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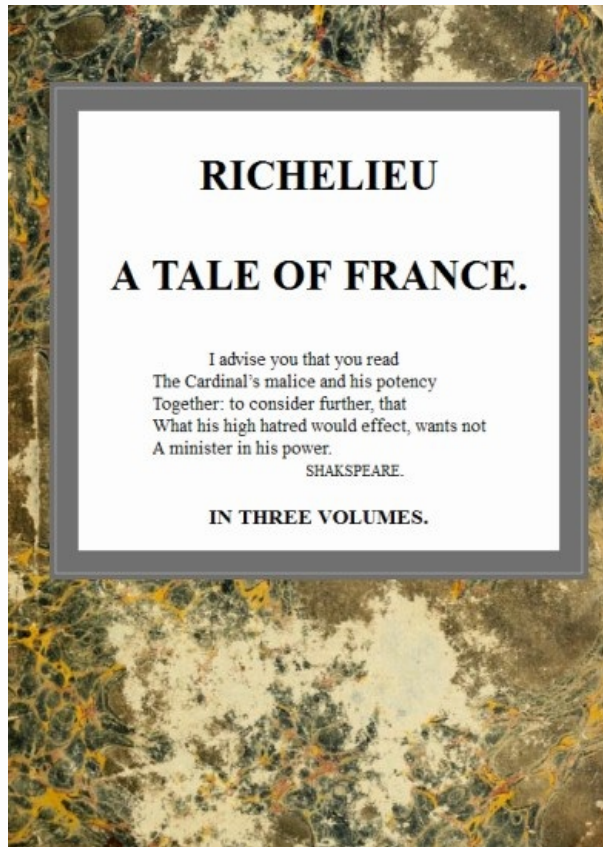
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RICHELIEU,

A TALE OF FRANCE.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY S. AND R. BENTLEY,

Dorset Street, Fleet Street.

RICHELIEU

A TALE OF FRANCE.

I advise you that you read
The Cardinal's malice and his potency
Together: to consider further, that
What his high hatred would effect, wants not
A minister in his power.

SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1829.

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DEDICATION.

To

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR name is too great a one to be trifled with, and therefore, I do not put it at the head of this page. Should your anticipations in favour of this work be realized, and its success be equal to my utmost hopes, I dedicate it to you in testimony both of my gratitude for your kindness, and my admiration for your genius; but should the hand of criticism cut it short hereafter, or the frost of neglect wither it in the bud, I take a humbler tone, and beg you only to accept my thanks for your good wishes and kind encouragement. If it should succeed, you will, I am sure, receive the work with some pleasure on my account;—if it fail, you will still accept it as the only means I have of expressing my feeling of obligation towards you; and, at all events, you will understand my motive for not prefixing your name to the Dedication of a book, the fate of which is yet doubtful.

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

DEARLY BELOVED READER,

ALTHOUGH I call the following pages *mine*, and upon the strength of them write myself Author, yet I must in truth confess, that I have very little to do with them, and still less to do with the story they record; and therefore I am fain to treat the world with something of my own exclusive composition, in the shape of a preface. The facts of the case are as follow: I one day possessed myself of a bundle of manuscript notes—no matter when or how, so that they were honestly come by, for that is all that you, or I, or Sir Richard Birnie, have to do with the matter. Now I say they were honestly come by, and the *onus probandi* must rest upon the other party. So no more of that.

My dear Mr. Colburn, where was I? I quite forget—Oh, now I have it! Having one day possessed myself of a bundle of manuscript notes,—honestly come by,—I proceeded to read them, and although the hand was small and crooked, with all the *K*'s shaped like Laocoons, and every *g* like a pair of spectacles, yet there was something in the tale there written, that made me read it through before I rose off my chair, although I did not then know, what I have since discovered, that every word of it was true. Now this is an advantage which you, my dear reader, have over me in perusing this history for the first time; for unquestionably even upon my pure *ipse dixit*, you will believe that the whole of the three volumes which follow, is neither more nor less than a plain and simple narration of facts. Nevertheless, in case there should be in the world any person so sceptical as to doubt the assertion, even of a novelist, I will refer my reader to the well-known authorities of the day, and merely observe, that though there may be some discrepancy in the dates and some difference in the names, yet every individual circumstance recorded in these pages, will be found to be collaterally verified by contemporary writers of good repute, who, however, did not know so much of the detail of the events in question as are disclosed in the old manuscript alluded to, nor were they, like the writer of that document, acquainted with the real causes of those movements which shook the whole of France, and which, originating in the heart of the Court, could only be detected by one who was himself a resident there. To you, my dear reader, whose confidence in my word I know to be as unbounded as the conscience of a tailor, or the stomach of an alderman, I have only to remark, that the Hero of my tale is by no means a fabulous person.

My story opens with the latter years of the reign of Louis XIII. King of France—a period memorable in English annals from the civil wars which then raged between Charles I. and his rebellious Parliament, and no less memorable in the history of France, as the most terrific portion of Richelieu's bloody domination.

At the death of Henry IV. the Regency of the kingdom during her son's minority, was seized upon by Mary de Medicis, a woman of considerable talent and of vast ambition, whose primary object seems to have been, so to secure the sovereign power to herself, that Louis during her life should remain in a state of tutelage.

In such projects, but still more in her obstinate partiality for the celebrated Marechal d'Ancre and his wife, originated a thousand factions and civil wars, which kept the country in a continual state of tumult during the King's minority. These factions, and the circumstances which they engendered, necessarily gave rise to various rapid changes in the Queen's ministry, and amidst these, for the first time, appeared on the political stage Richelieu, then Bishop of Luçon. His prospects yet doubtful, and his ambition still in its infancy, Richelieu made mildness and courtesy his first steps towards pre-eminence. He contented himself with an inferior station in the Council: his urbanity and his talents proved equally agreeable and useful; and no one beheld in the calm and polished Bishop of Luçon, any promise of the aspiring and remorseless Cardinal de Richelieu.

A circumstance, however, occurred almost in the outset of his career, which had nearly thrown him for ever from the destined scene of his aggrandizement. This was the fall of the Marechal d'Ancre, and the arrest of the Queen-mother.

On the marriage of Louis XIII., the jealous eye of Mary de Medicis soon perceived her son's first affection towards his young wife, and, fearful of an influence which might spring up to counteract her own, she found means to destroy, without remorse, the domestic happiness of her child, in order to secure her own dominion over him. But while she fomented every disagreement between Louis and his wife, and watched the least symptom of reviving affection with the suspicious anxiety of uncertain power, she blindly suffered near his person a favourite who combined with the genius to form great designs, the most consummate art to conceal them. Monsieur de Luynes, it appears, from the first moment of his intimacy with the King, projected his master's deliverance from the tyranny of Mary de Medicis; but lest he should be suspected of such designs, he hid them beneath the mask of levity and thoughtlessness. It would be little appropriate here to enter more largely into the details of these proceedings. Suffice it that in the end the Queen's favourite was shot as he entered the palace of the Louvre, and she herself was instantly arrested and exiled to Blois. Amongst others of her council who shared in the fall of the Queen, was Richelieu, and for some time he remained in exile at Avignon.

The Queen's party, however, was still strong in France; and in her misfortunes, the factious and discontented, who had formerly opposed her measures merely because she held the reins of government, now supported her against the hand to which those reins had been transferred. A civil war seemed inevitable, and in order to avert such an event, the King's advisers found themselves obliged to negotiate with the Princess, whom they had dispossessed; but Mary rejected all intercession, and it was not till the return of Richelieu that any compromise could be effected. That minister, however, with the deep diplomatic skill for which he was conspicuous, instantly availed himself of the weak point in the character of his mistress, and through the medium of her confessor, won her to his purpose. A reconciliation was now speedily effected between Mary and her son, and Richelieu having become the friend of the one and the confidant of the other, saw himself placed more surely than ever in the road to political eminence. Many circumstances combined to accelerate his progress. The death of the Duke de Luynes, the religious wars still raging in the heart of the kingdom, and the renewed differences between the King and his mother,—all gave the rising minister the means of increasing his power, and the opportunity of displaying the vast energies of his extraordinary mind. All was subdued before him; the Queen-mother was exiled; the Protestants were crushed; and the King himself became the slave of Richelieu.

But power so acquired was only to be maintained at the expense of much blood. Conspiracy after conspiracy was formed to cast off his dominion, and more than one insurrection burst forth in opposition to his tyranny; but each in turn was overthrown, and the blood of the conspirators only served to cement the fabric of his greatness. Usurped power must still have some object for suspicion, and after having quelled all his more powerful adversaries, the jealousy of Richelieu turned towards the young Queen, persecuting her with such uncalled for virulence as to

induce many to believe that his hatred proceeded from some more private and personal cause than was apparent.

In the mean time, Louis himself, seldom called upon, except as a state puppet, to sign some ordonnance, or hold some council under the direction of Richelieu, lingered on in inactivity, yielding one privilege after another to the grasping ambition of his minister, without the dignity of royalty or the peace of private life. It is true that, on more than one occasion, he was roused by circumstances to put forth the native energies of his mind, but this was most frequently on some trifling occurrence. And though the momentary flashes of a vigorous intellect would show that nature had been originally bountiful to him, yet he never evinced any steady determination of purpose. Richelieu spared no pains to secure the power he had acquired; and that he might leave the King no means of extricating himself, plunged the kingdom in wars and negociations which he well knew that none but himself could conduct with success. But here indeed his genius showed itself resplendent. The government of a world seemed in his hands, and yet he managed the complicated machine steadily and firmly, with a clear, discerning eye, and a calm, unshrinking heart. Nevertheless, whether it was that the multitude of his other avocations diverted his attention from the minor regulations of the kingdom, or whether, as some believe, he encouraged a disorganized state of the interior for political purposes, it must be acknowledged that all contemporary accounts represent the internal police of France during his administration, as in a strangely deranged condition—a condition little to have been expected from the vigour of his government, and the severe exactitude of his disposition.

But so it was. The partizans of the various factions which had long been embodied as armies, were fain, after his measures had dispersed them as considerable bodies, to take refuge in the less cultivated parts of the country—the mountains, the forests, or the wastes; and as they had before lived by anarchy, they now contrived to subsist by plunder. The nobles being called from their strong holds to expensive cities, and compelled by Richelieu's jealousy to show themselves continually at his luxurious Court, could no longer maintain the host of retainers which had formerly revelled at their expense, and these also were obliged to join themselves to the various bands of freebooters that infested the country. Occasionally a merciless execution of some of these banditti awed the rest for a time, but upon examining history, even to the end of Richelieu's life, we find that while he governed the nobles with a rod of iron, saw every attempt at conspiracy with a prophet's foresight, and repressed it with a giant's strength, he overlooked or forgave those crimes which did not affect his political situation.

Such was the state of France at the opening of the following history: and now having attempted to prepare my reader's mind for what is to follow, I have only farther to refer him to the notes at the end of the third volume, in confirmation of my assertion, that this tale is entirely true. The manuscript from which it is rendered in its present form, possessed that air of fact which from the first left very little doubt on my mind that the narrative was authentic; but not content with this, I examined the best authorities, and had the pleasure of finding that every material circumstance was perfectly unquestionable, and from the acquaintance of the original writer with all the most minute points, I cannot now divest myself of the idea that he must have been, in some degree, an actor in what he narrates.

Be that as it may, I feel sure that whoever peruses it to the end will be perfectly convinced of its truth; and in the hope that many will do so, I leave them to commence their journey, wishing them all a safe and happy arrival at its conclusion.

ERRATA

VOL. I.

- Page 49, line 5, *for* 'illuminated,' *read* 'illumined.'
- 115, — 16, *for* 'shas hent,' *read* 'has sent.'
- 182, — 15, *for* 'the side,' *read* 'your side.'

VOL. II.

- Page 65, line 5, *for* 'end,' *read* 'beginning.'
- 185, — 15, *for* 'whom,' *read* 'as.'

VOL. III.

- Page 216, line 18, *for* 'wave,' *read* 'waive.'
- 342, — 17, *for* 'laid,' *read* 'lain.'

RICHELIEU.

CHAPTER I.

Which shows what a French forest was in the year of our Lord 1642, and by whom it was inhabited.

THE vast Sylva Lida, which in the days of Charlemagne stretched far along the banks of the Seine, and formed a woody screen round the infant city of Paris, has now dwindled to a few thousand acres in the neighbourhood of St. Germain en Laye. Not so in the time of Louis the Thirteenth. It was then one of the most magnificent forests of France, and extending as far as the town of Mantes, took indifferently the name of the Wood of Mantes, or the Forest of Laye. That portion to the North of St. Germain has been long cut down: yet there were persons living, not many years since, who remembered some of the old trees still standing, bare, desolate, and alone, like parents who had seen the children of their hopes die around them in their prime.

Although much improvement in all the arts of life, and much increase of population had taken place during the latter years of Henry the Fourth, and under the regency of Mary de Medicis; yet at the time of their son Louis the Thirteenth, the country was still but thinly peopled, and far different from the gay, thronged land, that it appears to-day. For besides that it was in earlier days, there had been many a bitter and a heavy war, not only of France against her enemies, but of France against her children. Religious and political differences had caused disunion between man and man, had banished mutual confidence and social intercourse, and raised up those feuds and hatreds, which destroy domestic peace, and retard public improvement. Amidst general distrust and civil wars, industry had received no encouragement; and where stand at present many a full hamlet and busy village, where the vineyard yields its abundance, and the peasant gathers in peace the bounty of Nature, were then the green copses of the forest, the haunt of the wild boar and the deer. The savage tenants of the wood, however, did not enjoy its shelter undisturbed; for, in those days of suspicion, hunting was a safer sport than conversation, and the boughs of the oak a more secure covering than the gilded ceilings of the saloon.

To our pampered countrymen, long nurtured in that peculiar species of luxury called comfort, the roads of France even now must seem but rude and barbarous constructions, when compared with the smooth, joltless causeways over which they are borne in their own land; but in the time of Louis the Thirteenth, when all works of the kind were carried on by the Seigneur through whose estates they passed, few but the principal roads between one great town and another were even passable for a carriage. Those, however, which traversing the wood of Mantes, served as means of access to the royal residence of St. Germain, were of a superior kind, and would have been absolutely good, had the nature of the soil afforded a steady foundation: but this was not always to be found in the forest, and the engineer had shown no small ingenuity in taking advantage of all the most solid parts of the land, and in avoiding those places where the marshy or sandy quality of the ground offered no secure basis. By these circumstances, however, he was obliged to deviate sadly from those principles of direct progression, so dear to all Frenchmen; and the road from St. Germain to Mantes, as well as that which branched off from it to join the high-road to Chartres, instead of being one interminable, monotonous, straight line, with a long row of trees, like a file of grenadiers, on each side, went winding in and out with a thousand turnings amongst the old oaks of the forest, that seemed to stand forward, and stretch their broad branches across it, as if willing to shelter it from the obtrusive rays of the sun. Sometimes, climbing the side of a hill, it would suddenly display a wide view over the leafy ocean below, till the eye caught the towers and spires of distant cities breaking the far grey line of the horizon. Sometimes, descending into the depths of the forest, it would almost seem to lose itself amongst the wild groves and savannas, being itself the only trace of man's laborious hand amidst the wilderness around.

In the heart of the wood, at that point where the two roads (which I have mentioned) divaricated from each other, stood the hut of a Woodman, and the *abreuvoir* where many a gay lord of the Court would stop when his hunting was over, and give his horse time to drink. There, too, many a traveller would pause to ask his way through the forest; so that Philip, the woodman, and his young family, were known to almost all whom business or pleasure brought through the wood of Mantes; and although during the course of this true history, princes and heroes may become the subjects of discourse, it is with Philip that we must commence our tale.

It was at that season of the year, when the first leaves of summer begin to leave the branches from which they sprang, like the bright and tender hopes of early years, that fade and fall before the autumn of life has fully commenced. The sun had abated but little of his force, and the days scarcely seemed to have contracted their span.

The time of day, too, was like the period of the year, "falling gently into the sear," so that it was only a scarce perceptible shadow, stealing over the landscape, which told that the great power of light was quitting that quarter of the globe, to bestow the equal blessing of his smile on other nations and on distant climes. That shadow had been the signal for Philip the woodman to return towards his home, and he issued forth from one of the forest paths, near his dwelling, singing as he came the old hunting-song of *Le bon roi Dagobert*.^[A]

"King Dagobert in days of yore
Put on his hose wrong side before.
Says St. Eloi, the king's old squire,
'I would not offend, most gracious Sire,
But may your slave be soundly switch'd,
If your Majesty is not oddly breech'd,'
For you've got the wrong side before.'
Says the King, 'I do not care a groat;
One's breeches are scarcely worth a thought;
A beggar's a king when he's at his ease,
So turn them about which way you please,
And be quick, you s—"

[A] This song of *Le bon roi Dagobert* is in the original very long, and contains a great deal of witty ribaldry, unfit to be inserted here. The above is a somewhat free translation of the first verse, which stands thus in the French:

“Le bon roy Dagobert
Mettoit ses culottes à renvers.
Le bon St. Eloi
Lui dit, Oh mon Roy!
Que votre Majesté
Est bien mal culotté.
Eh bien, dit ce bon Roy,
Je consens qu’on les mête à l’endroit.”

Now St. Hubert, in all probability, is the only person who correctly knows how it happened, that the very unmeaning and inapplicable ditty of *Le bon roi Dagobert*, should have been appropriated exclusively to the noble exercise of hunting, to which it has no reference whatever; but so it has been, and even to the present day where is the chasseur who cannot, as he returns from the chace, blow the notes, or sing the words of *Le bon roi Dagobert*?

Philip, as woodman, had heard it echoed and re-echoed through the forest from his very infancy; and now, without even knowing that he did so, he sang it as a matter of habit, although his mind was occupied upon another subject: as men are always naturally inclined to employ their corporeal faculties on some indifferent object, when their mental ones are intensely engaged in things of deeper interest.

Philip advanced slowly along the road, with his brow knit in such a manner as to evince that his light song had no part in his thoughts. He was a man perhaps nearly fifty, still hale and athletic, though a life of labour had changed the once dark locks of his hair to grey. His occupation was at once denoted by his dress, which consisted simply of a long-bodied blue coat of coarse cloth, covered over, except the arms, with what is called in Brittany, a *Peau de bicque*, or goat-skin: a pair of leather breeches, cut off above the knee, with thick gaiters to defend his legs from the thorns, completed his dress below; and a round broad-brimmed hat was brought far over his eyes, to keep them from the glare of the declining sun. His apparel was girded round him by a broad buff belt, in the left of which hung his woodman’s knife; in the right he had placed the huge axe, which he had been using in his morning’s occupation: and thus accoutred, Philip would have been no insignificant opponent, had he met with any of those lawless rovers, who occasionally frequented the forest.

As he approached his dwelling, he suddenly stopped, broke off his song, and turning round, listened for a moment attentively; but the only noise to be heard was the discordant cry of the jay in the trees round about; and the only living things visible were a few wild birds overhead, slowly winging their flight from the distant fields and vineyards towards their forest home.

Philip proceeded, but he sang no more; and opening the cottage door, he spoke without entering. “Charles,” demanded he, “has the young gentleman returned, who passed by this morning to hunt?”

“No, father,” answered the boy coming forward; “nobody has passed since you went—I am sure no one has, for I sat on the old tree all the morning, carving you a sun-dial out of the willow branch you brought home yesterday;” and he drew forth one of those ingenious little machines, by means of which the French shepherds tell the time.

“Thou art a good boy,” said his father, laying his hand on his head, “thou art a good boy.” But still, as the Woodman spoke, his mind seemed occupied by some anxiety, for again he looked up the road and listened. “There are strange faces in the forest,” said Philip, not exactly soliloquizing, for his son was present, but certainly speaking more to himself than to the boy. “There are strange faces in the forest, and I fear me some ill deed is to be done. But here they come, thank God!—No! what is this?”

As he spoke, there appeared, just where the road turned into the wood, a sort of procession, which would have puzzled any one of later days, more than it did the Woodman. It consisted of four men on horseback, and four on foot, escorting a vehicle, the most elegant and tasteful that the age produced. The people of that day had doubtless very enlarged notions, and certainly the carriage I speak of would have contained any three of modern construction (always excepting that in which his most gracious Majesty the King of England appears on state occasions, and also that of the Lord Mayor of London City.)

Indeed the one in question was more like a state carriage than any other; broad at the top, low in the axle, all covered over with painting and gilding, with long wooden shafts for the horses, and green taffeta curtains to the windows: and in this guise it came on, swaying and swaggering about over the ruts in the road, not unlike the bloated Dutch pug of some over-indulgent dame, waddling slowly on, with its legs far apart, and its belly almost trailing on the ground.

When the carriage arrived at the *abreuvoir*, by the side of which Philip had placed himself, the footmen took the bridles from the horses’ mouths to give them drink, and a small white hand, from within, drew back the taffeta curtain, displaying to the Woodman one of the loveliest faces he had ever beheld. The lady looked round for a moment at the forest scene, in the midst of whose wild ruggedness they stood, and then raised her eyes towards the sky, letting them roam over the clear deepening expanse of blue, as if to satisfy herself how much daylight still remained for their journey.

“How far is it to St. Germain, good friend?” said she, addressing the Woodman, as she finished her contemplations; and her voice sounded to Philip like the warble of a bird, notwithstanding a slight peculiarity of intonation, which more refined ears would instantly have decided as the accent of Roussillon, or some adjacent province: the lengthening of the *i*, and the swelling roundness of the Spanish *u*, sounding very differently from the sharp precision peculiar to the Parisian pronunciation.

“I wish, Pauline, that you would get over that bad habit of softening all your syllables,” said an old lady who sat beside her in the carriage. “Your French is scarcely comprehensible.”

“Dear Mamma!” replied the young lady playfully, “am not I descended lineally from Clemence Isaure, the patroness of song and chivalry? And I should be sorry to speak aught but my own *langue d’oc*—the tongue of the first knights and first poets of France.— But hark! what is that noise in the wood?”

“Now help, for the love of God!” cried the Woodman, snatching forth his axe, and turning to the horsemen who accompanied the carriage; “murder is doing in the forest. Help, for the love of God!”

But as he spoke, the trampling of a horse’s feet was heard, and in a moment after, a stout black charger came down the road like lightning; the dust springing up under his feet, and the foam dropping from his bit.

Half falling from the saddle, half supported by the reins, appeared the form of a gallant young Cavalier; his naked sword still clasped in his hand, but now fallen powerless and dragging by the side of the horse; his head uncovered and thrown back, as if consciousness had almost left him, and the blood flowing from a deep wound in his forehead, and dripping amongst the thick curls of his dark brown hair.

The charger rushed furiously on; but the Woodman caught the bridle as he passed, and with some difficulty reined him in; while one of the footmen lifted the young gentleman to the ground, and placed him at the foot of a tree.

The two ladies had not beheld this scene unconcerned; and were descending from the carriage, when four or five servants in hunting livery were seen issuing from the wood at the turn of the road, contending with a very superior party of horsemen, whose rusty equipments and wild anomalous sort of apparel, bespoke them free of the forest by not the most honourable franchise.

"Ride on, ride on!" cried the young lady to those who had come with her: "Ride on and help them;" and she herself advanced to give aid to the wounded Cavalier, whose eyes seemed now closed for ever.

He was as handsome a youth as one might look upon: one of those forms which we are fond to bestow upon the knights and heroes that we read of in our early days, when unchecked fancy is always ready to give her bright conceptions "a local habitation and a name." The young lady, whose heart had never been taught to regulate its beatings by the frigid rules of society, or the sharp scourge of disappointment, now took the wounded man's head upon her knee, and gazed for an instant upon his countenance, the deadly paleness of which appeared still more ghastly from the red streams that trickled over it from the wound in his forehead. She then attempted to staunch the blood, but the trembling of her hands defeated her purpose, and rendered her assistance of but little avail.

The elder lady had hitherto been giving her directions to the footmen, who remained with the carriage, while those on horseback rode on towards the fray. "Stand to your arms, Michel!" cried she. "You take heed to the coach. You three, draw up across the road, each with his arquebuse ready to fire. Let none but the true men pass.—Fie! Pauline; I thought you had a firmer heart." She continued, approaching the young lady, "Give me the handkerchief.—That is a bad cut in his head, truly; but here is a worse stab in his side." And she proceeded to unloose the gold loops of his hunting-coat, that she might reach the wound. But that action seemed to recall, in a degree, the senses of the wounded Cavalier.

"Never! never!" he exclaimed, clasping his hand upon his side, and thrusting her fingers away from him, with no very ceremonious courtesy,—"never, while I have life."

"I wish to do you no harm, young Sir, but good," replied the old lady;—"I seek but to stop the bleeding of your side, which is draining your heart dry."

The wounded man looked faintly round, his senses still bewildered, either by weakness from loss of blood, or from the stunning effects of the blow on his forehead. He seemed, however, to have caught and comprehended some of the words which the old lady addressed to him, and answered them by a slight inclination of the head, but still kept his hand upon the breast of his coat, as if he had some cause for wishing it not to be opened.

The time which had thus elapsed more than sufficed to bring the horsemen, who had accompanied the carriage, (and who, as before stated, had ridden on before) to the spot where the servants of the Cavalier appeared contending with a party, not only greater in number, but superior in arms.

The reinforcement which thus arrived, gave a degree of equality to the two parties, though the freebooters might still have retained the advantage, had not one of their companions commanded them, in rather a peremptory manner, to quit the conflict. This personage, we must remark, was very different, in point of costume, from the forest gentry with whom he herded for the time. His dress was a rich livery suit of Isabel and silver; and indeed he might have been confounded with the other party, had not his active co-operation with the banditti (or whatever they might be) placed the matter beyond a doubt.

Their obedience, also, to his commands showed, that if he were not the instigator of the violence we have described, at least his influence over his lawless companions was singularly powerful; for at a word from him they drew off from a combat in which they were before engaged with all the hungry fury of wolves eager for their prey; and retreated in good order up the road, till its windings concealed them from the view of the servants to whom they had been opposed.

These last did not attempt to follow, but turning their horses, together with those who had brought them such timely aid, galloped up to the spot where their master lay. When they arrived, he had again fallen into a state of apparent insensibility, and they all flocked round him with looks of eager anxiety, which seemed to speak more heartfelt interest than generally existed between the murmuring vassal and his feudal lord.

One sprightly boy, who appeared to be his page, sprang like lightning from the saddle, and kneeling by his side, gazed intently on his face, as if to seek some trace of animation. "They have killed him!" he cried at length, "I fear me they have killed him!"

"No, he is not dead," answered the old lady; "but I wish, Sir Page, that you would prevail on your master to open his coat, that we may staunch that deep wound in his side."

"No, no! that must not be," cried the boy quickly; "but I will tie my scarf round the wound." So saying, he unloosed the rich scarf of blue and gold, that passing over his right shoulder crossed his bosom till it nearly reached the hilt of his sword, where forming a large knot it covered the bucklings of his belt. This he bound tightly over the spot in his master's side from whence the blood flowed; and then asked thoughtfully, without raising his eyes, "But how shall we carry him to St. Germain?"

"In our carriage," said the young lady; "we are on our way thither, even now."

The sound of her voice made the Page start, for since his arrival on the spot, he had scarcely noticed any one but his master, whose dangerous situation seemed to occupy all his thoughts: but now there was something in that sweet voice, with its soft Languedocian accent, which awakened other ideas, and he turned his full sunny face towards the lady who spoke.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed she, as that glance showed her a countenance not at all unfamiliar to her memory: "Is not this Henry de La Mothe, son of our old farmer Louis?"

"No other indeed, Mademoiselle Pauline," replied the boy; "though, truly, I neither hoped nor expected to see

you at such a moment as this."

"Then who"—demanded the young lady, clasping her hands with a look of impatient anxiety—"in the name of heaven, tell me who is this!"

For an instant, and but for an instant, a look of arch meaning played over the boy's countenance; but it was like a flash of lightning on a dark cloud, lost as quickly as it appeared, leaving a deep gloom behind it, as his eye fell upon the inanimate form of his master. "That, Madam," said he, while something glistened brightly, but sadly, in his eye, "that is Claude Count de Blenau."

Pauline spoke not, but there was a deadly paleness come upon her face, which very plainly showed, how secondary a feeling is general benevolence, compared with personal interest.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the elder lady, her brow darkening thoughtfully. "Well, something must be done for him."

The Page did not seem particularly well pleased with the tone in which the lady spoke, and, in truth, it had betrayed more pride than compassion.

"The best thing that can be done for him, Madame la Marquise," answered he, "is to put him in the carriage and convey him to St. Germain as soon as possible, if you should not consider it too much trouble."

"Trouble!" exclaimed Pauline; "trouble! Henry de La Mothe, do you think that my mother or myself would find any thing a trouble, that could serve Claude de Blenau, in such a situation?"

"Hush, Pauline!" said her mother. "Of course we shall be glad to serve the Count—Henry, help Michel and Regnard to place your master in the carriage.—Michel, give me your arquebuse; I will hold it till you have done.—Henry, support your master's head."

But Pauline took that post upon herself, notwithstanding a look from the Marchioness, if not intended to forbid, at least to disapprove. The young lady, however, was too much agitated with all that had occurred to remark her mother's looks, and following the first impulse of her feelings, while the servants carried him slowly to the carriage, she supported the head of the wounded Cavalier on her arm, though the blood continued to flow from the wound in his forehead, and dripped amidst the rich slashing of her Spanish sleeves, dabbling the satin with which it was lined.

