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Author: G. P. R. James

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AGNES SOREL.

A Novel

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF
"LIFE OF VICISSITUDES," "PEQUINILLO," "THE FATE," "AIMS AND OBSTACLES," "HENRY SMEATON," "THE WOODMAN," &c., &c., &c.

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1864

TO

MAUNSELL B. FIELD, ESQ.,

NOT ONLY AS THE COMPANION OF SOME OF MY LITERARY LABORS, BUT AS MY DEAR FRIEND; NOT ONLY AS A GENTLEMAN AND A MAN OF HONOR, BUT AS A MAN OF GENIUS AND OF FEELING; NOT ONLY AS ONE WHO DOES HONOR TO HIS OWN COUNTRY, BUT AS ONE WHO WOULD DO HONOR TO ANY,

This Book is Dedicated, with sincere Regard,

BY G. P. R. JAMES.

AGNES SOREL.

CHAPTER I.

How strange the sensation would be, how marvelously interesting the scene, were we to wake up from some quiet night's rest and find ourselves suddenly transported four or five hundred years back--living and moving among the men of a former age!

To pass from the British fortress of Gibraltar, with drums and fifes, red coats and bayonets, in a few hours, to the coast of Africa, and find one's self surrounded by Moors and male petticoats, turbans and cimeters, is the greatest transition the world affords at present; but it is nothing to that of which I speak. How marvelously interesting would it be, also, not only to find one's self brought in close contact with the customs, manners, and characteristics of a former age, with all our modern notions strong about us, but to be met at every turn by thoughts, feelings, views, principles, springing out of a totally different state of society, which have all passed away, and moldered, like the garments in which at that time men decorated themselves.

Such, however, is the leap which I wish the reader to take at the present moment; and--although I know it to be impossible for him to divest himself of all those modern impressions which are a part of his identity--to place himself with me in the midst of a former period, and to see himself surrounded for a brief space with the people, and the things, and the thoughts of the fifteenth century.

Let me premise, however, in this prefatory chapter, that the object of an author, in the minute detail of local scenery and ancient customs, which he is sometimes compelled to give, and which are often objected to by the animals with long ears that browse on the borders of Parnassus, is not so much to show his own learning in antiquarian lore, as to imbue his reader with such thoughts and feelings as may enable him to comprehend the motives of the persons acting before his eyes, and the sensations, passions, and prejudices of ages passed away. Were we to take an unsophisticated rustic, and baldly tell him, without any previous intimation of the habits of the time, that the son of a king of England one day went out alone--or, at best, with a little boy in his company--all covered over with iron; that he betook himself to a lone and desolate pass in the mountains, traversed by a high road, and sat upon horseback by the hour together, with a spear in his hand, challenging every body who passed to fight him, the unsophisticated rustic would naturally conclude that the king's son was mad, and would expect to hear of him next in Bedlam, rather than on the throne of England. I let any one tell him previously of the habits, manners, and customs of those days, and the rustic--though he may very well believe that the whole age was mad--will understand and appreciate the motives of the individual, saying to himself, "This man was not a bit madder than the rest."

However, this book is not intended to be a mere painting of the customs of the fifteenth century, but rather a picture of certain characters of that period, dressed somewhat in the garb of the times, and moved by those springs of action which influenced men in the age to which I refer. It has been said, and justly, that human nature is the same in all ages; but as a musical instrument will produce many different tones, according to the hand which touches it, so will human nature present many different aspects, according to the influences by which it is affected. At all events, I claim a right to play my own tune upon my violin, and what skills it if that tune be an air of the olden times. No one need listen who does not like it.

CHAPTER II.

There was a small, square room, of a very plain, unostentatious appearance, in the turret of a tall house in the city of Paris. The walls were of hewn stone, without any decoration whatever, except where at the four sides, and nearly in the centre of each, appeared a long iron arm, or branch, with a socket at the end of it, curved and twisted in a somewhat elaborate manner, and bearing some traces of having been gilt in a former day. The ceiling was much more decorated

than the walls, and was formed by two groined arches of stone-work, crossing each other in the middle, and thus forming, as it were, four pointed arches, the intervals between one mass of stone-work and another being filled up with dark-colored oak, much after the fashion of a cap in a coronet. The spot where the arches crossed was ornamented with a richly-carved pendant, or corbel, in the centre of which was embedded a massive iron hook, probably intended to sustain a large lamp, while the iron sockets protruding from the walls were destined for flambeaux or lanterns. The floor was of stone, and a rude mat of rushes was spread over about one eighth of the surface, toward the middle of the room, where stood a table of no very large dimensions, covered with a great pile of papers and a few manuscript books. No lamp hung from the ceiling; no lantern or flambeau cast its light from the walls as had undoubtedly been the case in earlier times: the tall, quaint-shaped window, besides being encumbered by a rich tracery of stone-work, could not admit even the moonbeams through the thick coat of dust that covered its panes, and the only light which that room received was afforded by a dull oil lamp upon the table, without glass or shade. All the furniture looked dry and withered, as it were, and though solid enough, being balkily formed of dark oak, presented no ornament whatever. It was, in short, an uncomfortable-looking apartment enough, having a ruinous and dilapidated appearance, without any of the picturesqueness of decay. Under the table lay a large, brindled, rough-haired dog, of the stag-hound breed, but cruelly docked of his tail, in accordance with some code of forest laws, which at that time were very numerous and very various in different parts of France, but all equally unjust and severe. Apparently he was sound asleep as dog could be; but we all know that a dog's sleep is not as profound as a metaphysician's dream, and from time to time he would raise his head a little from his crossed paws, and look slightly up toward the legs of a person seated at the table.

Now those legs--to begin at the unusual end of a portrait--were exceedingly handsome, well-shaped legs, indeed, evidently appertaining to a young man on the flowery side of maturity. There was none of the delicate, rather unsymmetrical straightness of the mere boy about them, nor the over-stout, balustrade-like contour of the sturdy man of middle age. Nor did the rest of the figure belie their promise, for it was in all respects a good one, though somewhat lightly formed, except the shoulders, indeed, which were broad and powerful, and the chest, which was wide and expansive. The face was good, though not strictly handsome, and the expression was frank and bright, yet with a certain air of steady determination in it which is generally conferred by the experience of more numerous years than seemed to have passed over that young and unwrinkled brow.

The dress of the young scribe--for he was writing busily--was in itself plain, though not without evident traces of care and attention in its device and adjustment. The shoes were extravagantly long, and drawn out to a very acute point, and the gray sort of mantle, with short sleeves, which he wore over his ordinary hose and jerkin, had, at the collar, and at the end of those short sleeves, a little strip of fur--a mark, possibly, of gentle birth, for sumptuary laws, always ineffectual, were issued from time to time, during all the earlier periods of the French monarchy, and generally broken as soon as issued.

There was no trace of beard upon the chin. The upper lip itself was destitute of the manly mustache, and the hair, combed back from the forehead, and lying in smooth and glossy curls upon the back of the neck, gave an appearance almost feminine to the head, which was beautifully set upon the shoulders. The broad chest already mentioned, however, the long, sinewy arms, and the strong brown hand which held the pen, forbade all suspicion that the young writer was a fair lady in disguise, although that was a period in the world's history when the dames of France were not overscrupulous in assuming any character which might suit their purposes for the time.

There was a good deal of noise and bustle in the streets of Paris, as men with flambeaux in their hands walked on before some great lord of the court, calling "Place! place!" to clear the way for their master as he passed; or as a merry party of citizens returned, laughing and jesting, from some gay meeting; or as a group of night-ramblers walked along, insulting the ear of night with cries, and often with blasphemies; or as lays and songs were trolled up from the corners of the streets by knots of persons, probably destitute of any other home, assembled round the large bonfires, lighted to give warmth to the shivering poor--for it was early in the winter of the great frost of one thousand four hundred and seven, and the miseries of the land were great. Still, the predominant sounds were those of joy and revelry; for the people of Paris were the same in those days that they are even now; and joy, festivity, and frolic, then, as in our own days, rolled and caroled along the highways, while the dust was yet wet with blood, and wretchedness, destitution, and oppression lurked unseen behind the walls. No sounds, however, seemed to disturb the lad at his task, or to withdraw his thoughts for one moment from the subject before him. Now a loud peal of laughter shook the casement; but still he wrote on. Now a cry, as if of pain, rang round the room from without, but such cries were common in those days, and he lifted not his head. And then again a plaintive song floated on the air, broken only by the striking of a clock, jarring discordantly with the mellow notes of the air; but still the pen hurried rapidly over the page, till some minutes after the hour of nine had struck, when he laid it down with a deep respiration, as if some allotted task were ended.

At length the dog which was lying at his feet lifted his head suddenly and gazed toward the door. The youth was reading over what he had written, and caught no sound to withdraw his attention; but the beast was right. There was a step--a familiar step--upon the stair-case, and the

good dog rose up, and walked toward the entrance of the room, just as the door was opened, and another personage entered upon the scene.

He was a grave man, of the middle age, tall, well formed, and of a noble and commanding presence. He was dressed principally in black velvet, with a gown of that stuff, which was lined with fur, indeed, though none of that lining was shown externally. On his head he had a small velvet cap, without any feather, and his hair was somewhat sprinkled with gray, though in all probability he had not passed the age of forty.

"Well, Jean," he said, in a deliberate tone, as he entered the room with a firm and quiet tread, "how many have you done, my son?"

"All of them, sir," replied the young man. "I was just reading over this last letter to Signor Bernardo Baldi, to see that I had made no mistake."

"You never mistake, Jean," said the elder man, in a kindly tone; and then added, thoughtfully, "All? You must have written hard, and diligently."

"You told me to have them ready against you returned, sir," said the youth.

"Yes, but I have returned an hour before the time," rejoined his elder companion; and then, as the young man moved away from the chair which he occupied, in order to leave it vacant for himself, the elder drew near the table, and, still standing, glanced his eye over some six or seven letters which lay freshly written, and yet unfolded. It was evident, however, that though, by a process not uncommon, the mind might take in, and even investigate, to a certain degree, all that the eye rested upon, a large part of the thoughts were engaged with other subjects, and that deeper interests divided the attention of the reader.

"There should be a comma there," he said, pointing with his finger, and at the same time seating himself in the chair.

The young man took the letter and added the comma; but when he looked up, his companion's eyes were fixed upon the matting on the floor, and it was apparent that the letters, and all they contained, had passed away from his memory.

The dog rose from the couchant attitude in which he had placed himself, and laid his shaggy head upon the elder man's knee; and, patting him quietly, the newcomer said, in a meditative tone, "It is pleasant to have some one we can trust. Don't you think so, Jean?"

"It is indeed, sir," replied the young man; "and pleasant to be trusted."

