possible. But he had scarcely made his escape, when the tapestry which covered the doorway into the Duke's cabinet was drawn aside, and the Cardinal de Guise, with the Archbishop of Lyons, and the rest of Leaguers, came forth from their conference with the Duke.

CHAP. XIII.

It is now necessary to turn to other apartments in the château of Blois: namely, a suite inhabited by the King himself. It comprised--besides several others both above and below--the King's bed-room, into which opened four doors--one communicating with the Monarch's private staircase, which we have already spoken of--one to the right entering into a small dressing-room--one to the left, which gave admittance to a chamber called the old cabinet--and one communicating by a short and narrow passage with the large chamber, which, during the residence of the King at Blois, was employed as a council-room. The walls of the council-room were bare; but those of the King's chamber and the two cabinets were lined throughout with rich old tapestry.

Before five o'clock on the morning of the 23d of December, Henry had risen from his bed and dressed himself in haste, and as soon as his toilet was completed, one of his valets was dispatched with all speed to bear a message, which had already been entrusted to him. The King then passed out of his dressing-room into his bed-chamber, holding a light in his hand, and approached the door which led to the private staircase. There was eagerness and much anxiety in his countenance, and his eyes were fixed upon the top of the stairs with an intense gaze, which seemed to strain them from their orbits.

At length a heavy foot was heard ascending, and then several more, and in a moment after the head and shoulders of an armed man, carrying a light, appeared at the mouth of the staircase.

"Ah, Laugnac, this is well!" cried the King, as soon as he saw him. "You are punctual and prepared, I see. Whom have you with you?"

"Nine of my most determined fellows, Sire," replied Laugnac. "There is not one, indeed, of the Forty-five that would not shed his life's blood for your Majesty. But these gentlemen I know well for men who would kill the devil himself, I believe, if you were to bid them."

As he spoke, half a dozen steps behind him appeared, man after man, nine of the Gascon band, called the "Quarante-cinq," in whose countenances might be read that sort of remorseless determination, which was suited to the moment and the deed, and whose frames displayed the strength requisite to execute whatever violent act was entrusted to them.

"This is well; this is well," said the King, as they entered. "But where is Larchant, Laugnac?"

"He remained behind, Sire," replied the other, "as it will be necessary to secure the doors of the council-chamber. Whenever the enemy has entered, he will come round and join your Majesty."

"I should like to have some one with me in the cabinet," said the King. "Run and tell Ornano, Bonnavet, and la Grange, to come to me," he continued, speaking to a valet. "Bring them by the back staircase."

The valet went away with a pale countenance, feeling all the agitation which such events might well produce; and while he was gone, the King, after asking Laugnac if he had explained to his companions what was the task in which they were about to be employed, addressed them all in a short speech, not without eloquence and fire.

When he had concluded, he made Laugnac open one of the large chests which formed the window-seats of his bed-room, and taking thence a number of long, sharp, and well-pointed knives, he gave them with his own hands to the assassins, saying, "Here, gentlemen, are the avengers of your liberty and mine! and I command and authorise you to use them for the punishment of the greatest criminal in my kingdom. Every law, divine and human, requires his death; and where power prevents the ordinary course of justice from taking place, it is a right and a privilege of the sovereign to execute judgment by any means that present themselves! Now, follow me, gentlemen!" And leading them on to the other side of the chamber, he posted them himself--the principal part of them in the old cabinet, and the rest behind the arras round the door of the bed-room itself. Most of those even who were in the cabinet were concealed also behind the arras near the entrance, and the door was left open.

By the time this had been arranged a page had entered the King's bed-room, and now informed him that the gentlemen he had sent for had arrived, adding, "Monsieur de Nambu is there also, Sire, saying you told him last night to come at this hour."

"I did, I did," said the King. "Bid them all come up;" and greeting the others briefly, he took Nambu by the arm and led him into the passage which conducted to the council-chamber. Through the door which led thither voices were heard speaking beyond.

"Stay there, Nambu," he said in a whisper, "and let no one pass without my especial order. The council cannot have begun its sitting yet, for it is still dark, I see."

"As I passed by I saw into the room," said Nambu, "and there were none but ushers and such people: but I heard that the Duke had been sent for according to the commands your Majesty gave last night."