"Oh Mademoiselle!" said the Page, when their task was accomplished, "this has been a sad day's hunting. But if I might advise," he continued, turning to the Marchioness, "the drivers must be told to go with all speed."

"Saucy as a page!" said the old lady, "is a proverb, and a good one. Now, Monsieur La Mothe, I do not think the drivers must go with all speed; for humbly deferring to your better opinion, it would shake your master to death."

The Page bit his lip, and his cheek grew somewhat red, in answer to the high dame's rebuke, but he replied calmly, "You have seen, Madam, what has happened to-day, and depend on it, if we be not speedy in getting out of this accursed forest, we shall have the same good gentry upon us again, and perhaps in greater numbers. Though they have wounded the Count, they have not succeeded in their object; for he has still about him that which they would hazard all to gain."

"You are in the right, boy," answered the lady: "I was over-hasty. Go in, Pauline. Henry, your master's horse must carry one of my footmen, of whom the other three can mount behind the carriage—thus we shall go quicker. You, with the Count's servants, mix with my horsemen, and keep close round the coach; and now bid them, on, with all speed." Thus saying, she entered the vehicle; and the rest having disposed themselves according to her orders, the whole cavalcade was soon in motion on the road to St. Germain.

CHAPTER II.

In which new characters are brought upon the stage, and some dark hints given respecting them.

THE sun had long gone down, and the large clear autumn moon had risen high in his stead, throwing a paler, but a gentler light upon the wood of Laye, and the rich wild forest-scenery bordering the road from St. Germain to Mantes. The light, unable to pierce the deeper recesses of the wood, fell principally upon those old and majestic trees, the aristocracy of the forest, which, raising their heads high above their brethren of more recent growth, seemed to look upon the beam in which they shone, as the right of elder birth, and due alone to their aspiring height. The deep shadows of their branches fell in long sombre shapes across the inequalities of the road, leaving but glimpses every now and then, to light the footsteps of whatever being might wander there at that hour of silence.

On one of those spots where the full beams fell, stood the cottage of Philip, the woodman: and the humble hut with its straw thatch, the open space of ground before it, with a felled oak which had lain there undisturbed till a coat of soft green moss had grown thick over its rugged bark, the little stream dammed up to afford a sufficient supply of water for the horses, and the large square block of stone to aid the traveller in mounting, all were displayed in the clear moonlight as plainly as if the full day had shone upon them.

Yet, however fair might be the night, there were very few who would have chosen the beams of the moon to light them across the wood of Mantes. In sooth, in those days sunshine was the best safeguard to travellers. For France swarmed with those who gathered in their harvest at night, and who (to use their own phrase) had turned their swords into reaping-hooks.

Two grand objects fully occupied the mind of that famous minister, the Cardinal de Richelieu (who then governed the kingdom with almost despotic sway): the prosecution of those mighty schemes of foreign policy, which at the time shook many a throne, and in after years changed more than one dynasty; and the establishment of his own power at home, which, threatened by factions, and attacked by continual conspiracies, was supported alone by the terror of his name, and the favour of a weak and irresolute monarch. These more immediate calls upon his attention gave him but little time to regulate the long-neglected police of the country; and indeed it was whispered, that Richelieu not only neglected, but knowingly tolerated many of the excesses of the times; the perpetrators of which were often called upon to do some of those good services which statesmen occasionally require of their less circumspect servants. It was said too, that scarce a forest in France but sheltered a band of these free rovers, who held themselves in readiness to merit pardon for their other offences, by offending in the State's behalf whenever it should be demanded, and in the mean time took very sufficient care to do those things on their own account for which they might be pardoned hereafter.

We may suppose then, it rarely happened that travellers chose that hour for passing through the wood of Mantes, and that those who did so were seldom of the best description. But on the night I speak of, two horsemen wound slowly along the road towards the cottage of the Woodman, with a sort of sauntering, idle pace, as if thoughtless of danger, and entirely occupied in their own conversation.

They were totally unattended also, although their dress bespoke a high station in society, and by its richness might have tempted a robber to inquire farther into their circumstances. Both were well armed with pistol, sword, and dagger, and appeared as stout cavaliers as ever mounted horse, having, withal, that air of easy confidence, which is generally the result of long familiarity with urgent and perilous circumstances.

Having come near the *abrevoir*, one of the two gave his horse to drink without dismounting, while the other alighted, and taking out the bit, let his beast satisfy its thirst at liberty. As he did so, his eye naturally glanced over the ground at the foot of the tree. Something caught his attention; and stooping down to examine more closely, "Here is blood, Chavigni!" he exclaimed; "surely, they have never been stupid enough to do it here, within sight of this cottage."

"I hope they have not done it at all, Lafemas," replied the other. "I only told them to tie him, and search him thoroughly; but not to give him a scratch, if they could avoid it."

"Methinks, thou hast grown mighty ceremonious of late, and somewhat merciful, Master Chavigni," replied his companion; "I remember the time, when you were not so scrupulous. Would it not have been the wiser way, to have quieted this young plotter at once, when your men had him in their hands?"

"Thou wert born in the Fauxbourg St. Antoine, I would swear, and served apprenticeship to a butcher," replied Chavigni. "Why, thou art as fond of blood, Lafemas, as if thou hadst sucked it in thy cradle! Tell me, when thou wert an infant Hercules, didst thou not stick sheep, instead of strangling serpents?"

"Not more than yourself, lying villain!" answered the other in a quick deep voice, making his hand sound upon the hilt of his sword. "Chavigni, you have taunted me all along the road; you have cast in my teeth things that you yourself caused me to do. Beware of yourself! Urge me not too far, lest you leave your bones in the forest!"

"Pshaw, man! pshaw!" cried Chavigni, laughing: "Here's a cool-headed judge! Here's the calm placid Lafemas! Here's the Cardinal's gentle hangman, who can condemn his dearest friends to the torture with the same meek look that he puts on to say grace over a Beccafico, suddenly metamorphosed into a bully and a bravo in the wood of Mantes.—But hark ye, Sir Judge!" he added, in a prouder tone, tossing back the plumes of his hat, which before hung partly over his face, and fixing his full dark eye upon his companion, who still stood scowling upon him with ill-repressed passion—"Hark ye, Sir Judge! Use no such language towards me, if you seek not to try that same sharp axe you have so often ordered for others. Suffice it for you to know, in the present instance, that it was not the Cardinal's wish that the young man should be injured. We do not desire blood, but when the necessity of the State requires it to be shed. Besides, man," and he gradually fell into his former jeering tone—"besides, in future, under your gentle guidance, and a touch or two of the *peine forte et dure*, this young nightingale may be taught to sing, and, in short, be forced to tell us all he knows. Now do you understand?"

"I do, I do," replied Lafemas. "I thought that there was some deep, damnable wile that made you spare him; and as to the rest, I did not mean to offend you. But when a man condemns his own soul to serve you, you should not taunt him, for it is hard to bear."

"Peace! peace!" cried Chavigni, in a sharp tone; "let me hear no more in this strain. Who raised you to what you are? We use you as you deserve; we pay you for your services; we despise you for your meanness; and as to your

soul," he added with a sneer, "if you have any fears on that head—why you shall have absolution. Are you not our dog, who worries the game for us? We house and feed you, and you must take the lashes when it suits us to give them. Remember, Sir, that your life is in my hand! One word respecting the affair of Chalais mentioned to the Cardinal, brings your head to the block! And now let us see what is this blood you speak of?"

So saying, he sprang from his horse, while Lafemas, as he had been depicted by his companion, hung his head like a cowed hound, and in sullen silence pointed out the blood, which had formed a little pool at the foot of the tree, and stained the ground in several places round about.

Chavigni gazed at it with evident symptoms of displeasure and uneasiness; for although, when he imagined that the necessities of the State required the severest infliction on any offender, no one was more ruthless than himself as to the punishment, no one more unhesitating as to the means—although, at those times, no bond of amity, no tie of kindred, would have stayed his hand, or restrained him in what he erroneously considered his political duty; yet Chavigni was far from naturally cruel; and, as his after life showed, even too susceptible of the strongest and deepest affections of human nature.

In his early youth, the Cardinal de Richelieu had remarked in him a strong and penetrating mind; but above all, an extraordinary power of governing and even subduing the ardent passions by which he was at times excited. As son to the Count de Bouthilliers, one of the oldest members of the Privy Council, the road to political preferment was open to Chavigni; and Richelieu, ever fearful of aught that might diminish his power, and careful to strengthen it by every means, resolved to bind the young Count to his cause by the sure ties of early habit and mutual interest. With this view he took him entirely under his own protection, educated him in his own line of policy, instilled into him, as principles, the deep stern maxims of his own mighty and unshrinking mind, and having thus moulded him to his wish, called him early to the council-table, and intrusted him with a greater share of his power and confidence than he would have yielded to any other man.

Chavigni repaid the Cardinal with heartfelt gratitude, with firm adherence, and uncompromising service. In private life, he was honourable, generous, and kind; but it was his axiom, that all must yield to State necessity, or (as he said) in other words, to the good of his country; and upon the strength of this maxim, which, in fact, was the cause of every stain that rests upon his memory, he fancied himself a patriot!

Between Chavigni and the Judge Lafemas, who was the Jeffreys of his country, and had received the name of *Le Bourreau du Cardinal*, existed a sort of original antipathy; so that the Statesman, though often obliged to make use of the less scrupulous talents of the Judge, and even occasionally to associate with him, could never refrain for any length of time from breaking forth into those bitter taunts which often irritated Lafemas almost to frenzy. The hatred of the Judge, on his part, was not less strong, even at the times it did not show itself; and he still brooded over the hope of exercising his gentle functions upon him who was at present, in a degree, his master.

But to return, Chavigni gazed intently on the spot to which Lafemas pointed. "I believe it is blood, indeed," said he, after a moment's hesitation, as if the uncertainty of the light had made him doubt it at first: "they shall rue the day that they shed it contrary to my command. It is blood surely, Lafemas: is it not?"

"Without a doubt," said Lafemas; "and it has been shed since mid-day."

"You are critical in these things, I know," replied the other with a cool sneer; "but we must hear more of this, Sir Judge, and ascertain what news is stirring, before we go farther. Things might chance, which would render it necessary that one or both of us should return to the Cardinal. We will knock at this cottage and inquire.—Our story must run, that we have lost our way in the wood, and need both rest and direction."

So saying, he struck several sharp blows with the hilt of his sword against the door, whose rickety and unsonorous nature returned a grumbling indistinct sound, as if it too had shared the sleep of the peaceable inhabitants of the cottage, and loved not to be disturbed by such nocturnal visitations. "So ho!" cried Chavigni; "will no one hear us poor travellers, who have lost our way in this forest!"

In a moment after, the head of Philip, the woodman, appeared at the little casement by the side of the door, examining the strangers, on whose figures fell the full beams of the moon, with quite sufficient light to display the courtly form and garnishing of their apparel, and to show that they were no dangerous guests. "What would ye, Messieurs?" demanded he, through the open window: "it is late for travellers."

"We have lost our way in your wood," replied Chavigni, "and would fain have a little rest, and some direction for our farther progress. We will pay thee well, good man, for thy hospitality."

"There is no need of payment, Sir," said the Woodman, opening the door. "Come in, I pray, Messieurs.—Charles!" he added, calling to his son, "get up and tend these gentlemen's horses. Get up, I say, Sir Sluggard!"

The boy crept sleepily out of the room beyond, and went to give some of the forest-hay to the beasts which had borne the strangers thither, and which gave but little signs of needing either rest or refreshment. In the mean while, his father drew two large yew-tree seats to the fire-side, soon blew the white ashes on the hearth into a flame, and having invited his guests to sit, and lighted the old brazen lamp that hung above the chimney, he bowed low, asking how he could serve them farther; but as he did so, his eye ran over their persons with a half-satisfied and inquiring glance, which made Lafemas turn away his head. But Chavigni answered promptly to his offer of service: "Why now, good friend, if thou couldst give us a jug of wine, 'twould be well and kindly done, for we have ridden far."

"This is no inn, Sir," replied Philip, "and you will find my wine but thin: nevertheless, such as it is, most welcome shall you taste."

From whatever motive it proceeded, Philip's hospitality was but lukewarm towards the strangers; and the manner in which he rinsed out the tankard, drew the wine from a *barrigue* standing in one corner of the room, half covered with a wolf-skin, and placed it on a table by the side of Chavigni, bespoke more churlish rudeness than goodwill. But the Statesman heeded little either the quality of his reception or of his wine, provided he could obtain the information he desired; so, carrying the tankard to his lips, he drank, or seemed to drink, as deep a draught as if its contents had been the produce of the best vineyard in Medoc. "It is excellent," said he, handing it to Lafemas, "or my thirst does wonders. Now, good friend, if we had some venison-steaks to broil on your clear ashes, our supper were complete."

"Such I have not to offer, Sir," replied Philip, "or to that you should be welcome too."

"Why, I should have thought," said Chavigni, "the hunters who ran down a stag at your door to-day, should have left you a part, as the woodman's fee."

"Do you know those hunters, Sir?" demanded Philip, with some degree of emphasis.

"Not I, in truth," replied Chavigni; though the colour rose in his cheek, notwithstanding his long training to courtly wile and political intrigue, and he thanked his stars that the lamp gave but a faint and glimmering light: "Not I, in truth; but whoever ran him down got a good beast, for he bled like a stag of ten. I suppose they made the *curée* at your door?"

"Those hunters, Sir," replied Philip, "give no woodman's fees; and as to the stag, he is as fine a one as ever brushed the forest dew, but he has escaped them this time."

"How! did he get off with his throat cut?" demanded Chavigni, "for there is blood enough at the foot of yon old tree, to have drained the stoutest stag that ever was brought to bay."

"Oh! but that is not stag's blood!" interrupted Charles, the woodman's son, who had by this time not only tended the strangers' horses, but examined every point of the quaint furniture with which it was the fashion of the day to adorn them. "That is not stag's blood; that is the blood of the young Cavalier, who was hurt by the robbers, and taken away by—"

At this moment the boy's eye caught the impatient expression of his father's countenance.

"The truth is, Messieurs," said Philip, taking up the discourse, "there was a gentleman wounded in the forest this morning. I never saw him before, and he was taken away in a carriage by some ladies, whose faces were equally strange to me."

"You have been somewhat mysterious upon this business, Sir Woodman," said Chavigni, his brow darkening as he spoke; "why were you so tardy in giving us this forest news, which imports all strangers travelling through the wood to know?"

"I hold it as a rule," replied Philip boldly, "to mind my own business, and never to mention any thing I see; which in this affair I shall do more especially, as one of the robbers had furniture of Isabel and silver;" and as he spoke he glanced his eye to the scarf of Chavigni, which was of that peculiar mixture of colours then called Isabel, bordered by a rich silver fringe.

"Fool!" muttered Chavigni between his teeth; "Fool! what need had he to show himself?"

Lafemas, who had hitherto been silent, now came to the relief of his companion: taking up the conversation in a mild and easy tone, "Have you many of these robbing fraternity in your wood?" said he; "if so, I suppose we peril ourselves in crossing it alone." And, without waiting for any answer, he proceeded, "Pray, who was the cavalier they attacked?"

"He was a stranger from St. Germain," answered the Woodman; "and as to the robbers, I doubt that they will show themselves again, for fear of being taken."

"They did not rob him then?" said the Judge. Now nothing that Philip had said bore out this inference; but Lafemas possessed in a high degree the talent of cross-examination, and was deeply versed in all the thousand arts of entangling a witness, or leading a prisoner to condemn himself. But there was a stern reserve about the Woodman which baffled the Judge's cunning: "I only saw the last part of the fray," replied Philip, "and therefore know not what went before."

"Where was he hurt?" asked Lafemas; "for he lost much blood."

"On the head and in the side," answered the Woodman.

"Poor youth!" cried the Judge in a pitiful tone. "And when you opened his coat, was the wound a deep one?"

"I cannot judge," replied Philip, "being no surgeon."

It was in vain that Lafemas tried all his wiles on the Woodman, and that Chavigni, who soon joined in the conversation, questioned him more boldly. Philip was in no communicative mood, and yielded them but little information respecting the events of the morning.

At length, weary of this fruitless interrogation, Chavigni started up—"Well, friend!" said he, "had there been danger in crossing the forest, we might have stayed with thee till daybreak; but, as thou sayest there is none, we will hence upon our way." So saying he strode towards the door, the flame-shaped mullets of his gilded spurs jingling over the brick-floor of Philip's dwelling, and calling the Woodman's attention to the knightly rank of his departing guest. In a few minutes all was prepared for their departure, and having mounted their horses, the Statesman drew forth a small silk purse tied with a loop of gold, and holding it forth to Philip, bade him accept it for his services. The Woodman bowed, repeating that he required no payment.

"I am not accustomed to have my bounty refused," said Chavigni proudly; and dropping the purse to the ground, he spurred forward his horse.

"Now, Lafemas," said he, when they had proceeded so far as to be beyond the reach of Philip's ears, "what think you of this?"

"Why, truly," replied the Judge, "I deem that we are mighty near as wise as we were before."

"Not so," said Chavigni. "It is clear enough these fellows have failed, and De Blenau has preserved the packet: I understand it all. His Eminence of Richelieu, against my advice, has permitted Madame de Beaumont and her daughter Pauline to return to the Queen, after an absence of ten years. The fact is, that when the Cardinal banished them the Court, and ordered the Marchioness to retire to Languedoc, his views were not so extended as they are now, and he had laid out in his own mind a match between one of his nieces and this rich young Count de Blenau; which, out of the royal family, was one of the best alliances in France. The boy, however, had been promised, and even, I believe, affianced by his father, to this Pauline de Beaumont; and accordingly his Eminence sent away the girl and her mother, with the same *sangfroid* that a man drives a strange dog out of his court-yard; at the same time he kept the youth at Court, forbidding all communication with Languedoc: but now that the Cardinal can match his niece to the Duke D'Enghien, De Blenau may look for a bride where he lists, and the Marquise and her daughter have been suffered to return. To my knowledge, they passed through Chartres yesterday morning on their way to St. Germain."

"But what have these to do with the present affair?" demanded Lafemas.

"Why thus has it happened," continued Chavigni. "The youth has been attacked. He has resisted, and been wounded. Just then, up come these women, travelling through the forest with a troop of servants, who join with the Count, and drive our poor friends to cover. This is what I have drawn from the discourse of yon surly Woodman."

"You mean, from your own knowledge of the business," replied Lafemas, "for he would confess nothing."

"Confess, man!" exclaimed Chavigni.—"Why he did not know that he was before a confessor, and still less before a Judge, though thou wouldest fain have put him to the question. I saw your lip quivering with anxiety to order him the torture; rack, and thumb-screw, and *oubliette* were in your eye, every sullen answer he gave."

"Were it not as well to get him out of the way?" demanded Lafemas. "He remarked your livery, Chavigni, and may blab."

"Short-sighted mole!" replied his companion. "The very sulkiness of humour which has called down on him thy rage, will shield him from my fears—which might be quite as dangerous. He that is so close in one thing, depend upon it, will be close in another. Besides, unless he tells it to the trees, or the jays, or the wild boars, whom should he tell it to? I would bet a thousand crowns against the Prince de Conti's brains, or the Archbishop Coadjutor's religion, or Madame de Chevreuse's—reputation, or against any thing else that is worth nothing, that this good Woodman sees no human shape for the next ten years, and then all that passes between them will be, "Good day, Woodman!"—'Good day, Sir!'—and he mimicked the deep voice of him of whom they spoke. But, notwithstanding this appearance of gaiety, Chavigni was not easy; and even while he spoke, he rode on with no small precipitation, till, turning into a narrow forest path, the light of the moon, which had illuminated the greater part of the high road, was cut off entirely by the trees, and the deep gloom obliged them to be more cautious in proceeding. At length, however, they came to a little savanna, surrounded by high oaks, where Chavigni entirely reined in his horse, and blew a single note on his horn, which was soon answered by a similar sound at some distance.

CHAPTER III.

Which shows what a French forest was at night, and who inhabited it.

THOSE whom either the love of sylvan sports, or that calm meditative charm inherent to wood scenery, has tempted to explore the deeper recesses of the forest, must be well aware that many particular glades and coverts will often lie secret and undiscovered, amidst the mazes of the leafy labyrinth, even to the eyes of those long accustomed to investigate its most intricate windings. In those countries where forest hunting is a frequent sport, I have more than once found myself led on into scenes completely new, when I had fancied that long experience had made me fully acquainted with every rood of the woodland round about, and have often met with no small trouble in retracing the spot, although I took all pains to observe the way thither, and fix its distinctive marks in my memory.

In the heart of the forest of St. Germain, at a considerable distance from any of the roads, or even by-paths of the wood, lay a deep dingle or dell, which probably had been a gravel-pit many centuries before, and might have furnished forth sand to strew the halls of Charlemagne, for aught I know to the contrary. However, so many ages had elapsed since it had been employed for such purpose, that many a stout oak had sprung, and flourished, and withered round about it, and had left the ruins of their once princely forms crumbling on its brink. At the time I speak of, a considerable part of the dell itself was filled up with tangled brush-wood, which a long hot season had stripped and withered; and over the edge hung a quantity of dry shrubs and stunted trees, forming a thick screen over the wild recess below.

One side, and one side only, was free of access, and this was by means of a small sandy path winding down into the bottom of the dell, between two deep banks, which assumed almost the appearance of cliffs as the road descended. This little footway conducted, it is true, into the most profound part of the hollow, but then immediately lost itself in the thick underwood, through which none but a very practised eye would have discovered the means of entering a deep lair of ground, sheltered by the steep bank and its superincumbent trees on one side, and concealed by a screen of wood on every other.

On the night I have mentioned, this well concealed retreat was tenanted by a group of men, whose wild attire harmonized perfectly with the rudeness of the scene around. The apparel of almost every class was discernible among them, but each vesture plainly showed, that it had long passed that epoch generally termed "better days;" and indeed, the more costly had been their original nature, the greater was their present state of degradation. So that what had once been the suit of some gay cavalier of the court, and which doubtless had shone as such in the circles of the bright and the fair, having since passed through the hands of the page, who had perhaps used it to personate his master, and the *fripier*, who had tried hard to restore it to a degree of lustre, and the poor petitioner who had bought it and borne it second-hand to court, and lost both his labour and his money—having passed through these, and perhaps a thousand other hands, it had gradually acquired that sort of undefinable tint, which ought properly to be called old-age colour, and at present served, and only served, to keep its owner from the winds of heaven. At the same time the buff jerkin which covered the broad shoulders of another hard by, though it had never boasted much finery, had escaped with only a few rusty stains from its former intimacy with a steel cuirass, and a slight greasy gloss upon the left side, which indicated its owner's habit of laying his hand upon his sword.

Here, too, every sort of offensive weapon was to be met with. The long Toledo blade with its basket hilt and black scabbard tipped with steel; the double-handed heavy sword, which during the wars of the League had often steaded well the troops of Henry the Fourth, when attacked by the superior cavalry of the Dukes of Guise and Mayenne, and which had been but little used since; the poniard, the stiletto, the heavy petronel, or horse pistol, and the smaller girdle pistol, which had been but lately introduced, were all to be seen, either as accompaniments to the dress of some of the party, or scattered about on the ground, where they had been placed for greater convenience.

The accoutrements of these denizens of the forest were kept in countenance by every other accessory circumstance of appearance; and a torch stuck in the sand in the midst, glared upon features which Salvator might have loved to trace. It was not alone the negligence of personal appearance, shown in their long dishevelled hair and untrimmed beards, which rendered them savagely picturesque, but many a furious passion had there written deep traces of its unbounded sway, and marked them with that wild undefinable expression, which habitual vice and lawless licence are sure to leave behind in their course.

At the moment I speak of, wine had been circulating very freely amongst the robbers; for such indeed they were. Some were sleeping, either with their hands clasped over their knees and their heads drooping down to meet them, or stretched more at their ease under the trees, snoring loud in answer to the wind, that whistled through the branches. Some sat gazing with a wise sententious look on the empty gourds, many of which, fashioned into bottles, lay scattered about upon the ground: and two or three, who had either drunk less of the potent liquor, or whose heads were better calculated to resist its effects than the rest, sat clustered together singing and chatting by turns, arrived exactly at that point of ebriety, where a man's real character shows itself, notwithstanding all his efforts to conceal it.

The buff jerkin we have spoken of, covered the shoulders of one among this little knot of choice spirits, who still woke to revel after sleep had laid his leaden mace upon their companions; and it may be remarked, that a pair of broader shoulders are rarely to be seen than those so covered.

Wouvermans is said to have been very much puzzled by a figure in one of his pictures, which, notwithstanding all his efforts, he could never *keep down* (as painters express it). Whatever he did, that one figure was always salient, and more prominent than the artist intended; nor was it till he had half blotted it out, that he discovered its original defect was being too large. Something like Wouvermans' figure, the freebooter I speak of, stood conspicuous amongst the others, from the Herculean proportion of his limbs; but he had, in addition, other qualities to distinguish him from the rest. His brow was broad, and of that peculiar form to which physiognomists have attached the idea of a strong determined spirit; at the same time, the clear sparkle of his blue Norman eye bespoke an impetuous, but not a depraved mind.

A deep scar was apparent on his left cheek; and the wound which had been its progenitor, was most probably the cause of a sneering turn in the corner of his mouth, which, with a bold expression of daring confidence, completed the mute history that his face afforded, of a life spent in arms, or well, or ill, as circumstances prompted,—an unshrinking heart, which dared every personal evil, and a bright but unprincipled mind, which followed no

dictates but the passions of the moment.

He was now in his gayest mood, and holding a horn in his hand, trolled forth an old French ditty, seeming confident of pleasing, or perhaps careless whether he pleased or not.

“Thou’rt an ass, Robin, thou’rt an ass,
To think that great men be
More gay than I that lie on the grass
Under the greenwood tree.
I tell thee no, I tell thee no,
The Great are slaves to their gilded show.

Now tell me, Robin, tell me,
Are the ceilings of gay saloons
So richly wrought as yon sky we see,
Or their glitter so bright as the moon’s?
I tell thee no, I tell thee no,
The Great are slaves to their gilded show.

Say not nay, Robin, say not nay!
There is never a heart so free,
In the vest of gold, and the palace gay,
As in buff ‘neath the forest tree.
I tell thee yea, I tell thee yea,
The Great were made for the poor man’s prey.”

So sang the owner of the buff jerkin, and his song met with more or less applause from his companions, according to the particular humour of each. One only amongst the freebooters seemed scarcely to participate in the merriment. He had drunk as deeply as the rest, but he appeared neither gay, nor stupid, nor sleepy; and while the tall Norman sang, he cast, from time to time, a calm sneering glance upon the singer, which showed no especial love, either for the music, or musician.

“You sing about prey,” said he, as the other concluded the last stanza of his ditty—“You sing about prey, and yet you are no great falcon, after all; if we may judge from to-day.”

“And why not, Monsieur Pierrepont Le Blanc?” demanded the Norman, without displaying aught of ill-humour in his countenance: “though they ought to have called you Monsieur Le Noir—Mr. Black, not Mr. White.—Nay, do not frown, good comrade; I speak but of your beard, not of your heart. What, art thou still grumbling, because we did not cut the young Count’s throat outright?”

“Nay, not for that,” answered the other, “but because we have lost the best man amongst us, for want of his being well seconded.”

“You lie, Parbleu!” cried the Norman, drawing his sword, and fixing his thumb upon a stain, about three inches from the point. “Did not I lend the youth so much of my iron toothpick? and would have sent it through him, if his horse had not carried him away. But I know you, Master Buccaneer—You would have had me stab him behind, while Mortagne slashed his head before. That would have been a fit task for a Norman gentleman, and a soldier! I whose life he saved too!”

“Did you not swear, when you joined our troop,” demanded the other, “to forget every thing that went before?”

The Norman hesitated; he well remembered his oath, against which the better feelings of his heart were perhaps sometimes rebellious. He felt, too, confused at the direct appeal the other had made to it; and to pass it by, he caught at the word forget, answering with a stave of the song—

“Forget! forget! let slaves forget
The pangs and chains they bear;
The brave remember every debt
To honour, and the fair.
For these are bonds that bind us more,
Yet leave us freer than before.

“Yes, let those that can do so, forget: but I very well remember, at the battle at Perpignan, I had charged with the advance guard, when the fire of the enemy’s musketeers, and a masked battery which began to enfilade our line, soon threw our left flank into disorder, and a charge of cavalry drove back De Coucy’s troop. Mielleraye’s standard was in the hands of the enemy, when I and five others rallied to rescue it. A gloomy old Spaniard fired his petronel and disabled my left arm, but still I held the standard-pole with my right, keeping the standard before me; but my Don drew his long Toledo, and had got the point to my breast, just going to run it through me and standard and all, as I’ve often spitted a duck’s liver and a piece of bacon on a skewer; when, turning round my head, to see if no help was near, I perceived this young Count de Blenau’s banderol, coming like lightning over the field, and driving all before it; and blue and gold were then the best colours that ever I saw, for they gave me new heart, and wrenching the standard-pole round—But hark, there is the horn!”

As he spoke, the clear full note of a hunting-horn came swelling from the south-west; and in a moment after, another, much nearer to them, seemed to answer the first. Each, after giving breath to one solitary note, relapsed into silence; and such of the robbers as were awake, having listened till the signal met with a reply, bestirred themselves to rouse their sleeping companions, and to put some face of order upon the disarray which their revels had left behind.