"And yet we must sometimes part with those we most trust," continued the other. "It is sad, but sometimes it is necessary."

The young man's countenance fell a little, but he made no reply, and the other, looking toward the wide fire-place, remarked, "You have let the fire go out, Jean, and these are not days in which one can afford to be without warmth."

The young man gathered the embers together, threw on some logs of wood, and both he and his companion mused for several minutes without speaking a word. At length the youth seemed to summon sudden courage, and said, abruptly, "I hope you are not thinking of parting with me, sir. I have endeavored to the utmost to do my duty toward you well, and you have never had occasion to find fault; though perhaps your kindness may have prevented you from doing so, even when there was occasion."

"Not so, not so, my son," replied the other, warmly; "there has been no fault, and consequently no blame. Nay more, I promised you, if you fulfilled all the tasks I set you well, never to part with you but for your own advantage. The time has come, however, when it is necessary to part with you, and I must do so for your own sake."

There was a dead silence for a moment or two, and then the elder man laid his finger quietly on the narrow strip of fur that bordered his companion's dress, saying, with a slight smile, "You are of noble blood, Jean, and I am a mere bourgeois."

"I can easily strip that off, if it offends you, sir," replied the young man, giving him back his smile. "It is soon done away."

"But not the noble blood, Jean," answered his companion; "and this occupation is not fitted for you."

An air of deep and anxious grief spread over the young man's face, and he answered earnestly, "There is nothing derogatory in it, sir. To write your letters, to transact any honorable business which you may intrust to me, can not in any way degrade me, and you know right well that it was from no base or ignoble motive that I undertook the task. My mother's poverty is no stain upon our honorable blood, nor surely can her son's efforts be so to change that poverty into competence."

His companion smiled upon him kindly, saying, "Far from it, Jean; but still, if there be an

opportunity of your effecting your object in a course more consonant with your birth and station, it is my duty as your friend to seize it for you. Such an opportunity now presents itself, and you must take advantage of it. It may turn out well; I trust it will; but, should the reverse be the case--for in these strange, unsettled times, those who stand the highest have most to fear a fall--if the reverse should be the case, I say, you will always find a resource in Jacques Cœur; his house, his purse, his confidence will be always open to you. Put on your chaperon, then, and come with me: for Fortune, like Time, should always be taken by the forelock. The jade is sure to kick if we get behind her."

The young man took down one of the large hoods in which it was still customary, for the bourgeoisie especially, to envelop their heads, when walking in the streets of Paris. Beneath it, however, he placed a small cap, fitting merely the crown of the head, and over the sort of tunic he wore he cast a long mantle, for the weather was very cold. When fully accoutered, he ventured to ask where Maître Cœur was going to take him; but the good merchant answered with a smile, "Never mind, my son, never mind. If we succeed as I expect, you will soon know; if not, there is no need you should. Come with me, Jean, and trust to me."

"Right willingly," replied the young man, and followed him.

The house was a large and handsome house, as things went at that time in Paris; but the stair-case was merely one of those narrow, twisting spirals which we rarely see, except in cathedrals or ruined castles, in the present times. Windows to that stair-case there were none, and in the daytime the manifold steps received light only through a loophole here and there; for in those days it was not at all inconvenient for the owner, even of a very modest mansion, to have the means of ascending and descending from one part of his house to the other, without the danger of being struck by the arrows which were flying somewhat too frequently in the streets of Paris. At night, a lantern, guarded by plates of horn from the cold blasts through the loopholes, shed a faint and twinkling ray, at intervals of ten or twelve yards, upon the steps. But Jacques Cœur and his young companion were both well acquainted with the way, and were soon at the little door which opened into the court-yard. Jean Charost looked round for the merchant's mule, as they issued forth; but no mule was there, nor any attendant in waiting; and Jacques Cœur drawing his cloak more tightly around him, walked straight out of the gates, and along the narrow streets, unlighted by any thing but the pale stars shining dimly in the wintery sky.

The merchant walked fast, and Jean Charost followed a step behind: not without some curiosity: not without some of that palpitating anxiety which, with the young, generally precedes an unexpected change of life, yet with a degree, at least, of external calmness which nothing but very early discipline in the hard school of the world could give. It seemed to him, indeed, that his companion intended to traverse the whole city of Paris; for, directing his course toward the quarter of St. Antoine, he paused not during some twenty minutes, except upon one occasion, when, just as they were entering one of the principal streets, half a dozen men, carrying torches, came rapidly along, followed by two or three on horseback, and several on foot. Jacques Cœur drew back into the shadow, and brought his cloak closer round him; but the moment the cavalcade had passed he walked on again, saying in a whisper, "That is the Marquis de Giac, a favorite of the Duke of Burgundy--or, rather, the husband of the duke's favorite. He owes me a thousand crowns, and, consequently, loves not to see me in his way."

Five minutes more brought them to a large stone wall, having two towers, almost like those of a church, one at either end, and a great gate with a wicket near the centre. Monasteries were more common than bee-hives in Paris in those days, and Jean Charost would have taken no notice of the wall, or of a large, dull-looking building rising up behind it, had it not been that a tall man, clad apparently in a long gray gown, rushed suddenly up to the gate, just as the two men were passing, and rang the bell violently. He seemed to hold something carefully on his left arm; but his air was wild and hurried, and Jacques Cœur murmured, as they passed, "Alas, alas! 'Tis still the same, all over the world."

Jean Charost did not venture to ask the meaning of his comment, but looked up and marked the building well, following still upon the merchant's rapid steps; and a short distance further on the great towers of the Bastile came in sight, looking over the lesser buildings in the front.

Before they reached the open space around the fortress, however, the street expanded considerably, and at its widest point, appeared upon the left a large and massive edifice, surrounded by walls of heavy masonry, battlemented and machicolated, with four small, flanking towers at the corners. In the centre of this wall, as in the case of the monastery, was a large gateway; but the aspect of this entrance was very different from that of the entrance to the religious building. Here was an archway with battlements above, and windows in the masonry looking out on the street. A parapetted gallery, too, of stone-work, from which a porter or warden could speak with any one applying for admission, without opening the gate, ran along just above the arch.

No great precaution, however, seemed to be in force at the moment of Jacques Cœur's approach. The gate was open, though not unguarded; for two men, partly armed, were lolling at the entrance, notwithstanding the coldness of the night. Behind the massy chains, too, which ran along the whole front line of the wall, solidly riveted into strong stone posts, cutting off a path of about five feet in width from the street, were eight or nine men and young lads, some well armed, almost as if for war, and some dressed in gay and glittering apparel of a softer texture. The night,

as I have said, was in sooth very cold; but yet the air before the building received some artificial warmth from a long line of torches, blazing high in iron sockets projecting from the walls, which looked grim and frowning in the glare.

At the gates Jacques Cœur stopped short, and let his mantle fall a little, so as to show his face. One of the men under the arch stared at him, and took a step forward, as if to inquire his business, but the other nodded his head, saying, "Good evening, again, Maître Jacques. Pass in. You will find Guillot at the door."

"Come, Jean," said Jacques Cœur, turning to his young companion; and passing under the arch, they entered a small piece of ground laid out apparently as a garden; for the light of some lanterns, scattered here and there, showed a number of trees planted in even rows, in the midst of which rose a palace of a much lighter and more graceful style of architecture than the stern and heavy-looking defenses on the street could have led any one to expect. A flight of steps led up from the garden to a deep sort of open entrance-hall, where a light was burning, showing a door of no very great size, surrounded with innumerable delicate moldings of stone. To the door was fastened, by a chain, a large, heavy iron ring, deeply notched all along the internal circle, and by its side hung a small bar of steel, which, when run rapidly over these notches, produced a loud sound, not altogether unmusical. To this instrument of sound Jacques Cœur applied himself, and the door was immediately opened from within.

"Come in, Maître Jacques," said a man of almost gigantic height. "Come in; the duke is waiting for you in the little hall."

CHAPTER III.

Passing through a small and narrow hall, Jacques Cœur and his companion ascended a flight of six or seven steps, and then entered, by a door larger than that which communicated with the garden, a vestibule of very splendid proportions.

It must be remembered that the arts were at that time just at the period of their second birth in Europe; the famous fifteenth century had just begun, and a true taste for the beautiful, in every thing except architecture, was confined to the breasts of a few. Cimabue, Giotto, Hubert van Eyk, and John of Bruges had already appeared; but the days of Leonardo, of Raphael, of Michael Angelo, of Giorgione, and of Correggio were still to come. Nevertheless, the taste for both painting and sculpture was rapidly extending in all countries, and especially in France, which, though it never produced a great man in either branch of art, had always an admiration of that which is fine when produced by others. It was with astonishment and delight, then, that Jean Charost, who had never in his life before seen any thing that deserved the name of a painting, except a fresco here and there, and the miniature illuminations of missals and psalm books, beheld the vestibule surrounded on every side with pictures which appeared to him perfection itself, and which probably would have even presented to our eyes many points of excellence, unattained or unattainable by our own contemporaries. Though the apartment was well lighted, he had no time to examine the treasures it contained; for Jacques Cœur, more accustomed to such scenes himself, and with his mind fully occupied by other thoughts, hurried straight across to a wide, two-winged stair-case of black oak, at the further end of the vestibule, and ascended the steps at a rapid rate.

The young man followed through a long corridor, plainly furnished, till his guide stopped and knocked at a door on the right hand side. A voice from within exclaimed, "Come in;" and when Jacques Cœur opened the door, Jean Charost found himself at the entrance of a room and in the presence of a person requiring some description.

The little hall, as it was called, was a large vaulted chamber about forty feet in length, and probably twenty-six or twenty-eight in width. It was entirely lined with dark-colored wood, and the pointed arch of the roof, really or apparently supported by highly ornamented wood-work, was of the same material. All along the walls, however, upheld by rings depending from long arms of silver, were wide sheets of tapestry, of an ancient date, but full of still brilliant colors; and projecting from between these, at about six feet from the ground, were a number of other silver brackets supporting sconces of the same metal. Large straight-backed benches were arranged along the walls, touching the tapestry; but there was only one table in the room, on which stood a large candelabra of two lights, each supporting a wax taper or candle, not much inferior in size to those set upon the altar by Roman Catholics, and by those who repudiate the name, but follow the practices, of Rome--the mongrel breed, who have not the courage to confess themselves converted, yet have turned tail upon their former faith, and the faith of their ancestors.