The King then left him, and returned into his room, where he found Laugnac and the rest of the gentlemen, whom he led towards the door of his dressing-room.

"I have taken off my head-piece and cuirass, Sire," said Laugnac, "as I intend to remain here at the door of your Majesty's dressing-room till the matter is settled, and the sight of arms might scare the prey."

"Right, right, Laugnac!" replied the King. "Bid the page send for Revol by the back staircase. We shall want him to fetch the Duke." And, this said, he retired into his cabinet.

The page ran round at once to the door of the council-chamber, where he found Revol just about to enter; and whispering a word to him, the Secretary of State gave the bag of papers which he had in his hand to one of the ushers, bidding him hold it till he returned, and followed the King's domestic, forbidding the servants, who had accompanied him thither, to go any farther. The spot where they remained was the large open space at the top of the great staircase, and a number of other persons were there collected, while the company of the King's guard might be seen at the foot of the staircase, not, indeed, under arms, or drawn up in regular order, but waiting apparently for the arrival of some one to give them directions.

After the departure of Revol, the statesmen who had been summoned to the council arrived rapidly one after the other. The Cardinal of Vendôme was amongst the first, and then followed the Marshals de Retz and d'Aumont. Some other members of the council came next, and then the Archbishop of Lyons. But still neither the Cardinal de Guise nor the Duke had made their

appearance. Time was now wearing on, and occasionally a page, or valet-de-chambre, known to belong to the King, was seen to come and speak with some of the people at the top of the staircase, and then return suddenly.

While this was going on, a boy, bearing the habiliments of a page of the Duke of Guise, passed along at the foot of the staircase; and, seeing a number of archers of the guard collected there, he ran lightly up the steps and mingled with the various persons collected. He passed rapidly along from one to another, as if he was looking for some person, spoke to two or three of those whose faces he knew, and then hurrying away down the stairs, passed with a step of light to the apartments of the Duke of Guise. He found that Prince just quitting his cabinet and entering the antechamber. A number of gentlemen and officers followed him, but the boy advanced straight towards him with a degree of familiarity, neither insolent nor ungraceful, and kissing his hand said, with his slight Italian accent, "May so humble a being as I am detain your Highness for one moment?"

"What is it, Ignati? Speak!" said the Duke of Guise, "I am already late for the council, my good boy."

"Your Highness promised to grant me any favour I asked," replied the boy, "and as the greatest at this moment, I ask to speak with your Highness alone."

"What is it?" said the Duke somewhat impatiently; "what is it?" And he drew him a little on one side, motioning the rest to remain.

"My Lord," said Ignati, "there is danger going forward, I am sure. All the archers of the guard are at the foot of the staircase; there are many strange faces, not usually seen at the door of the council-chamber. Twice I saw a servant of the King's come and speak to Henville, and hearing you had not arrived, go round again, as if by the back staircase, to the King's apartments. I am sure, sir, there is something wrong."

The Duke smiled, but it was somewhat thoughtfully. "Thank you, my good boy," he said. "I know rumours often precede the act; but I cannot pause to consider such things now."

"Oh, sir, think!" the boy ventured to exclaim; "think how the welfare of the State and the welfare of a thousand individuals depend entirely upon your safety. What would become of me? What would become of the young Count and his bride, if----"

"Ay, well bethought," replied the Duke. "Bring me here paper and the ink-horn;" and when the boy brought them, Guise bent down over a large coffer that stood near, and wrote a few lines.

"Take that to the Count," he said, as soon as he had finished writing. "Quick, Ignati: but, after all, these warnings are but nonsense. There is nobody in France dares do it. Look, I have delayed too long. Here comes a messenger from the King."

"As I find your Highness coming," said the usher, approaching the Duke, "it is needless, perhaps, to deliver the King's message: but I was directed to say to your Highness that the council waited, and that His Majesty was extremely anxious that the business of the day should go on, as he wished to proceed to Clery in time for dinner. If your Highness were not well, he said, perhaps you would not object to the council being held without you."

"You see!" said the Duke in a low voice, turning towards Ignati with a smile, "you see!" And following the usher, he walked on upon his way towards the council-chamber.