“Now, Sir Norman,” cried he that they distinguished by the name of Le Blanc; “we shall see how Monseigneur rates your slackness in his cause. Will you tell him your long story of the siege of Perpignan?”

“Pardie!” cried the other, “I care no more for him, than I do for you. Every man that stands before me on forest ground is but a man, and I will treat him as such.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” exclaimed his companion; “it were good to see thee bully a privy counsellor; why, thou darest as soon take a lion by the beard.”

"I dare pass my sword through his heart, were there need," answered the Norman; "but here they come,—stand you aside and let me deal with him."

Approaching steps, and a rustling sound in the thick screen of wood already mentioned, as the long boughs were forced back by the passage of some person along the narrow pathway, announced the arrival of those for whom the robbers had been waiting.

"Why, it is as dark as the pit of Acheron!" cried a deep voice amongst the trees. "Are we never to reach the light I saw from above? Oh, here it is.—Chauvelin, hold back that bough, it has caught my cloak." As the speaker uttered the last words, an armed servant, in Isabel and silver, appeared at the entrance of the path, holding back the stray branches, while Chavigni himself advanced into the circle of robbers, who stood grouped around in strange picturesque attitudes, some advancing boldly, as if to confront the daring stranger that thus intruded on their haunts, some gazing with a kind of curiosity upon the being so different from themselves, who had thus placed himself in sudden contact with them, some lowering upon him with bended heads, like wolves when they encounter a nobler beast of prey.

The Statesman himself advanced in silence; and, with something of a frown upon his brow, glanced his eye firmly over every face around, nor was there an eye amongst them that did not sink before the stern commanding fire of his, as it rested for a moment upon the countenance of each, seeming calmly to construe the expression of the features, and read into the soul beneath, as we often see a student turn over the pages of some foreign book, and collect their meaning at a glance.

"Well, Sirs," said he at length, "my knave tells me, that ye have failed in executing my commands."

The Norman we have somewhat minutely described heretofore, now began to excuse himself and his fellows; and was proceeding to set forth that they had done all which came within their power and province to do, and was also engaged in stating, that no man could do more, when Chavigni interrupted him. "Silence!" cried he, with but little apparent respect for these lords of the forest, "I blame ye not for not doing more than ye could do; but how dare ye, mongrel bloodhounds, to disobey my strict commands? and when I bade ye abstain from injuring the youth, how is it ye have mangled him like a stag torn by the wolves?"

The Norman turned with a look of subdued triumph towards him who had previously censured his forbearance. "Speak, speak, Le Blanc!" cried he; "answer Monseigneur.—Well," continued he, as the other drew back, "the truth is this, Sir Count: we were divided in opinion with respect to the best method of fulfilling your commands, so we called a council of war—"

"A council of war!" repeated Chavigni, his lip curling into an ineffable sneer. "Well, proceed, proceed! You are a Norman, I presume—and braggart, I perceive.—Proceed, Sir, proceed!"

Be it remarked, that by this time the influence of Chavigni's first appearance had greatly worn away from the mind of the Norman. The commanding dignity of the Statesman, though it still, in a degree, overawed, had lost the effect of novelty; and the bold heart of the freebooter began to reproach him for truckling to a being who was inferior to himself, according to his estimate of human dignities—an estimate formed not alone on personal courage, but also on personal strength.

However, as we have said, he was, in some measure, overawed; and though he would have done much to prove his daring in the sight of his companions, his mind was not yet sufficiently wrought up to shake off all respect, and he answered boldly, but calmly, "Well, Sir Count, give me your patience, and you shall hear. But my story must be told my own way, or not at all. We called a council of war, then, where every man gave his opinion, and my voice was for shooting Monsieur de Blenau's horse as he rode by, and then taking advantage of the confusion among his lackeys, to seize upon his person, and carrying him into St. Herman's brake, which lies between Le Croix de bois and the river—You know where I mean, Monseigneur?"

"No, truly," answered the Statesman; "but, as I guess, some deep part of the forest, where you could have searched him at your ease—The plan was a good one. Why went it not forward?"

"You shall hear in good time," answered the freebooter, growing somewhat more familiar in his tone. "As you say, St. Herman's brake is deep enough in the forest—and if we had once housed him there, we might have searched him from top to toe for the packet—ay, and looked in his mouth, if we found it no where else. But the first objection was, that an arquebuse, though a very pretty weapon, and pleasant serviceable companion in broad brawl and battle, talks too loud for secret service, and the noise thereof might put the Count's people on their guard before we secured his person. However, they say '*a Norman cow can always get over a stile*,' so I offered to do the business with yon arbalette;" and he pointed to a steel cross-bow lying near, of that peculiar shape which seems to unite the properties of the cross-bow and gun, propelling the ball or bolt by means of the stiff arched spring and cord, by which little noise is made, while the aim is rendered more certain by a long tube similar to the barrel of a musket, through which the shot passes.

"When was I ever known to miss my aim?" continued the Norman. "Why, I always shoot my stags in the eye, for fear of hurting the skin. However, Mortagne—your old friend, Monsieur de Chavigni—who was a sort of band captain amongst us, loved blood, as you know, like an unreclaimed falcon; besides, he had some old grudge against the Count, who turned him out of the Queen's anteroom, when he was Ancient in the Cardinal's guard. He it was who over-ruled my proposal. He would have shot him willingly enough, but your gentleman would not hear of that; so we attacked the Count's train, at the turn of the road—boldly, and in the face. Mortagne was lucky enough to get a fair cut at his head, which slashed through his beaver, and laid his skull bare, but went no farther, only serving to make the youth as savage as a hurt boar; for I had only time to see his hand laid upon his sword, when its cross was knocking against Mortagne's ribs before, and the point shining out between his blade-bones behind. It was done in the twinkling of an eye."

"He is a gallant youth," said Chavigni; "he always was from a boy; but where is your wounded companion?"

"Wounded!" cried the Norman. "Odds life! he's dead. It was enough to have killed the Devil. There he lies, poor fellow, wrapped in his cloak. Will you please to look upon him, Sir Counsellor?" and snatching up one of the torches, he approached the spot where the dead man lay, under a bank covered with withered brush-wood and stunted trees.

Chavigni followed with a slow step and gloomy brow, the robbers drawing back at his approach; for though they held high birth in but little respect, the redoubted name and fearless bearing of the Statesman had power over even their ungoverned spirits. He, however, who had been called Pierrepont Le Blanc by the tall Norman, twitched his

companion by the sleeve as he lighted Chavigni on. "A cowed hound, Norman!" whispered he—"thou hast felt the lash—a cowed hound!"

The Norman glanced on him a look of fire, but passing on in silence, he disengaged the mantle from the corpse, and displayed the face of his dead companion, whose calm closed eyes and unruffled features might have been supposed to picture quiet sleep, had not the ashy paleness of his cheek, and the drop of the under-jaw, told that the soul no longer tenanted its earthly dwelling. The bosom of the unfortunate man remained open, in the state in which his comrades had left it, after an ineffectual attempt to give him aid; and in the left side appeared a small wound, where the weapon of his opponent had found entrance, so trifling in appearance, that it seemed a marvel how so little a thing could overthrow the prodigious strength which those limbs announced, and rob them of that hardy spirit which animated them some few hours before.

Chavigni gazed upon him, with his arms crossed upon his breast, and for a moment his mind wandered far into those paths, to which such a sight naturally directs the course of our ideas, till, his thoughts losing themselves in the uncertainty of the void before them, by a sudden effort he recalled them to the business in which he was immediately engaged.

"Well, he has bitterly expiated the disobedience of my commands; but tell me," he said, turning to the Norman, who still continued to hold the torch over the dead man, "how is it ye have dared to force my servant to show himself, and my liveries, in this attack, contrary to my special order?"

"That is easily told," answered the Norman, assuming a tone equally bold and peremptory with that of the Statesman. "Thus it stands, Sir Count: you men of quality often employ us nobility of the forest to do what you either cannot, or dare not do for yourselves; then, if all goes well, you pay us scantily for our pains; if it goes ill, you hang us for your own doings. But we will have none of that. If we are to be falcons for your game, we will risk the stroke of the heron's bill, but we will not have our necks wrung after we have struck the prey. When your lackey was present, it was your deed. Mark ye that, Sir Counsellor?"

"Villain, thou art insolent!" cried Chavigni, forgetting, in the height of passion, the fearful odds against him, in case of quarrel at such a moment. "How dare you, slave, to—"

"Villain! and slave!" cried the Norman, interrupting him, and laying his hand on his sword. "Know, proud Sir, that I dare any thing. You are now in the green forest, not at council-board, to prate of daring."

Chavigni's dignity, like his prudence, became lost in his anger. "Boasting Norman coward!" cried he, "who had not even courage, when he saw his leader slain before his face—"

The Norman threw the torch from his hand, and drew his weapon; but Chavigni's sword sprang in a moment from the scabbard. He was, perhaps, the best swordsman of his day; and before his servant (who advanced, calling loudly to Lafemas to come forth from the wood where he had remained from the first) could approach, or the robbers could show any signs of taking part in the fray, the blades of the statesman and the freebooter had crossed, and, maugre the Norman's vast strength, his weapon was instantly wrenched from his hand, and, flying over the heads of his companions, struck against the bank above.

Chavigni drew back, as if to pass his sword through the body of his opponent; but the one moment he had been thus engaged, gave time for reflection on the imprudence of his conduct, and calmly returning his sword to its sheath, "Thou art no coward, after all," said he, addressing the Norman in a softened tone of voice; "but trust me, friend, that boasting graces but little a brave man. As for the rest, it is no disgrace to have measured swords with Chavigni."

The Norman was one of those men so totally unaccustomed to command their passions, that, like slaves who have thrown off their chains, each struggles for the mastery, obtains it for a moment, and is again deprived of power by some one more violent still.

The dignity of the Statesman's manner, the apparent generosity of his conduct, and the degree of gentleness with which he spoke, acted upon the feelings of the Norman, like the waves of the sea when they meet the waters of the Dordogne, driving them back even to their very source with irresistible violence. An unwonted tear trembled in his eye. "Monseigneur, I have done foul wrong," said he, "in thus urging you, when you trusted yourself amongst us. But you have punished me more by your forbearance, than if you had passed your sword through my body."

"Ha! such thoughts in a freebooter!" cried Chavigni. "Friend, this is not thy right trade. But what means all this smoke that gathers round us?—Surely those bushes are on fire;—see the sparks how they rise!"

His remark called the eyes of all upon that part of the dingle, into which the Norman had incautiously thrown his torch, on drawing his sword upon the Statesman. Continued sparks, mingled with a thick cloud of smoke, were rising quickly from it, showing plainly that the fire had caught some of the dry bushes thereabout; and in a moment after a bright flame burst forth, speedily communicating itself to the old withered oaks round the spot, and threatening to spread destruction into the heart of the forest.

In an instant all the robbers were engaged in the most strenuous endeavours to extinguish the fire; but the distance, to which the vast strength of the Norman had hurled the torch among the bushes, rendered all access extremely difficult. No water was to be procured, and the means they employed, that of cutting down the smaller trees and bushes with their swords and axes, instead of opposing any obstacle to the flames, seemed rather to accelerate their progress. From bush to bush, from tree to tree, the impetuous element spread on, till, finding themselves almost girt in by the fire, the heat and smoke of which were becoming too intense for endurance, the robbers abandoned their useless efforts to extinguish it, and hurried to gather up their scattered arms and garments, before the flames reached the spot of their late revels.

The Norman, however, together with Chavigni and his servant, still continued their exertions; and even Lafemas, who had come forth from his hiding-place, gave some awkward assistance; when suddenly the Norman stopped, put his hand to his ear, to aid his hearing amidst the cracking of the wood and the roaring of the flames, and exclaimed, "I hear horse upon the hill—follow me, Monseigneur. St. Patrice guide us! this is a bad business:—follow me!" So saying, three steps brought him to the flat below, where his companions were still engaged in gathering together all they had left on the ground.

"Messieurs!" he cried to the robbers, "leave all useless lumber; I hear horses coming down the hill. It must be a lieutenant of the forest, and the *gardes champêtres*, alarmed by the fire—Seek your horses, quick!—each his own way. We meet at St. Herman's brake—You, Monseigneur, follow me, I will be your guide; but dally not, Sir, if, as I

guess, you would rather be deemed in the Rue St. Honoré, than in the Forest of St. Germain."

So saying, he drew aside the boughs, disclosing a path somewhat to the right of that by which Chavigni had entered their retreat, and which apparently led to the high sand-cliff which flanked it on the north. The Statesman, with his servant and Lafemas, followed quickly upon his steps, only lighted by the occasional gleam of the flames, as they flashed and flickered through the foliage of the trees.

Having to struggle every moment with the low branches of the hazel and the tangled briars that shot across the path, it was some time ere they reached the bank, and there the footway they had hitherto followed seemed to end. "Here are steps," said the Norman, in a low voice; "hold by the boughs, Monseigneur, lest your footing fail. Here is the first step."

The ascent was not difficult, and in a few minutes they had lost sight of the dingle and the flames by which it was surrounded; only every now and then, where the branches opened, a broad red light fell upon their path, telling that the fire still raged with unabated fury. A moment or two after, they could perceive that the track entered upon a small savanna, on which the moon was still shining, her beams showing with a strange sickly light, mingled as they were with the fitful gleams of the flames and the red reflection of the sky. The whole of this small plain, however, was quite sufficiently illuminated to allow Chavigni and his companion to distinguish two horses fastened by their bridles to a tree hard by; and a momentary glance convinced the Statesman, that the spot where he and Lafemas had left their beasts, was again before him, although he had arrived there by another and much shorter path than that by which he had been conducted to the rendezvous.

"We have left all danger behind us, Monseigneur," said the robber, after having carefully examined the savanna, to ascertain that no spy lurked amongst the trees around. "The flies are all swarming round the flames. There stand your horses—mount, and good speed attend you! Your servant must go with me, for our beasts are not so nigh."

Chavigni whispered a word in the robber's ear, who in return bowed low, with an air of profound respect. "I will attend your Lordship—" replied he, "—and without fear."

"You may do so in safety," said the Statesman, and mounting his horse, after waiting a moment for the Judge, he took his way once more towards the high road to St. Germain.

CHAPTER IV.

In which the learned reader will discover that it is easy to raise suspicions without any cause, and that royalty is not patent against superstition.

WE must now return to the principal personage of our history, and accompany him on his way towards St. Germain, whither he was wending when last we left him.

There are some authors fond of holding their readers in suspense, of bringing them into unexpected situations, and surprising them into applause. All such things are extremely appropriate in a novel or romance; but as this is a true and authentic history, and as eke I detest what theatrical folks call "claptrap," I shall proceed to record the facts in the order in which they took place, as nearly as it is possible to do so, and will, like our old friend Othello, "a round unvarnished tale deliver."

The distance to St. Germain was considerable, and naturally appeared still longer than it really was, to persons unacquainted with one step of the road before them, and apprehensive of a thousand occurrences both likely and unlikely. Nothing, however, happened to interrupt them on the way; and their journey passed over, not only in peace, but pretty much in silence also. Both the ladies who occupied the inside of the carriage, seemed to be very sufficiently taken up with their own thoughts, and no way disposed to loquacity, so that the only break to the melancholy stillness which hung over them, was now and then a half-formed sentence, proceeding from what was rapidly passing in the mind of each, or the complaining creak of the heavy wheels, as they ground their unwilling way through the less practicable parts of the forest road.

At times, too, a groan from the lips of their wounded companion interrupted the silence, as the roughness of the way jolted the ponderous vehicle in which he was carried, and re-awakened him to a sense of pain.

Long ere they had reached St. Germain, night had fallen over their road, and nothing could be distinguished by those within the carriage, but the figures of the two horsemen who kept close to the windows. The interior was still darker, and it was only a kind of inarticulate sob from the other side, which made the Marchioness inquire, "Pauline! you are not weeping?"

The young lady did not positively say whether she was so or not, but replied in a voice which showed her mother's conjecture to be well founded.

"It was not thus, Mamma," she said, "that I had hoped to arrive at St-Germain."

"Fie, fie! Pauline," replied the old lady; "I have long tried to make you feel like a woman, and you are still a child, a weak child. These accidents, and worse than these, occur to every one in the course of life, and they must be met with fortitude. Have you flattered yourself that *you* would be exempt from the common sorrows of humanity?"

"But if he should die?" said Pauline, with the tone of one who longs to be soothed out of their fears. The old lady, however, applied no such unction to the wound in her daughter's heart. Madame de Beaumont had herself been reared in the school of adversity; and while her mind and principles had been thus strengthened and confirmed, her feelings had not been rendered more acute. In the present instance, whether she spoke it heedlessly, or whether she intended to destroy one passion by exciting another, to cure Pauline's grief by rousing her anger, her answer afforded but little consolation. "If he dies," said she dryly, "why I suppose the fair lady, whose picture he has in his bosom, would weep, and you——"

A deep groan from their wounded companion broke in upon her speech, and suggested to the Marchioness that he might not be quite so insensible as he seemed. Such an answer, too, was not so palatable to Pauline as to induce her to urge the conversation any farther; so that Silence again resumed her empire over the party, remaining undisturbed till the old lady, drawing back the curtain, announced that they were entering St. Germain.

A few minutes more brought them to the lodging of the Count de Blenau; and here the Marchioness descending, gave all the necessary directions in order that the young gentleman might be carried to his sleeping-chamber in the easiest and most convenient method, while Pauline, without proffering any aid, sat back in a dark corner of the carriage. Nor would any thing have shown that she was interested in what passed around her, but when the light of a torch glared into the vehicle, discovering a handkerchief pressed over her eyes to hide the tears she could not restrain.

As soon as the Count was safely lodged in his own dwelling, the carriage proceeded towards the palace, which showed but little appearance of regal state. However the mind of Pauline might have been accustomed to picture a court in all the gay and splendid colouring which youthful imagination lends to anticipated pleasure, her thoughts were now far too fully occupied, to admit of her noticing the lonely and deserted appearance of the scene. But to Madame de Beaumont it was different. She, who remembered St. Germain in other days, looked in vain for the lights flashing from every window of the palace; for the servants hurrying along the different avenues, the sentinels parading before every entrance, and the gay groups of courtiers and ladies, in all the brilliant costume of the time, which used to crowd the terrace and gardens to enjoy the cool of the evening after the sun had gone down.

All that she remembered had had its day; and nothing remained but silence and solitude. A single sentry, at the principal gate, was all that indicated the dwelling of a king; and it was not till the carriage had passed under the archway, that even an attendant presented himself to inquire who were the comers at that late hour.

The principal domestic of Madame de Beaumont, who had already descended from his horse, gave the name of his lady with all ceremony, and also tendered a card (as he had been instructed by the Marchioness), on which her style and title were fully displayed. The royal servant bowed low, saying that the Queen, his mistress, had expected the Marchioness before; and seizing the rope of a great bell, which hung above the staircase, he rang such a peal that the empty galleries of the palace returned a kind of groaning echo to the rude clang which seemed to mock their loneliness.

Two or three more servants appeared, in answer to the bell's noisy summons; yet such was still the paucity of attendants, that Madame de Beaumont, even while she descended from her carriage, and began to ascend the "grand escalier," had need to look, from time to time, at the splendid fresco paintings which decorated the walls, and the crowns and fleurs-de-lis with which all the cornices were ornamented, before she could satisfy herself that she really was in the royal chateau of St. Germain.

Pauline's eyes, fixed on the floor, wandered little to any of the objects round, yet, perhaps, the vast spaciousness

of the palace, contrasted with the scarcity of its inhabitants, might cast even an additional degree of gloom over her mind, saddened, as it already was, by the occurrences of the day. Doubtless, in the remote parts of Languedoc, where Pauline de Beaumont had hitherto dwelt, gay visions of a court had come floating upon imagination like the lamps which the Hindoos commit to the waters of the Ganges, casting a wild and uncertain light upon the distant prospect; and it is probable, that even if St. Germain had possessed all its former splendour, Pauline would still have been disappointed, for youthful imagination always outrivals plain reality; and besides, there is an unpleasing feeling of solitude communicated by the aspect of a strange place, which detracts greatly from the first pleasure of novelty. Thus there were a thousand reasons why Mademoiselle de Beaumont, as she followed the attendant through the long empty galleries and vacant chambers of the palace, towards the apartments prepared for her mother and herself, felt none of those happy sensations which she had anticipated from her arrival at court; nor was it till, on entering the antechamber of their suite of rooms, she beheld the gay smiling face of her Lyonaise waiting-maid, that she felt there was any thing akin to old recollections within those cold and pompous walls, which seemed to look upon her as a stranger.

The soubrette had been sent forward the day before with a part of the Marchioness de Beaumont's equipage; and now, having endured a whole day's comparative silence with the patience and fortitude of a martyr, she advanced to the two ladies with loquacity in her countenance, as if resolved to make up, as speedily as possible, for the restraint under which her tongue had laboured during her short sojourn in the palace; but the deep gravity of Madame de Beaumont, and the melancholy air of her daughter, checked Louise in full career; so that, having kissed her mistress on both cheeks, she paused, while her lip, like an overfilled reservoir whose waters are trembling on the very brink, seemed ready to pour forth the torrent of words which she had so long suppressed.

Pauline, as she passed through the anteroom, wiped the last tears from her eyes, and on entering the saloon, advanced towards a mirror which hung between the windows, as if to ascertain what traces they had left behind. The soubrette did not fail to advance, in order to adjust her young lady's dress, and finding herself once more in the exercise of her functions, the right of chattering seemed equally restored; for she commenced immediately, beginning in a low and respectful voice, but gradually increasing as the thought of her mistress was swallowed up in the more comprehensive idea of herself.

"Oh, dear Mademoiselle," said she, "I am so glad you are come at last. This place is so sad and so dull! Who would think it was a court? Why, I expected to see it all filled with lords and ladies, and instead of that, I have seen nothing but dismal-looking men, who go gliding about in silence, seeming afraid to open their lips, as if that cruel old Cardinal, whom they all tremble at, could hear every word they say. I did see one fine-looking gentleman this morning, to be sure, with his servants all in beautiful liveries of blue and gold, and horses as if there were fire coming out of their very eyes; but he rode away to hunt, after he had been half an hour with the Queen and Mademoiselle de Hauteford, as they call her."

"Mademoiselle who?" exclaimed Pauline, quickly, as if startled from her reverie by something curious in the name. "Who did you say, Louise?"

"Oh, such a pretty young lady!" replied the waiting-woman. "Mademoiselle de Hauteford is her name. I saw her this morning as she went to the Queen's levee. She has eyes as blue as the sky, and teeth like pearls themselves; but withal she looks as cold and as proud as if she were the Queen's own self."

While the soubrette spoke, Pauline raised her large dark eyes to the tall Venetian mirror which stood before her, and which had never reflected any thing lovelier than herself, as hastily she passed her fair small hand across her brow, brushing back the glossy ringlets that hung clustering over her forehead. But she was tired and pale with fatigue and anxiety; her eyes, too, bore the traces of tears, and with a sigh and look of dissatisfaction, she turned away from the mirror, which, like every other invention of human vanity, often procures us disappointment as well as gratification.

Madame de Beaumont's eyes had been fixed upon Pauline; and translating her daughter's looks with the instinctive acuteness of a mother, she approached with more gentleness than was her wont. "You are beautiful enough, my Pauline," said she, pressing a kiss upon her cheek; "you are beautiful enough. Do not fear."

"Nay, Mamma," replied Pauline, "I have nothing to fear, either from possessing or from wanting beauty."

"Thou art a silly girl, Pauline," continued her mother, "and take these trifles far too much to heart. Perhaps I was wrong concerning this same picture. It was but a random guess. Besides, even were it true, where were the mighty harm? These men are all alike, Pauline—Like butterflies, they rest on a thousand flowers before they settle on any one. We all fancy that our own lover is different from his fellows; but, believe me, my child, the best happiness a woman can boast, is that of being most carefully deceived."

"Then no such butterfly love for me, Mamma," replied Pauline, her cheek slightly colouring as she spoke. "I would rather not know this sweet poison—love. My heart is still free, though my fancy may have—have—"

"May have what, Pauline?" demanded her mother, with a doubtful smile. "My dear child, thy heart, and thy fancy, I trow, have not been so separate as thou thinkest."

"Nay, Mamma," answered Pauline, "my fancy, like an insect, may have been caught in the web of a spider; but the enemy has not yet seized me, and I will break through while I can."

"But, first, let us be sure that we are right," said Madame de Beaumont. "For as every rule has its exception, there be some men, whose hearts are even worthy the acceptance of a squeamish girl, who, knowing nothing of the world, expects to meet with purity like her own. At all events, love, De Blenau is the soul of honour, and will not stoop to deceit. In justice, you must not judge without hearing him."

"But," said Pauline, not at all displeas'd with the refutation of her own ideas, and even wishing, perhaps, to afford her mother occasion to combat them anew,— "but—"

The sentence, however, was never destined to be concluded; for, as she spoke, the door of the apartment opened, and a form glided in, the appearance of which instantly arrested the words on Pauline's lips, and made her draw back with an instinctive feeling of respect.

The lady who entered had passed that earlier period of existence when beauties and graces succeed each other without pause, like the flowers of spring, that go blooming on from the violet to the rose. She was in the summer of life, but it was the early summer, untouched by autumn; and her form, though it possessed no longer the airy lightness of youth, had acquired in dignity a degree of beauty which compensated for the softer loveliness that years

had stolen away. Her brown hair fell in a profusion of large curls round a face, which, if not strictly handsome, was highly pleasing: and even many sorrows and reverses, by mingling an expression of patient melancholy with the gentle majesty of her countenance, produced a greater degree of interest than the features could have originally excited.

Those even who sought for mere beauty of feature, would have perceived that her eyes were quick and fine; that her skin was of the most delicate whiteness, except where it was disfigured by the use of rouge; and that her small mouth might have served as model to a statuary, especially while her lips arched with a warm smile of pleasure and affection, as advancing into the apartment, she pressed Madame de Beaumont to her bosom, who on her part, bending low, received the embrace of Anne of Austria with the humble deference of a respectful subject towards the condescension of their sovereign.

"Once more restored to me, my dear Madame de Beaumont!" said the Queen. "His Eminence of Richelieu does indeed give me back one of the best of my friends—And this is your Pauline."—She added, turning to Mademoiselle de Beaumont, "You were but young, my fair Demoiselle, when last I saw you. You have grown up a lovely flower from a noble root; but truly you will never be spoiled by splendour at our court."

As she spoke, her mind seemed naturally to return to other days, and her eye fixed intently on the ground, as if engaged in tracing out the plan of her past existence, running over all the lines of sorrow, danger and disappointed hope, till the task became too bitter, and she turned to the Marchioness with one of those long deep sighs, that almost always follow a review of the days gone by, forming a sort of epitaph to the dreams, the wishes, and the joys, that once were dear, and are now no more.

"When you met me, De Beaumont," said the Queen, "with the proud Duke of Guise on the banks of the Bidasoa—quitting the kingdom of my father, and entering the kingdom of my husband—with an army for my escort, and princes kneeling at my feet—little, little did ever you or I think, that Anne of Austria, the wife of a great king, and daughter of a long line of monarchs, would, in after years, be forced to dwell at St. Germain, without guards, without court, without attendants, but such as the Cardinal de Richelieu chooses to allow her.—The Cardinal de Richelieu!" she proceeded thoughtfully; "the servant of my husband!—but no less the master of his master, and the king of his king."

"I can assure your Majesty," replied Madame de Beaumont, with a deep tone of feeling which had no hypocrisy in it, for her whole heart was bound by habit, principle, and inclination, to her royal mistress—"I can assure your Majesty, that many a tear have I shed over the sorrows of my Queen; and when his Eminence drove me from the court, I regretted not the splendour of a palace, I regretted not the honour of serving my sovereign, I regretted not the friends I left behind, or the hopes I lost, but I regretted that I could not be the sharer of my mistress's misfortunes.—But your Majesty has now received a blessing from Heaven," she continued, willing to turn the conversation from the troubled course of memory to the more agreeable channels of hope—"a blessing which we scarcely dreamed of, a consolation under all present sorrows, and a bright prospect for the years to come.

"Oh, yes, my little Louis, you would say," replied the Queen, her face lightening with all a mother's joy as she spoke of her son. "He is indeed a cherub; and sure am I, that if God sends him years, he will redress his mother's wrongs by proving the greatest of his race."

She spoke of the famous Louis the Fourteenth, and some might have thought she prophesied. But it was only the fervour of a mother's hope, an ebullition of that pure feeling, which alone, of all the affections of the heart, the most sordid poverty cannot destroy, and the proudest rank can hardly check.

"He is indeed a cherub," continued the Queen; "and such was your Pauline to you, De Beaumont, when the Cardinal drove you from my side: a consolation not only in your exile, but also in your mourning for your noble lord. Come near, young lady; let me see if thou art like thy father."

Pauline approached; and the Queen laying her hand gently upon her arm, ran her eye rapidly over her face and figure, every now and then pausing for a moment, and seeming to call memory to her aid, in the comparison she was making between the dead and the living. But suddenly she started back, "*Sainte Vierge!*" cried she, crossing herself, "your dress is all dabbled with blood. What bad omen is this?"

"May it please your Majesty," said the Marchioness, half smiling at the Queen's superstition, for her own strong mind rejected many of the errors of the day, "that blood is only an omen of Pauline's charitable disposition; for in the forest hard by, we came up with a wounded cavalier, and, like a true *demoiselle errante*, Pauline rendered him personal aid, even at the expense of her robe."