At this table was seated, with paper, and pen, and ink before him--not unemployed even at that moment--a man of the middle age, of a very striking and interesting appearance. As none of the sconces were lighted, and the candelabra before him afforded the only light which the room received, he sat in the midst of a bright spot, surrounded almost by darkness, and, though Heaven knows, no saint, looking like the picture of a saint in glory. His face and figure might well have afforded a subject for the pencil; for not only was he handsome in feature and in form, but there was an indescribable charm of expression about his countenance, and a marvelous grace in his person which characterized both, even when in profound repose. We are too apt to confine the idea of grace to action. Witness a sleeping child--witness the Venus de Medici--witness the Sappho of Dannecker. At all other times it is evanescent, shifting, and changing, like the streamers of the Aurora Borealis. But in calm stillness, thought can dwell upon it; the mind can take it in, read it, and ponder upon its innate meaning, as upon the page of some ever-living book, and not upon the mere hasty word spoken by some passing stranger.

He was writing busily, and had apparently uttered the words, "Come in," without ever looking up; but the moment after Jacques Cœur and his young companion had entered, the prince--for he could be nothing else but a prince, let republicans say what they will--lifted his speaking eyes and looked forward.

"Oh, my friend," he said, seeing the great merchant; "come hither. I have been anxiously waiting for you."

Jacques Cœur advanced to within a few paces, while the other still kept his seat, and Jean Charost followed a step or two behind.

"Well, what news do you bring me?" asked the prince, lowering his tone a little; "good, I hope. Come, say you have changed your resolution! Why should a merchant's resolutions be made of sterner stuff than a woman's, or the moon's, or man's, or any other of the light things that inhabit this earth, or whirl around it? Faith, my good friend, the most beneficent of things are always changing. If the Sun himself stuck obstinately to one point, we should be scorched by summer heat, and blinded by too much light. But come, come; to speak seriously, this is absolutely needful to me--you are a friend--a good friend--a well-wisher to your country and myself. Say you have changed your mind."

All this time he had continued seated, while Jacques Cœur, without losing any of that dignity of carriage which distinguished him, stood near, with his velvet cap in his hand, and with an air of respect and deference. "I have told your highness," he replied, bowing his head reverently, "that I can not do it--that it is impossible."

The other started up from the table with some impetuosity. "Impossible?" he exclaimed. "What, would you have me believe that you, reputed the most wealthy merchant of all these realms, can not yourself, or among your friends, raise the small sum I require in a moment of great need? No, no. Say rather that your love for Louis of Orleans has grown cold, or that you doubt his power of repaying you--that you think fortune is against him--that you believe there is a destiny that domineers over his. But say not that it is impossible."

"My lord duke, I repeat," replied Jacques Cœur, in a tone which had a touch of sorrow in it, "I repeat, that it is impossible; not that my affection for your service has grown cold--not that I believe the destiny of any one in these realms can domineer over that of the brother of my king--not that I have not the money, or could not obtain it in Paris in an hour. Nay, more, I will own I have it, as by your somewhat unkind words, mighty prince, you drive me to tell you how it is impossible. I would have fain kept my reasons in respectful silence; but perhaps, after all, those reasons may be better to you than my gold."

"Odd's life, but not so substantial," replied the Duke of Orleans, with a smile, seating himself again, and adding, "speak on, speak on; for if we can not have one good thing, it is well to have another; and I know your reasons are always excellent, Maître Jacques."

"Suppose, my lord," replied Jacques Cœur, "that this wealth of mine is bound up in iron chests, with locks of double proof, and I have lost the key."

"Heaven's queen, send for a blacksmith, and dash the chests to pieces," said the Duke of Orleans, with a laugh.

"Such, perhaps, is the way his highness of Burgundy would deal with them," replied Jacques Cœur. "But you, sir, think differently, I believe. But let me explain to you that the chests--these iron chests, are conscience--the locks, faith and loyalty--the only key that can open them, conviction. But to leave all allegories, my lord duke, I tell your highness frankly, that did you ask this sum for your own private need, my love and affection to your person would bid me throw my fortune wide before you, and say, 'Take what you will.' But when you tell me, and I know that your object is, with this same wealth of mine, to levy war in this kingdom, and tear the land with the strife of faction, I tell you I have not the key, and say it is impossible. I say it is impossible for me, with my convictions, to let you have this money for such purposes."

"Now look you here," cried the Duke of Orleans; "how these good men will judge of matters that they know not, and deal with things beyond their competence! Here, my good friend, you

erect yourself into a judge of my plans, my purposes, and their results--at once testify against me, and pronounce the judgment."

"Nay, my good lord, not so," replied Jacques Cœur. "You ask me to do a thing depending on myself; and many a man would call various considerations to counsel before he said yea or nay; would ask himself whether it was convenient, whether there was a likelihood of gain, whether there was a likelihood of loss, whether he affected your side or that of Burgundy. Now, so help me Heaven, as not one of these considerations weighs with me for a moment. I have asked myself but one question: 'Is this for the good of my country? Is it for the service of my king?' Your highness laughs, but it is true; and the answer has been 'No.'"

"Jacques Cœur, thou art a good and honest man," replied the duke, laying his hand upon the merchant's sleeve, and looking in his face gravely; "but you drive me to give you explanations, which I think, as my friend and favorer, you might have spared. The spendthrift gives such explanations, summons plausible excuses, and tells a canting tale of how he came in such a strait, when he goes to borrow money of a usurer; but methinks such things should have no place between Louis of Orleans, the king's only brother, and his friend Jacques Cœur."

"Ah, noble prince," cried the merchant, very much touched. But the duke did not attend to his words; and, rising from his seat, threw back his fine and stately head, saying, "The explanation shall be given, however. I seek not one denier of this money for myself. My revenues are ample, more than ample for my wishes. My court is a very humble one, compared with that of Burgundy. But I seek this sum to enable me to avert dangers from France, which I see coming up speedily, like storms upon the wind. I need not tell you, Jacques Cœur, my brother's unhappy state, nor how he, who has ever possessed and merited the love of all his subjects, is, with rare intervals, unconscious of his kingly duties. The hand of God takes from him, during the greater part of life, the power of wielding the sceptre which it placed within his grasp."

"I know it well, your highness," replied the merchant.

"His children are all young, Jacques Cœur," continued the duke; "and there are but two persons sufficiently near in blood, and eminent in station, to exercise the authority in the land which slips from the grasp of the monarch--the Duke of Burgundy and the Duke of Orleans. The one, though a peer of France and prince of its blood royal, holds possessions which render him in some sorts a foreigner. Now God forbid that I should speak ill of my noble cousin of Burgundy; but he is a man of mighty power, and not without ambition--honorable, doubtless, but still high-handed and grasping. Burgundy and Flanders, with many a fair estate and territory besides, make up an almost kingly state, and I would ask you yourself if he does not well-nigh rule in France likewise. Hear me out, hear me out! You would say that he has a right to some influence here, and so he has. But I would have this *well-nigh*, not *quite*. I pledge you my word that my sole object is to raise up such a power as to awe my good cousin from too great and too dangerous enterprises. Were it a question of mere right--whose is the right to authority here, till the king's children are of an age to act, but the king's brother? Were it a question of policy--in whom should the people rely but in him whose whole interests are identified with this monarchy? Were it a question of judgment--who is so likely to protect, befriend, and direct aright the children of the king as the uncle who has fostered their youth, and loved them even as his own? There is not a man in all France who suspects me of wishing aught but their good. I fear not the Duke of Burgundy so much as to seek to banish him from all power and authority in the realm; but I only desire that his authority should have a counterpoise, in order that his power may never become dangerous. And now tell me, Jacques Cœur, whether my objects are such as you can honestly refuse to aid, remembering that I have used every effort, in a peaceful way, to induce my cousin of Burgundy to content himself with a lawful and harmless share of influence."

"My lord, I stand rebuked," replied Jacques Cœur. "But, if your highness would permit me, I would numbly suggest that efforts might strike others, to bring about the happy object you propose, which may have escaped your attention."

"Name them--name them," cried the Duke of Orleans, somewhat warmly. "By heaven's queen, I think I have adopted all that could be devised by mortal man. Name them, my good friend," he added, in a milder tone.

"Nay, royal sir," replied Jacques Cœur," it is not for one so humble as myself to suggest any remedies in such a serious case; but I doubt not your relatives, the Dukes of Alençon and Berri, and the good King of Sicily, so near and dear to you, might, in their wisdom, aid you with advice which would hold your honor secure, promote the pacification of the realm, and attain the great object that you have in view."

The Duke of Orleans made no reply, but walked once or twice up and down the hall, with his arms folded on his chest, apparently in deep thought. At length, however, he stopped before Jacques Cœur, and laid his finger on his breast, saying, in a grave and inquiring tone, "What would men think of me, my friend, if Louis of Orleans, in a private quarrel with John of Burgundy, were to call in the soft counsels of Alençon, of Berri, and Anjou? Would not men say that he was afraid?"

The slightest possible smile quivered for an instant on the lips of Jacques Cœur, but he replied, gravely and respectfully, "First, I would remark, your highness, that this is not a private

quarrel, as I understand it, but a cause solely affecting the good of the realm."

The Duke of Orleans smiled also, with a gay, conscious, half-detected smile; but Jacques Cœur proceeded uninterrupted, saying, "Secondly, I should boldly answer that men would dare say nothing. The prince who boldly bearded Henry the Fourth of Lancaster on his usurped throne, to do battle hand to hand, in the hour of his utmost triumph and success,[1] could never be supposed afraid of any mortal man. Believe me, my lord, the thought of fear has never been, and never can be joined with the name of Louis of Orleans."

"Ah, Jacques Cœur, Jacques Cœur," replied the prince, laughing, "art thou a flatterer too?"

"If so, an honest one," answered the merchant; "and, without daring to dictate terms to your highness, let me add that, should you--thinking better of this case--employ the counsels of the noble princes I have mentioned, and their efforts prove unsuccessful, then, convinced that the last means for peace have been tried and failed, I shall find my duty and my wishes reconciled, and the last livre that I have, should I beg my bread in the streets as a common mendicant, will be freely offered in your just cause."

There was a warmth, a truth, a sincerity in the great merchant's words that seemed to touch his noble auditor deeply. The duke threw himself into his seat again, and covered his eyes for a moment or two; then, taking Jacques Cœur's hand, he pressed it warmly, saying, "Thanks, my friend, thanks. I have urged you somewhat hardly, perhaps, but I know you wish me well. I believe your advice is good. Pride, vanity, whatever it is, shall be sacrificed. I will send for my noble cousins, consult with them, and, if the bloody and disastrous arbitrement of war can be avoided, it shall be so. Many may bless the man who stayed it; and although, in their ignorance, they may not add the name of Jacques Cœur to their prayers, there is a Being who has seen you step between princes and their wrath, and who himself has said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'"

The duke then leaned his head upon his hand, and fell into thought again.