At the bottom of the staircase he found Larchant and the whole body of archers of the guard, who now pressed round him somewhat closely.

"What is it, Larchant? what is it, my good friend?" said the Duke. "Your presence here is unusual, I think."

"We are here, your Highness," replied Larchant, "to solicit in a body your mediation with the King. You promised me yesterday, my Lord, that you would present our petition to his Majesty, and advocate our cause in the council. These poor fellows have not received any pay for months; I might almost say years."

"I did advocate your cause, yesterday," said the Duke, "and his Majesty graciously sent an order upon the treasurer by one of the ushers."

"But the treasurer ungraciously told us, sir, that there was not a sous in his coffers," replied Larchant; and the Duke taking the paper out of his hand, began to mount the stairs, saying, "I will see to it, Larchant; I will see to it."

Larchant and the archers followed him up the steps, still pressing close upon him; and he heard a low deep voice say from the midst of them, "Look to yourself, my Lord Duke, there are bad men abroad!"

The Duke passed on, however, without notice and entered the hall of the council, the ushers drawing back with low bows as he appeared, and throwing open the doors for him to go in. The

moment after those fatal doors had closed behind him, the archers drew up across them at the head of the stairs. Larchant hurried away towards the chamber of the King, and Villequier, passing rapidly by, said in a low voice to one of the attendants, "Go down to Monsieur de Crillon, at the Corps de Garde; tell him to shut and guard the gates, as the Duke has gone in."

Though he spoke low, he seemed little to heed who listened to the words; and they were heard by the boy Ignati, who, with the painful conviction that some great evil was about to befall the Duke, had followed him step by step to the council-chamber. The boy put his hand to his brow with a look of painful anxiety, and darted away once more towards the apartments of the Duke of Guise. The first person he met with there was Pericard, the Duke's secretary; and grasping his arm, he exclaimed, "They will murder him! they will murder him! They are closing the gates of the castle and guarding them!"

Pericard rushed to one of the windows that looked out into the court. "Too true, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Too true, indeed! It may be yet time to save him though. Run quick, Ignati, and get one of the Duke's handkerchiefs while I write." And with a rapid hand he wrote down,--"My Lord, your death is resolved. They are barring and guarding the gates. I beseech you come out from the hall of the council to your own apartments. We can make them good against all the world, till the town rises to protect you."

Before he had done, the boy was back again with the handkerchief; and enveloping the note therein, Pericard gave it to him, exclaiming, "Fly, fly with that to the door of the council-chamber, Ignati. The ushers will let you in, surely, to give it to the Duke, if you say that he has forgotten his handkerchief."

"They have let me in before," said Ignati; "but I doubt it now. I will try and make my way at all events."

Again he flew to the top of the staircase, and, as if a matter of course, pushed up towards the door, endeavouring to force his way through the archers.

"Stand back, saucy spright," cried one of the men; "you cannot pass here."

"But I must pass," cried the boy, turning upon him with a fierce air of authority. "I am the Duke of Guise's page, and bring him his handkerchief, which he forgot. Make way, saucy archer, or I will teach you to whom you speak."

"Listen to the insolence of these Guisards," said the man. "But their day is over. Stand back, fool, or I'll knock you down with my partisan."

The boy laid his hand upon his dagger, still striving to push forward; and the man, without further words, struck him a blow over the head with the staff of his halbert, which laid him prostrate upon the ground. For a moment he seemed stunned, but then, starting up, he turned away, and went down the stairs, bursting into tears ere he reached the bottom, not with the pain of the blow he had received, but with the bitter conviction that the last effort had failed, and the fate of Guise was sealed.

In the meantime the Duke of Guise entered the council-room, carrying in his hand the petition of the guards. Every one rose at his approach; and as the greater part of those present were personally friendly towards him, he went round and spoke to them with his usual grace and suavity, and then laying the petition on the table, approached the fire, saying, "It is awfully cold this morning! Has not his Majesty yet appeared?"

"Not yet," replied the Cardinal de Guise, "though we expected him before, for he sent down to hasten our coming. But what is the matter with your Highness? there is blood trickling over your mustachio."