"Nay, nay, De Beaumont," said the Queen, "it matters not how it came; it is a bad omen: some misfortune is about to happen. I remember the day before my father died, the Conde de Saldaña came to court with a spot of blood upon the lace of his cardinal; and on that fatal day which—"

The door of the apartment at this moment opened, and Anne of Austria, filled with her own peculiar superstition, stopped in the midst of her speech and turned her eye anxiously towards it, as if she expected the coming of some ghastly apparition. The figure that entered, however, though it possessed a dignity scarcely earthly, and a calm still grace—an almost inanimate composure, rarely seen in beings agitated by human passions, was, nevertheless, no form calculated to inspire alarm.

"Oh, Mademoiselle de Hauteford!" cried the Queen, her face brightening as she spoke, "De Beaumont, you will love her, for that she is one of my firmest friends."

At the name of De Hauteford, Pauline drew up her slight elegant figure to its full height, with a wild start, like a deer suddenly frightened by some distant sound, and drawing her hand across her forehead, brushed back the two or three dark curls which had again fallen over her clear fair brow.

"De Hauteford!" cried Anne of Austria as the young lady advanced, "what has happened? You look pale—some evil is abroad."

"I would not have intruded on your Majesty, or on these ladies," said Mademoiselle de Hauteford with a graceful but cold inclination of the head towards the strangers, "had it not been that Monsieur Seguin, your Majesty's Surgeon, requests the favour of an audience immediately. Nor does he wish to be seen by the common attendants; in truth, he has followed me to the antechamber, where he waits your Majesty's pleasure."

"Admit him, admit him!" cried the Queen. "What can he want at this hour?"

The surgeon was instantly brought into the presence of the Queen by Mademoiselle de Hauteford; but, after

approaching his royal mistress with a profound bow, he remained in silence glancing his eye towards the strangers who stood in the apartment, in such a manner as to intimate that his communication required to be made in private.

"Speak, speak, Seguin!" cried the Queen, translating his look and answering it at once; "these are all friends, old and dear friends."

"If such be your Majesty's pleasure," replied the Surgeon, with that sort of short dry voice, which generally denotes a man of few words. "I must inform you at once, that young Count de Blenau has been this morning attacked by robbers, while hunting in the forest, and is severely hurt."

While Seguin communicated this intelligence, Pauline (she scarce knew why) fixed her eye upon Mademoiselle de Hauteford, whose clear pale cheek, ever almost of the hue of alabaster, showed that it could become still paler. The Queen too, though the rouge she wore concealed any change of complexion, appeared manifestly agitated. "I told you so, De Beaumont," she exclaimed—"that blood foreboded evil: I never knew the sign to fail. This is bad news truly, Seguin," she continued. "Poor De Blenau! surely he will not die."

"I hope not, Madam," replied the Surgeon; "I see every chance of his recovery."

"But speak more freely," said the Queen. "Have you learnt any thing from him? These are all friends, I tell you."

"The Count is very weak, Madam," answered Seguin, "both from loss of blood and a stunning blow on the head; but he desired me to tell your Majesty, that though the wound is in his side, his heart is uninjured!"

"Oh, I understand, I understand," exclaimed the Queen. "De Blenau is one out of a thousand; I must write him a note; follow me, Seguin. Good night, dear Madame de Beaumont. Farewell, Pauline!—Come to my levee to-morrow, and we will talk over old stories and new hopes.—But have a care, Pauline—No more blood upon your robe. It is a bad sign in the house of Austria."

The moment the Queen was gone, Pauline pleaded fatigue, and retired to her chamber, followed by her maid Louise, who, be it remarked, had remained in the room during the Royal visit.

"This is a strange place, this St. Germain," said the waiting-woman, as she undressed her mistress.

"It is indeed!" replied Pauline. "I wish I had never seen it. But of one thing let me warn you, Louise, before it is too late. Never repeat any thing you may see or hear, while you are at the court; for if you do, your life may answer for it."

"My life! Mademoiselle Pauline," exclaimed the soubrette, as if she doubted her ears.

"Yes indeed, your life!" replied the young lady: "So beware."

"Then I wish I had never seen the place either," rejoined the maid; "for what is the use of seeing and hearing things, if one may not talk about them?—and who can be always watching one's tongue?"

CHAPTER V.

A Chapter of mighty import, which may be read or not, as the Reader thinks fit, the Book being quite as well without it.

WITH the happy irregularity of all true stories, we must return, for a moment, to a very insignificant person,—the Woodman of Mantes. Indeed, I have to beg my reader's pardon for saying so much about any one under the rank of a Chevalier at least; but all through this most untractable of all histories, I have been pestered with a set of shabby fellows in very indifferent circumstances. Woodcutters, robbers, gentlemen's servants, and the like, who make themselves so abominably useful, that though we wish them at the Devil all the time, we can no way do without them. Let the sin not be attributed to me; for I declare, upon my conscience, that when first I undertook to record this tale, I attempted a thorough reform; I superseded a great number of subordinate characters, put others upon the retired list, and dismissed a great many as useless sinecurists; but when I had done, all was in confusion; and then, after considering matters for half an hour, and turning over a page or two in the book of Nature, I found, that the most brilliant actions and the greatest events were generally brought about from the meanest motives and most petty causes: I perceived, that women and valets de-chambre govern the world: I found that saur-kraut had disagreed with Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, made her insolent to Queen Anne, made Queen Anne threaten to box her ears, made England resign her advantages over France—placed the Bourbon dynasty on the throne of Spain, and changed the face of Europe even to the present day. So, if saur-kraut did all this, surely I may return to Philip, the woodman of Mantes.

Chavigni, as we have seen, cast his purse upon the ground, and rode away from the cottage of the Woodman, little heeding what so insignificant an agent might do or say. Yet Philip's first thought was one which would have procured him speedy admission to the Bastille, had Chavigni been able to divine its nature. "The young Count shall know all about it," said Philip to himself. "That's a great rogue in Isabel and silver, for all his fine clothes, or I'm much mistaken."

His next object of attention was the purse; and after various *pros* and *cons*, Inclination, the best logician in the world, reasoned him into taking it. "For," said Philip, "dirty fingers soil no gold;" and having carefully put it into his pouch, the Woodman laid his finger upon the side of his nose, and plunged headlong into a deep meditation concerning the best and least suspicious method of informing the young Count de Blenau of all he had seen, heard, or suspected. We will not follow the course of this cogitation, which, as it doubtless took place in the French tongue, must necessarily suffer by translation, but taking a short cut straight through all the zig-zags of Philip's mind, arrive directly at the conclusion, or rather at the consequences, which were these. In the first place, he commanded his son Charles to load the mule with wood, notwithstanding the boy's observation, that no one would buy wood at that time of the morning, or rather the night; for, to make use of Shakspeare's language, the Morn, far from being yet clad in any russet mantle, was snugly wrapped up in the blanket of the dark, and snoring away, fast asleep, like her betters.

Precisely in the same situation as Aurora, that is to say, soundly sleeping, till her ordinary hour of rising, was Joan, the Woodman's wife. Philip, however, by sundry efforts, contrived to awaken her to a sense of external things; and perceiving that, after various yawns and stretches, her mind had arrived at the point of comprehending a simple proposition, "Get up, Joan, get up!" cried he. "I want you to write a letter for me; writing being a gift that, by the blessing of God, I do not possess."

The wife readily obeyed; for Philip, though as kind as the air of spring, had a high notion of marital privileges, and did not often suffer his commands to be disputed within his little sphere of dominion. However, it seemed a sort of tenure by which his sway was held, that Joan, his wife, should share in all his secrets; and accordingly, in the present instance, the good Woodman related in somewhat prolix style, not only all that had passed between Chavigni and Lafemas in the house, but much of what they had said before they even knocked at his door.

"For you must know, Joan," said he, "that I could not sleep for thinking of all this day's bad work; and, as I lay awake, I heard horses stop at the water, and people speaking, and very soon what they said made me wish to hear more, which I did, as I have told you. And now, Joan, I think it right, as a Christian and a man, to let this young cavalier know what they are plotting against him. So sit thee down; here is a pen and ink, and a plain sheet out of the boy's holy catechism,—God forgive me! But it could not go to a better use."

It matters not much to tell all the various considerations which were weighed and discussed by Philip and his wife in the construction of this epistle. Suffice it to say, that like two unskilful players at battledoor and shuttlecock, they bandied backwards and forwards the same objections a thousand times between them, for ever letting them drop, and taking them up again anew, till such time as day was well risen before they finished. Neither would it much edify the world, in all probability, to know the exact style and tenor of the composition when it was complete, although Philip heard his wife read it over with no small satisfaction, and doubtless thought it as pretty a piece of oratory as ever was penned.

It is now unfortunately lost to the public, and all that can be satisfactorily vouched upon the subject is, that it was calculated to convey to the Count de Blenau all the information which the Woodcutter possessed, although that information might be clothed in homely language, without much perfection, either in writing or orthography.

When it had been read, and re-read, and twisted up according to the best conceit of the good couple, it was intrusted to Charles, the Woodman's boy, with many a charge and direction concerning its delivery, For his part, glad of a day's sport, he readily undertook the task, and driving the laden mule before him, set out, whistling on his way to St. Germain's. He had not, however, proceeded far, when he was overtaken by Philip with new directions; the principal one being to say, if any one should actually see him deliver the note, and make inquiries, that it came from a lady. "For," said Philip,—and he thought the observation was a shrewd one,—"so handsome a youth as the young Count must have many ladies who write to him."

Charles did not very well comprehend what it was all about, but he was well enough contented to serve the young Count, who had given him many a kind word and a piece of silver, when the hunting-parties of the court had stopped to water their horses at the *abrevoir*. The boy was diligent and active, and soon reached St. Germain. His next task was to find out the lodging of the Count de Blenau: and, after looking about for some time, he addressed himself, for information, to a stout, jovial-looking servant, who was sauntering down the street, gazing about at the various hotels, with a look of easy *nonchalance*, as if idleness was his employment.

"Why do you ask, my boy?" demanded the man, without answering his question.

"I want to sell my wood," replied the Woodman's son, remembering that his errand was to be private. "Where does he lodge, good Sir?"

"Why, the Count does not buy wood in this hot weather," rejoined the other.

"I should suppose the Count does not buy wood, himself, at all," replied the boy, putting the question aside with all the shrewdness of a French peasant; "but, perhaps, his cook will."

"Suppose I buy your wood, my man," said the servant.

"Why, you are very welcome, Sir," answered Charles; "but if you do not want it, I pray you, in honesty, show me which is the Count de Blenau's hotel."

"Well, I will show thee," said the servant; "I am e'en going thither myself, on the part of the Marquise de Beaumont, to ask after the young Count's health."

"Oh, then, you are one of those who were with the carriage yesterday, when he was wounded in the wood," exclaimed the boy. "Now I remember your colours. Were you not one of those on horseback?"

"Even so," answered the man; "and if I forget not, thou art the Woodman's boy. But come, prithee, tell us what is thy real errand with the Count. We are all his friends, you know; and selling him the wood is all a tale."

Charles thought for a moment, to determine whether he should tell the man all he knew or not; but remembering the answer his father had furnished him with, he replied, "The truth then is, I carry him a note from a lady."

"Oh, ho! my little Mercury!" cried the servant; "so you are as close with your secrets as if you were an older politician. This is the way you sell wood, is it?"

"I do not know what you mean by Mercury," rejoined the boy.

"Why he was a great man in his day," replied the servant, "and, as I take it, used to come and go between the gods and goddesses; notwithstanding which, Monsieur Rubens, who is the greatest painter that ever lived, has painted this same Mercury as one of the late Queen's^[A] council, but nevertheless he was a carrier of messages, and so forth."

[A] Alluding, no doubt, to the picture of the reconciliation of Mary de Medicis and her son Louis XIII. in which Mercury seems hand in glove with the cardinals and statesmen of the day.

"Why, then, thou art more Mercury than I, for thou carriest a message, and I a letter," answered Charles, as they approached the hotel of the Count, towards which they had been bending their steps during this conversation. Their proximity to his dwelling, in all probability, saved Charles from an angry answer; for his companion did not seem at all pleased with having the name of Mercury retorted upon himself; and intending strongly to impress upon the Woodman's boy that he was a person of far too great consequence to be jested with, he assumed a tone of double pomposity towards the servant who appeared on the steps of the hotel. "Tell Henry de La Mothe, the Count's page," said the servant, "that the Marquise de Beaumont has sent to inquire after his master's health."

The servant retired with the message, and in a moment after Henry de La Mothe himself appeared, and informed the messenger that his master was greatly better. He had slept well, he said, during the night; and his surgeons assured him that the wounds which he had received were likely to produce no farther harm than the weakness naturally consequent upon so great a loss of blood as that which he had sustained. Having given this message on his master's account, Henry, on his own, began to question the servant concerning many little particulars of his own family; his father being, as already said, *Fermier* to Madame de Beaumont.

Charles, the Woodman's son, perceiving that the conversation had turned to a subject too interesting soon to be discussed, glided past the Marchioness's servant, placed the note he carried in the hand of the Count's Page, pressed his finger on his lip, in sign that it was to be given privately, and detaching himself from them, without waiting to be questioned, drove back his mule through the least known parts of the forest, and rendered an account to his father of the success of his expedition.

"Who can that note be from?" said the Marchioness de Beaumont's servant to Henry de La Mothe. "The boy told me, it came from a lady."

"From Mademoiselle de Hauteford, probably," replied the Page, thoughtfully. "I must give it to my master without delay, if he be strong enough to read it. We will talk more another day, good friend;"—and he left him.

"From Mademoiselle de Hauteford!" said the man. "Oh, ho!"—and he went home to tell all he knew to Louise, the soubrette.

CHAPTER VI.

The Marquis de Cinq Mars, the Count de Fontrailles, and King Louis the Thirteenth, all making fools of themselves in their own way.

THERE are some spots on the earth which seem marked out as the scene of extraordinary events, and which, without any peculiar beauty, or other intrinsic quality to recommend them, acquire a transcendent interest, as the theatre of great actions. Such is Chantilly, the history of whose walls might furnish many a lay to the poet, and many a moral to the sage; and even now, by its magnificence and its decay, it offers a new comment on the vanity of splendour, and proves, by the forgotten greatness of its lords, how the waves of time are the true waters of oblivion.

Be that as it may, Montmorency, Conde, are names so woven in the web of history, that nothing can tear them out, and these were the lords of Chantilly. But amongst all that its roof has sheltered, no one, perhaps, is more worthy of notice than Louis the Thirteenth: the son of Henry the Fourth and Mary de Medicis, born to an inheritance of high talents and high fortune, with the inspiring incitement of a father's glory, and the powerful support of a people's love.

It is sad that circumstance—that stumbling block of great minds—that confounder of deep-laid schemes—that little, mighty, unseen controller of all man's actions, should find pleasure in bending to its will, that which Nature originally seemed to place above its sway. Endued with all the qualities a throne requires, brave, wise, clear-sighted, and generous; with his mother's talents and his father's courage, the events of his early life quelled every effort of Louis's mind, and left him but the slave of an ambitious minister! a monarch but in name! the shadow of a King! How it was so, matters not to this history—it is recorded on a more eloquent page. But at the time of my tale, the brighter part of life had passed away from King Louis; and now that it had fallen into the sear, he seemed to have given it up as unworthy a farther effort. He struggled not even for that appearance of Royal state which his proud Minister was unwilling to allow him; and, retired at Chantilly, passed his time in a thousand weak amusements, which but served to hurry by the moments of a void and weary existence.

It was at this time, that the first news of the Cardinal de Richelieu's illness began to be noised abroad. His health had long been declining; but so feared was that redoubtable Minister, that though many remarked the increased hollowness of his dark eye, and the deepening lines upon his pale cheek, no one dared to whisper what many hoped—that the tyrant of both King and people was falling under the sway of a still stronger hand.

The morning was yet in its prime. The grey mist had hardly rolled away from the old towers and battlements of the Chateau of Chantilly, which, unlike the elegant building afterwards erected on the same spot, offered then little but strong fortified walls and turrets.—The heavy night-dew lay still sparkling upon the long grass in the avenues of the Park, when two gentlemen were observed walking near the Palace, turning up and down the alley, then called the Avenue de Luzarches, with that kind of sauntering pace which indicated their conversation to be of no very interesting description.

Perhaps, in all that vast variety of shapes which Nature has bestowed upon mankind, and in all those innate differences by which she has distinguished man's soul, no two figures or two minds could have been found more opposite than those of the two men thus keeping a willing companionship—the Count de Fontrailles, and the Marquis de Cinq Mars, Grand Ecuyer, or, as it may be best translated, Master of the Horse.

Cinq Mars, though considerably above the common height of men, was formed in the most finished and elegant proportion, and possessed a native dignity of demeanour, which characterized even those wild gesticulations in which the excess of a bright and enthusiastic mind often led him to indulge.

On the other hand, Fontrailles, short in stature, and mean in appearance, was in countenance equally unprepossessing. He had but one redeeming feature, in the quick grey eye, that, with the clear keenness of its light, seemed to penetrate the deepest thoughts of those upon whom it was turned.

Such is the description that history yields of these two celebrated men; and I will own that my hankering after physiognomy has induced me to transcribe it here, inasmuch as the mind of each was like his person.

In the heart of Cinq Mars dwelt a proud nobility of spirit, which, however he might be carried away by the fiery passions of his nature, ever dignified his actions with something of great and generous. But the soul of Fontrailles, ambitious, yet mean, wanted all the wild ardour of his companion, but wanted also all his better qualities; possessing alone that clear, piercing discernment, which, more like instinct than judgment, showed him always the exact moment of danger, and pointed out the means of safety.

And yet, though not friends, they were often (as I have said) companions; for Cinq Mars was too noble to suspect, and Fontrailles too wary to be known—besides, in the present instance, he had a point to carry, and therefore was doubly disguised.

"You have heard the news, doubtless, Cinq Mars," said Fontrailles, leading the way from the great Avenue de Luzarches into one of the smaller alleys, where they were less liable to be watched; for he well knew that the conversation he thus broached would lead to those wild starts and gestures in his companion, which might call upon them some suspicion, if observed. Cinq Mars made no reply, and he proceeded. "The Cardinal is ill!" and he fixed his eye upon the Master of the Horse, as if he would search his soul. But Cinq Mars still was silent, and, apparently deeply busied with other thoughts, continued beating the shrubs on each side of the path with his sheathed sword, without even a glance towards his companion. After a moment or two, however, he raised his head with an air of careless abstraction: "What a desert this place has become!" said he; "look how all these have grown up, between the trees. One might really be as well in a forest as a royal park now-a-days."

"But you have made me no answer," rejoined Fontrailles, returning perseveringly to the point on which his companion seemed unwilling to touch: "I said, the Cardinal is ill."

"Well, well! I hear," answered Cinq Mars, with a peevish start, like a restive horse forced forward on a road he is unwilling to take. "What is it you would have me say?—That I am sorry for it? Well, be it so—I am sorry for it—sorry that a trifling sickness, which will pass away in a moon, should give France hopes of that liberation, which is yet far off."

"But, nevertheless, you would be sorry were this great man to die," said Fontrailles, putting it half as a question, half as an undoubted proposition, and looking in the face of the Marquis, with an appearance of hesitating

uncertainty.

Cinq Mars could contain himself no more. "What!" cried he vehemently, "sorry for the peace of the world!—sorry for the weal of my country!—sorry for the liberty of my King! Why, I tell thee, Fontrailles, should the Cardinal de Richelieu die, the people of France would join in pulling down the scaffolds and the gibbets, to make bonfires of them!"

"Who ever dreamed of hearing *you* say so?" said his companion. "All France agrees with you, no doubt; but we all thought that the Marquis de Cinq Mars either loved the Cardinal, or feared him, too much to see his crimes."

"Fear him!" exclaimed Cinq Mars, the blood mounting to his cheek, as if the very name of fear wounded his sense of honour. He then paused, looked into his real feelings, shook his head mournfully, and after a moment's interval of bitter silence added, "True! true! Who is there that does not fear him? Nevertheless, it is impossible to see one's country bleeding for the merciless cruelty of one man, the prisons filled with the best and bravest of the land to quiet his suspicions, and the King held in worse bondage than a slave to gratify the daring ambition of this insatiate churchman, and not to wish that Heaven had sent it otherwise."

"It is not Heaven's fault, Sir," replied Fontrailles; "it is our own, that we do suffer it. Had we one man in France who, with sufficient courage, talent, and influence, had the true spirit of a patriot, our unhappy country might soon be freed from the bondage under which she groans."

"But where shall we find such a man?" asked the Master of the Horse, either really not understanding the aim of Fontrailles, or wishing to force him to a clearer explanation of his purpose. "Such an undertaking as you hint at," he continued, "must be well considered, and well supported, to have any effect. It must be strengthened by wit—by courage—and by illustrious names.—It must have the power of wealth, and the power of reputation.—It must be the rousing of the lion with all his force, to shake off the toils by which he is encompassed."

"But still there must be some one to rouse him," said Fontrailles, fixing his eyes on Cinq Mars with a peculiar expression, as if to denote that he was the man alluded to. "Suppose this were France," he proceeded, unbuckling his sword from the belt, and drawing a few lines on the ground with the point of the sheath: "show me a province or a circle that will not rise at an hour's notice to cast off the yoke of this hated Cardinal. Here is Normandy, almost in a state of revolt;—here is Guienne, little better;—here is Sedan, our own;—here are the Mountains of Auvergne, filled with those whom his tyranny has driven into their solitude for protection; and here is Paris and its insulted Parliament, waiting but for opportunity."

"And here," said Cinq Mars, with a melancholy smile, following the example of his companion, and pointing out with his sword, as if on a map, the supposed situations of the various places to which he referred—"And here is Peronne, and Rouen, and Havre, and Lyons, and Tours, and Brest, and Bordeaux, and every town or fortress in France, filled with his troops and governed by his creatures; and here is Flanders, with Chaunes and Mielleray, and fifteen thousand men, at his disposal; and here is Italy, with Bouillon, and as many more, ready to march at his command!"

"But suppose I could show," said Fontrailles, laying his hand on his companion's arm, and detaining him as he was about to walk on—"but suppose I could show, that Mielleray would not march,—that Bouillon would declare for us,—that England would aid us with money, and Spain would put five thousand men at our command,—that the King's own brother—"

Cinq Mars waved his hand: "No! no! no!" said he, in a firm, bitter tone: "Gaston of Orleans has led too many to the scaffold already. The weak, wavering Duke is ever the executioner of his friends. Remember poor Montmorency!"

"Let me proceed," said Fontrailles; "hear me to an end, and then judge. I say, suppose that the King's own brother should give us his name and influence, and the King himself should yield us his consent."

"Ha!" exclaimed Cinq Mars, pausing abruptly.—The idea of gaining the King had never occurred to him; and now it came like a ray of sunshine through a cloud, brightening the prospect which had been before in shadow. "Think you the King would consent?"

"Assuredly!" replied his companion. "Does he not hate the Cardinal as much as any one? Does not his blood boil under the bonds he cannot break? And would he not bless the man who gave him freedom? Think, Cinq Mars!" he continued, endeavouring to throw much energy into his manner, for he knew that the ardent mind of his companion wanted but the spark of enthusiasm to inflame—"think, what a glorious object! to free alike the people and their sovereign, and to rescue the many victims even now destined to prove the tyrant's cruelty!—Think, think of the glorious reward, the thanks of a King, the gratitude of a nation, and the blessings of thousands saved from dungeons and from death!"

It worked as he could have wished. The enthusiasm of his words had their full effect on the mind of his companion. As the other went on, the eye of Cinq Mars lightened with all the wild ardour of his nature; and striking his hand upon the hilt of his sword, as if longing to draw it in the inspiring cause of his Country's liberty, "Glorious indeed!" he exclaimed,—"glorious indeed!"

But immediately after, fixing his glance upon the ground, he fell into meditation of the many circumstances of the times; and as his mind's eye ran over the difficulties and dangers which surrounded the enterprise, the enthusiasm which had beamed in his eye, like the last flash of an expiring fire, died away, and he replied with a sigh, "What you have described, Sir, is indeed a glorious form—But it is dead—it wants a soul. The King, though every thing great and noble, has been too long governed now to act for himself. The Duke of Orleans is weak and undecided as a child. Bouillon is far away—"

"And where is Cinq Mars?" demanded Fontrailles,— "where is the man whom the King really loves? If Cinq Mars has forgot his own powers, so has not France; and she now tells him—though by so weak a voice as mine—that he is destined to be the soul of this great body to animate this goodly frame, to lead this conspiracy, if that can be so called which has a King at its head, and Princes for its support."

In these peaceable days, when we are taught to pray against privy conspiracy, both as a crime and misfortune, the very name is startling to all orthodox ears; but at the time I speak of, it had no such effect. Indeed, from the commencement of the wars between Henri Quatre and the League, little else had existed but a succession of conspiracies, which one after another had involved every distinguished person in the country, and brought more than one noble head to the block. Men's minds had become so accustomed to the sound, that the explosion of a new plot scarcely furnished matter for a day's wonder, as the burghers of a besieged city at length hardly hear the

roaring of the cannon against their walls; and so common had become the name of conspirator, that there were very few men in the realm who had not acquired a just title to such an appellation.

The word "conspiracy," therefore, carried nothing harsh or disagreeable to the mind of Cinq Mars. What Fontrailles proposed to him, bore a plausible aspect. It appeared likely to succeed; and, if it did so, offered him that reward for which, of all others, his heart beat—Glory! But there was one point on which he paused: "You forget," said he,—“you forget that I owe all to Richelieu,—you forget that, however he may have wronged this country, he has not wronged me; and though I may wish that such a being did not exist, it is not for me to injure him.”

"True, most true!" replied his wily companion, who knew that the appearance of frank sincerity would win more from Cinq Mars than aught else: "if he has done as you say, be still his friend. Forget your country in your gratitude—though in the days of ancient virtue patriotism was held paramount. We must not hope for such things now—so no more of that. But if I can show that this proud Minister has never served you; if I can prove that every honour which of late has fallen upon you, far from being a bounty of the Cardinal, has proceeded solely from the favour of the King, and has been wrung from the hard Churchman as a mere concession to the Monarch's whim; if it can be made clear that the Marquis Cinq Mars would now have been a Duke and Constable of France, had not his kind friend the Cardinal whispered he was unfit for such an office:—then will you have no longer the excuse of friendship, and your Country's call must and shall be heard."

"I can scarce credit your words, Fontrailles," replied Cinq Mars. "You speak boldly,—but do you speak truly?"

"Most truly, on my life!" replied Fontrailles. "Think you, Cinq Mars, if I did not well know that I could prove each word I have said, that thus I would have placed my most hidden thoughts in the power of a man who avows himself the friend of Richelieu?"

"Prove to me,—but prove to me, that I am not bound to him in gratitude," cried Cinq Mars vehemently,—“take from me the bonds by which he has chained my honour, and I will hurl him from his height of power, or die in the attempt.”

"Hush!" exclaimed Fontrailles, laying his finger on his lip as they turned into another alley, "we are no longer alone. Govern yourself, Cinq Mars, and I will prove every tittle of what I have advanced ere we be two hours older."

This was uttered in a low tone of voice; for there was indeed another group in the same avenue with themselves. The party, which was rapidly approaching, consisted of three persons, of whom one was a step in advance, and, though in no degree superior to the others in point of dress, was distinguished from them by that indescribable something which constitutes the idea of dignity. He was habited in a plain suit of black silk with buttons of jet, and every part of his dress, even to the sheath and hilt of his *couteau de chasse*, corresponding. On his right hand he wore a thick glove, of the particular kind generally used by the sportsmen of the period, but more particularly by those who employed themselves in the then fashionable sport of bird-catching; and the nets and snares of various kinds carried by the other two, seemed to evince that such had been the morning's amusement of the whole party.

The King, for such was the person who approached, was rather above the middle height, and of a spare habit. His complexion was very pale; and his hair, which had one time been of the richest brown, was now mingled throughout with grey. But still there was much to interest, both in his figure and countenance. There was a certain air of easy self-possession in all his movements; and even when occupied with the most trivial employment, which was often the case, there was still a degree of dignity in his manner, that seemed to show his innate feeling of their emptiness, and his own consciousness of how inferior they were, both to his situation and his talents. His features at all times appeared handsome, but more especially when any sudden excitement called up the latent animation of his dark-brown eye, recalling to the minds of those who remembered the days gone before, that young and fiery Prince who could not brook the usurped sway even of his own highly talented mother, but who had now become the slave of her slave. The consciousness of his fallen situation, and of his inability to call up sufficient energy of mind to disengage himself, generally cast upon him an appearance of profound sadness: occasionally, however, flashes of angry irritability would break across the cloud of melancholy which hung over him, and show the full expression of his countenance, which at other times displayed nothing but the traces of deep and bitter thought, or a momentary sparkle of weak, unthinking merriment. So frequent, however, were the changes to be observed in the depressed Monarch, that some persons even doubted whether they were not assumed to cover deeper intentions. It might be so, or it might not; but at all events, between the intervals of these natural or acquired appearances, would often shine out strong gleams of his mother's unyielding spirit, or his father's generous heart.