All this time, while a somewhat long and interesting conversation had been taking place in his presence, Jean Charost had been standing a few steps behind Jacques Cœur, without moving a limb; and, in truth, so deeply attentive to all that was passing, that he hardly ventured to draw a breath. The whole scene was a lesson to him, however; a lesson never forgot. He saw the condescension and kindness, the familiar friendship which the brother of the King of France displayed toward the simple merchant; but he saw, also, that no familiarity induced Jacques Cœur for one moment to forget respect, or to abate one tittle of the reverence due to the duke's station. He saw that it was possible to be bold and firm, even with a royal personage, and yet to give him no cause of offense, if he were in heart as noble as in name. Both the principal personages in the room, however, in the mighty interests involved in their discourse, seemed to have forgotten his presence altogether; indeed, one of them, probably, had hardly even perceived him. But at length the duke, waking up, as it were, from the thoughts which had absorbed him, with his resolution taken and his course laid out, raised his eyes toward Jacques Cœur, as if intending to continue the conversation with some further announcement of his purposes. As he did so, he seemed suddenly to perceive the figure of Jean Charost, standing in the half light behind, and he exclaimed, quickly and eagerly, "Ha! who is that? Who is that young man? Whence came he? What wants he?"

Jacques Cœur started too; for he had totally forgotten the fact of his having brought Jean Charost there. For an instant he looked confused and agitated, but then recovered himself, and replied, "This is the young gentleman whom I commended to your highness's service. In the importance of the question you first put to me, I totally forgot to present him to you."

The duke gazed in the face of Jean Charost as he advanced a step or two into the light, seeming to question his countenance closely, and for a moment there was a slight look of annoyance and anxiety in his aspect which did not escape the eyes of Jacques Cœur.

"Sir, I have committed a great fault," he said; "but it might have been greater; for, although this young gentleman has heard all that we have said, I will answer for his faith, his honesty, and his discretion with my life."

Ere the words were uttered, however, the Duke of Orleans had recovered himself entirely, and looking up frankly in Jacques Cœur's face, he answered, "As far as I can recollect our conversation, my good friend, it contained not one word which either you or I should fear to have blazoned to the whole realm of France. Come hither, young gentleman. Are you willing to serve me?"

"If not willing before, sir," answered Jean Charost, "what I have heard to-night would make me willing to shed the last drop of my blood for your highness."

The duke smiled upon him kindly. "Good," he said; "good. You are of noble race, my friend tells me."

"On all sides," answered Jean Charost. "Of the nobility of the sword."

"Well, then," said the duke, "we will soon find an office for you. Let me think for a moment--"

But, ere the words had left his lips, there was a sharp rap at the door, and, without waiting for permission, a man, dressed as a superior servant, hurried in, followed by an elderly woman in an extravagantly high *hennin*--a head-dress of the times--both bearing eagerness and alarm on their countenance.

"I am sorry to tell your highness--" cried the man.

But the duke stopped him, exclaiming, "Hush!" with a look of anxiety and alarm, and then advanced a step or two toward the newcomers, with whom he spoke for a few moments in an eager whisper. He then took several rapid strides toward the door, but paused ere he reached it, and looking back, almost without stopping, exclaimed, "To-morrow, my young friend; be with me to-morrow by nine. I will send for you in the evening, Maître Jacques. I trust then to have news for you. Excuse me now; something has happened."

CHAPTER IV.

For a moment after the Duke of Orleans had quitted the hall, Jacques Cœur and his young companion stood looking at each other in silence; for the agitation which the prince had displayed was far greater than persons in his rank usually suffered to appear. Those were the days when strong passions lay concealed under calm exteriors, and terrible deeds were often meditated and even executed under cover of the most tranquil aspect.

"Come, Jean, my friend." said the merchant, at length; "let us go. We must not pause here with these papers on the table."

As he spoke, he walked toward the door; but, before he quitted the house, he sought diligently in the outer vestibule and the neighboring rooms for some of the domestics. All seemed to be in confusion, however, and though steps were heard moving about in various directions, as if some general search were being made, several minutes elapsed before even a page or a porter could be found. At length a boy of about twelve years of age presented himself, and him Jacques Cœur directed, in a tone of authority, to place himself at the door of the little hall, and neither to go in himself nor let any one enter till he had an opportunity of letting the duke know that he had left the papers he was writing on the table.

"Something has moved his highness very greatly," said Jacques Cœur, as he walked through the streets with his young companion. "He is not usually so careless of what he writes."

"I have always heard him called the gay Duke of Orleans," said Jean Charost, "and I certainly was surprised to find him so grave and thoughtful."

"There are many ways of being thoughtful, my young friend," replied the merchant, "and a light and smiling air, a playful fancy, and a happy choice of words, with many persons--as has been the case with the duke--conceal deep meaning and great strength of mind. He is, indeed, one of the most thoughtful men in France. But his imagination is somewhat too strong, and his passions, alas, stronger still. He is frank, and noble, and generous, however--kind and forgiving; and I do sincerely believe that he deeply regrets his faults, and condemns them as much as any man in France. Many are the resolutions of reformation that he makes; but still an ardent temperament, a light humor, and a joyous spirit carries him away impulsively, and deeds are done, before he well knows they are undertaken, which are bitterly repented afterward."

Jacques Cœur paused, and seemed to hesitate, as if he thought he had almost gone too far with his young companion; but there were more serious considerations pressing upon his mind at that moment than Jean Charost, or even the Duke of Orleans, at all comprehended, though both were affected by them. He was one of the most remarkable men of his age; and although he had not at that time risen to the high point of either honor or wealth which he afterward attained, he was in the high road to distinction and to fortune--a road opened to him by no common means. His vast and comprehensive mind perceived opportunities which escaped the eyes of men more limited in intellect; his energetic and persevering character enabled him to grasp and hold them; and, together with these powers, so serviceable to any man in commercial or political life, he possessed a still higher characteristic--a kindly and a generous spirit, prompting to good deeds as well as to great ones, always under the guidance of prudence and wisdom. He had, moreover, that which I know not whether to call an art or a quality--the capability of impressing almost all men with the truth of his character. Few with whom he was brought in any close connection doubted his judgment or his sincerity, and his true beneficence of heart had the power of attaching others to him so strongly that even persecution, sorrow, and misfortune could not break the bond.

In the present instance, he had two objects in view in placing Jean Charost in the service of the Duke of Orleans; or, rather, he saw at once that two objects might possibly be attained by that kind act. He had provided, apparently, well and happily for a youth to whom he was sincerely attached, and whom he could entirely trust, and he placed near a prince for whom he had a great regard and some admiration, notwithstanding all his faults, one whose character was likely to be not without its influence, even upon a person far higher in station and more brilliant as well as more experienced than himself.

Although he had full confidence in Jean Charost--although he knew that there was an integrity of purpose, and a vigor of determination in the youth, well fitted to stand all trials, he nevertheless thought that some warning, some knowledge, at least of the circumstances in which he was about to be placed, might be serviceable to himself, and give a beneficial direction to any influence he might obtain with the duke. To give this, was his object in turning the conversation at once to the character of Louis of Orleans; but yet the natural delicacy of his mind led him to hesitate, when touching upon the failings of his princely friend. The higher purpose, however, predominated at length, and he went boldly forward.

"It is necessary, Jean," he said, "to prepare you in some degree for the scenes in which you will have to mingle, and especially to afford you some information of the character of the prince you are about to serve. I will mention no names, as there are people passing in the street; but you will understand of whom I speak. He is habitually licentious. The courts of kings are very generally depraved; and impressions received in early life, however reason and religion may fight against them at after periods, still leave a weak and assailable point in the character not easily strengthened for resistance. Man's heart is as a fortress, my young friend; a breach effected in the walls of which is rarely, if ever, repaired with as much firmness as at first. I do not wish to palliate his errors, for they are very great, but merely to explain my anxiety to have good counsels near him."

"It is very necessary, indeed, sir," replied Jean Charost, simply, never dreaming that his counsels could be those to which Jacques Cœur alluded. "I have heard a good deal of the duke since we have been here in Paris, and although all must love and admire his great and noble qualities, yet it is sad to hear the tales men tell of him."

"Age and experience," replied Jacques Cœur, "may have some effect; nay, are already having an effect in rendering good resolutions firmer, and the yielding to temptation less frequent. It is only required now that some person having influence over him, and constantly near him, should throw that influence into the scale of right. I know not, my dear lad, whether you may or may not obtain influence with him. He has promised me to treat you with all favor, and to keep you as near his person as possible, and I feel quite sure that if any opportunities occur of throwing in a word in favor of virtue and good conduct, or of opposing vice and licentiousness, you will not fail to seize it. I do not mean to instigate you to meddle in the affairs of this prince, or to intrude counsels upon him. To do so would be impertinent and wrong in one of your position; but he himself may furnish opportunity. Consult you he will not; but converse with you often, he probably will; and it is quite possible in a calm, quiet, unobtrusive course, to set good counsel before him, without appearing to advise, or pretending to meddle."

"I should fear," replied Jean Charost, "that he would converse very little with a boy like me, certainly not attend much to my opinions."

"That will greatly depend upon the station you obtain in his household," replied Jacques Cœur. "If you are very much near his person, I doubt not that he will. Those who give way to their passion, Jean, and plunge into a sea of intrigue, are often in situations of difficulty and anxiety, where they can find no counsel in their own breasts, no comfort in their own hearts. It is then that they will fly to any one who may happen to be near for help and resource. I only say such things may happen, not that they will; but if they do, I trust to you, Jean Charost, to use them to good purpose."

The conversation proceeded much in the same tone till they reached the lodging of the merchant, and ascended once more to the small chamber in which Jean Charost had been writing. By this time, according to the notions of Jacques Cœur, it was too late for any one to be out of bed, and he and his young companion separated for the night. On the following morning, however, when Jean descended to the counting-room, or office, at an early hour, he found Jacques Cœur already there, and one or two of his servants with him. He heard orders given about horses, and equipments of various kinds, before the great merchant seemed aware of his presence. But when the servants were all dispatched upon their various errands, Jacques turned and greeted him kindly.

"Let us talk of a little business, my son," he said; "for in an hour's time we shall have to part on our several ways; you to the Hôtel d'Orleans, I back again to Bourges; for I am weary of this great city, Jean, and besides, business calls me hence. Now let us, like good merchants, reckon what it is I am in your debt."

"Nay, sir," answered Jean Charost, "it is I that am altogether in yours; I do not mean alone for kindness, but even in mere money. I have received more from you, I believe, than you promised to give me."