"The cold has made my nose bleed twice this morning," replied the Duke, and putting his hand in his pocket he said, "My people have been negligent; they have forgotten to give me a handkerchief. St Prix," he continued, turning his head to one of the King's valets-de-chambre, who stood on the inside of the door communicating with the King's apartments. "I wish you would send to my rooms for a handkerchief. You will find some of my people at the door."

"There are plenty, my Lord, belonging to the King," replied St. Prix, "in this little cabinet:" and crossing the hall of the council, he took one out and gave it to the Duke, who thanked him graciously, and still sitting by the fire fell into a deep fit of thought. Suddenly, however, he turned pale; his eyes assumed the same expression as they had done the night before, when he had fancied he saw a figure in the room with him, and taking a small silver bonbonnière from his pocket, he opened it, as if seeking for something that it usually contained, saying at the same time, "I feel very faint!--My people have neglected every thing," he added, "this morning."

Several members of the council gathered round him, and St. Prix, the valet, brought him from the cabinet where the handkerchief had been found, some of the dried plums of Brignolles, which were then held as a restorative. The Duke took one of them and ate it, and placed the others in the bonbonnière. After a little, his colour returned, and he said, "I am better now. How strange these attacks are, and how fortunate that one never feels them on occasions of battle or danger!"

A moment or two after, he took a turn or two up and down the room, and seemed perfectly recovered; and as he was about to resume his seat, the door of the passage leading to the King's chamber was opened, and the Secretary of State, Revol, entered, saying, "Monseigneur, his Majesty wishes to speak a word with your Highness before the business of the council commences. You will find him in the old cabinet to the left."

Revol was as pale as death. But the Duke of Guise took not the slightest notice; and, passing through the door, which St. Prix held open for him and closed after him, he advanced towards the chamber of the King.

On entering it he saw Laugnac seated upon the coffer at the farther end of the room; and he remarked, with an angry frown, that the King's attendant did not rise when he entered. He said nothing, however, but turned towards the door of the old cabinet, which was too low to suffer him to pass without bowing his head. He accordingly stooped for the purpose; and, raising the tapestry with his left hand, while he held his hat in the right, he passed on.

He had scarcely taken a step into the cabinet, however, when he at once saw several men in arms standing round. At the same moment there was a sound close to him; and, springing from behind the arras, a fierce and powerful man, named St. Malines, rushed upon him.

The Duke dropped his hat, and moved his hand towards his sword; but at the same moment some one seized the hilt with both hands, and St. Malines struck him a blow with a knife over the left shoulder, burying the weapon in his bosom.

Another and another blow succeeded from the hands of those around him: the blood rushed up into his mouth and throat; but still, with prodigious power, he seized two of those who were assailing him, and dashed them headlong to the ground, exclaiming at the same time, "Ah, traitors!"

Rushing towards the door, he dragged another along with him into the chamber of the King; and seeing Laugnac still there, and marking him as the instigator of his murder, with a brow awful in the struggle of the strong spirit against the power of death, with hands clenched, and teeth set, he darted towards him.

Ere he had taken two steps, however, his brain reeled, his eyes lost their sight, and Laugnac starting up saw, by the fearful swimming of those visionless orbs, that the terrible deed was fully accomplished, that the life of Guise was at an end; and though the Duke still rushed forward upon him with the convulsive impulse of his last sensation, the Captain of the Quarante-cinq did not even unsheath his sword, but merely struck him a light blow with the weapon in the scabbard, and Guise fell headlong on the carpet by the King's bedside.

The sound of that deep heavy fall was enough, and Henry, coming forth from his cabinet, gazed for several minutes earnestly upon the dead man, while the dark blood rushed forth, and formed a pool round the Monarch's feet.

The countenance of every one there present, lips and cheek alike, were as white as parchment; and for two or three minutes not a word was spoken, till at length the King exclaimed, "What a height he was! He seems to me taller even dead than living!"

Then setting his foot upon the dead man's neck, he cruelly repeated the cruel words which Guise himself had used at the death of Coligny, "Venomous beast, thou shalt spit forth no more poison!"

CHAP. XIV.