The rapid pace with which he always proceeded, soon brought the King close to Cinq Mars and Fontrailles. "Good-morrow, Monsieur de Fontrailles," said he, as the Count bowed low at his approach. "Do not remain uncovered. 'Tis a fine day for forest sports, but not for bare heads; though I have heard say, that if you were in the thickest mist of all Holland, you would see your way through it.—What! *mon Grand Ecuyer*," he continued, turning to Cinq Mars; "as sad as if thou hadst been plotting, and wert dreaming even now of the block and axe?" And with a kind and familiar air, he laid his hand upon his favourite's arm: who on his part started, as if the Monarch had read his thoughts and foretold his doom.

A single word has sometimes lost or won an empire. Even less than a single word, if we may believe the history of Darius's horse, who, being a less loquacious animal than Balaam's ass, served his master without speaking. However, Fontrailles fixed his eye on Cinq Mars, and seeing plainly the effect of Louis's speech, he hastened to wipe it away. "To calculate petty dangers in a great undertaking," said he, "were as weak as to think over all the falls one may meet with in the chase, before we get on horseback."

Both Cinq Mars and the King were passionately fond of the noble forest sport, so that the simile of Fontrailles went directly home, more especially to the King, who, following the idea thus called up, made a personal application of it to him who introduced it. "Jesu, that were folly indeed!" he exclaimed, in answer to the Count's observation. "But you are not fond of the chase either, Monsieur de Fontrailles, if I think right; I never saw you follow boar or stag, that I can call to mind."

"More my misfortune than my fault, Sire," replied Fontrailles. "Had I ever been favoured with an invitation to follow the royal hounds, your Majesty would have found me as keen of the sport as even St. Hubert is said to have been of yore."

"Blessed be his memory!" cried the King. "But we will hunt to-day; we will see you ride, Monsieur de Fontrailles. What say you, Cinq Mars? The parties who went out to turn a stag last night (I remember now) presented this

morning, that in the *bosquet* at the end of the forest, near Argenin, is quartered a fat stag of ten, and another by Boisjardin; but that by Argenin will be the best, for he has but one *refuite* by the long alley.—Come, gentlemen, seek your boots,—seek your boots; and as our *Grand Veneur* is not at Chantilly, you, Cinq Mars, shall superintend the chase. Order the *Maitre valet de chiens* to assemble the old pack and the *relais* at the *Carrefour d'Argenin*, and then we will quickly to horse." So saying, he turned away to prepare for his favourite sport; but scarcely had gone many paces ere he slackened his pace, and allowed the two gentlemen to rejoin him. "What think you, friend?" said he, addressing Cinq Mars; "they tell me, the Cardinal is sick. Have you heard of it?"

"I have heard a vague report of the kind," replied Cinq Mars, watching his master's countenance, "but as yet nothing certain. May I crave what information your Majesty possesses?"

"Why, he is sick, very sick," replied Louis, "and perchance may die. May his soul find mercy! Perchance he may die, and then—" And the King fell into deep thought.

It is possible that at that moment his mind was engaged in calculating all that such an event as the death of Richelieu would produce; for, gradually, as if he dreamed of ruling for himself, and as hope spread out before him many a future year of power and greatness, his air became more dignified, his eye flashed with its long repressed fire, and his step acquired a new degree of firmness and majesty.

Fontrailles watched the alteration of the King's countenance, and, skilful at reading the mind's workings by the face, he added, as if finishing the sentence which Louis had left unconcluded,—but taking care to blend what he said with an air of raillery towards the Master of the Horse, lest he should offend the irritable Monarch—"And then," said he, "Cinq Mars shall be a Duke. Is it not so, Sire?"

Louis started. His thoughts had been engaged in far greater schemes; and yet rewarding his friends and favourites, always formed a great part of the pleasure he anticipated in power, and he replied, without anger, "Most likely it will be so—Indeed," he added, "had my wishes, as a man, been followed,"—and he turned kindly towards the Master of the Horse,—"it should have been so long ago, Cinq Mars. But Kings, you know, are obliged to yield their private inclinations to what the State requires."

Fontrailles glanced his eye towards the Grand Ecuyer, as if desiring him to remark the King's words. Cinq Mars bent his head, in token that he comprehended, and replied to the King: "I understand your Majesty; but, believe me, Sire, no honour or distinction could more bind Cinq Mars to his King, than duty, gratitude, and affection do at this moment."

"I believe thee, friend,—I believe thee, from my soul," said Louis. "God forgive us that we should desire the death of any man! and surely do not I that of the Cardinal, for he is a good Minister, and a man of powerful mind. But, withal, we may wish that he was more gentle and forgiving. Nevertheless, he is a great man. See how he thwarts and rules half the Kings in Europe—See how he presses the Emperor, and our good brother-in-law, Philip of Spain; while the great Gustavus, this northern hero, is little better than his general."

"He is assuredly a great man, Sire," replied Cinq Mars. "But permit me to remark, that a great bad man is worse than one of less talents, for he has the extended capability of doing harm; and perhaps, Sire, if this Minister contented himself with thwarting Kings abroad, he would do better than by opposing the will of his own Sovereign at home."

The time, however, was not yet come for Louis to make even an attempt toward liberating himself from the trammels to which he had been so long accustomed. Habit in this had far more power over his mind than even the vast and aspiring talents of Richelieu. No man in France, perhaps, more contemned or hated the Cardinal than the royal slave whom he had so long subjugated to his burdensome sway. Yet Louis, amidst all his dreams for the future, looked with dread upon losing the support of a man whom he detested, but upon whose counsels and abilities he had been accustomed to rely with confidence and security.

Cinq Mars saw plainly the state of his master's mind; and as he entered the Palace, he again began to doubt whether he should at all lend himself to the bold and dangerous measures which Fontrailles had suggested.

CHAPTER VII.

In which is shown how a great King hunted a great beast, and what came of the hunting.

WHILE the King's mind, as he returned to the Chateau de Chantilly, was agitated by vague hopes and fears, which, like the forms that we trace in the clouds, rolled into a thousand strange and almost palpable shapes before his mind's eye, and yet were but a vapour after all; and while the thoughts of Cinq Mars ran over all the difficulties and dangers of the future prospect, reverted to the obligations Richelieu had once conferred upon him, or scanned the faults and crimes of the Minister, till the struggle of patriotism and gratitude left nothing but doubt behind: the imagination of Fontrailles was very differently occupied. It was not that he pondered the means of engaging more firmly the wavering mind of Cinq Mars. No, for he had marked him for his own; and, from that morning's conversation, felt as sure of his companion as the ant-lion does of the insect he sees tremble on the edge of his pit. Neither did he revolve the probable issue of the dangerous schemes in which he was engaging both himself and others; for he was confident in his powers of disentangling himself, when it should become necessary to his own safety so to do, and he was not a man to distress himself for the danger of his friends. The occupation of his mind as they approached the Castle, was of a more personal nature. The truth is, that so far from discomposing himself upon the score of distant evils, the sole trouble of his thoughts was the hunting-party into which he had entrapped himself. Being by no means a good horseman, and caring not one *sous* for a pastime which involved far too much trouble and risk to accord in any degree with his idea of pleasure, Fontrailles had professed himself fond of hunting, merely to please the King, without ever dreaming that he should be called upon to give farther proof of his veneration for the Royal sport.

He saw plainly, however, that his case admitted of no remedy. Go he must; and, having enough philosophy in his nature to meet inevitable evils with an unshrinking mind, he prepared to encounter all the horrors of the chase, as if they were his principal delight.

He accordingly got into his boots with as much alacrity as their nature permitted, for, each weighing fully eight pounds, they were somewhat ponderous and unmanageable. He then hastily loaded his pistols, stuck his *couteau de chasse* in his belt, and throwing the feather from his hat, was the first ready to mount in the court-yard.

"Why, how is this, Monsieur de Fontrailles?" said the King, who in a few minutes joined him in the area where the horses were assembled. "The first at your post! You are, indeed, keen for the sport. Some one, see for Cinq Mars.—Oh! here he comes: Mount, gentlemen, mount! Our Ordinaries of the chase, and Lieutenants, await us at the *Carrefour d'Argenin*.—Mount, gentlemen, mount! Ha! have you calculated your falls for to-day, Monsieur de Fontrailles, as you spoke of this morning?" And the King's eyes glistened with almost childish eagerness for his favourite pastime.

In the mean while, Cinq Mars had approached with a slow step and a gloomy countenance, showing none of the alacrity of Fontrailles, or the enthusiastic ardour of the King. "There are other dangers than falls to be met with in chase, my liege," said the Master of the Horse, with a bitter expression of displeasure in his manner; "and that Claude de Blenau could inform your Majesty."

"I know not what you mean, Cinq Mars," answered the King. "De Blenau is a gallant cavalier; as staunch to his game as a beagle of the best; and though he shows more service to our Queen than to ourself, he is no less valued for that."

"He is one cavalier out of ten thousand—" replied Cinq Mars, warmly: "my dearest companion and friend; and whilst Cinq Mars has a sword to wield, De Blenau shall never want one to second his quarrel."

"Why, what ails thee, Cinq Mars?" demanded the King with some surprise. "Thou art angry,—what is it now?"

"It is, Sire," replied the Master of the Horse, "that I have just had a courier from St. Germain, who bears me word, that, three days since past, the Count, as your Majesty and I have often done, was hunting in the neighbourhood of Mantes, and was there most treacherously attacked by an armed band, in which adventure he suffered two wounds that nearly drained his good heart of blood. Shall this be tolerated, Sire?"

"No, indeed! no, indeed!" replied the King with much warmth. "This shall be looked to. Our kingdom must not be overrun with robbers and brigands."

"Robbers!" exclaimed Cinq Mars, indignantly. "I know not—they may have been robbers; but my letters say, that one of them wore colours of Isabel and silver."

"Those are the colours of Chavigni's livery," replied the King, who knew the most minute difference in the bearing of every family in the kingdom, with wonderful precision. "This must be looked to, and it *shall*, or I am not deserving of my name. But now mount, gentlemen, mount! we are waited for at the rendezvous."

The *Carrefour d'Argenin*, at which the King and his attendants soon arrived, was a large open space in the forest, where four roads crossed. Each of these, but one, cut into a long straight avenue through the wood, opened a view of the country beyond, forming a separate landscape, as it were, framed, or to use the French term, *encadré*, by the surrounding trees. The sun had not yet risen sufficiently to shine upon any of these forest roads; but the sweeping hills and dales beyond, were to be seen through the apertures, richly lighted up by the clear beams of the morning; though occasionally a soft wreath of mist, lingering in the bosom of some of the hollows, would roll a transient shadow over the prospect. Louis had chosen this spot for the rendezvous, perhaps as much on account of its picturesque beauty, as for any other reason. Deprived, as he was, of courtly splendour and observance, his mind, unperverted by the giddy show and tinsel pomp that generally surrounds a royal station, regarded with a degree of enthusiasm the real loveliness of Nature; and now it was some time before even the preparations for his favourite sport could call his attention from the picturesque beauty of the spot.

The policy of Richelieu, which had led him to deprive the King of many of the external marks of sovereignty, as well as of the real power, taught him also to encourage all those sports which might at once occupy Louis's mind, and place him at a distance from the scene of government. Thus, the hunting equipage of the King was maintained in almost more than royal luxury.

The first objects that presented themselves, in the *Carrefour d'Argenin*, were a multitude of dogs and horses, grouped together with the lieutenants of the forest, and the various officers of the hunt, under those trees which would best afford them shade as the sun got up. Various *piqueurs* and valets were seen about the ground, some

holding the horses, some laying out the table for the royal *dejeûné*, and some busily engaged in cutting long straight wands from the more pliable sort of trees, and peeling off the bark for a certain distance, so as to leave a sort of handle or hilt still covered, while the rest of the stick, about three feet in length, remained bare. These, called "batons de chasse," were first presented to the King, who, having chosen one, directed the rest to be distributed among his friends and attendants, for the purpose of guarding their heads from the boughs, which in the rapidity of the chase, while it continued in the forest, often inflicted serious injuries.

The *Maître valet de chiens*, and his ordinaries, each armed with a portentous-looking horn, through the circles of which were passed a variety of dog couples, were busily occupied in distributing the hounds into their different relays, and the grooms and other attendants were seen trying the girths of the heavy hunting saddles, loading the pistols, or placing them in the holsters, and endeavouring to distinguish themselves fully as much by their bustle as by their activity.

However, it was an animated scene, and those who saw it could not wonder that Louis preferred the gay excitement of such sports, to the sombre monotony of a palace without a court, and royalty without its splendour.

After examining the preparations with a critical eye, and inquiring into the height, age, size, and other distinctive signs of the stag which was to be hunted, Louis placed himself at the breakfast-table which had been prepared in the midst of the green, and motioning Cinq Mars and Fontrailles to be seated, entered into a lively discussion concerning the proper spots for placing the relays of horses and dogs. At length it was determined that six hounds and four hunters should be stationed at about two leagues and a half on the high road; that twelve dogs and four *piqueurs*, with an ordinary of the chase, should take up a position upon the side of a hill under which the stag was likely to pass; and that another relay should remain at a spot called *Le Croix de bois*, within sight of which the hunt would be obliged to come, if the animal, avoiding the open country, made for the other extremity of the forest.

It fell upon Cinq Mars to communicate these directions to the officers of the hunt, which he did in that sort of jargon, which the sports of the field had made common in those days, but which would now be hardly intelligible. He was engaged in giving general orders, that the horses should be kept in the shade and ready to be mounted at a moment's notice, in case the King, or any of his suite should require them, and that the ordinary should by no means let slip any of the dogs of the relay upon the stag, even if it passed his station, without especial orders from the *piqueurs* of the principal hunt—when suddenly he stopped, and pointing with his hand, a man was discovered standing in one of the avenues, apparently watching the Royal party.

The circumstance would have passed without notice, had it not been for the extraordinary stature of the intruder, who appeared fully as tall as Cinq Mars himself. Attention was farther excited by his disappearing as soon as he was observed; and some grooms were sent to bring him before the King, but their search was in vain, and the matter was soon forgotten.

The minute relation of a Royal hunt in France, anno 1642, would afford very little general interest. Enough has been said to show how different were the proceedings of that time from our method of conducting such things in the present day; and those who want farther information on the subject may find it in a very erudite treatise, "*De la Chasse, &c.*" by Le Mercier, in the year fifty-six of the same century. We must, however, in a more general manner, follow the King over the field, though without attempting to describe all the minute occurrences of the day, or the particulars of etiquette usual on such occasions.

The stag, poor silly beast, who had been dozing away his time in a thicket at about half a mile distance, was soon roused by the very unwished appearance of the huntsmen, and taking his path down the principal avenue, bounded away towards the open country, calculating, more wisely than the beast recorded by our old friend Æsop, that the boughs might encumber his head gear. The horns sounded loud, the couples were unloosed, the dogs slipped, and away went man and beast in the pursuit. For a moment or two, the forest was filled with clang, and cry, and tumult:—as the hunt swept away, it grew fainter and fainter, till the sound, almost lost in the indistinct distance, left the deep glades of the wood to resume their original silence.

They did not, however, long appear solitary, for in a few minutes after the hunt had quitted the forest, the same tall figure, whose apparition had interrupted Cinq Mars in his oratory concerning the relays, emerged from one of the narrower paths, leading a strong black horse, whose trappings were thickly covered with a variety of different figures in brass, representing the signs of the zodiac, together with sundry triangles, crescents, and other shapes, such as formed part of the astrological quackery of that day. The appearance of the master was not less singular in point of dress than that of the horse. He wore a long black robe, somewhat in the shape of that borne by the order of Black Friars, but sprinkled with silver signs. This, which made him look truly gigantic, was bound round his waist by a broad girdle of white leather, traced all over with strange characters, that might have been called hieroglyphics, had they signified any thing; but which were, probably, as unmeaning as the science they were intended to dignify.

To say the truth, the wearer did not seem particularly at his ease in his habiliments; for when, after having looked cautiously around, he attempted to mount his horse, the long drapery of his gown got entangled round his feet at every effort, and it was not till he had vented several very ungodly execrations, and effected a long rent in the back of his robe, that he accomplished the ascent into the saddle. Once there, however, the dexterity of his horsemanship, and his bearing altogether, made him appear much more like the captain of a band of heavy cavalry than an astrologer, notwithstanding the long snowy beard which hung down to his girdle, and the profusion of white locks that, escaping from his fur cap, floated wildly over his face, and concealed the greater part of its features.

The horseman paused for a moment, seemingly immersed in thought, while his horse, being a less considerate beast than himself, kept pawing the ground, eager to set off. "Let me see," said the horseman; "the stag will soon be turned on the high road by the carriers for Clermont, and must come round under the hill, and then I would take the world to a *chapon de Maine*, that that fool Andrieu lets slip his relay, and drives the beast to water. If so, I have them at the *Croix de bois*. At all events, one must try." And thus speaking, he struck his horse hard with a thick kind of truncheon he held in his hand, and soon was out of the forest.

In the mean while the King and his suite followed close upon the hounds; the Monarch and Cinq Mars, animated by the love of the chase, and Fontrailles risking to break his neck rather than be behind. The road for some way was perfectly unobstructed, and as long as it remained so, the stag followed it without deviation; but at length a train of carriers' waggons appeared, wending their way towards Clermont. The jingling of the bells on the yokes of the oxen, and the flaunting of the red and white ribbons on their horns, instantly startled the stag, who, stopping short in his flight, stood at gaze for a moment, and then darting across the country, entered a narrow track of that unproductive

sandy kind of soil, called in France *landes*, which bordered the forest. It so happened,—unfortunately, I was going to say, but doubtless the stag thought otherwise—that a large herd of his horned kindred were lying out in this very track, enjoying the morning sunshine, and regaling themselves upon the first fruits that fell from some chesnut-trees, which in that place skirted the forest.

Now the stag, remembering an old saying, which signalizes the solace of “company in distress,” proceeded straight into the midst of the herd; who being fat burghers of the wood, and like many other fat burghers somewhat selfish withal, far from compassionating his case, received him with scanty courtesy, and, in short, wished him at the devil. However, no time was to be lost; the dogs were close upon his steps; “*sauve qui peut!*” was the word among the stags, and away they all went, flying in every direction.

The hunters had as little cause to be pleased with this manœuvre as the stags; for the hounds being young, were deceived by a strong family likeness between one of the herd and the one they had so long followed, and all of the dogs but four, yielding up the real object of pursuit, gave chase to the strange stag, who, darting off to the left, took his way towards the river. Cinq Mars and most of the *piqueurs*, misled by seeing the young hounds have so great a majority, followed also. It was in vain the King called to him to come back, that he was hunting the wrong beast, and was as great a fool as a young hound; he neither heeded nor heard, and soon was out of sight.

“*Sa christi!*” cried Louis, “there they go, just like the world, quitting the true pursuit to follow the first fool that runs, and priding themselves on being in the right, when they are most in error; but come, Monsieur de Fontrailles, we will follow the true stag of the hunt.”

But Fontrailles too was gone. The separation of the hounds had afforded an opportunity of quitting the sport not to be neglected, and he had slunk away towards the Palace by the nearest road, which, leading through a narrow dell, skirted the side of the hill opposite to that over which the King’s stag had taken his course. However, he still heard from time to time the dogs give tongue, and the hunting cry of the King; who, without considering that no one followed, gave the exact number of *mots* on his horn, followed by the haloo, and the “*Il dit vrai! il dit vrai!*” which the *piqueurs* ordinarily give out, to announce that the dog who cried was upon the right scent. Still Fontrailles pursued his way, when suddenly he perceived the stag, who, having distanced the King, was brought to bay under the bank over which his road lay.

At that season of the year, the stag is peculiarly dangerous, but Fontrailles did not want personal courage, and, dismounting from his horse, he sprang to the bottom of the bank; where, drawing his *couteau de chasse*, he prepared to run in upon the beast; but remembering at the moment that the King could not be far distant, he paused, and waiting till Louis came up, held the stirrup and offered his weapon to the Monarch, who instantly running in, presented the knife with all the dexterity of an experienced sportsman, and in a moment laid the stag dead at his feet.

It was now the task of Fontrailles to keep off the hounds, while the King, anxious to have all the honours of the day to himself, began what is called in France the “*section*” and “*curée aux chiens*” without waiting for *piqueurs* or ordinaries. Nevertheless, he had only time to make the longitudinal division of the skin, and one of the transverse sections from the breast to the knee, when the sound of a horse’s feet made him raise his head from his somewhat unkingly occupation, thinking that some of the other hunters must be now come up.

“*Que Diable!*” cried the King, viewing the strange figure of the Astrologer we have already noticed in this profound chapter. “*Je veux dire, Vive Dieu!* What do you want? and who are you?”

“A friend to the son of Henri Quatre,” replied the stranger, advancing his horse closer to the King, who stood gazing on him with no small degree of awe—for he it remembered, that the superstitious belief in all sorts of necromancy was at its height both in England and France.

“A friend to the son of Henri Quatre! and one who comes to warn him of near-approaching dangers.”

“What are they, friend?” demanded the King, with a look of credulous surprise: “Let me know whence they arise and how they may be avoided, and your reward is sure.”

“I seek no reward,” replied the stranger, scornfully. “Can all the gold of France change the star of my destiny? No! Monarch, I come uncalled, and I will go unrewarded. The planets are still doubtful over your house, and therefore I forewarn you ere it be too late—A Spaniard is seeking your overthrow, and a woman is plotting your ruin—A Prince is scheming your destruction, and a Queen is betraying your trust.

“How!” exclaimed Louis. “Am I to believe—”

“Ask me no questions,” cried the stranger, who heard the trampling of horses’ feet approaching the scene of conference. “In this roll is written the word of fate. Read it, O King! and timely guard against the evil that menaces.” So saying, he threw a scroll of parchment before the King, and spurred on his horse to depart; but at that moment, the figure of Cinq Mars, who by this time had run down the stag he had followed, presented itself in his way, “What mumming is this?” cried the Master of the Horse, regarding the stranger.

“Stop him! Cinq Mars,” cried Fontrailles, who foresaw that the stranger’s predictions might derange all his schemes. “He is an impostor: do not let him pass!” And at the same time he laid his hand upon the Astrologer’s bridle. But in a moment, the stranger spurring on his charger, overturned Fontrailles, shivered the hunting sword, which Cinq Mars had drawn against him, to atoms with one blow of his truncheon, and scattering the grooms and huntsmen like a flock of sheep, was soon out of reach of pursuit.

“What means all this?” exclaimed Cinq Mars;—“explain Fontrailles! Sire, shall we follow yon impostor?”

But Louis’s eyes were fixed with a strained gaze upon the scroll, which he held in his hand, and which seemed to absorb every faculty of his soul. At length he raised them, mounted his horse in silence, and still holding the parchment tight in his hand, rode on, exclaiming, “To Chantilly.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Showing how the green-eyed monster got hold of a young lady's heart, and what he did with it.

WHO is there that has not dreamed and had their dream broken? Who is there that has not sighed to see spring flowers blighted, or summer sunshine yield to wintry clouds; or bright hopes change to dark sorrows, and gay joys pass away like sudden meteors, that blaze for one splendid moment, and then drop powerless into the dark bosom of the night?

If memory, instead of softening all the traces, gave us back the original lines of life in their native harshness, who could live on to old age? for the catalogue of broken hopes, and disappointed wishes, and pleasures snatched from us never to return, would be more than any human mind could bear. It would harden the heart to marble, or break it in its youth. It is happy too, that in early years our mind has greater power of resistance, for the novelty of sorrow gives it a double sting.

The fatigues of her journey had long worn off, and left Pauline de Beaumont all the glow of wild youthful beauty, which had adorned her in her native hills. Her cheek had recovered its fine soft blush in all its warmth, and her eyes all their dark brilliancy. But the cheerful gaiety which had distinguished her, the light buoyancy of spirit, that seemed destined to rise above all the sorrows of the world, had not come back with the rose of her cheek, or the lustre of her eye. She loved to be alone, and instead of regretting the gloom and stillness which prevailed in the court of Anne of Austria, she often seemed to find its gaiety too much for her, and would retire to the suite of apartments appropriated to her mother and herself, to enjoy the solitude of her own thoughts.

At first, Madame de Beaumont fancied that the melancholy of her daughter was caused by the sudden change from many loved scenes, endeared by all the remembrances of infancy, to others in which, as yet, she had acquired no interest. But as a second week followed the first, after their arrival at St. Germain's, and the same depression of spirits still continued, the Marchioness began to fear that Pauline had some more serious cause of sorrow; and her mind reverted to the suspicions of De Blenau's constancy, which she had been the first to excite in her daughter's bosom.

The coming time is filled with things that we know not, and chance calls forth so many unexpected events, that the only way in life is to wait for Fate, and seize the circumstances of the day; by the errors of the past to correct our actions at present, and to leave the future to a wiser judgment and a stronger hand. Madame de Beaumont took no notice of her daughter's melancholy, resolving to be guided in her conduct by approaching circumstances; for clouds were gathering thickly on the political horizon of France, which, like a thunder-storm depending on the fickle breath of the wind, might break in tempests over their head, or be wafted afar, and leave them still in peace.

It was one of those still evenings, when the world, as if melancholy at the sun's decline, seems to watch in silence the departure of his latest beams. All had sunk into repose, not a cloud passed over the clear expanse of sky, not a noise was stirring upon earth; and Pauline felt a sensation of quiet, pensive melancholy steal over all her thoughts, harmonizing them with the calmness of the scene, as it lay tranquilly before her, extending far away to the glowing verge of heaven, unawakened by a sound, unruffled by a breath of air.

The window at which she sat looked towards St. Denis, where lay the bones of many a race of Kings, who had, in turn, worn that often contested diadem, which to the winner had generally proved a crown of thorns. But her thoughts were not of them. The loss of early hopes, the blight of only love, was the theme on which her mind brooded, like a mother over the tomb of her child. The scene before her—its vast extent—the dying splendour of the sun—the deep pureness of the evening sky—the sublimity of the silence—all wrought upon her mind; and while she thought of all the fairy hopes she had nourished from her youth, while she dreamed, over again, all the dreams she had indulged of one on whose fame, on whose honour, on whose truth, she had fondly, rashly, raised every wish of her future life; and while new-born fears and doubts came sweeping away the whole,—the tears rose glistening in her eyes, and rolled, drop after drop, down her cheeks.

"Pauline!" said a voice close behind her. She started, turned towards the speaker, and with an impulse stronger than volition, held out her hand to Claude de Blenau. "Pauline," said he, printing a warm kiss on the soft white hand that he held in his, "dear, beautiful Pauline, we have met at last."

From the moment he had spoken, Pauline resolved to believe him as immaculate as any human being ever was since the first meeting of Adam and Eve; but still she wanted him to tell her so. It was not coquetry; but she was afraid that after what she had seen, and what she had heard, she ought not to be satisfied. Common propriety, she thought, required that she should be jealous till such time as he proved to her that she had no right to be so. She turned pale, and red, and drew back her hand without reply.

De Blenau gazed on her for a moment in silent astonishment; for, young, and ardent, and strongly tinged with that romantic spirit of gallantry which Anne of Austria had introduced from Spain into the court of France, the whole enthusiasm of his heart had been turned towards Pauline de Beaumont; and he had thought of her the more, perhaps, because forbid to think of her. Nor had the romance he had worked up in his own mind admitted a particle of the cold ceremonies of courtly etiquette; he had loved to figure it as something apart from the world. A life with her he loved, of ardour, and passion, and sunshiny hours, unclouded by a regret, unchilled by a reserve, but all boundless confidence, and unrestrained affection—Such had been the purport of his letters to Pauline de Beaumont, and such had been the colouring of her replies to him. And who is there that has not dreamed so once?

De Blenau gazed on her for a moment in silence. "Do you not speak to me, Pauline?" said he at length. "Or is it that you do not know me? True, true! years work a great change at our time of life. But I had fancied—perhaps foolishly fancied—that Pauline de Beaumont would know Claude de Blenau wheresoever they met, as well as De Blenau would know her."

While he spoke, Pauline knew not well what to do with her eyes; so she turned them towards the terrace, and they fell upon Mademoiselle de Hauteford, who was walking slowly along before the Palace. Less things than that have caused greater events in this world than a renewal of all Pauline's doubts. Doubts did I call them? Before Mademoiselle de Hauteford, with all the graceful dignity for which she was conspicuous, had taken three steps along the terrace, Pauline's doubts had become almost certainties; and turning round, with what she fancied to be great composure, she replied, "I have the pleasure of knowing you perfectly, Monsieur de Blenau; I hope you have

recovered entirely from your late wounds."

"Monsieur de Blenau!—The pleasure of knowing me!" exclaimed the Count. "Good God, is this my reception? Not three months have gone, since your letters flattered me with the title of 'Dear Claude.'—My wounds are better, Mademoiselle de Beaumont, but you seem inclined to inflict others of a more painful nature."

Pauline strove to be composed, and strove to reply, but it was all in vain; Nature would have way, and she burst into tears and sobbed aloud. "Pauline, dearest Pauline!" cried De Blenau, catching her to his bosom unrepulsed: "This must be some mistake—calm yourself, dear girl, and, in the name of Heaven, tell me, what means this conduct to one who loves you as I do?"

"One who loves me, Claude!" replied Pauline, wiping the tears from her eyes; "Oh no, no—But what right had I to think that you would love me? None, none, I will allow. Separated from each other so long, I had no title to suppose that you would ever think of the child to whom you were betrothed, but of whom you were afterwards commanded not to entertain a remembrance—would think of her, after those engagements were broken by a power you could not choose but obey. But still, De Blenau, you should not have written those letters filled with professions of regard, and vows to retain the engagements your father had formed for you, notwithstanding the new obstacles which had arisen. You should not, indeed, unless you had been very sure of your own heart; for it was cruelly trifling with mine," and she gently disengaged herself from his arms.—"I only blame you," she added, "for ever trying to gain my affection, and not for now being wanting in love to a person you have never seen since she was a child."