"More than the mere stipend, Jean," replied Jacques Cœur; "but not more than what was implied. I promised your mother, excellent lady, God bless her, that I would give you a hundred crowns of the sun by the year, and, moreover, whatever I found your assistance was worth to me besides. I deal with it merely as a matter of account, Jean; and I find that by the transactions with Genoa, partly carried on by yourself in the last year, I have made a profit of sixteen per cent, on invested money; on the business of Amalfi, transacted altogether by yourself nineteen per cent.; on other business of a similar kind, with which I and my ordinary clerks have had to do alone, an average of fifteen per cent. Thus, in all affairs that you have dealt with, there has been a gain over ordinary gains of somewhere between three and four per cent. Now this surplus is to be divided between you and me, according to my view of the case. I have looked into it closely, to do justice to both, and I find that, as the transactions of this year have been somewhat large, I am a debtor to you a sum of two thousand seven hundred and forty-three crowns, two livres Parisis, and one denier. There is a note of the account; I think you will find it correct."

Poor Jean Charost was astonished and overcome. The small patrimony of his father--just sufficient to maintain a man of gentle blood within that narrow limit thronged with petty cares, usually called moderate competence--a sort of myth, embellished by the poets--a kind of economical Arcadia, in which that perfect happiness represented, is as often found as the Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses in plum-colored velvet coats and pink ribbons are found in the real pastoral--this small estate, I say, had been hypothecated to the amount of three thousand crowns, to enable his father to serve and die for his sovereign on the battle-field; and the great first object of Jean Charost's ambition had been to enable his poor mother to pay off a debt which, with its interest, was eating into the core of the estate. Hitherto the prospect of success had seemed far, far away; he had thought he could see it in the distance; but he had doubted, and feared, and the long journey to travel had seemed to dim even the sunrise of hope. But now the case was reversed; the prospect seemed near, the object well-nigh attained, and for an instant or two he could hardly believe his ears.

"Oh, sir," he exclaimed, after some murmured thanks, "take it to my mother--take it all to my mother. It will make her heart leap for joy. I shall want no money where I am going."

Jacques Cœur gazed at him with the faint, rueful smile of age listening to inexperience. "You will need more than you know, my good youth," he answered. "Courts are very different places from merchant's houses; and if great openings are there found, there are openings of the purse likewise. But I know your object, my dear boy. It is a worthy one, and you can gratify it to a certain extent, while you yet retain the means of appearing as you should in the household of the Duke of Orleans. I will take two thousand crowns to your mother. Then only a thousand will remain to be paid upon the mortgage, which I will discharge; and you shall repay me when your economy and your success, in both of which I have great confidence, shall make it light for you to do so."

Such was the kindly plan proposed by the merchant, and Jean Charost acceded joyfully. It must not be denied that to be in possession of seven hundred crowns seemed, in his young and untaught eyes, to put him among the wealthy of the land. It must not be denied, either, that the thought rose up of many things he wanted, of which he had never much felt the want before. Among the rest, a horse seemed perfectly indispensable but the kindness of Jacques Cœur had beforehand deprived him of all excuse for this not unreasonable expense. He found that a fine horse, taken in payment of a debt from Spain, with bridle and housings all complete, had been destined for his use by the great merchant; and certainly well mounted, and, as he thought, well equipped with all things, Jean Charost set out for the Hôtel d'Orleans, at about half past eight o'clock, carrying a message from Jacques Cœur to the duke, to account for and excuse the sudden departure of the merchant.

CHAPTER V.

To retrace one's steps is always difficult; and it may be as well, whenever the urgency of action will permit it, in life, as in a tale that is told, to pause a little upon the present, and not to hurry on too rapidly to the future, lest the stern Irrevocable follow us too closely. I know nothing more difficult, or more necessary to impress upon the mind of youth, than the great and important fact, that every thing, once done, is irrevocable; that Fate sets its seal upon the deed and upon the word; that it is a bond to good or evil; that though sometimes we may alter the conditions in a degree, the weightier obligations of that bond can never be changed; that there is something recorded in the great Book against us, a balance for, or adverse to us, which speeds us lightly onward, or hampers all our after efforts.

No, no. There is no going back. As in the fairy tale, the forest closes up behind us as we pass

through, and in the great adventure of life our only way is forward.

Life, in some of its phases, should always be the model of a book, and to avoid the necessity of even trying to go far back, it may be as well to pause here, and tell some events which had occurred even within the space of time which our tale has already occupied.

In a chamber, furnished with fantastic splendor, and in a house not far from the palace of the Duke of Orleans, stood a richly-decorated bed. It was none of those scanty, parsimonious, modern contrivances, in which space to turn seems grudged to the unhappy inmate, but a large, stately, elaborate structure, almost a room in itself. The four posts, at the four corners, were carved, and gilt, and ornamented with ivory and gold. Groups of cupids, or cherubim, I know not well which, supported the pillars, treading gayly upon flowers; and, as people were not very considerate of harmony in those days, the sculptor of this bed, for so I suppose we must call him, had added Corinthian capitals to the posts, and crowned the acanthus of dark wood with large plumes of real ostrich feathers. Round the valance, and on many parts of the draperies, which were of a light crimson velvet, appeared numerous inscriptions, embroidered in gold. Some were lines from poets of the day, or old romances of the Langue d'oc, or Langue d'oil, while, strange to say, others were verses from the Psalms of David.

On this bed lay a lady sweetly asleep, beautiful but pale, and bearing traces of recent illness on her face; and beside her lay a babe which seemed ten days or a fortnight old, swathed up according to the abominable custom of the day, in what was then called *en mailotin*. A lamp was on a table near, a vacant chair by the bedside, from which a heedless nurse had just escaped to take a little recreation during her lady's slumbers. All was still and silent in the room and throughout the house. The long and narrow corridors were vacant; the lower hall was far off. The silver bell, which was placed nigh at hand, might have rang long and loud without calling any one to that bedside; but the nurse trusted to the first calm slumber of the night, and doubtless promised herself that her absence would not be long. It proved long enough--somewhat too long, however.

The door opened almost without a sound, and a tall, gray figure entered, which could hardly have been seen from the bed, in the twilight obscurity of that side of the room, even had any eyes been open there. It advanced stealthily to the side of the bed, with the right hand hidden in the breast; but there, for a moment, whatever was the intent, the figure paused, and the eyes gazed down upon the sleeping woman and the babe by her side. Oh, what changes of expression came, driven like storm-clouds, over that countenance, by some tempest of passions within, and what a contrast did the man's face present to that of the sleeping girl. It might be that the wronger and the wronged were there in presence, and that calm, peaceful sleep reigned quietly, where remorse, and anguish, and repentance should have held their sway; while agony, and rage, and revenge were busy in the heart which had done no evil.

Whether it was doubt, or hesitation, or a feeling of pity which produced the pause, I can not tell; but whatever was the man's purpose--and it could hardly be good--he stopped, and gazed for more than one minute ere he made the intent a deed. At length, however, he withdrew the right hand from his bosom, and something gleamed in the lamp-light.

It is strange: the lady moved a little in her sleep, as if the gleam of the iron had made itself felt, and she murmured a name. Her hand and arm were cast carelessly over the bed-clothes; her left side and breast exposed. The name she murmured seemed to act like a command; for instantly one hand was pressed upon her lips, and the other struck violently her side. The cry was smothered; the hands clutched the air in vain: a slight convulsive effort to rise, an aguish shudder, and all was still.

The assassin withdrew his hand, but left the dagger in the wound. Oh, with what bitter skill he had done the deed! The steel had pierced through and through her heart!

There he stood for a moment, and contemplated his handiwork. What was in his breast--who can tell? But suddenly he seemed to start from his dark revery, took the hand he had made lifeless in his own, and withdrew a wedding ring from the unresisting finger.

Though passion is fond of soliloquy, he uttered but few words. "Now let him come and look," he murmured; and then going rapidly round to the other side of the bed, he snatched up the infant, cast part of his robe around it, and departed.

Oh, what an awful, dreadful thing was the stillness which reigned in that terrible chamber after the murderer was gone. It seemed as if there were something more than silence there--a thick dull, motionless air of death and guilt. It lasted a long while--more than half an hour; and then, walking on tip-toe, came back the nurse. For a moment or two she did not perceive that any thing had happened. All was so quiet, so much as she had left it, that she fancied no change had taken place. She moved about stealthily, arranged some silver cups and tankards upon a *dressoir*, and smoothed out the damask covering with its fringe of lace.

Presently there was a light tap at the door, and going thither on tip-toe, she found one of the Duke of Orleans's chief servants come to inquire after the lady's health.

"Hush!" said the nurse, lifting up her finger, "she is sleeping like an angel."

"And the baby?" asked the man.

"She is asleep too," replied the nurse; "she has not given a cry for an hour."

"That's strange!" said the man. "I thought babies cried every five minutes."

Upon second thoughts, the nurse judged it strange too; and a certain sort of cold dread came upon her as she remembered her long absence, and combined it with the perfect stillness.

"Stay a moment: I'll just take a peep and tell you more;" and she advanced noiselessly to the side of the bed. The moment she gazed in, she uttered a fearful shriek. Nature was too strong for art or policy. There lay the mother dead; the infant gone; and she screamed aloud, though she knew that the whole must be told, and her own negligence exposed.

The man darted in from the door, and rushed to the side of the bed. The bloody evidences of the deed which had been done were plain before him, and catching the nurse by the arm, he questioned her vehemently.

She was a friend of his, however--indeed, I believe, a relation--and first came a confession, and then a consultation. She declared she had not been absent five minutes, and that the deed must have been done within that short time; that somebody must have been concealed in the room at the time she left, for she had been so close at hand that she must have seen any one pass. She went on to declare that she believed it must have been done by sorcery; and as sorcery was in great repute at that time, the man might have been of her opinion, if the gore and the wound had not plainly shown a mortal agency.

Then came the question of what was to be done. The duke must be told--that was clear; and it was agreed by both the man and the woman that it would be better for them to bear their own tale.

"Do not let us tell him all at once," said the good lady, for horror and grief had by this time been swallowed up in more personal considerations; "he would kill us both on the spot, I do believe. Tell him, at first, that she is very ill; then, when he is going to see her, that she is dying; then that she is dead. And then--and then--let him find out himself that she has been murdered. Good gracious! I should not wonder if the murderer was still in the room. Did you not think you saw the curtain move?" and she gave a fearful glance toward the bed.

The man unsheathed his sword, and for the first time they searched the room, which they had never thought of before.

Nothing, however, could be found--not a vestige of the murderer--the very dagger that had done the deed was now gone; and after some further consultation, and some expressions of horror and regret, they set out to bear the intelligence to the Duke of Orleans, neglecting, in the fear of any one forestalling them, to give any directions for pursuit of the murderer.