From the door of the council-chamber the boy Ignati flew back to the apartments of the Duke of Guise, and the tidings which he brought spread confusion and terror through the whole of the Duke's domestics: but Ignati was of a clinging and affectionate disposition, and after the Duke, his master, his next thoughts turned to Charles of Montsoreau. To his apartments then the boy proceeded with all possible speed, having in his hand the note from the Duke of Guise, which he had almost forgotten in the agitation of the late events. He found the young nobleman already dressed, and concluding with his attendants various arrangements for his approaching union with her he loved--an union, indeed, entirely dependent upon the life of him who was at that very moment falling under the blows of assassins.

With the natural hopefulness of youth and of high courage, Charles of Montsoreau, though still

somewhat anxious, had nearly forgotten the apprehensions of the night before. But the terrified countenance of Ignati, and the cut upon the boy's brow from the blow he had received, showed the young Count at once that something had gone wrong; and demanding what was the matter, but without waiting for an answer, he opened the billet of the Duke of Guise, and read.

The words which he found there written were as follows:--

"I have had many warnings, Logères, which personally, it does not become me to attend to. However, should these warnings prove to have been justly given, and you see Henry of Guise no more, take your fair bride with you at once; fly to my brother of Mayenne; be united as soon as possible, without waiting for any ceremony but the blessing of the priest; and, to the best of your power, avenge the death of him who was your friend to the last."

"Where is the Duke, Ignati?" demanded the young Count, eagerly. "Has he yet gone to the council?"

"He is gone! he is gone!" replied the boy; "and he will never return!" And in a rapid manner he told him all that had taken place, as far as he himself yet knew it.

"Fly to the apartments of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut instantly," said the Count. "Ask if I can speak with her, and give her that note. If she is not in her own apartment, she is in that of the Duchess of Nemours, which is by the side of it. Quick, Ignati; tell her there is not a moment to be lost."

The boy sped away. The Count then gave a few rapid orders to Gondrin, bidding him discover if there was any means of issuing forth from the castle; and then turned his steps, as speedily as possible, towards the chamber of Marie de Clairvaut.

In the narrow passage, however, which led towards the apartments of the Duchess of Nemours, he was passed by Pericard, the Duke's secretary, who slackened not his pace for an instant, but said, "Fly, sir! Fly! The Duke is dead!" and rushed on. The next moment, Charles met the fair girl herself, coming towards him with as swift a pace as his own, and followed by the boy Ignati, who from time to time turned back his head, as if to see that they were not pursued. Marie was as pale as death.

"Oh, Charles," she said, "I fear we cannot obey my uncle's commands. What has happened to him, I know not; but the guards have just arrested the Duchess de Nemours and my poor cousin Joinville. It is impossible to pass in that direction, and I fear all the gates are guarded."

"Run to the chapel," said the boy. "Run to the chapel by the back staircase and the little corridor behind the Duke's room. There will be no one in the chapel in this time of confusion, and there is a way from the chapel into the gardens. The postern may be left unguarded."

"Excellently bethought," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "Speed on, Ignati; speed on before us, and see that there is no one on the watch. If you find Gondrin, send him to the chapel without a moment's delay. We must fly, sweet Marie; we must fly, as your uncle has ordered. It is clear--though it is terrible to say--it is clear that he is dead. They would not have dared to arrest his son and mother had he been living. But we must find you some cloak or covering, sweet girl. You cannot go forth in all this bridal array."

Marie bent down her head and wept, for though she had suffered much within the last few months, it had not been with that withering kind of suffering which dries up the fountain of our tears. She hurried on with her lover, however, and in his apartments a mantle was speedily found to cover the bright and happy attire which she had that morning put on with feelings of hope and joy. In few but distinct words Charles of Montsoreau told the two servants, whom he found there, to get out, if possible, by any means into the town, and to bring round the rest of his train and his horses to the farther side of the gardens; and then hurrying on by the way which the boy had suggested, he led Marie de Clairvaut towards the chapel, where they were to have been united.

The little corridor which they followed entered at once into a small room, called the revestry, by the side of the chapel itself, and as Charles of Montsoreau approached, he heard voices and paused to listen. He then plainly distinguished the tones of Gondrin and the page; and though another deep voice was also heard, he hurried on, feeling certain that they would have come to give him warning had there been danger.