"Never seen you!" replied De Blenau with a smile: "Pauline, you are as mistaken in that, as in any doubt you have of me. A year has not passed since last we met. Remember that summer sunset on the banks of the Rhone: remember the masked Cavalier who gave you the ring now on your finger: remember the warm hills of Languedoc, glowing with a blush only equalled by your cheek, when he told you that that token was sent by one who loved you dearly, and would love you ever—that it came from Claude de Blenau, who had bid him place the ring on your finger, and a kiss on your hand, and renew the vow that he had long before pledged to you.—Pauline, Pauline, it was himself."

"But why, dear Claude," demanded Pauline eagerly, forgetting coldness, and pride, and suspicion, in the memory his words called up, "why did you not tell me? why did you not let me know that it was you?"

"Because if I had been discovered," answered the Count, "it might have cost me my life, years of imprisonment in the Bastille, or worse—the destruction of her I loved? The slightest cry of surprise from you might have betrayed me."

"But how did you escape, without your journey being known?" demanded Pauline; "they say in Languedoc, that the Cardinal has bribed the evil spirits of the air to be his spies on men's actions."

"It is difficult indeed to say how he acquires his information," replied De Blenau; "but, however, I passed undiscovered. It was thus it happened: I had gone as a volunteer to the siege of Perpignan, or rather, as one of the *Arrière-ban* of Languedoc, which was led by the young and gallant Duc d'Enghien, to whom, after a long resistance, that city delivered its keys. As soon as the place had surrendered, I asked permission to absent myself for a few days. His Highness granted it immediately, and I set out.—For what think you, Pauline? what, but to visit that spot, round which all the hopes of my heart, all the dreams of my imagination, had hovered for many a year.—But to proceed, taking the two first stages of my journey towards Paris, I suddenly changed my course, and embarking on the Rhone, descended as far as the Chateau de Beaumont. You remember, that my page, Henry La Mothe, is the son of your mother's *fermier*, old La Mothe, and doubtless know full well his house among the oaks, on the borders of the great wood. It was here I took up my abode, and formed a thousand plans of seeing you undiscovered. At length, fortune favoured me. Oh! how my heart beat as, standing by one of the trees in the long avenue, Henry first pointed out to me two figures coming slowly down the path from the Chateau—yourself and your mother,—and as, approaching towards me, they gradually grew more and more distinct, my impatience almost overpowered me, and I believe I should have started forward to meet you, had not Henry reminded me of the danger. You passed close by.—O Pauline! I had indulged many a waking dream. I had let fancy deck you in a thousand imaginary charms—but at that moment, I found all I had imagined, or dreamed, a thousand times excelled. I found the beautiful girl, that had been torn from me so many years before, grown into woman's most surpassing loveliness; and the charms which fancy and memory had scattered from their united stores, faded away before the reality, like stars on the rising of the sun. But this was not enough. I watched my opportunity. I saw you, as you walked alone on the terrace, by the side of the glittering Rhone,—I spoke to you,—I heard the tones of a voice to be remembered for many an after hour, and placing the pledge of my affection on your hand, I tore myself away."

De Blenau paused. Insensibly, whilst he was speaking, Pauline had suffered his arm again to glide round her waist. Her hand somehow became clasped in his, and as he told the tale of his affection, the tears of many a mingled emotion rolled over the dark lashes of her eye, and chasing one another down her cheek, fell upon the lip of her lover, as he pressed a kiss upon the warm sunny spot which those drops bedewed.

De Blenau saw that those tears were not tears of sorrow, and had love been with him an art, he probably would have sought no farther; for in the whole economy of life, but more especially in that soft passion Love, holds good the homely maxim, to let *well* alone. But De Blenau was not satisfied; and like a foolish youth, he teased Pauline to know why she had at first received him coldly. In good truth, she had by this time forgotten all about it; but as she was obliged to answer, she soon again conjured up all her doubts and suspicions. She hesitated, drew her hand from that of the Count, blushed deeper and deeper, and twice began to speak without ending her sentence.

"I know not what to think," said she at length, "De Blenau: I would fain believe you to be all you seem,—I would fain reject every doubt of what you say."

Her coldness, her hesitation, her embarrassment, alarmed De Blenau's fears, and he too began to be suspicious.

"On what can you rest a doubt?" demanded he, with a look of bitter mortification; and perceiving that she still paused, he added sadly, but coldly, "Mademoiselle de Beaumont, you are unkind. Can it be that you are attached to another? Say, am I so unhappy?"

"No, De Blenau, no!" replied Pauline, struggling for firmness: "but answer me one question, explain to me but this one thing, and I am satisfied."

"Ask me any question, propose to me any doubts," answered the Count, "and I will reply truly, upon my honour."

"Then tell me," said Pauline,— But just as she was about to proceed, she felt some difficulty in proposing her

doubts. She had a thousand times before convinced herself they were very serious and well founded; but all jealous suspicions look so very foolish in black and white, or what is quite as good, in plain language, though they may seem very respectable when seen through the twilight of passion, that Pauline knew not very well how to give utterance to hers. "Then tell me," said Pauline, with no small hesitation—"then tell me, what was the reason you would suffer no one to open your hunting coat, when you were wounded in the forest—no, not even to staunch the bleeding of the side?"

"There was a reason, certainly," replied De Blenau, not very well perceiving the connexion between his hunting-coat and Pauline's coldness; "there was a reason certainly; but how in the name of Heaven does that affect you, Pauline?"

"You shall see by my next question," answered she. "Have you or have you not received a letter, privately conveyed to you from a lady? and has not Mademoiselle de Hauteford visited you secretly during your illness?"

It was now De Blenau's turn to become embarrassed; he faltered, and looked confused, and for a moment his cheek, which had hitherto been pale with the loss of blood, became of the deepest crimson, while he replied, "I did not know that I was so watched."

"It is enough, Monsieur de Blenau," said Pauline rising, her doubts almost aggravated to certainties. "To justify myself, Sir, I will tell you that you have not been watched. Pauline de Beaumont would consider that man unworthy of her affection, whose conduct would require watching. What I know, has come to my ears by mere accident. In fact," and her voice trembled the more, perhaps, that she strove to preserve its steadiness—"in fact, I have become acquainted with a painful truth through my too great kindness for you, in sending my own servant to inquire after your health, and not to watch you, Monsieur de Blenau."

"Stop, stop, Pauline! in pity, stop," cried De Blenau, seeing her about to depart. "Your questions place me in the most embarrassing of situations. But, on my soul, I have never suffered a thought to stray from you, and you yourself will one day do me justice. But at present, on this point, I am bound by every principle of duty and honour, not to attempt an exculpation."

"None is necessary, Monsieur de Blenau," replied Pauline. "It is much better to understand each other at once. I have no right to any control over you. You are of course free, and at liberty to follow the bent of your own inclinations. Adieu! I shall always wish your welfare." And she was quitting the apartment, but De Blenau still detained her, though she gently strove to withdraw her hand.

"Yet one moment, Pauline," said he. "You were once kind, you were once generous, you have more than once assured me of your affection. Now, tell me, did you bestow that affection on a man destitute of honour? on a man who would sully his fame by pledging his faith to what was false?" Pauline's hand remained in his without an effort, and he went on. "I now pledge you my faith, and give you my honour, however strange it may appear that a lady should visit me in private, I have never loved or sought any but yourself. Pauline, do you doubt me now?"

Her eyes were fixed upon the ground, and she did not reply, but there was a slight motion in the hand he held, as if it would fain have returned his pressure had she dared. "I could," he continued, "within an hour obtain permission to explain it all. But oh, Pauline, how much happier would it make me to find, that you trust alone to my word, that you put full confidence in a heart that loves you!"

"I do! I do!" exclaimed Pauline, with all her own wild energy, at the same time placing her other hand also on his, and raising her eyes to his face: "Say no more, De Blenau. I believe I have been wrong; at all events, I cannot, I will not doubt, what makes me so happy to believe." And her eyes, which again filled with tears, were hidden on his bosom.

De Blenau pressed her to his heart, and again and again thanked the lips that had spoken such kind words, in the way that such lips may best be thanked.—"Dearest Pauline," said De Blenau, after enjoying a moment or two of that peculiar happiness which shines but once or twice even in the brightest existence, giving a momentary taste of heaven, and then losing itself, either in human cares, or less vivid joys.—The heart is a garden, and youth is its spring, and hope is its sunshine, and love is a thorny plant, that grows up and bears one bright flower, which has nothing like it in all the earth—

"Dearest Pauline," said De Blenau, "I leave you for a time, that I may return and satisfy every doubt. Within one hour all shall be explained."

As he spoke, the door of the apartment opened, and one of the servants of the Palace entered, with a face of some alarm. "Monsieur de Blenau," said he, "I beg a thousand pardons for intruding, but there have been, but now, at the Palace gate, two men of the Cardinal's guard inquiring for you: so I told them that you were most likely at the other side of the Park, for—for—" and after hesitating a moment, he added, "They are the same who arrested Monsieur de Vitry."

De Blenau started. "Fly, fly, Claude!" exclaimed Pauline, catching him eagerly by the arm—"Oh fly, dear Claude, while there is yet time. I am sure they seek some evil towards you."

"You have done well," said De Blenau to the attendant. "I will speak to you as I come down.—Dearest Pauline," he continued when the man was gone—"I must see what these gentlemen want. Nay, do not look frightened; you are mistaken about their errand. I have nothing to fear, believe me. Some trifling business, no doubt. In the mean time, I shall not neglect my original object. In half an hour all your doubts shall be satisfied."

"I have none, Claude," replied Pauline; "indeed I have none, but about these men."

De Blenau endeavoured to calm her, and assured her again and again that there was no danger. But Pauline was not easy, and the Count himself had more suspicions concerning their object than he would suffer to appear.

CHAPTER IX.

Containing a great deal that would not have been said had it not been necessary.

IN front of the Palace of St. Germain's, but concealed from the park and terrace by an angle of the building, stood the Count de Chavigni, apparently engaged in the very undignified occupation of making love to a pretty-looking soubrette, no other than Louise, the waiting-maid of Mademoiselle de Beaumont. But, notwithstanding the careless nonchalance with which he affected to address her, it was evident that he had some deeper object in view than the trifling of an idle hour.

"Well, *ma belle*," said he, after a few words of a more tender nature, "you are sure the Surgeon said, though the wound is in his side, his heart is uninjured?"

"Yes, exactly," said Louise, "word for word; and the Queen answered, 'I understand you.' But I cannot think why you are so curious about it."

"Because I take an interest in the young Count," replied Chavigni. "But, his heart must be very hard if it can resist such eyes as yours."

"He never saw them," said Louise, "for I was not with my Lady when they picked him up wounded in the forest."

"So much the better," replied Chavigni, "for that is he turning that angle of the Palace: I must speak to him; so farewell, *belle Louise*, and remember the signal.—Go through that door, and he will not see you."

Speaking thus, Chavigni left her, and a few steps brought him up to De Blenau, who at that moment traversed the angle in which he had been standing with Louise, and was hurrying on with a rapid pace in search of the Queen.

"Good morrow, Monsieur de Blenau," said Chavigni: "you seem in haste."

"And am so, Sir," replied De Blenau proudly; and added, after a moment's pause, "Have you any commands for me?" for Chavigni stood directly in his way.

"None in particular," answered the other with perfect composure—"only if you are seeking the Queen, I will go with you to her Majesty; and as we go, I will tell you a piece of news you may perhaps like to hear."

"Sir Count de Chavigni, I beg you would mark me," replied De Blenau. "You are one of the King's Council—a gentleman of good repute, and so forth; but there is not that love between us that we should be seen taking our evening's walk together, unless, indeed, it were for the purpose of using our weapons more than our tongues."

"Indeed, Monsieur de Blenau," rejoined Chavigni, his lip curling into a smile which partook more of good humour than scorn, though, perhaps, mingled somewhat of each—"indeed you do not do me justice; I love you better than you know, and may have an opportunity of doing you a good turn some day, whether you will or not. So with your leave I walk with you, for we both seek the Queen."

De Blenau was provoked. "Must I tell you, Sir," exclaimed he, "that your company is disagreeable to me?—that I do not like the society of men who herd with robbers and assassins?"

"Psha!" exclaimed Chavigni, somewhat peevishly. "Captious boy, you'll get yourself into the Bastille some day, where you would have been long ago, had it not been for me."

"When you tell me, Sir, how such obligations have been incurred," answered the Count, "I shall be happy to acknowledge them."

"Why, twenty times, Monsieur de Blenau, you have nearly been put there," replied Chavigni, with that air of candour which it is very difficult to affect when it is not genuine. "Your hot and boiling spirit, Sir, is always running you into danger. Notwithstanding all your late wounds, a little bleeding, even now, would not do you any harm. Here the first thing you do is to quarrel with a man who has served you, is disposed to serve you, and of whose service you may stand in need within five minutes."

"But to give you proof at once that what I advance is more than a mere jest—Do you think that your romantic expedition to Languedoc escaped me? Monsieur de Blenau, you start, as if you dreamed that in such a country as this, and under such an administration, any thing could take place without being known to some member of the government. No, no, Sir! there are many people in France, even now, who think they are acting in perfect security, because no notice is apparently taken of the plans they are forming, or the intrigues they are carrying on; while, in reality, the hundred eyes of Policy are upon their every action, and the sword is only suspended over their heads, that it may eventually fall with more severity."

"You surprise me, I own," replied De Blenau, "by showing me that you are acquainted with an adventure, which I thought buried in my own bosom, or only confided to one equally faithful to me."

"You mean your Page," said Chavigni, with the same easy tone in which he had spoken all along. "You have no cause to doubt him. He has never betrayed you (at least to my knowledge). But these things come about very simply, without treachery on any part. The stag never flies so fast, nor the hare doubles so often, but they leave a scent behind them for the dogs to follow,—and so it is with the actions of man; conceal them as he will, there is always some trace by which they may be discovered; and it is no secret to any one, now-a-days, that there are people in every situation of life, in every town of France, paid to give information of all that happens; so that the schemes must be well concealed indeed, which some circumstance does not discover. I see, you shake your head, as if you disapproved of the principle."

"De Blenau, you and I are engaged in different parties. You act firmly convinced of the rectitude of your own cause—Do me the justice to believe that I do the same. You hate the Minister—I admire him, and feel fully certain that all he does is for the good of the State. On the other hand, I applaud your courage, your devotion to the cause you have espoused, and your proud unbending spirit—and I would bring you to the scaffold to-morrow, if I thought it would really serve the party to which I am attached."

The interesting nature of his conversation, and the bold candour it displayed, had made De Blenau tolerate Chavigni's society longer than he had intended, and even his dislike to the Statesman had in a degree worn away before the easy dignity and frankness of his manner. But still, he did not like to be seen holding any kind of companionship with one of the Queen's professed enemies; and taking advantage of the first pause, he replied—

"You are frank, Monsieur de Chavigni, but my head is well where it is. And now may I ask to what does all this tend?"

"You need not hurry the conversation to a conclusion," replied Chavigni. "You see that we are in direct progress towards that part of the Park where her Majesty is most likely to be found." But seeing that De Blenau seemed impatient of such reply, he proceeded: "However, as you wish to know to what my conversation tends, I will tell you. If you please, it tends to your own good. The Cardinal wishes to see you——"

He paused, and glanced his eye over the countenance of his companion, from which, however, he could gather no reply, a slight frown being all the emotion that was visible.

Chavigni then proceeded. "The Cardinal wishes to see you. He entertains some suspicion of you. If you will take my advice, you will set out for Paris immediately, wait upon his Eminence, and be frank with him—Nay, do not start! I do not wish you to betray any one's secrets, or violate your own honour. But be wise, set out instantly."

"I suspected something of this," replied De Blenau, "when I heard that there were strangers inquiring for me. But whatever I do, I must first see the Queen:" and observing that Chavigni was about to offer some opposition, he added decidedly, "It is absolutely necessary—on business of importance."

"May I ask," said Chavigni, "is it of importance to her Majesty or yourself?"

"I have no objection to answer that at once," replied De Blenau: "it concerns myself alone."

"Stop a moment," cried Chavigni, laying his hand on the Count's arm, and pausing in the middle of the avenue, at the farther extremity of which a group of three or four persons was seen approaching. "No business can be of more importance than that on which I advise you to go.—Monsieur de Blenau, I would save you pain. Let me, once more, press you to set out without having any farther conversation with her Majesty than the mere *etiquette* of taking leave for a day."

De Blenau well knew the danger which he incurred, but still he could not resolve to go, without clearing the doubts of Pauline, which five minutes' conversation with the Queen would enable him to do. "It is impossible," replied he, thoughtfully; "besides, let the Cardinal send for me. I do not see why I should walk with my eyes open into the den of a lion."

"Well then, Sir," answered Chavigni, with somewhat more of coldness in his manner, "I must tell you, his Eminence has sent for you, and that, perhaps, in a way which may not suit the pride of your disposition. Do you see those three men that are coming down the avenue? they are not here without an object.—Come, once more, what say you, Monsieur le Comte? Go with me, to take leave of the Queen, for I must suffer no private conversation. Let us then mount our horses, and ride as friends to Paris. There, pay your respects to the Cardinal, and take Chavigni's word, that, unless you suffer the heat of your temper to betray you into any thing unbecoming, you shall return safe to St. Germain's before to-morrow evening. If not, things must take their course."

"You offer me fair, Sir," replied the Count, "if I understand you rightly, that the Cardinal has sent to arrest me; and of course, I cannot hesitate to accept your proposal. I have no particular partiality for the Bastille, I can assure you."

"Then you consent?" said Chavigni. De Blenau bowed his head. "Well then, I will speak to these gentlemen," he added, "and they will give us their room."

By this time the three persons, who had continued to advance down the avenue, had approached within the distance of a few paces of Chavigni and the Count. Two of them were dressed in the uniform of the Cardinal's guard; one as a simple trooper, the other being the Lieutenant who bore the *lettre de cachet* for the arrest of De Blenau. The third, we have had some occasion to notice in the wood of Mantes, being no other than the tall Norman, who on that occasion was found in a rusty buff jerkin, consorting with the banditti. His appearance, however, was now very much changed for the better. The neat trimming of his beard and mustaches, the smart turn of his broad beaver, the flush newness of his long-waisted blue silk vest, and even the hanging of his sword, which instead of offering its hilt on the left hip, ever ready for the hand, now swung far behind, with the tip of the scabbard striking against the right calf,—all denoted a change of trade and circumstances, from the poor bravo who won his daily meal at the sword's point, to the well-paid bully, who fattened at his lord's second table, on the merit of services more real than apparent.

De Blenau's eye fixed full upon the Norman, certain that he had seen him somewhere before, but the change of dress and circumstances embarrassed his recollection.

In the mean while, Chavigni advanced to the Cardinal's officer. "Monsieur Chauville," said he, "favour me by preceding me to his Eminence of Richelieu. Offer him my salutation, and inform him, that Monsieur le Comte de Blenau and myself intend to wait upon him this afternoon."

Chauville bowed, and passed on, while the Norman, uncovering his head to Chavigni, instantly brought back to the mind of De Blenau the circumstances under which he had first seen him.

"You have returned, I see," said Chavigni. "Have you found an occasion of fulfilling my orders?"

"To your heart's content, Monseigneur," replied the Norman; "never was such an Astrologer, since the days of Intrim of Blois."

"Hush!" said Chavigni, for the other spoke aloud. "If you have done it, that is enough. But for a time, keep yourself to Paris, and avoid the Court, as some one may recognise you, even in these fine new feathers."

"Oh, I defy them," replied the Norman, in a lower tone than he had formerly spoken, but still so loud that De Blenau could not avoid hearing the greater part of what he said—"I defy them; for I was so wrapped up in my black robes and my white beard, that the Devil himself would not know me for the same mortal in the two costumes. But I hope, Monsieur le Comte, that my reward may be equal to the risk I have run, for they sought to stop me, and had I not been too good a necromancer for them, I suppose I should have been roasting at a stake by this time. But one wave of my magic wand sent the sword of Monsieur de Cinq Mars out of his hand, and opened me a passage to the wood; otherwise I should have fared but badly amongst them."

"You must not exact too much, Monsieur Marteville," replied Chavigni. "But we will speak of this to-night. I shall be in Paris in a few hours; at present, you see, I am occupied;" and leaving the Norman, he rejoined De Blenau, and proceeded in search of the Queen.

"If my memory serves me right, Monsieur de Chavigni," said De Blenau, in a tone of some bitterness, "I have seen that gentleman before, and with his sword shining at my breast."

"It is very possible," answered Chavigni, with the most indifferent calmness. "I have seen him in the same

situation with respect to myself."

"Indeed!" rejoined De Blenau, with some surprise; "but probably not with the same intention," he added.

"I do not know," replied the Statesman, with a smile. "His intentions in my favour were to run me through the body."

"And is it possible, then," exclaimed De Blenau, "that with such a knowledge of his character and habits, you can employ and patronize him?"

"Certainly," answered Chavigni, "I wanted a bold villain. Such men are very necessary in a State. Now, I could not have better proof that this man had the qualities required, than his attempting to cut my throat. But you do him some injustice; he is better than you suppose—is not without feeling—and has his own ideas of honour."

De Blenau checked the bitter reply which was rising to his lips, and letting the conversation drop, they proceeded, in silence, in search of the Queen. They had not gone much farther, when they perceived her leaning familiarly on the arm of Madame de Beaumont, and seemingly occupied in some conversation of deep interest. However, her eye fell upon the Count and Chavigni as they came up, and, surprised to see them together, she abruptly paused in what she was saying.

"Look there, De Beaumont," said she: "something is not right. I have seen more than one of these creatures of the Cardinal hanging about the Park to-day. I fear for poor De Blenau. He has been too faithful to his Queen to escape long."

"I salute your Majesty," said Chavigni, as soon as they had come within a short distance of the Queen, and not giving De Blenau the time to address her: "I have been the bearer of a message from his Eminence of Richelieu to Monsieur de Blenau, your Majesty's Chamberlain, requesting the pleasure of entertaining him for a day in Paris. The Count has kindly accepted the invitation; and I have promised that the Cardinal shall not press his stay beyond to-morrow. We only now want your Majesty's permission and good leave, which in his Eminence's name I humbly crave for Monsieur de Blenau."

"His Eminence is too condescending," replied the Queen. "He knows that his will is law; and we, humble Kings and Queens, as in duty, do him reverence. I doubt not that his intentions towards our Chamberlain are as mild and amiable, as his general conduct towards our self."

"The truth is, your Majesty," said De Blenau, "the Cardinal has sent for me, and (however Monsieur de Chavigni's politeness may colour it) in a way that compels my attendance."

"I thought so," exclaimed the Queen, dropping the tone of irony which she had assumed towards Chavigni, and looking with mingled grief and kindness upon the young Cavalier, whose destruction she deemed inevitable from the moment that Richelieu had fixed the serpent eyes of his policy upon him—"I thought so. Alas, my poor De Blenau! all that attach themselves to me seem devoted to persecution."

"Not so, your Majesty," said Chavigni, with some degree of feeling; "I can assure you, Monsieur de Blenau goes at perfect liberty. He is under no arrest; and, unless he stays by his own wish, will return to your Majesty's court to-morrow night. The Cardinal is far from wishing to give unnecessary pain."

"Talk not to me, Sir Counsellor," replied the Queen, angrily: "Do I not know him? I, who of all the world have best cause to estimate his baseness? Have I not under his own hand, the proof of his criminal ambition? but no more of that—" And breaking off into Spanish, as was frequently her custom when angry, she continued, "No sè si es la misma vanidad, la soberbia, ó la arrogancia. Que todo esto, segun creo es el Cardenal."

"It is useless, Madam," said De Blenau, as soon as the Queen paused in her angry vituperation of the Minister, "to distress you farther with this conversation. I know not what the Cardinal wants, but he may rest assured that De Blenau's heart is firm, and that no human means shall induce him to swerve from his duty; and thus I humbly take my leave."

"Go then, De Blenau," said the Queen: "Go, and whether we ever meet again or not, your faithful services and zealous friendship shall ever have my warmest gratitude; and Anne of Austria has no other reward to bestow." Thus saying, she held out her hand to him. De Blenau in silence bent his head respectfully over it, and turned away. Chavigni bowed low, and followed the Count, to whose hotel they proceeded, in order to prepare for their departure.

In the orders which De Blenau gave on their arrival, he merely commanded the attendance of his Page.

"Pardon me, Monsieur de Blenau, if I observe upon your arrangements," said Chavigni, when he heard this order. "But let me remind you, once more, that you are not going to a prison, and that it might be better if your general train attended you, as a gentleman of high station about to visit the Prime Minister of his Sovereign. They will find plenty of accommodation in the Hotel de Bouthiliers."

"Be it so, then," replied De Blenau, scarcely able to assume even the appearance of civility towards his companion. "Henry de La Mothe," he proceeded, "order a dozen of my best men to attend me, bearing my full colours in their sword-knots and scarfs. Trick out my horses gaily, as if I were going to a wedding, for Claude de Blenau is about to visit the Cardinal; and remember," he continued, his anger at the forced journey he was taking overcoming his prudence, "that there be saddled for my own use the good black barb that carried me so stoutly when I was attacked by assassins in the wood of Mantes;" and as he spoke, his eye glanced towards the Statesman, who sitting in the window seat, had taken up the Poems of Rotrou, and apparently inattentive to all that was passing, read on with as careless and easy an air, as if no more important interest occupied his thoughts, and no contending passions struggled in his breast.

CHAPTER X.

Shows how the Count de Blenau supped in a place that he little expected.

THOUGH the attendants of the Count de Blenau did not expend much time in preparing to accompany their master, the evening was nevertheless too far spent, before they could proceed, to permit the hope of reaching Paris ere the night should have set in. It was still quite light enough, however, to show all the preparations for the Count's departure to the boys of St. Germain's, who had not beheld for many a good day such a gay cavalcade enliven the streets of that almost deserted town.

Chavigni and De Blenau mounted their horses together; and the four or five servants which the Statesman had brought with him from Paris, mingling with those of De Blenau, followed the two gentlemen as they rode from the gate. Having the privilege of the Park, Chavigni took his way immediately under the windows of the Palace, thereby avoiding a considerable circuit, which would have occupied more time than they could well spare at that late hour of the evening.

The moment Pauline de Beaumont had seen her lover depart, the tears, which she had struggled to repress in his presence, flowed rapidly down her cheeks. The noble, candid manner of De Blenau had nearly quelled all suspicion in her mind. The graces of his person, the tone of his voice, the glance of his eye, had realized the day-dreams which she had nourished from her youth.

Fame had long before told her that he was brave, high-spirited, chivalrous; and his picture, as well as memory, had shown him as strikingly handsome; but still it did not speak, it did not move; and though Pauline had often sat with it in her hand, and imagined the expressions of his various letters as coming from those lips, or tried in fancy to animate the motionless eyes of the portrait, still the hero of her romance, like the figure of Prometheus ere he had robbed the Sun of light to kindle it into active being, wanted the energy of real life. But at length they had met, and whether it was so in truth, or whether she imagined it, matters not, but every bright dream of her fancy seemed fulfilled in De Blenau; and now that she had cause to fear for his safety, she upbraided herself for having entertained a suspicion.

She wept then—but her tears were from a very different cause to that which had occasioned them to flow before. However, her eyes were still full, when a servant entered to inform her that the Queen desired her society with the other ladies of her scanty Court. Pauline endeavoured to efface the marks which her weeping had left, and slowly obeyed the summons, which being usual at that hour, she knew was on no business of import; but on entering the closet, she perceived that tears had also been in the bright eyes of Anne of Austria.

The circle, which consisted of Madame de Beaumont, Mademoiselle de Hauteford, and another Lady of honour, had drawn round the window at which her Majesty sat, and which, thrown fully open, admitted the breeze from the Park.

"Come hither, Pauline," said the Queen as she saw her enter, "What! have you been weeping too? Nay, do not blush, sweet girl; for surely a subject need not be ashamed of doing *once* what a Queen is obliged to do every day. Why, it is the only resource that we women have. But come here: there seems a gay cavalcade entering the Park gates. These are the toys with which we are taught to amuse ourselves. Who are they, I wonder? Come near, Pauline, and see if your young eyes can tell."

Pauline approached the window, and took her station by the side of the Queen, who, rising from her seat, placed her arm kindly through that of Mademoiselle de Beaumont, and leaning gently upon her, prevented the possibility of her retiring from the spot where she stood.

In the mean while the cavalcade approached. The gay trappings of the horses, and the rich suits of their riders, with their silk scarfs and sword-knots of blue and gold, soon showed to the keen eyes of the Queen's ladies that the young Count de Blenau was one of the party; while every now and then a horseman in Isabel and silver appearing amongst the rest, told them, to their no small surprise, that he was accompanied by the Count de Chavigni, the sworn friend of Richelieu, and one of the principal leaders of the Cardinal's party. The Queen, however, evinced no astonishment, and her attendants of course did not attempt to express the wonder they felt at such a companionship.

The rapid pace at which the two gentlemen proceeded, soon brought them near the Palace; and Chavigni, from whose observant eye nothing passed without notice, instantly perceived the Queen and her party at the window, and marked his salutation with a profound inclination, low almost to servility, while De Blenau raised his high-plumed hat and bowed, with the dignity of one conscious that he had deserved well of all who saw him.