The house lay close to the Orleans palace, with an entrance from it into the gardens of the latter. Through that door they passed, walked down a short avenue of trees and vases, crossed a walk, and entered the palace by a side door. The man made his way straight toward the little hall, closely followed by the woman, and found the duke, as I have shown, in conversation with Jacques Cœur and Jean Charost. As had been agreed, the prince was at first informed that the lady was very ill, and even that intelligence caused the agitation which I have depicted. But how can I describe his state of mind when the whole truth was known, the fire of his rage, the abyss of his sorrow, and more, far more than all, the depth--the poignancy of his remorse? When he looked upon that beautiful and placid face, lying there in the cold, dull sleep of death--when he saw the fair bosom deluged in purple gore--when he remembered that, for the gratification of his light love, he had torn her from the arms of a husband who doted on her, from peaceful happiness and tranquil innocence, if not from joy and splendor--when he thought he had made her an adulteress--had brought disgrace upon her name--that he had been even, as he felt at that moment, accessory to her death, the worm that never dies seemed to fix itself upon his heart, and, casting himself down beside the bed, he cursed the day that he was born, and invoked bitterer maledictions on his own head than his worst enemy would have dared to pile upon him.

True, in his anguish he did not altogether forget his energy. Instant orders were given to search for and pursue the murderer; and especial directions to beset all the doors of a small hotel in the neighborhood of the Temple, and to mark well who went out or came in. But this done, he fell again into the dark apathy of despair, and, seated in the chamber of death, slept not, took no refreshment throughout the livelong night. Priests came in, tall tapers were set in order, vases of holy water, and silver censers, and solemn voices were raised in holy song. But the duke sat there unmoved; his arms crossed upon his chest; his eyes fixed with a stony glare upon the floor. No one dared to speak to him or to disturb him; and the dark, long night of winter waned away, and the gray morning sunlight entered the chamber, ere he quitted the side of her he had loved and ruined.

CHAPTER VI.

Hope is nothing but a bit of cork floating on the sea of life, now tossed up into the sky, now sunk down into the abyss, but rising, rising again over the crest of the foamy wave, and topping all things even unto the end.

Joyous and hopeful, Jean Charost presented himself at the gates of the Duke of Orleans's palace; but the heavy door under the archway was closed, and some minutes elapsed ere he obtained admission. The tall man who opened for him seemed doubtful whether he would let him in or not; and it was not till Jean had explained that the duke had appointed him, and that he was the person who had accompanied Jacques Cœur on the preceding night, that the man would let him pass the wicket. He then told him, however, to go on to the house and inquire for the master of the pages.

Jean Charost was not very well satisfied with this reply; for, to his mind, it seemed to indicate that the duke had made up his mind to place him among his pages, and had given orders accordingly. Now the position of a page in a great household was not very desirable in the eyes of Jean Charost; besides, he had passed the age, he thought, when such a post was appropriate. He had completed his seventeenth year, and looked much older than he really was.

As he walked on, however, he heard a step behind him, and, looking round, saw a man following him. There was nothing very marvelous in this, and he proceeded on his way till he found himself in the vestibule before described, and asked, as he had been directed, for the master of the pages. The man to whom he addressed himself said, "I'll send you to him. You were here last night, were you not, young gentleman?"

Jean Charost answered in the affirmative, and the man made a sign to the person who had followed the youth across the garden and had entered the vestibule with him. Immediately Jean felt his arm taken hold of, somewhat roughly, by the personage behind him, and, ere he well knew what was taking place, he was pulled into a small room on one side of the vestibule, and the door closed upon him. The room was already tenanted by three or four persons of different conditions. One seemed an old soldier, with a very white beard, and a scar across his brow; one was dressed as a mendicant friar; and one, by his round jacket, knee-breeches, and blue stockings, with broad-toed shoes and a little square cap, was evidently a mechanic. The old soldier was walking up and down the room with a very irritable air; the mendicant friar was telling his beads with great rapidity; the mechanic sat in a corner, twisting his thumbs round and round each other, and looking half stupefied. The scene did not explain itself at all, and Jean stood for a moment or two, not at all comprehending why he was brought there, or what was to happen next.

"By Saint Hubert, this is too bad!" exclaimed the old soldier, at length; and approaching the door, he tried to open it, but it was locked.

"Pray, what is the matter?" asked Jean Charost, simply.

"Why, don't you know?" exclaimed the old man. "On my life, I believe the duke is as mad as his brother."

"The fact is, my son," said the friar, "some offense was committed here last night, a robbery or a murder; and the duke has given orders that every body who was at the house after the hour of seven should be detained till the matter is investigated."

"He does not suppose I committed a murder!" exclaimed the old soldier, in a tone of great indignation.

"I can't tell that," replied the friar, with a quiet smile; "gentlemen of your profession sometimes do."

"I never murdered any body in my life," whined the mechanic.

"Happy for you," said the friar; "and happier still if you get people to believe you."

He then addressed himself to his beads again, and for nearly an hour all was silence in the room, except the low muttering of the friar's paters and aves. But the gay hopes of Jean Charost sunk a good deal under the influence of delay and uncertainty, although, of course, he felt nothing like alarm at the situation in which he was placed. At length a man in a black gown and a square black cap was introduced, struggling, it is true, and saying to those who pushed him in, "Mark, I resist! it is not with my own consent. This incarceration is illegal. The duke is not a lord high justiciary on this ground; and for every minute I will have my damages, if there be honesty in the sovereign courts, and justice in France."

The door was closed upon him, however, unceremoniously; for the servants of great men in those days were not very much accustomed to attend to punctilios of law; and the advocate, for so he seemed, turned to his fellow-prisoners, and told them in indignant terms how he had been engaged to defend the steward of the prince in a little piece of scandal that had arisen in the Marais; how he had visited him to consult the night before, and had been seized on his return that day, and thrust in there upon a pretense that would not bear an argument.

"I thought," said the old soldier, bitterly, "that you men of the robe would make any thing bear an argument. I know you argued me out of all my fortune among you."

The little petulant man of law had not time to reply, when the door was opened, and the whole party were marched into the presence of the Duke of Orleans, under the escort of half a dozen men-at-arms.

The duke was seated in the little hall where Jean Charost had seen him on the preceding night, with his hair rough and disheveled, and his apparel neglected. His eyes were fixed upon the table before him, and he only raised them once or twice during the scene that followed; but a venerable-looking man who sat beside him, and who was, in fact, one of the judges of the Châtelet, kept his eyes fixed upon the little party which now entered with one of those cold, fixed, but piercing looks that seem to search the heart by less guarded avenues than the lips.

"Ah, Maître Pierrot le Brun," he said, looking at the advocate, "I will deal with you, brother, first. Pray what was it brought you hither last night, and again this morning?"

The advocate replied, but in a tone greatly subdued, as compared with that which he had used in the company of his fellow-prisoners. His case was soon proved, and he was suffered to depart, offering somewhat humiliating thanks for his speedy dismissal.

The old soldier, however, maintained his surly tone, and when asked what brought him thither the night before and again that day, replied boldly, "I came to see if the Duke of Orleans would do something for a man-at-arms of Charles the Fifth. I fought for his father, and was one half ruined by my services to my king, the other half by such men as the one who has just gone out. I can couch a lance, or wield a sword as well as ever, and I don't see why, being a gentleman of name and arms, I should be thrown on one side like a rusty plastron."

The Duke of Orleans suddenly raised his head, asked the old man's name, wrote something on a bit of paper, and gave it to him, seeming to raise no small emotions of joy and satisfaction; for the soldier caught his hand and kissed it warmly, as if his utmost wishes were gratified.

The judge was for asking some more questions, but the duke interfered, saying, "I know him--let him pass. He had no share in this."

The mendicant friar was next examined, and, to say truth, his account of himself did not seem, to the ears of Jean Charost at least, to be quite as satisfactory as could be desired. His only excuse for being twice in the palace of the duke within four-and-twenty hours was, that he came to beg an alms for his convent, and there was a look of shrewd meaning in his countenance while he replied, which to one who did not know all the various trades exercised by gentry of his cloth, seemed exceedingly suspicious. The duke and the magistrate, however, appeared to be satisfied, and the former then turned his eyes upon Jean Charost, while the judge called up the mechanic and put some questions to him.

"Who are you, young gentleman?" said the Duke of Orleans, motioning Jean to approach him. "I have seen your face somewhere--who are you?"

"I waited upon your highness last night," replied Jean Charost, with the rear-guard of all his hopes and expectations routed by the discovery that the duke did not even recollect him. "I was brought hither by Monsieur Jacques Cœur; and by your own command, I returned this morning at nine o'clock."

"I remember," said the duke, "I remember;" and, casting down his eyes again, he fell into a fit of thought which had not come to an end when the judge concluded his examination of the poor mechanic. That examination had lasted longer than any of the others; for it seemed that the man had been working till a late hour on the previous evening on the bolts of some windows which looked from a neighboring house into the gardens of the Orleans palace, and that shortly before the hour at which the murder was committed he had seen a tall man pass swiftly along the corridor, near which he was employed. He could not describe his apparel, the obscurity having prevented his remarking the color; but he declared that it looked like the costume of a priest or a monk, and was certainly furnished with a hood, much in the shape of a cowl. This was all that could be extracted from him, and, indeed, it was evident that he knew no more; so, in the end, he was suffered to depart.

The judge then turned to Jean Charost, who remained standing before the Duke of Orleans, in anxious expectation of what was to come next. The duke was still buried in thought; for the young man's reply to his question had probably revived in his mind all the painful feelings first produced by the intelligence which had interrupted his conversation with Jacques Cœur on the preceding night.

"What is your name, your profession, and what brought you to the Orleans palace last night, young man?" asked the judge, in a grave, but not a stern tone.

"My name is Jean Charost de Brecy," replied the young man, "a gentleman by name and arms; and I came hither last night--"

But the Duke of Orleans roused himself from his revery, and waved his hand, saying, "Enough--enough, my good friend. I know all about this young man. He could have no share in the dark deed: for he was with me when it was done. I forgot his face for a moment; but I remember him well now, and what I promised him."

"Suffer me, your highness," said the judge. "We know not what he may have seen in coming or going. Things which seem trifles often have bearings of great weight upon important facts--at what time came you hither, young gentleman? Were you alone, and, if not, who was with you?"

Jean Charost answered briefly and distinctly, and the judge then inquired, "Did you meet any one, as you entered this house, who seemed to be quitting it?"

"No," replied Jean Charost, "several persons were lingering about the gate, and in front, between the walls and the chain; but nobody seemed quitting the spot."

"No one in a long flowing robe and cowl, the habit of a priest or a friar?" asked the judge.

"No," replied Jean Charost; "but we saw, a few moments before, a man such as you describe, seeking admission at the gates of a large house like a monastery. He seemed in haste, too, from the way he rang the bell."

The judge questioned him closely as to the position of the house he described; and when he had given his answer, turned to the duke, saying, "The Celestins."

"They have had naught to do with it," replied the duke, at once. "The good brethren love me too well to inflict such grief upon me."