The door was partly open, and throwing it back, the Count beheld a scene which made all his blood run cold, while the fair girl whom he was leading forward recoiled in terror and dismay.

Stretched upon the floor, with his sword half drawn from the sheath, and a deep wound in his left breast, lay Gaspar de Montsoreau. A pool of blood surrounded him, and the expression of his whole countenance showed in a moment that the spirit had departed some time. Scattered--some upon the ground, some upon the table in the midst of the room, some even in the midst of the blood itself--were a number of pieces of gold; and two leathern bags, one open and half empty of its contents, were seen upon the ground.

At the further side of the room, near the door leading into the chapel, was standing Gondrin, with his sword naked, and his foot upon the chest of the Italian Orbi; while the boy Ignati knelt

beside the assassin, and with his drawn dagger held over him, seemed putting to him some quick and eager questions.

"I tell you true," answered the man, as Charles of Montsoreau entered; "I tell you true. It was he who set me on and paid me: the Abbé de Boisguerin, and no one else."

The boy sprang up and moved away on the young Count's appearance; and a few words from Gondrin explained to him, that coming from the gardens--where he had found all solitary, the key in the lock of the postern gate, and the way clear--he had heard a low cry from the side of the chapel, and on entering that room had discovered the unhappy Marquis de Montsoreau weltering in his blood, and the Italian Orbi gathering up some of the gold pieces, which seemed to have fallen to the ground in a brief struggle between him and the Marquis.

During this account, Marie de Clairvaut, pale as death and terribly agitated, supported herself by one of the high-backed chairs, and turned her eyes from the horrible sight which that room exhibited; and Charles of Montsoreau gazed for a moment on the dead form of his brother, with those feelings of fraternal love which no unkindness or ill treatment had been able to banish.

Every instant, however, was precious; and recovering himself as speedily as possible, he turned to Gondrin, bidding him disarm the Italian who had still his sword, though the weapon with which he had committed the murder had been dropped beside the dead body.

"Shall I kill him, sir?" said Gondrin, pressing the man down more firmly with his foot, as he found him make a slight effort to escape.

"Oh, in pity, in pity, Charles," cried Marie, clasping her hands towards him, "do not; do not!"

"No, no!" replied Charles of Montsoreau; "cut that rope from the window, Ignati. Bind him hand and foot, Gondrin, and leave him to the justice of those who come after."

It was done in a moment; and Charles of Montsoreau only pausing once more for a moment to gaze on his brother's corpse, exclaimed with sincere sorrow, "Alas, poor Gaspar!" and then with a quick step led Marie de Clairvaut from that terrible chamber into the gardens and towards the postern gate.

All was clear, and Charles of Montsoreau turned the key and threw the gate back. The moment that it was opened, two men darted forward from the other side, as if to seize the person coming out, and in one of them, though entirely changed in dress and appearance, Charles instantly recognised the Abbé de Boisguerin, who, before he saw that any one had accompanied Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, had caught her violently by the arm.

The memory of a thousand wrongs flashed upon the young Count's mind in a moment; his sword sprung from the sheath, glittered for a single instant in the air, and then passed through the body of the base man before him, piercing him from side to side.

The Abbé uttered a shrill and piercing cry, and, when the Count withdrew his weapon, fell instantly back upon the ground, quivering in the agonies of death. The other man who had stood beside the Abbé fled again; but on the road, about fifty yards from the garden wall, stood a carriage with six horses and their drivers, with a group of some nine or ten men on horseback.

On the Abbé's first cry the horsemen began to ride towards the spot, but the appearance of Gondrin coming through the low door behind the Count, and then the page, made them pause, hesitate, and seem to consult. In another moment or two the sound of horses coming from the side of the town caused them to withdraw still farther from the spot; and with joy that is scarcely to be expressed, Charles of Montsoreau saw his own colours in the scarfs of the horsemen that approached. In a moment after, he was surrounded by at least twenty of his own armed attendants: led horses, too, were there in plenty; and he now whispered words of hope that he really felt to Marie de Clairvaut, who clung almost fainting to his arm.