Chavigni led the way to Marly, and thence to Ruel, where night began to come heavily upon the twilight; and long before they entered Paris, all objects were lost in darkness. "You must be my guest for to-night, Monsieur de Blenau," said Chavigni, as they rode on down the Rue St. Honoré, "for it will be too late to visit the Cardinal this evening."

However, as they passed the Palais Royal (then called the Palais Cardinal), the blaze of light, which proceeded from every window of the edifice, told that on that night the superb Minister entertained the Court;—a Court, of which he had deprived his King, and which he had appropriated to himself. De Blenau drew a deep sigh as he gazed upon the magnificent edifice, and compared the pomp and luxury which every thing appertaining to it displayed, with the silent, desolate melancholy which reigned in the royal palaces of France.

Passing on down the Rue St. Honoré, and crossing the Rue St. Martin, they soon reached the Place Royale, in which Chavigni had fixed his residence. Two of De Blenau's servants immediately placed themselves at the head of his horse, and held the bridle short, while Henry de La Mothe sprang to the stirrup. But at that moment a gentleman who seemed to have been waiting the arrival of the travellers, issued from the Hotel de Bouthiliers, and prevented them from dismounting.

"Do not alight, gentlemen," exclaimed he; "his Eminence the Cardinal de Richelieu has sent me to request that Messieurs De Blenau and Chavigni will partake a small collation at the Palais Cardinal, without the ceremony of changing their dress."

De Blenau would fain have excused himself, alleging that the habit which he wore was but suited to the morning, and also was soiled with the dust of their long ride. But the Cardinal's officer overbore all opposition, declaring that his Eminence would regard it as a higher compliment, if the Count would refrain from setting foot to

the ground till he entered the gates of his Palace.

"Then we must go back," said Chavigni. "We are honoured by the Cardinal's invitation. Monsieur de Blenau, pardon me for having brought you so far wrong. Go in, Chatenay," he added, turning to one of his own domestics, "and order flambeaux."

In a few moments all was ready; and preceded by half a dozen torch-bearers on foot, they once more turned towards the dwelling of the Minister. As they did so, De Blenau's feelings were not of the most agreeable nature, but he acquiesced in silence, for to have refused his presence would have been worse than useless.

The Palais Royal, which, as we have said, was then called the Palais Cardinal, was a very different building when occupied by the haughty Minister of Louis the Thirteenth, from that which we have seen it in our days. The unbounded resources within his power gave to Richelieu the means of lavishing on the mansion which he erected for himself, all that art could produce of elegant, and all that wealth could supply of magnificent. For seven years the famous Le Mercier laboured to perfect it as a building; and during his long administration, the Cardinal himself never ceased to decorate it with every thing rare or luxurious. The large space which it occupied was divided into an outer and an inner court, round which, on every side, the superb range of buildings, forming the Palace, was placed in exact and beautiful proportion, presenting every way an external and internal front, decorated with all the splendour of architectural ornament.

The principal façade lay towards the Rue St. Honoré, and another of simpler, but perhaps more correct design, towards the gardens, which last were themselves one of the wonders of Paris at the time. Extending over the space now occupied by the Rue de Richelieu, the Rue de Valois, and several other streets, they contained, within themselves, many acres of ground, and were filled with every plant and flower that Europe then possessed, scattered about amongst the trees, which, being planted long before the formality of the Dutch taste was introduced in France, had in general been allowed to fall into natural groups, unperturbed into the long avenues and straight alleys which disfigure so many of the royal parks and gardens on the Continent.

The right wing of the first court was principally occupied by that beautiful Theatre, so strongly connected with every classic remembrance of the French stage, in which the first tragedies of Rotrou and Corneille were produced,—in which many of the inimitable comedies of Molière were first given to the world, and in which he himself acted till his death.

In the wing immediately opposite, was the Chapel, built in the Ionic order, and ornamented in that pure and simple manner which none knew better how to value than the Cardinal de Richelieu.

The two courts were divided from each other by a massive pile of building, containing the grand saloon, the audience-chamber, and the cabinet of the high council. On the ground-floor was the banqueting-room and its antechamber; and a great part of the building fronting the gardens was occupied by the famous gallery of portraits, which Richelieu had taken care should comprise the best pictures that could be procured of all the greatest characters in French history.

The rest of the Palace was filled with various suites of apartments, generally decorated and furnished in the most sumptuous manner. Great part of these the Cardinal reserved either for public entertainments, or for his own private use; but what remained was nevertheless fully large enough to contain that host of officers and attendants by which he was usually surrounded.

On the evening in question almost every part of that immense building was thrown open to receive the multitude that interest and fear gathered round the powerful and vindictive Minister. Almost all that was gay, almost all that was beautiful, had been assembled there. All to whom wealth gave something to secure—all to whom rank gave something to maintain—all whom wit rendered anxious for distinction—all whom talent prompted to ambition. Equally those that Richelieu feared or loved, hated or admired, were brought there by some means, and for some reason.

The scene which met the eyes of De Blenau and Chavigni, as they ascended the grand staircase and entered the saloon, can only be qualified by the word princely. The blaze of jewels, the glare of innumerable lights, the splendid dresses of the guests, and the magnificent decorations of the apartments themselves, all harmonized together, and formed a *coup-d'œil* of surpassing brilliancy.

The rooms were full, but not crowded; for there were attendants stationed in various parts for the purpose of requesting the visitors to proceed, whenever they observed too many collected in one spot. Yet care was taken that those who were thus treated with scant ceremony should be of the inferior class admitted to the Cardinal's fête. Each officer of the Minister's household was well instructed to know the just value of every guest, and how far he was to be courted, either for his mind or influence.

To render to all the highest respect, was the general order, but some were to be distinguished. Care was also taken that none should be neglected, and an infinite number of servants were seen gliding through the apartments, offering the most costly and delicate refreshments to every individual of the mixed assembly.

De Blenau followed Chavigni through the grand saloon, where many an eye was turned upon the elegant and manly figure of him, who on that night of splendour and finery, presumed to show himself in a suit, rich indeed and well-fashioned, but evidently intended more for the sports of the morning than for the gay evening circle in which he then stood. Yet it was remarked, that none of the ladies drew back as the Cavalier passed them, notwithstanding his riding-dress and his dusty boots; and one fair demoiselle, whose rank would have sanctioned it, had it been done on purpose, was unfortunate enough to entangle her train on his spurs. The Count de Coligni stepped forward to disengage it, but De Blenau himself had already bent one knee to the ground, and easily freeing the spur from the robe of Mademoiselle de Bourbon, he remained for a moment in the same attitude. "It is but just," said he, "that I should kneel, at once to repair my awkwardness, and sue for pardon."

"It was my sister's own fault, De Blenau," said the Duke d'Enghien, approaching them, and embracing the young Count. "We have not met, dear friend, since the rendering of Perpignan. But what makes you here? Does your proud spirit bend at last to ask a grace of my Lord Uncle Cardinal?"

"No, your Highness," replied De Blenau; "no farther grace have I to ask, than leave to return to St. Germain's as soon as I may."

"What!" said the Duke, in the abrupt heedless manner in which he always spoke, "does he threaten you too with that cursed bugbear of a Bastille? a bugbear, that makes one man fly his country, and another betray it; that makes

one man run his sword into his heart, and another marry;”—alluding without ceremony to his own compelled espousal of the Cardinal’s niece. “But there stands Chavigni,” he continued, “waiting for you, I suppose. Go on, go on; there is no stopping when once you have got within the Cardinal’s magic circle—Go on, and God speed your suit; for the sooner you are out of that same circle the better.”

Quitting the young hero, who had already, on more than one occasion, displayed that valour and conduct which in after-years procured for him the immortal name of the Great Condé, the Count de Blenau passed another group, consisting of the beautiful Madame de Montbazou and her avowed lover, the Duke of Longueville, who soon after, notwithstanding his unconcealed passion for another, became the husband of Mademoiselle de Bourbon. For he it remarked, in those days a bitter quarrel existed between Love and Marriage, and they were seldom seen together in the same society. It is said indeed, that in France, a coolness remains between them to this day. Here also was the Duke of Guise, who afterwards played so conspicuous a part in the revolution of Naples, and by his singular adventures, his gallantry and chivalrous courage, acquired the name of *l’Hero de la Fable*, as Condé had been called *l’Hero de l’Histoire*. Still passing on, De Blenau rejoined Chavigni, who waited for him at the entrance of the next chamber.

It was the great hall of audience, and at the farther extremity stood the Cardinal de Richelieu himself, leaning for support against a gilt railing, which defended from any injurious touch the beautiful picture of Raphael, so well known by the title of “La Belle Jardiniere.” He was dressed in the long purple robes of his order, and wore the peculiar hat of a Cardinal; the bright colour of which made the deadly hue of his complexion look still more ghastly. But the paleness of his countenance, and a certain attenuation of feature, was all that could be discerned of the illness from which he suffered. The powerful mind within seemed to conquer the feebleness of the body. His form was erect and dignified, his eye beaming with that piercing sagacity and haughty confidence in his own powers, which so distinguished his policy; and his voice clear, deep, and firm, but of that peculiar quality of sound, that it seemed to spread all round, and to come no one knew from whence, like the wind echoing through an empty cavern.

It was long since De Blenau had seen the Cardinal; and on entering the audience-chamber, the sound of that voice made him start. Its clear hollow tone seemed close to him, though Richelieu was conversing with some of his immediate friends at the farther end of the room.

As the two cavaliers advanced, De Blenau had an opportunity of observing the manner in which the Minister treated those around him: but far from telling aught of dungeons and of death, his conversation seemed cheerful, and his demeanour mild and placid. “And can this be the man,” thought the Count, “the fabric of whose power is cemented by blood and torture?”

They had now approached within a few paces of the spot where the Cardinal stood; and the figure of Chavigni catching his eye, he advanced a step, and received him with unaffected kindness. Towards De Blenau, his manner was full of elegant politeness. He did not embrace him as he had done Chavigni; but he held him by the hand for a moment, gazing on him with a dignified approving smile. Those who did not well know the heart of the subtle Minister, would have called that smile benevolent, especially when it was accompanied by many kind inquiries respecting the young nobleman’s views and pursuits. De Blenau had been taught to judge by actions, not professions; and the Cardinal had taken care to imprint his deeds too deeply in the minds of men to be wiped out with soft words. To dissemble was not De Blenau’s forte; and yet he knew, that to show a deceiver he cannot deceive, is to make him an open enemy for ever. He replied, therefore, calmly and politely; neither repulsed the Cardinal’s advances, nor courted his regard; and after a few more moments of desultory conversation, prepared to pursue his way through the various apartments.

“There are some men, Monsieur le Comte,” said the Cardinal, seeing him about to pass on, “whom I might have scrupled to invite to such a scene as this, in their riding-dress. But the Count de Blenau is not to be mistaken.”

“I felt no scruple,” answered De Blenau, “in presenting myself thus, when your Eminence desired it; for the dress in which the Cardinal de Richelieu thought fit to receive me, could not be objected to by any of his circle.”

The Cardinal bowed; and De Blenau adding, that he would not intrude farther at that moment, took his way through the suite of apartments to Richelieu’s left hand. Chavigni was about to follow, but a sign from the Cardinal stopped him, and the young Count passed on alone.

Each of the various rooms he entered was thronged with its own peculiar groups. In one, was an assembly of famous artists and sculptors; in another, a close convocation of philosophers, discussing a thousand absurd theories of the day; and in the last he came to, was a buzzing hive of poets and *beaux esprits*; each trying to distinguish himself, each jealous of the other, and all equally vain and full of themselves.

In one corner was Scuderi, haranguing upon the nature of tragedy, of which he knew nothing. In another place, Voiture, throwing off little empty couplets and bon-mots, like a child blowing bubbles from a tobacco-pipe; and farther on was Rotrou, surrounded by a select party more silent than the rest, to whom he recited some of his unpublished poems, marking strongly the verse, and laying great emphasis upon the rhyme. De Blenau stopped for a moment to listen while the poet proceeded:—

“L’aube desia se lève, et le mignard Zephire,
Parfumant l’horizon du doux air qu’il respire,
Va d’un son agréable esveiller les oiseaux
Pour saluer le jour qui paroist sur les eaux.”

But though the verses he recited were highly poetic, the extravagant affectation of his manner soon neutralized their effect upon De Blenau; and passing on down a broad flight of steps, De Blenau found himself in the gardens of the Palace. These, as well as the whole front of the building, were illuminated in every direction. Bands of musicians were dispersed in the different walks, and a multitude of servants were busily engaged in laying out tables for supper with all the choicest viands of the season, and in trimming the various lamps and tapers which hung from the branches of the trees or were displayed on fanciful frames of wood, so placed as to give the fullest light to the banquets which were situated near them.

Scattered about in various parts of the garden, but more especially near the Palace, were different groups of gentlemen, all speaking of plays, assemblies, or fêtes, and all taking care to make their conversation perfectly audible, lest the jealous suspicion ever attendant on usurped power, should attribute to them schemes which, it is

probable, fear alone prevented them from attempting.

Nevertheless, the gardens, as we have said, containing several acres of ground, there were many parts comparatively deserted. It was towards these more secluded spots that De Blenau directed his steps, wishing himself many a league away from the Palais Cardinal and all its splendour. Just as he had reached a part where few persons were to be seen, some one struck him slightly on the arm, and turning round, he perceived a man who concealed the lower part of his face with his cloak, and tendered him what seemed to be a billet.

At the first glance De Blenau thought he recognised the Count de Coligni, a reputed lover of Mademoiselle de Bourbon, and imagined that the little piece of gallantry he had shown that lady on his first entrance, might have called upon him the wrath of the jealous Coligni. But no sooner had he taken the piece of paper, than the other darted away amongst the trees, giving him no time to observe more, either of his person or his dress.

Approaching a spot where the number of lamps gave him sufficient light to read, De Blenau opened the note, which contained merely these words. "Beware of Chavigni;—they will seek to draw something from you which may criminate you hereafter."

As he read, De Blenau heard a light step advancing, and hastily concealing the note, turned to see who approached. The only person near was a lady, who had thrown a thick veil over her head, which not only covered her face, but the upper part of her figure. She passed close by him, but without turning her head, or by any other motion seeming to notice him; but as she did so, De Blenau heard a low voice from under the veil, desiring him to follow. Gliding on, without pausing for a moment, the lady led the way to the very extreme of the garden. De Blenau followed quick upon her steps, and as he did so, endeavoured to call to mind where he had seen that graceful and dignified figure before. At length the lady stopped, looked round for a moment, and raising her veil, discovered the lovely countenance of Mademoiselle de Bourbon.

"Monsieur de Blenau," said the Princess, "I have but one moment to tell you, that the Cardinal and Chavigni are plotting the ruin of the Queen; and they wish to force or persuade you to betray her. After you had left the Cardinal, by chance I heard it proposed to arrest you even to-night; but Chavigni said, that he had given his word that you should return to St. Germain's to-morrow. Take care, therefore, of your conduct while here, and if you have any cause to fear, escape the moment you are at liberty. Fly to Flanders, and place yourself under the protection of Don Francisco de Mello."

"I have to return your Highness a thousand thanks," replied De Blenau; "but as far as innocence can give security, I have no reason to fear."

"Innocence is nothing here," rejoined the lady. "But you are the best judge, Monsieur de Blenau. I sent Coligni to warn you, and taking an opportunity of escaping from the supper-table, came to request that you will offer my humble duty to the Queen, and assure her that Marie de Bourbon is ever hers. But here is some one coming—Good God, it is Chavigni!"

As she spoke, Chavigni came rapidly upon them. Mademoiselle de Bourbon drew down her veil, and De Blenau placed himself between her and the Statesman, who, affecting an excess of gaiety, totally foreign to his natural character, began to rally the Count upon what he termed his gallantry. "So, Monsieur de Blenau," cried he, "already paying your devoirs to our Parisian dames. Nay, I must offer my compliments to your fair lady on her conquest;" and he endeavoured to pass the Count towards Mademoiselle de Bourbon.

De Blenau drew his sword. "Stand off, Sir," exclaimed he, "or by Heaven you are a dead man!" And the point came flashing so near Chavigni's breast, that he was fain to start back a step or two. The lady seized the opportunity to pass him, for the palisade of the garden had prevented her escaping the other way. Chavigni attempted to follow, but De Blenau caught his arm, and held him with a grasp of iron.

"Not one step, Sir!" cried he. "Monsieur de Chavigni, you have strangely forgot yourself. How is it you presume, Sir, to interrupt my conversation with any one? And let me ask, what affair it is of yours, if a lady chose to give me five minutes of her company even here! You have slackened your gallantry not a little."

"But was the Cardinal's garden a place fitted for such love stories?" demanded Chavigni, feeling, at the same time, very sure that the conversation he had interrupted had not been of love; for in those days politics and faction divided the heart of a Frenchwoman with gallantry, and, instead of quarrelling for the empire of her breast, these apparently opposite passions went hand in hand together; and exempt from the more serious dangers incurred by the other sex in similar enterprises, women were often the most active agents and zealous partisans in the factions and conspiracies of the times.

It had been Chavigni's determination, on accompanying De Blenau to the Palais Cardinal, not to lose sight of his companion for a moment, in order that no communication might take place between him and any of the Queen's party till such time as the Cardinal had personally interrogated him concerning the correspondence which they supposed that Anne of Austria carried on with her brother, Philip of Spain. Chavigni, however, had been stopped, as we have seen, by the Cardinal himself, and detained for some time in conversation, the principal object of which was, the Count de Blenau himself, and the means of either persuading him by favour, or of driving him by fear, not only to abandon, but to betray the party he had espoused. The Cardinal thought ambition would do all; Chavigni said that it would not move De Blenau; and thus the discussion was considerably prolonged.

As soon as Chavigni could liberate himself, he had hastened after the Count, and found him as we have described. To have ascertained who was his companion, Chavigni would have risked his life; but now that she had escaped him, the matter was past recall; and willing again to throw De Blenau off his guard, he made some excuses for his intrusion, saying he had thought that the lady was not unknown to him.

"Well, well, let it drop," replied De Blenau, fully more desirous of avoiding farther inquiries than Chavigni was of relinquishing them. "But the next time you come across me on such an occasion, beware of your heart's blood, Monsieur de Chavigni." And thus saying, he thrust back his sword into the scabbard.

Chavigni, however, was resolved not to lose sight of him again, and passing his arm through that of the Count, "You are still too hot, Monsieur de Blenau," said he; "but nevertheless let us be friends again."

"As far as we ever were friends, Sir," replied De Blenau. "The open difference of our principles in every respect, must always prevent our greatly assimilating."

Chavigni, however, kept to his purpose, and did not withdraw his arm from that of De Blenau, nor quit him again during the whole evening.

Whether the Statesman suspected Mademoiselle de Bourbon or not, matters little; but on entering the banquet-room, where the principal guests were preparing to take their seats, they passed that lady with her brother and the Count de Coligni, and the eye of Chavigni glanced from the countenance of De Blenau to hers. But they were both upon their guard, and not a look betrayed that they had met since De Blenau's spur had been entangled in her train.

At that moment the Master of the ceremonies exclaimed with a loud voice, "Place au Comte de Blenau," and was conducting him to a seat higher than his rank entitled him to take, when his eye fell upon the old Marquis de Brion; and with the deference due not only to his station but to his high military renown, De Blenau drew back to give him precedence.

"Go on, go on, *mon cher De Blenau*," said the old soldier; and lowering his voice to a whisper, he added, "honest men like you and I are all out of place here; so go on, and never mind. If it were in the field, we would strive which should be first; but here there is no knowing which end of the table is most honourable."

"Wherever it were, I should always be happy to follow Monsieur de Brion," replied De Blenau; "but as you will have it, so let it be." And following the Master of the ceremonies, he was soon placed amongst the most distinguished guests, and within four or five seats of the Cardinal. Like the spot before a heathen altar, it was always the place either of honour or sacrifice; and De Blenau scarcely knew which was to be his fate. At all events, the distinction which he met with, was by no means pleasing to him, and he remained in silence during greater part of the banquet.

Every thing in the vast hall where they sat was magnificent beyond description. It was like one of those scenes in fairy romance, where supernatural powers lend their aid to dignify some human festival. All the apartment was as fully illuminated as if the broad sun had shone into it in his fullest splendour; yet not a single light was to be seen. Soft sounds of music also occasionally floated through the air, but never so loud as to interrupt the conversation.

At the table all was glitter, and splendour, and luxury; and from the higher end at which De Blenau sat, the long perspective of the hall, decked out with all a mighty kingdom's wealth and crowded with the gay, the bright, and the fair, offered an interminable view of beauty and magnificence.

I might describe the passing of the banquet, and the bright smiles that were given, and the bright things that were said. I might enlarge upon the crowd of domestics, the activity of the seneschals and officers, and tell of the splendour of the decorations. I might even introduce the famous court fool, L'Angeli, who stood behind the chair of his young lord the Duke d'Enghien. But no—a master's hand has given to the world so many splendid pictures of such scenes, that mine would seem but a feeble imitation. Let such things rest with Scott, whose magic wand has had power to call up the spirit of the past with as much truth, as if it were again substantially in being.

To pursue our theme, however. The Cardinal de Richelieu, who held in his hand the fate of all who sat around him, yielded to his guests the most marked attention, treating them with the profound humility of great pride; trying to quell the fire of his eye, till it should become nothing but affability; and to soften the deep tones of his voice, from the accent of command to an expression of gentle courtesy; but notwithstanding all his efforts, a degree of that haughtiness with which the long habit of despotic rule had tinged his manners, would occasionally appear, and still show that it was the lord entertaining his vassals. His demeanour towards De Blenau, however, was all suavity and kindness. He addressed him several times in the most marked manner during the course of the banquet, and listened to his reply with one of those approving smiles, so sweet upon the lips of power.

De Blenau was not to be deceived, it is true. Yet though he knew that kindness to be assumed on purpose to betray, and the smile to be as false as Hell, there was a fascination in the distinction shown him, against which he could not wholly guard his heart. His brow unbent of its frown, and he entered into the gay conversation which was going on around; but at that moment he observed the Cardinal glance his eye towards Chavigni with a meaning smile.

De Blenau marked it. "So," thought he, "my Lord Cardinal, you deem me your own." And as the guests rose, De Blenau took his leave, and returned with Chavigni to the Place Royale.

CHAPTER XI.

Containing a Conference, which ends much as it began.

THE music of the Cardinal's fête rang in De Blenau's ears all night, and the lights danced in his eyes, and the various guests flitted before his imagination, like the figures in some great phantasmagoria. One time he seemed wandering in the gardens with Pauline de Beaumont, and offering up all the dearest treasures of his heart, when suddenly the lady raised her veil, and it was Mademoiselle de Bourbon. Then again he was seated on the Cardinal's right hand, who poured out for him a cup of wine: he raised it to his lips, and was about to drink, when some one dashed it from his hand, exclaiming, "It is poison!" then, turning round to see who had thus interposed, he beheld a figure without a head, and the overthrown cup poured forth a stream of blood. The next moment it was all the Cardinal's funeral, and the fool L'Angeli appeared as chief mourner. At length, however, towards the approach of morning, the uneasy visions died away, and left him in deep sleep, from which he rose refreshed, and prepared to encounter the events of a new day.

Alas! that man should still rise to sorrow and to danger, and that the kindest gift of Heaven should be the temporary forgetfulness of existence. Sorrow! how is it that thy coarse thread is so intimately mingled with the web of life, that he who would tear thee out must rend the whole fabric? Oh life, thou long sad dream! when shall we rise from all thy phantom agonies to that bright waking which we fondly hope?

De Blenau prepared his mind, as a man arming for a battle; and sent to notify to Chavigni, that he was about to visit the Cardinal. In a few minutes after, the Statesman himself appeared, and courteously conducted the young Count to his horse, but did not offer to accompany him to the Minister. "Monsieur de Blenau," said he, "it is better you should go alone. After your audience, you will doubtless be in haste to return to St. Germain's; but if you will remain to take your noon meal at my poor table, I shall esteem myself honoured."

De Blenau thanked him for his courtesy, but declined, stating that he was anxious to return home before night, if he were permitted to do so at all. "My word is passed for your safety," replied Chavigni; "so have no doubt on that head. But take my counsel, Monsieur le Comte: moderate your proud bearing towards the Cardinal. Those who play with a lion, must take good care not to irritate him."

On arriving at the Palais Cardinal, De Blenau left his attendants in the outer court, and following an officer of the household, proceeded through a long suite of apartments to a large saloon, where he found several others waiting the leisure of the Minister, who was at that moment engaged in conference with the Ambassador from Sweden.

De Blenau's own feelings were not of the most comfortable nature; but on looking round the room, he guessed, from the faces of all those with whom it was tenanted, that such sensations were but too common there. One had placed himself at a window, and gazed upon the stones of the court-yard with as much earnestness as if they had inspired him with the deepest interest. Another walked up and down his own corner with irregular steps and downcast look. Another leaned back in his seat, with his chin resting on his breast, and regarded intently a door in the other side of the saloon. And another sat bending his hat into so many shapes, that he left it, in the end, of no shape at all. But all were marked, by the knitted brow and anxious eye, for men whose fate was hanging on the breath of another.

There was nothing consolatory in their looks, and De Blenau turned to the portraits which covered the walls of the saloon. The first that his eye fell upon was that of the famous Montmorency. He was represented as armed in steel, with the head uncovered; and from his apparent age it seemed that the picture had not been painted long before the unfortunate conspiracy, which, by its failure, brought him to the scaffold. There was also an expression of grave sadness in the countenance, as if he had presaged his approaching fate. De Blenau turned to another; but it so happened that each picture in the room represented some one of the many whom Richelieu's unsparing vengeance had overtaken. Whether they were placed in that waiting-room in order to overawe those whom the Minister wished to intimidate; or whether it was that the famous gallery, which the Cardinal had filled with portraits of all the principal historical characters of France, would contain no more, and that in consequence the pictures of the later dates had been placed in this saloon, without any deeper intent, matters not; but at all events they offered no very pleasant subject of contemplation.

De Blenau, however, was not long kept in suspense; for, in a few minutes, the door on the other side of the room opened, and the Swedish Ambassador passed out. The door shut behind him, but in a moment after an attendant entered, and although several others had been waiting before him, De Blenau was the first summoned to the presence of the Cardinal.

He could not help feeling as if he wronged those he left still in doubt as to their fate: but following the officer through an ante-room, he entered the audience closet, and immediately perceived Richelieu seated at a table, over which were strewed a multitude of papers of different dimensions, some of which he was busily engaged in examining;—reading them he was not, for his eye glanced so rapidly over their contents, that his knowledge of each could be but general. He paused for a moment as De Blenau entered, bowed his head, pointed to a seat, and resumed his employment. When he had done, he signed the papers, and gave them to a dull-looking personage, in a black silk pourpoint, who stood behind his chair.

"Take these three death-warrants," said he, "to Monsieur Lafemas, and then these others to Poterie at the Bastille. But no—stop," he continued after a moment's thought; "you had better go to the Bastille first, for Poterie can put Caply to the torture, while you are gone to Lafemas; and you can bring me back his confession as you return."

De Blenau shuddered at the *sang froid* with which the Minister commanded those things that make one's blood curdle even to imagine. But the attendant was practised in such commissions; and taking the packets, as a mere matter of course, he bowed in silence, and disappearing by a door on the other side, left De Blenau alone with the Cardinal.

"Well, Monsieur de Blenau," said Richelieu, looking up with a frank smile, "your pardon for having detained you. There are many things upon which I have long wished to speak to you, and this caused me to desire your company. But I have no doubt that we shall part perfectly satisfied with each other."

The Cardinal paused, as if for a reply. "I hope so too, my Lord," said De Blenau. "I can, of course, have no cause to be dissatisfied with your Eminence; and for my own part, I feel my bosom to be clear."

"I doubt it not, Monsieur le Comte," replied the Minister, with a gracious inclination of the head—"I doubt it not; I know your spirit to be too frank and noble to mingle in petty faction and treasonable cabal. No one more admires your brave and independent bearing than myself. You must remember that I have marked you from your youth. You have been educated, as it were, under my own eye; and were it now necessary to trust the welfare of the State to the honour of any one man, I would confide it to the honour of De Blenau."

"To what, in the name of Heaven, can this lead?" thought De Blenau; but he bowed without reply, and the Cardinal proceeded.

"I have, for some time past," he continued, "been thinking of placing you in one of those high stations, to which your rank and consideration entitle you to aspire. At present, none are vacant; but as a forerunner to such advancement, I propose to call you to the Council, and to give you the government of Poitou."

De Blenau was now, indeed, astonished. The Cardinal was not a man to jest: and yet what he proposed, as a mere preliminary, was an offer that the first noble in France might have accepted with gladness. The Count was about to speak. But Richelieu paused only for a moment, to observe the effect of what he said upon his auditor; and perhaps over-rating the ambition of De Blenau, he proceeded more boldly.

"I do not pretend to say, notwithstanding my sense of your high merit, and my almost parental feelings towards you, that I am wholly moved to this by my individual regard; but the truth is, that the State requires, at this moment, the services of one, who joins to high talents a thorough knowledge of the affairs of Spain."