"They have cause, my lord," replied the judge; "but we do not always find that gratitude follows good offices. By your permission, I will make some inquiry as to who was the person who entered their gates last night at the hour named."

"As you will," replied the duke, shaking his head; "but I repeat, there is something within me which tells me better than the clearest evidence, who was the man that did this horrid act; and he is not at the Celestins. Inquire, if you please; but it is vain, I know. He and I will meet, however, ere our lives end. My conscience was loaded on his account. He has well balanced the debt; and when we meet--"

He added no more, but clasped his hands tight together, and set his teeth bitterly.

"Nevertheless, I will inquire," said the judge, who seemed somewhat pertinacious in his own opinions. "It is needful that this should be sifted to the bottom. Such acts are becoming too common."

As he spoke, he rose and took his leave, bidding the artisan follow him; and Jean Charost remained alone in the presence of the Duke of Orleans, though two or three servants and armed men passed and repassed from time to time across the further end of the hall.

For several minutes the duke remained in thought; but at length he raised his eyes to Jean Charost's face, and gazed at him for a few moments with an absent air. Then rising, he beckoned him to follow, saying, "Come with me. There is a weight in this air; it is heavy with sorrow."

Thus saying, he led the way through a small door at the end of the hall--opposite to that by which the young gentleman had entered--into a large, square, inner court of the palace, round three sides of which ran an arcade or cloister.

"Give me your arm," said the duke, as they issued forth; and, leaning somewhat heavily on his young companion, he continued to pace up and down the arcade for more than an hour, sometimes in silence--sometimes speaking a few words--asking a question--making some observation on the reply--or giving voice to the feelings of his own heart, in words which Jean Charost did not half understand.

More than once a page, a servant, or an armed officer would come and ask a question, receive the duke's answer, and retire. But in all instances the prince's reply was short, and made without pausing in his walk. It was evidently one of those moments of struggle when the mind seeks to cast off the oppression of some great and heavy grief, rousing itself again to resist, after one of all the many stunning blows which every one must encounter in this mortal career. And it is wonderful how various is the degree of elasticity--the power of action--shown by the spirits of different men in the same circumstances. The weak and puny, the tender and the gentle fall, crushed, as it were, probably never to recover, or crawl away from a battle-field, for which they are not fitted, to seek in solitude an escape from the combat of life. The stern and hardy warrior, accustomed to endure and to resist, may be cast down for a moment by the shock, but starts on

his feet again, ready to do battle the next instant; and the light and elastic leaps up with the very recoil of the fall, and mingles in the melee again, as if sporting with the ills of the world. In the character of the Duke of Orleans there was something of both the latter classes of mind. From his very infancy he had been called upon to deal with the hard things of life. Strife, evil, sorrow, care, danger, had been round his cradle, and his youth and his manhood had been passed in contests often provoked by himself, often forced upon him by others.

It was evident that, in the present case, the prince had suffered deeply, and we have seen that he yielded, more than perhaps he had ever done before, to the weight of his sorrow. But he was now making a great effort to cast off the impression, and to turn his mind to new themes, as a relief from the bitterness of memory. He was in some degree successful, although his thoughts would wander back, from time to time, to the painful topic from which he sought to withdraw them; but every moment he recovered himself more and more. At first, his conversation with Jean Charost consisted principally of questions, the replies to which were hardly heard or noticed; but gradually he began to show a greater interest in the subject spoken of, questioned the young man much, both in regard to Jacques Cœur and to his own fate and history, and though he mused from time to time over the replies, yet he soon returned to the main subject again, and seemed pleased and well satisfied with the answers he received.

Indeed, the circumstances attending both the first introduction and second interview of Jean Charost with the duke were of themselves fortunate. He became associated, as it were, in the prince's mind with moments sanctified by sorrow, and filled with deep emotion. A link of sympathy seemed to be established between them, which nothing else could have produced, and the calm, graceful, thoughtful tone of the young man's mind harmonized so well with the temporary feelings of the prince, that, in the hour which followed, he had made more progress in his regard than a gayer, a lighter, a more brilliant spirit could have done in double the time.

Still, nothing had been said of the position which Jean Charost was to occupy in the prince's household, when a man bearing a long white wand entered, and informed the duke that the Duke de Berri was coming that way to visit him. Orleans turned, and advanced a few steps toward a door leading from the court into the interior of the building, as if to meet his noble relation. But before he was half down the arcade, the Duke de Berri was marshaled in, with some state, by the prince's officers.

"Leave us," said the Duke of Orleans, speaking to the attendants, as soon as he had embraced his relation; and Jean Charost, receiving the command as general, was about to follow. But the prince stopped him, beckoning him up, and presented him to the Duke de Berri, saying, "This is my young secretary, noble uncle; given to me by my good friend Jacques Cœur. I have much to say to you; some part of which it may be necessary to reduce to writing. We had better, therefore, keep him near us."

The Duke de Berri merely bowed his head, gazing at Jean Charost thoughtfully; and the prince added, "But the air is shrewd and keen, even here, notwithstanding the sunshine. Let us go into the octagon chamber. No, not there, it overlooks that dreadful room. This way, my uncle."

CHAPTER VII.

"This is beautiful writing," said the Duke of Orleans, laying one hand upon Jean Charost's shoulder, and leaning over him as he added the few last words to a proposal of accommodation between the prince and the Duke of Burgundy. "Can the hand that guides a pen so well wield a sword and couch a lance?"

"It may be somewhat out of practice, sir," replied Jean Charost, "for months have passed since it tried either; but, while my father lived, it was my pastime, and he said I should make a soldier."

"He was a good one himself, and a good judge," replied the duke. "But we will try you, Jean--we will try you. Now give me the pen. I can write my name, at least, which is more than some great men can do."

Jean Charost rose, and the duke, seating himself, signed his name in a good bold hand, and folded up the paper. "There, my uncle," he continued, "you be the messenger of peace to the Hôtel d'Artois. I must go to Saint Pol to see my poor brother. He was in sad case yesterday; but I have ever remarked that his fury is greatest on the eve of amendment. Would to God that we could but have an interval of reason sufficiently long for him to settle all these distracting affairs himself, and place the government of the kingdom on a basis more secure. Gladly would I retire from all these cares and toils, and pass the rest of my days--"

"In pleasure?" asked the Duke de Berri, with a faint smile.

A cloud came instantly over the face of the Duke of Orleans. "Nay, not so," he replied, in a tone of deep melancholy. "Pleasure is past, good uncle. I would have said--and pass the rest of my days in thought, in sorrow, and perhaps in penitence."

"Would that it might be so," rejoined the old man; and he shook his head with a sigh and a doubtful look.

"You know not what has happened here," said the Duke of Orleans, laying his hand gloomily upon his relation's arm. "An event fearful enough to awaken any spirit not plunged in utter apathy. I can not tell you. I dare not remember it. But you will soon hear. Let us go forth;" and, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, he walked slowly out of the room, accompanied by the Duke de Berri, without taking any further notice of Jean Charost, who followed, a step or two behind, to the outer court, where the horses and attendants of both the princes were waiting for them.

Some word, some indication of what he was to do, of what was expected from him, or how he was to proceed, Jean Charost certainly did look for. But none was given. Wrapped in dark and sorrowful meditations, the duke mounted and rode slowly away, without seeming to perceive even the groom who held his stirrup, and the young man remained in the court, a complete stranger among a crowd of youths and men, each of whom knew his place and had his occupation. His heart had not been lightened; his mind had not been cheered by all the events of the morning; and the gloomy, mysterious hints which he had heard of a dark and terrible crime having been committed within those walls, brooded with a shadowy horror over the scene. But those who surrounded him seemed not in the least to share such sensations. Death tenanted a chamber hard by; the darkened windows of the house that flanked the garden could be seen from the spot where they stood, and yet there appeared no heavy heart among them. No one mourned, no one looked sad. One elderly man turned away whistling, and re-entered the palace. Two squires, in the prime of life, began to spar and wrestle with rude jocularity, the moment their lord's back was turned; and many a monkey-trick was played by the young pages, while three or four lads, some older, some younger than Jean Charost himself, stood laughing and talking at one side of the court, with their eyes fixed upon him.

He felt his situation growing exceedingly unpleasant, and, after some consideration, he made up his mind to turn back again into the house, and ask to see the master of the pages, to whom he had been first directed; but, just as he was about to put this purpose in execution, a tall, gayly-dressed young man, with budding mustache, and sword and dagger by his side, came from the little group I have mentioned, and bowed low to the young stranger, with a gay but supercilious air. "May I inquire," he said, using somewhat antiquated phrases, and all the grimace of courtesy, "May I inquire, *Beau Sire*, who the *Beau Sire* may be, and what may be his business here?"

Jean Charost was not apt to take offense; and though the tone and manner were insolent, and his feelings but little in harmony with a joke, he replied, quietly enough, "My name is Jean Charost de Brecy, and my business, sir, is certainly not with you."

"How can the *Beau Sire* tell that?" demanded the other, while two or three more from the same youthful group gathered round, "seeing that he knows not my name. But on that score I will enlighten him. My name is Juvenel de Royans."

"Then, Monsieur Juvenel de Royans," replied the young man, growing a little angry, "I will in turn inform you how I know that my business is not with you. It is simply because it lies with his highness, the Duke of Orleans, and no one else."

"Oh, ho!" cried the young man, "we have a grand personage to deal with, who will not take up with pages and valets, I warrant; a chanticleer of the first crow! Sir, if you are not a cock of the lower court, perhaps it might be as well for you to vacate the premises."

"I really don't know what you mean, good youth," answered Jean Charost. "You seem to wish to insult me. But I will give you no occasion. You shall make one, if you want one; and I have only simply to warn you that his highness last night engaged me in his service."

"As what? as what?" cried a dozen voices round him.

Jean Charost hesitated; and Juvenel de Royans, seeing that he had gained some advantage, though he knew not well what, exclaimed, in a solemn and reproving tone, "Silence, messieurs. You are all mistaken. You think that every post in this household is filled, and therefore that there is nothing vacant for this young gentleman. But there is one post vacant, for which he is, doubtless, eminently qualified, namely, the honorable office of Instructor of the Monkeys."

"The first that I am likely to begin with is yourself," answered Jean Charost, amid a shout of laughter from the rest; "and I am very likely to give you the commencing lesson speedily, if you do not move out of my way."

"I am always ready for instruction," replied the other, barring the passage to the house.

Jean Charost's hand was upon his collar in a moment; but the other was as strong as himself, and a vehement struggle was on the point of taking place, when a middle-aged man, who had

been standing at the principal door of the palace, came out and thrust himself between the two youths, exclaiming, "For shame! for shame! Ah, Master Juvenel, at your old tricks again. You know they have cost you the duke's favor. Take care that they do not cost you something more."