"Stop the carriage, Gondrin!" he exclaimed, seeing the drivers in the act of mounting, as if to hasten away after the horsemen, who, on their part, had taken flight at the first sight of the young Count's followers. "We must make use of it, whether they will or not; but promise them large rewards. There is a mystery here I do not understand; but it is evidently some new villainy. Come, dear Marie, come; we must not pause." And leading her forward to the carriage, he spoke to the drivers himself.

One of them was the master of the horses which the Abbé had hired, and he was found not at all unwilling to enter into any arrangement that the Count chose to propose. Marie de Clairvaut was placed in the carriage, the horsemen surrounded it, and Charles himself was about to mount his horse, when he perceived that the boy Ignati had not followed him, but remained kneeling by the side of the Abbé de Boisguerin. Turning quickly back, to his utter surprise he found the youth weeping bitterly; and when he urged him to rise and come with the carriage, Ignati shook his head saying, "No, no! I cannot leave him like dead carrion for the hawks and ravens.--He was my father! Go on, my Lord Count, and God speed you!--I must see him buried, and masses said for his soul!"

The Count was moved, but he could not remain; and giving the boy some money, he said,

"Spend that upon his funeral, Ignati; and then follow me with all speed to Lyons. I grieve for you, my boy, though I understand not how this can be."

Only one more difficulty existed, which was, to pass through that part of the town leading to the bridge over the Loire. But the servants who had made their escape from the castle, and brought round their fellows to his assistance, assured the Count that the news of the Duke of Guise's murder had already spread through the city, and that every thing was in such a state of confusion and dismay, he might pass with the greatest security.

Such he found to be the case; all the guard of the King was within the walls of the château; the gates of the bridges, and of the town itself, were in the hands of the faction of the League; and no questions were asked of one who was known to have been the dear and intimate friend of the murdered Duke.

Taking his way through a part of the country devoted to the League, Charles of Montsoreau and his fair companion found no difficulty in reaching Lyons, where the history of all that had taken place was soon told to the Duke of Mayenne, and the last lines which the hand of Henry of Guise ever traced were shown to him, who was destined thenceforth to be the great head of the League.

Had the words and the wishes of his brother not been sufficient for Mayenne, the necessity of binding to his cause for ever one whose aid was so important as that of Charles of Montsoreau, would have been enough to decide the Duke's conduct towards him: and as soon as possible, after all the anguish, difficulty, and danger, which they had undergone together, the fate of the young Count of Logères and Marie de Clairvaut was united for ever.

In regard to them it need only be said that they loved each other to the last hours of life.

The boy Ignati followed the young Count to Lyons, but he would not remain with the man who had taken his father's life. He subsequently devoted himself to the church, and in the end rose high, by the great interest that was exercised on his behalf.

The wars of the League succeeded: but the feelings of Charles of Montsoreau were greatly changed by the death of the Duke of Guise; and though he waged war, as zealously as any body could possibly do, against the murderer of his lost friend, yet, when Henry III. himself fell under the blow of an assassin, the young Count of Logères would no longer contend against a monarch so generous, so noble, and so chivalrous, as the King who next ascended the throne.

He sheathed the sword then, after the accession of Henri Quatre, and the rest of his days passed in peace and calm retirement, in the society of her whom he loved ever, and loved alone.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): I have given the Duke's own words without variation.

[Footnote 2](#): This extraordinary fact reminds us of days not long passed.

[Footnote 3](#): This is historically true in regard to one of the dispatches to the Duke of Guise; and in representing Henry and his courtiers as occasionally acting the part of low and mercenary swindlers, first fleecing and then laughing at a dupe, I am also borne out by facts.

[Footnote 4](#): Such were the arms of the Villequier family.

[Footnote 5](#): Such is the account given by the most credible historians. The author of the life of the Duke, M. Girard, who was nearly contemporary, gives a different version: acknowledges that the Duke fled into his cabinet, but adds that he there defended himself

like a lion.

[Footnote 6](#): Such, and in such terms, strange and fantastic as they may seem, was undoubtedly the warning given by the physician Miron to the Duke of Guise not many days before the catastrophe of Blois.

[Footnote 7](#): Some of the Duke's historians say, that he did not speak the words aloud, but merely wrote at the bottom of the note, "On n'oseroit," and then threw it under the table.

[Footnote 8](#): This awful fact is but too certain.

THE END.

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