"So!" thought De Blenau, "I have it now. The government of Poitou, and a seat at the Council, provided I betray the Queen and sell my own honour." Richelieu seemed to wait an answer, and De Blenau replied: "If your Eminence means to attribute such knowledge to me, some one must have greatly misled you. I possess no information on the affairs of Spain whatever, except from the common reports and journals of the time."

This reply did not seem to affect Richelieu's intentions. "Well, well, Monsieur de Blenau," said he, with a smile, "you will take your seat at the Council, and will, of course, as a good subject and an honourable man, communicate to us whatever information you possess, on those points which concern the good of the State. We do not expect all at once; and every thing shall be done to smooth your way, and facilitate your views. Then, perhaps, if Richelieu live to execute the plans he has formed, you, Monsieur de Blenau, following his path, and sharing his confidence, may be ready to take his place, when death shall at length call him from it."

The Cardinal counted somewhat too much on De Blenau's ambition, and not sufficiently on his knowledge of the world; and imagining that he had, the evening before, discovered the weak point in the character of the young Count, he thought to lead him to any thing, by holding out to him extravagant prospects of future greatness. The dish, however, was somewhat too highly flavoured; and De Blenau replied, with a smile,—

"Your Eminence is exceeding good to think at all of me, in the vast and more important projects which occupy your mind. But, alas! my Lord, De Blenau would prove but a poor successor to Richelieu.—No, my Lord Cardinal," he continued, "I have no ambition; that is a passion which should be reserved for such great and comprehensive minds as yours. I am contented as I am. High stations are always stations of danger."

"I had heard that the Count de Blenau was no way fearful," said Richelieu, fixing on him a keen and almost scornful glance. "Was the report a mistake? or is it lately he has become afraid of danger?"

De Blenau was piqued, and lost temper. "Of personal danger, my Lord, I am never afraid," replied he. "But when along with risk to myself is involved danger to my friends, danger to my country, danger to my honour, and danger to my soul," and he returned the Cardinal's glance full as proudly as it had been given, "then, my Lord Cardinal, I would say, it were no cowardice, but true courage to fly from such peril—unless," he added, remembering the folly of opposing the irritable and unscrupulous Minister, and thinking that his words had, perhaps, been already too warm—"unless, indeed, one felt within one's breast the mind of a Richelieu."

While De Blenau spoke, the Cardinal's brow knitted into a frown. A flush too came over his cheek; and untying the ribbon which served as a fastening, he took off the velvet cap he generally wore, as if to give himself air. He heard him, however, to the end, and then answered drily, "You speak well, Monsieur de Blenau, and, I doubt not, feel what you say. But am I to understand you, that you refuse to aid us at the Council with your information and advice?"

"So far, your Eminence is right," replied the Count, who saw that the storm was now about to break upon his head; "I must, indeed, decline the honours which you offer with so bountiful a hand. But do not suppose that I do so from unwillingness to yield you any information; for, truly, I have none to give. I have never meddled with politics. I have never turned my attention to State affairs; and therefore still less could I yield you any advice. Your Eminence would be woefully disappointed, when you expected to find a man well acquainted with the arts of government, and deep read in the designs of foreign states, to meet with one, whose best knowledge is to range a battalion, or to pierce a boar; a soldier, and not a diplomatist; a hunter, and not a statesman. And as to the government of Poitou, my Lord, its only good would be the emolument, and already my revenues are far more than adequate to my wants."

"You refuse my kindness, Sir," replied the Cardinal, with an air of deep determined haughtiness, very different from the urbanity with which he had at first received De Blenau; "I must now speak to you in another tone. And let me warn you to beware of what you say; for be assured, that I already possess sufficient information to confound you if you should prevaricate."

"My Lord Cardinal," replied De Blenau, somewhat hastily, "I am not accustomed to prevaricate. Ask any questions you please, and, so long as my honour and my duty go with them, I will answer you."

"Then there are questions," said the Cardinal, "that you would think against your duty to answer?"

"I said not so, your Eminence," replied De Blenau. "In the examination I find I am to undergo, give my words their full meaning, if you please, but no more than their meaning."

"Well then, Sir, answer me as a man of honour and a French noble," said the Cardinal—"Are you not aware of a correspondence that has been, and is now, carried on between Anne of Austria and Don Francisco de Mello, Governor of the Low Countries?"

"I know not whom you mean, Sir, by Anne of Austria," replied De Blenau. "If it be her Majesty, your Queen and mine, that you so designate, I reply at once that I know of no such correspondence, nor do I believe that it exists."

"Do you mean to say, Monsieur de Blenau," demanded the Cardinal, fixing his keen sunken eyes upon the young Count with that basilisk glance for which he was famous—"Do you mean to say, that you yourself have not forwarded letters from the Queen to Madame de Chevreuse, and Don Francisco de Mello, by a private channel?—Pause, Monsieur de Blenau, before you answer, and be well assured that I am acquainted with every particular of your conduct."

"Your Eminence is, no doubt, acquainted with much more intricate subjects than any of my actions," replied the Count. "With regard to Madame de Chevreuse, her Majesty has no need to conceal a correspondence with her, which has been fully permitted and sanctioned, both by your Eminence and the still higher authority of the King; and I may add, that to my certain knowledge, letters have gone to that lady by your own courier. On the other point, I have answered already; and have only to say once more, that I know of no such correspondence, nor would I, assuredly, lend myself to any such measures, which I should conceive to be treasonable."

"I have always hitherto supposed you to be a man of honour," said the Cardinal coolly; "but what must I conceive now, Monsieur le Comte, when I tell you that I have those very letters in my possession?"

"You may conceive what you please, Sir," replied De Blenau, giving way to his indignation; "but I will dare any man to lay before me a letter from her Majesty to the person you mention, which has passed through the hands of De Blenau."

The Cardinal did not reply, but opening an ebony cabinet, which stood on his right hand, he took from one of the compartments a small bundle of papers, from which he selected one, and laid it on the table before the Count, who had hitherto looked on with no small wonder and expectation. "Do you know that writing, Sir?" demanded the Cardinal, still keeping his hand upon the paper, in such a manner as to allow only a word or two to be visible.

De Blenau examined the line which the Cardinal suffered to appear, and replied—"From what little I can see, I should imagine it to be the hand-writing of her Majesty. But that does not show that I have any thing to do with it."

"But there is that in it which does," answered Richelieu, folding down a line or two of the letter, and pointing out to the Count a sentence which said, "This will be conveyed to you by the Count de Blenau, who you know never fails."

"Now, Sir!" continued the Cardinal, "once more let me advise you to give me all you possess upon this subject. From a feeling of personal regard, I have had too much patience with you already."

"All I can reply to your Eminence," answered the Count, not a little embarrassed, "is, that no letter whatever has been conveyed by me, knowingly, to the Governor of the Low Countries."

De Blenau's eyes naturally fixed on the paper, which still lay on the table, and from which the Cardinal had by this time withdrawn his hand; and feeling that both life and honour depended upon that document, he resolved to ascertain its authenticity, of which he entertained some doubt.

"Stop," said he hastily, "let me look at the superscription," and before Richelieu could reply, he had raised it from the table and turned to the address. One glance was enough to satisfy him, and he returned it to the Cardinal with a cool and meaning smile, repeating the words—"To Madame de Chevreuse."

At first the Cardinal had instinctively stretched out his hand to stop De Blenau in his purpose, but he instantly recovered himself, nor did his countenance betray the least change of feeling. "Well, Sir," replied he, "you said that you would dare any one to lay before you a letter from the Queen to the person I mentioned. Did I not mention Madame de Chevreuse, and is not there the letter?"

"Your Eminence has mistaken me," replied De Blenau, bowing his head, and smiling at the Minister's art; "I meant, Don Francisco de Mello. I had answered what you said in regard to Madame de Chevreuse, before."

"I did mistake you then, Sir," said the Cardinal; "but it was from the ambiguity of your own words. However, passing over your boldness, in raising that letter without my permission; I will show you that I know more of your proceedings than you suspect. I will tell you the very terms of the message you sent to the Queen, after you were wounded in the wood of Mantes, conveying to her, that you had not lost the packet with which you were charged. Did not Seguin tell her, on your part, that though the wound was in your side, your heart was not injured?"

"I dare say he did, my Lord," replied De Blenau, coolly; "and the event has proved that he was quite right, for your Eminence must perceive that I am quite recovered, which, of course, could not have been the case, had any vital part been hurt. But I hope, your Eminence, that there is no offence, in your eyes, either in having sent the Queen, my mistress, an account of my health, or in having escaped the attack of assassins."

A slight flush passed over Richelieu's cheek. "You may chance to fall into less scrupulous hands than even their's," replied he. "I am certainly informed, Sir, that you, on the part of the Queen, have been carrying on a treasonable intercourse with Spain—a country at war with France, to whose crown you are a born subject and vassal; and I have to tell you, that the punishment of such a crime is death. Yes, Sir, you may knit your brow. But no consideration shall stay me from visiting, with the full severity of the law, such as do so offend; and though the information I want be but small, depend upon it, I shall not hesitate to employ the most powerful means to wring it from you."

De Blenau had no difficulty in comprehending the nature of those means, to which the Cardinal alluded; but his mind was made up to suffer the worst. "My Lord Cardinal," replied he, "what your intentions are, I know not; but be sure, that to whatever extremes you may go, you can wring nothing from me but what you have already heard. I once more assure you, that I know of no treasonable correspondence whatsoever; and firm in my own innocence, I equally despise all attempts to bribe or to intimidate me."

"Sir, you are insolent!" replied the Cardinal rising: "Use no such language to me!—Are you not an insect I can sweep from my path in an instant? Ho, a guard there without! We shall soon see, whether you know aught of Philip of Spain."

Had the Cardinal's glance been directed towards De Blenau, he would have seen, that at the name of Philip of Spain, a degree of paleness came over his cheek; but another object had caught Richelieu's eye, and he did not observe it. It was the entrance of the attendant whom he had despatched with the death-warrants, which now drew his notice; and well pleased to show De Blenau the dreadful means he so unscrupulously employed to extort confession from those he suspected, he eagerly demanded, "What news?"

"May it please your Eminence," said the attendant, "Caply died under the torture. In truth, it was soon over with

him, for he did not bear it above ten minutes."

"But the confession, the confession!" exclaimed Richelieu. "Where is the *procès verbal*?"

"He made no confession, Sir," replied the man. "He protested, to the last, his innocence, and that he knew nothing."

"Pshaw!" said Richelieu; "they let him die too soon; they should have given him wine to keep him up. Foolish idiot," he continued, as if meditating over the death of his victim; "had he but told what he was commanded, he would have saved himself from a death of horror. Such is the meed of obstinacy."

"Such," thought De Blenau, "is, unhappily, often the reward of firmness and integrity. But such a death is honourable in itself."

No one could better read in the face what was passing in the mind than Richelieu, and it is probable that he easily saw in the countenance of De Blenau, the feelings excited by what had just passed. He remembered also the promise given by Chavigni; and if, when he called the Guard, he had ever seriously proposed to arrest De Blenau, he abandoned his intention for the moment. Not that the high tone of the young Count's language was either unfelt, or forgiven, for Richelieu never pardoned; but it was as easy to arrest De Blenau at St. Germain's as in Paris; and the wily Minister calculated, that by giving him a little liberty, and throwing him off his guard, he might be tempted to do those things which would put him more completely in the power of the government, and give the means of punishing him for his pride and obstinacy, as it was internally termed by a man long unaccustomed to any opposition.

De Blenau was principally obnoxious to the Cardinal, as the confidant of the Queen, and from being the chief of her adherents both by his rank, wealth, and reputation. Anne of Austria having now become the only apparent object which could cloud the sky of Richelieu's political power, he had resolved either to destroy her, by driving her to some criminal act, or so to entangle her in his snares, as to reduce her to become a mere instrument in his hands and for his purposes. To arrest De Blenau would put the Queen upon her guard; and therefore, the Minister, without hesitation, resolved to dissemble his resentment, and allow the Count to depart in peace; reserving for another time the vengeance he had determined should overtake him at last. Nor was his dissembling of that weak nature which those employ, who have all the will to deceive, without the art of deceiving.

Richelieu walked rapidly up and down the closet for a moment, as if striving to repress some strong emotion, then stopped, and turning to De Blenau with some frankness of manner, "Monsieur le Comte," said he, "I will own that you have heated me,—perhaps I have given way to it too much. But you ought to be more careful of your words, Sir, and remember that with men whose power you cannot resist, it is sometimes dangerous even to be in the right, much more to make them feel it rudely. However, it is all past, and I will now detain you no longer; trusting to your word, that the information which I have received, is without foundation. Let me only add, that you might have raised yourself this day to a height which few men in France would not struggle to attain. But that is past also, and may, perhaps, never return."

"I am most grateful, believe me," replied De Blenau, "for all the favours your Eminence intended me; and I have no doubt, that you will soon find some other person, on whom to bestow them, much more worthy of them than myself."

Richelieu bowed low, and fixed his eyes upon the Count without reply—a signal that the audience was over, which was not lost upon De Blenau, who very gladly took his leave of the Minister, hoping most devoutly never to see his face again. The ambiguity of his last sentence, however, had not escaped the Cardinal.

"So, Monsieur de Blenau!" said he, as soon as the Count had left him, "you can make speeches with a double meaning also! Can you so? You may rue it though, for I will find means to bend your proud spirit, or to break it; and that before three days be over. Is every thing prepared for my passage to Chantilly?" he continued, turning to the attendant.

"All is prepared, please your Eminence," replied the man; "and as I passed, I saw Monsieur de Chavigni getting into his chaise to set out."

"We will let him be an hour or two in advance," said the Cardinal. "Send in the Marquis de Goumont;" and he again applied himself to other affairs.

CHAPTER XII.

"An entire new comedy, with new scenery, dresses, and decorations."

THE little village of Mesnil St. Loup, all insignificant as it is, was at the time of my tale a place of even less consequence than it appears now-a-days, when nine people out of ten have scarcely ever heard of its existence.

It was, nevertheless, a pretty-looking place; and had its little *auberge*, on the same scale and in the same style as the village to which it belonged,—small, neat, and picturesque, with its high pole before the door, crowned with a gay garland of flowers, which served both for sign and inscription to the inn; being fully as comprehensible an intimation to the peasantry of the day, that "Bon vin et bonne chère" were to be obtained within, as the most artful flourish of a modern sign-painter.

True it is, that the little cabaret of Mesnil St. Loup was seldom troubled with the presence of a traveller; but there the country people would congregate after the labours of the day, and enjoy their simple sports with a relish that luxury knows not. The high road from Paris to Troyes passed quite in another direction; and a stranger in Mesnil St. Loup was a far greater stranger than he could possibly have been anywhere else, except perhaps in newly discovered America. For there was nothing to excite either interest or curiosity; except it were the little church, which had seen many a century pass over its primitive walls, remaining still unaltered, while five or six old trees, which had been its companions for time out of mind, began to show strong signs of decay, in their rifted bark and falling branches, but still formed a picturesque group, with a great stone cross and fountain underneath them, and a seat for the weary traveller to rest himself in their shade.

Thus, Mesnil St. Loup was little known to strangers, for its simplicity had no attractions for the many. Nevertheless, on one fine evening, somewhere about the beginning of September, the phenomenon of a new face showed itself at Mesnil St. Loup. The personage to whom it appertained, was a horseman of small mean appearance, who, having passed by the church, rode through the village to the *auberge*, and having raised his eyes to the garland over the door, he divined from it, that he himself would find there good Champagne wine, and his horse would meet with entertainment equally adapted to his peculiar taste. Thereupon, the stranger alighted and entered the place of public reception, without making any of that bustle about himself, which the landlord seemed well inclined to do for him; but on the contrary sat himself down in the most shady corner, ordered his bottle of wine, and inquired what means the house afforded of satisfying his hunger, in a low quiet tone of voice, which reached no farther than the person he addressed.

"As for wine," the host replied, "Monsieur should have such wine that the first merchant of Epernay might prick his ears at it; and in regard to eatables, what could be better than stewed eels, out of the river hard by, and a *civet de lièvre*?—Monsieur need not be afraid," he added; "it was a real hare he had snared that morning himself, in the forest under the hill. Some dishonourable innkeepers," he observed—"innkeepers unworthy of the name, would dress up cats and rats, and such animals, in the form of hares and rabbits; even as the Devil had been known to assume the appearance of an Angel of light; but he scorned such practices, and could not only show his hare's skin, but his hare in the skin. Farther, he would give Monsieur an ortolan in a vine leaf, and a dish of stewed sorrel."

The stranger underwent the innkeeper's oration with most exemplary patience, signified his approbation of the proposed dinner, without attacking the hare's reputation; and when at length it was placed before him, he ate his meal and drank his wine, in profound silence, without a word of praise or blame to either one or the other. The landlord, with all his sturdy loquacity, failed in more than one attempt to draw him into conversation; and the hostess, though none of the oldest or ugliest, could scarce win a syllable from his lips, even by asking if he were pleased with his fare. The taciturn stranger merely bowed his head, and seemed little inclined to exert his oratorical powers, more than by the simple demand of what he wanted; so that both mine host and hostess gave him up in despair—the one concluding that he was "an odd one," and the other declaring that he was as stupid as he was ugly.

This lasted some time, till one villager after another, having exhausted every excuse for staying to hear whether the stranger would open his lips, dropped away in his turn, and left the apartment vacant. It was then, and not till then, that mine host was somewhat surprised, by hearing the silent traveller pronounce in a most audible and imperative manner, "Gaultier, come here." The first cause of astonishment was to hear him speak at all; and the next to find his own proper name of Gaultier so familiar to the stranger, forgetting that it had been vociferated at least one hundred times that night in his presence. However, Gaultier obeyed the summons with all speed, and approaching the stranger with a low reverence, begged to know his good will and pleasure.

"Your wine is good, Gaultier," said the stranger, raising his clear grey eyes to the rosy round of Gaultier's physiognomy. Even an innkeeper is susceptible of flattery; and Gaultier bent his head down towards the ground, as if he were going to do *kou-tou*.

"Gaultier, bring me another bottle," said the stranger. This phrase was better than the former; that sort of substantial flattery that goes straight to an innkeeper's heart. Truly, it is a pity that innkeepers are such selfish beings. And yet it is natural too;—so rapidly does mankind pass by them, that theirs can be, at best, but a stage-coach sort of affection for their fellow-creatures—The coachman shuts the door—Drive on!—and it is all over. Thus, my dear Sir, the gaities, the care, and the bustle in which you and I live, render our hearts but as an inn, where many a traveller stays for an hour, pays his score, and is forgotten.—I am resolved to let mine upon lease.—

The bottle of wine was not long in making its appearance; and as Gaultier set it on the table before the stranger, he asked if he could serve him farther.

"Can you show me the way to the old Chateau of St. Loup?" demanded the stranger.

"Surely, I can, Sir," replied the innkeeper; "that is to say, as far as knowing where it is. But I hope Monsieur does not mean to-night."

"Indeed do I," answered the stranger; "and pray why not? The night is the same as the day to an honest man."

"No doubt, no doubt!" exclaimed Gaultier, with the greatest doubt in the world in his own mind.—"No doubt! But, Holy Virgin! Jesu preserve us!"—and he signed the cross most devoutly—"we all know that there are spirits, and demons, and astrologers, and the Devil, and all those sort of things; and I would not go through the Grove where old Père Le Rouge, the sorcerer, was burnt alive, not to be prime minister, or the Cardinal de Richelieu, or any other great man,—that is to say, after nightfall. In the day I would go anywhere, or do any thing,—I am no coward, Sir,—I

dare do any thing. My father served in the blessed League against the cursed Huguenots—so I am no coward;—but bless you, Sir, I will tell you how it happened, and then you will see—”

“I know all about it,” replied the stranger, in a voice that made the innkeeper start, and look over his left shoulder; “I know all about it; but sit down and drink with me, to keep your spirits up, for you must show me the way this very night. Père Le Rouge was a dear friend of mine, and before he was burnt for a sorcerer, we had made a solemn compact to meet once every ten years. Now, if you remember aright, it is just ten years, this very day, since he was executed; and there is no bond in Hell fast enough to hold him from meeting me to-night at the old chateau. So sit you down and drink!”—And he poured out a full cup of wine for the innkeeper, who looked aghast at the portentous compact between the stranger and Père Le Rouge. However, whether it was that Gaultier was too much afraid to refuse, or had too much *esprit de corps* not to drink with any one who would drink with him, can hardly be determined now; but so it was, that sitting down, according to the stranger’s desire, he poured the whole goblet of wine over his throat at one draught, and, as he afterwards averred, could not help thinking that the stranger must have enchanted the liquor, for no sooner had he swallowed it, than all his fears of Père Le Rouge began to die away, like morning dreams. However, when the goblet was drained, Gaultier began more justly to estimate the danger of drinking with a sorcerer; and that the stranger was such, a Champenois *aubergiste* of 1642 could never be supposed to doubt, after the diabolical compact so unscrupulously confessed. Under this impression, he continued rolling his empty cup about upon the table, revolving at the same time his own critical situation, and endeavouring to determine what might be his duty to his King and Country under such perilous circumstances. Rolling the cup to the right—he resolved instantly to denounce this malignant enchanter to the proper authorities, and have him forthwith burnt alive, and sent to join Père Le Rouge in the other world, by virtue of the humane and charitable laws in that case especially made and provided. Then rolling the cup to the other side—his eye glanced towards the stranger’s bottle, and resting upon the vacuum which their united thirst had therein occasioned, his heart over-flowed with the milk of human kindness, and he pitied from his soul that perverted taste which could lead any human being from good liquor, comfortable lodging, and the society of an innkeeper, to a dark wood and a ruined castle, an old roasted sorcerer, and the Devil perhaps into the bargain.

“Would you choose another bottle, Sir?” demanded Gaultier; and as his companion nodded his head in token of assent, was about to proceed on this errand—with the laudable intention also of sharing all his newly arisen doubts and fears with his gentle help-mate, who, for her part, was busily engaged in the soft domestic duties of scolding the stable-boy and boxing the maid’s ears. But the stranger stopped him, perhaps divining, and not very much approving, the aforesaid communication. He exclaimed, “*La Bourgeoise!*” in a tone of voice which overpowered all other noises: the abuse of the dame herself—the tears of the maid—the exculpation of the stable-boy—the cackle of the cocks and hens, which were on a visit in the parlour—and the barking of a prick-eared cur included. The fresh bottle soon stood upon the table; and while the hostess returned to her former tender avocations, the stranger, whose clear grey eye seemed reading deeply into Gaultier’s heart, continued to drink from the scanty remains of his own bottle, leaving mine host to fill from that which was hitherto uncontaminated by any other touch than his own. This Gaultier did not fail to do, till such time as the last rays of the sun, which had continued to linger fondly amidst a flight of light feathery clouds overhead, had entirely left the sky, and all was grey.

At that moment the stranger drew forth his purse, let it fall upon the table with a heavy sort of clinking sound, showing that the louis-d’ors within had hardly room to jostle against each other. It was a sound of comfortable plenty, which had something in it irresistibly attractive to the ears of Gaultier; and as he stood watching while the stranger insinuated his finger and thumb into the little leathern bag, drawing forth first one broad piece and then another, so splendid did the stranger’s traffic with the Devil begin to appear in the eyes of the innkeeper, that he almost began to wish that he had been brought up a sorcerer also.

The stranger quietly pushed the two pieces of gold across the table till they got within the innkeeper’s sphere of attraction, when they became suddenly hurried towards him, with irresistible velocity, and were plunged into the abyss of a large pocket on his left side, close upon his heart.

The stranger looked on with philosophic composure, as if considering some natural phenomenon, till such time as the operation was complete. “Now, Gaultier,” cried he, “put on your beaver, and lead to the beginning of the Grove. I will find my way through it alone. But hark ye, say no word to your wife.”

Gaultier was all complaisance, and having placed his hat on his head, he opened the door of the auberge, and brought forth the stranger’s horse, fancying that what with a bottle of wine, and two pieces of gold, he could meet Beelzebub himself, or any other of those gentlemen of the lower house, with whom the Curé used to frighten the little boys and girls when they went to their first communion. However, the stranger had scarcely passed the horse’s bridle over his arm, and led him a step or two on the way, when the cool air and reflection made the innkeeper begin to think differently of the Devil, and be more inclined to keep at a respectful distance from so grave and antique a gentleman. A few steps more made him as frightened as ever; and before they had got to the end of the village, Gaultier fell hard to work, crossing himself most laboriously, and trembling every time he remembered that he was conducting one sorcerer to meet another, long dead and delivered over in form, with fire and fagot, into the hands of Satan.

It is probable that he would have run, but the stranger was close behind, and cut off his retreat.

At about a mile and a half from the little village of Mesnil, stood the old Chateau of St. Loup, situated upon an abrupt eminence, commanding a view of almost all the country round. The valley at its foot, and the slope of the hill up to its very walls, were covered with thick wood, through which passed the narrow deserted road from Mesnil, winding in and out with a thousand turns and divarications, and twice completely encircling the hill itself, before it reached the castle gate, which once, in the hospitable pride of former days, had rested constantly open for the reception equally of the friend and the stranger, but which now only gave entrance to the winds and tempests—rude guests, that contributed, even more than Time himself, the great destroyer, to bring ruin and desolation on the deserted mansion. Hard by, in a little cemetery, attached to the Chapel, lay many of the gay hearts that had once beat there, now quiet in the still cold earth. There, mouldering like the walls that overshadowed them, were the last sons of the brave and noble race of Mesnil, without one scion left to dwell in the halls of their forefathers, or to grieve over the desolation of their heritage. There, too, lay the vassals, bowed to the will of a sterner Lord, and held in the surer bondage of the tomb; and yet perhaps, in life, they had passed on, happier than their chief, without his proud anxiety and splendid cares; and now, in death, his bed was surely made as low, and the equal wind that

whispered over the grave of the one, offered no greater flattery to the monument of the other. But, beyond all these, and removed without the precincts of consecrated ground, was a heap of shards and flints—the Sorcerer’s grave! Above it, some pious hand had raised the symbol of salvation—a deed of charity, truly, in those days, when eternal mercy was farmed by the Church, like a turnpike on the high road, and none could pass but such as paid toll. But, however, there it rose,—a tall white cross, standing, as that symbol should always stand, high above every surrounding object, and full in view of all who sought it.

As the *aubergiste* and his companion climbed the hill, which, leading from the village of Mesnil, commanded a full prospect of the rich woody valley below, and overhung that spot which, since the tragedy of poor Père Le Rouge, had acquired the name of the Sorcerer’s Grove, it was this tall white cross that first caught their attention. It stood upon the opposite eminence, distinctly marked on the back-ground of the evening sky, catching every ray of light that remained, while behind it, pile upon pile, lay the thick clouds of a coming storm.

“There, Monsieur,” cried Gaultier, “there is the cross upon the Sorcerer’s grave!” And the fear which agitated him while he spoke, made the stranger’s lip curl into a smile of bitter contempt. But as they turned the side of the hill, which had hitherto concealed the castle itself from their sight, the teeth of Gaultier actually chattered in his head, when he beheld a bright light shining from several windows of the deserted building.

“There!” exclaimed the stranger, “there, you see how well Père Le Rouge keeps his appointment. I am waited for, and want you no farther. I can now find my way alone. I would not expose you, my friend, to the dangers of that Grove.”

The innkeeper’s heart melted at the stranger’s words, and he was filled with compassionate zeal upon the occasion. “Pray don’t go,” cried Gaultier, almost blubbering betwixt fear and tender-heartedness; “pray don’t go! Have pity upon your precious soul! You’ll go to the Devil, indeed you will!—or at least to purgatory for a hundred thousand years, and be burnt up like an overdone rabbit. You are committing murder, and conspiracy, and treason,”—the stranger started, but Gaultier went on—“and heresy, and pleurisy, and sorcery, and you will go to the Devil, indeed you will—and then you’ll remember what I told you.”

“What is fated, is fated!” replied the stranger, in a solemn voice, though Gaultier’s speech had produced that sort of tremulous tone, excited by an inclination either to laugh or to cry. “I have promised, and I must go. But let me warn you,” he continued, sternly, “never to mention one word of what has passed to-night, if you would live till I come again. For if you reveal one word, even to your wife, the ninth night after you have done so, Père Le Rouge will stand on one side of your bed, and I on the other, and Satan at your feet, and we will carry you away body and soul, so that you shall never be heard of again.”

When he had concluded, the stranger waited for no reply, but sprang upon his horse, and galloped down into the wood.

In the mean time, the landlord climbed to a point of the hill, from whence he could see both his own village, and the ruins of the castle. There, the sight of the church steeple gave him courage, and he paused to examine the extraordinary light which proceeded from the ruin. In a few minutes, he saw several figures flit across the windows, and cast a momentary obscurity over the red glare which was streaming forth from them upon the darkness of the night. “There they are!” cried he, “Père Le Rouge, and his pot companion!—and surely the Devil must be with them, for I see more than two, and one of them has certainly a tail—Lord have mercy upon us!”

As he spoke, a vivid flash of lightning burst from the clouds, followed instantly by a tremendous peal of thunder. The terrified innkeeper startled at the sound, and more than ever convinced that man’s enemy was on earth, took to his heels, nor ceased running till he reached his own door, and met his better angel of a wife, who boxed his ears for his absence, and vowed he had been gallanting.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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Typographical errors corrected by the etext transcriber:

shas ent to inquire=> has sent to inquire {pg 115}

Frontrailles=> Fontrailles {pg 163}

Gaultier=> Gaultier {pg 283}

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK RICHELIEU: A TALE OF FRANCE, V. 1/3 ***

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