"The young gentleman offered me some instruction," said Juvenel de Royans, in a tone of affected humility. "Surely you would not have me reject such an offer, although I know not who he is, or what may be his capability for giving it."

"He is the duke's secretary, sir," said the elder man, "and may have to give you instruction in more ways than you imagine."

"I cry his reverence, and kiss the toe of his pantoufle," said the other, nothing daunted, adding, as he looked at Jean Charost's shoes, which were cut in a somewhat more convenient fashion than the extravagant and inconvenient mode of Paris, "His *cordovanier*; has been somewhat penurious in regard to those same pantoufle toes, but my humility is all the greater."

"Come with me, sir; come with me, and never mind the foolish boy," said the elder gentleman, taking Jean Charost's arm, and drawing him away. "I will take you to the maître d'hôtel, who will show you your apartments. The duke will not be long absent, and if his mind have a little recovered itself, he will soon set all these affairs to rights for you."

"Perhaps there may be some mistake," said Jean Charost, hesitating a little. "I think that you are the gentleman who introduced the Duke de Berri about half an hour ago; but, although his highness gave me the name of his secretary in speaking to that duke, he has in no way intimated to me personally that I am to fill such an office, and it may be better not to assume that it is so till I hear further."

"Not so, not so," cried the gentleman, with a smile. "You do not know the duke yet. He is a man of a single word: frank, and honest in all his dealings. What he says, he means. He may do more, but never less; and it were to offend him to doubt any thing he has said. He called you his secretary in your presence; I heard him, and you are just as much his secretary as if you had a patent for the place. Besides, shortly after Maître Jacques Cœur left him yesterday evening--the first time, when he was here alone, I mean--he gave orders concerning you. I am merely a poor *écuyer de la main*, but tolerably well with his highness. The maître d'hôtel, however, knows all about it."

By this time they had reached the vestibule of the palace, and Jean Charost was conducted by his new friend through a number of turning and winding passages, which showed him that the house was much larger than he had at first believed, to a large room, where they found an old man in a lay habit of black, but with the crown of his head shaved, immersed in an ocean of bundles of papers, tied up with pack-thread.

"This is the young gentleman of whom the duke spoke to you, signor," said Jean's conductor; "his highness's new secretary. You had better let him see his rooms, and take care of him till the duke comes, for I found young Juvenel de Royans provoking him to quarrel in the outer court."

"Ah, that youth, that youth," cried the maître d'hôtel, with a strong foreign accent. "He will get himself into trouble, and Heaven knows the trouble he has given me. But can not you, good Monsieur Blaize, just show the young gentleman his apartments? Here are the keys. I know it is not in your office; but I am so busy just now, and so sad too, that you would confer a favor upon me. Then bring him back, as soon as he knows his way, and we three will dine snugly together in my other room. It is two hours past the time; but every thing has been in disorder this black day, and the duke has gone out without any dinner at all. Will you favor me, Monsieur Blaize?"

"With pleasure, with pleasure, my good friend," replied the old *écuyer*, taking the two keys which the other held out to him, and saying, in an inquiring tone, "The two rooms next to the duke's bed-room, are they not?"

"No, no. The two on this side, next the toilet-chamber," answered the other. "You will find a fire lighted there, for it is marvelous cold in this horrid climate;" and Monsieur Blaize, nodding his head, led the way toward another part of the palace.

Innumerable small chambers were passed, their little doors jostling each other in a long corridor, and Jean Charost began to wonder when they would stop, when a sharp turn brought them to a completely different part of the house. A large and curiously-constructed stair-case presented itself, rising from the sides of a vestibule, in two great wings, which seemed all the way up as if they were going to meet each other at the next landing-place, but yet, taking a sudden turn, continued separate to the top of the five stories through which they ascended, without any communication whatsoever between the several flights. Quaint and strange were the ornaments carved upon the railings and balustrades: heads of devils and angels, cherubims with their wings extended, monkeys playing on the fiddle, dragons with their snaky tails wound round the bones of a grinning skeleton, and Cupid astride upon a goose. In each little group there was probably some allegory, moral or satirical; but, though very much inclined, Jean Charost could not pause to inquire into the conceit which lay beneath, for his companion led the way up one of the flights with a rapid step, and then carried him along a wide passage, in which the doors were few and large, and ornamented with rich carvings, but dimly seen in the ill-lighted corridor. At

the end, a little flight of six broad steps led them to another floor of the house, more lightsome and cheerful of aspect, and here they reached a large doorway, with a lantern hanging before it and some verses carved in the wood-work upon the cornice.

Here Monsieur Blaize paused for a moment to look over his shoulder, and say, "That is the duke's bed-chamber, and the door beyond his toilet-chamber, where he receives applicants while he is dressing; and now for the secretary's room."

As he spoke, he approached a little door--for no great symmetry was observed--and, applying a key to the lock, admitted his young companion into the apartments which were to be his future abode. The first room was a sort of antechamber to the second, and was fitted up as a sort of writing-chamber, with tables, and chairs, and stools, ink-bottles and cases for paper, while a large, open fire-place displayed the embers of a fire, which had been sufficiently large to warm the whole air within. Within this room wat another, separated from it by a partition of plain oak, containing a small bed, very handsomely decorated, a chair, and a table, but no other furniture, except three pieces of tapestry, representing, somewhat grotesquely, and not very decently, the loves of Jupiter and Leda. The two chambers, which formed one angle of the building, and received light from two different sides, had apparently been one in former times, but each was large enough to form a very convenient room; and there was an air of comfort and habitability, if I may use the term, which seemed to the eye of Jean Charost the first cheerful thing he had met with since his entrance into the palace.

On the table, in the writing-room, were spots of ink of no very old date; and one article, belonging to a former tenant had been left behind, in the shape of a sword hanging by one of the rings of the scabbard from a nail driven into the oaken partition. In passing through, Jean Charost paused to look at it, and the old *écuyer* exclaimed, "Ah, poor fellow! he will never use it again. That belonged to Monsieur De Gray, the duke's late secretary, who was killed in a rencounter near Corbeil. Master Juvenel de Royans thought to get the post, but he had so completely lost the duke's favor by his rashness and indiscretion, that it was flatly refused him.

"Then probably he will be no great friend of mine," said Jean Charost, with a faint smile; "and perhaps his conduct just now had as much of malice in it as of folly."

Monsieur Blaize paused and meditated for a moment. He was at that age when the light tricks and vagaries of sportive youth are the most annoying--not old enough to dote upon the reflected image of regretted years, nor young enough to feel any sympathy with the follies of another age. He was, nevertheless, a very just man, and, as Jean Charost found afterward, just in small things as well as great; in words as well as deeds.

"No," he said, thoughtfully; "no; I do not think he is one to bear malice--at all events, not long. His nature is a frank and generous one, though overlaid by much conceit and vanity, and carried away by a rash, unbridled spirit. It is probable he neither cared who or what you were, and merely resolved, in order to make the foolish boys round him laugh, that he would have what he called some sport with the stranger, without at all considering how much pain he might give, or where an idle jest might end. There are multitudes of such men in the world, and they gain, good lack! the reputation of gallant, daring spirits, simply because they put themselves and every one else in danger, as if the continual periling of a hard head were really any sign of being a brave man. But we must not keep the signor's dinner waiting. It is one of his little foibles to love his meat well done, and never drink bad wine. Your eyes seem seeking something. What is it you require?"

"I thought, perhaps," replied Jean Charost, "that my baggage might have been brought up here, as the apartment, it seems, was prepared for me. It must have come some time ago, I think. My horse, too, I left at the gates, and Heaven knows what has become of him."

"We will inquire--we will inquire as we go," said the *écuyer*; "but no great toilet is required here at the dinner hour. At supper we sometimes put on our smart attire; but, in these hazardous times, one never knows how, or how soon, the mid-day meal may be brought to an end."

Thus saying, he turned to the door, and, taking a different way back from that which he had followed in leading Jean Charost to his apartments, he paused for a moment at a little dark den, shut off from one of the lower halls by a half door, breast high, and spoke a few words to some invisible person within.

"Stall number nineteen," growled a voice from within. "But who's to dress him? No groom--no horse-boy, even!"

"We will see to that presently," replied the *écuyer*; and then seeing a man pass along the other side of the hall, he crossed over, spoke to him for a moment or two, and returning, informed Jean Charost that his baggage had arrived, and would be carried up to the door of his apartments before dinner was over.

On returning to the rooms of the maître d'hôtel, they found that high functionary emerged from his accounts, and ready to conduct them into his own private dining-room, where, by especial privilege, he took his meals with a select few, and certainly did not fare worse than his lord and master. There might be more gold on the table of the Duke of Orleans, but probably less

good cheer. The maître d'hôtel himself was a sleek, quiet specimen of Italian humanity, always exceedingly full of business, very accurate, and even very faithful; by birth a gentleman; nominally an ecclesiastic; fond of quiet, if not of ease, and loving all kinds of good things, without the slightest objection to a sly joke, even if the whiskers of decency, morality, or religion were a little singed thereby. He was an exceedingly good man, nevertheless, a hater of all strife and quarreling, though in this respect he had fallen upon evil days; and his appearance and conduct, with his black beard, his tonsure, his semi-clerical dress, and his air of grave suavity, generally assured him respect from all members of the duke's household.

Two other officers, besides himself and the *écuyer*, formed the party at dinner with Jean Charost, and every thing passed with great decorum, all parties seeming to enjoy themselves among fat capon, snipes, rich Burgundy, and other delicacies, far too much to waste the precious moments in idle conversation.

Jean Charost thought the dinner very dull indeed, and wondered, with a feeling of some apprehension, if his meals were always to be taken in such solemn assembly. Peals of laughter, too, which he heard from a hall not far off, gave the gravity of the proceedings all the effect of contrast. But the young gentleman soon found that when that serious passion, hunger, was somewhat appeased, his companions could unbend a little. With the second course, a few quiet jokes began to fly about, staid and formal enough, indeed; but the gravity of the party was soon restored by Monsieur Blaize starting a subject of importance, in which Jean Charost was deeply interested. He announced to the maître d'hôtel that their young companion, not knowing the customs of the duke's household, had brought no servant with him, and it was agreed upon all hands that this was a defect to be remedied immediately.

Jean was a little puzzled, and a little alarmed at the idea of expense about to be incurred; for his education had been one of forced economy, and the thought of entertaining a servant for his own especial needs had never entered into his mind. He could only protest, however, in a subdued and somewhat anxious tone, that he knew not where or how to procure a person suitable; but, on that score, immediate assistance was offered him by the maître d'hôtel himself.

"I have more than a hundred and fifty names on my books," he said, "of lads all eager to be entered upon the duke's household in any capacity. I will look through the list by-and-by."

But, without giving him time to do so, every one of the gentlemen at the table hastened to mention some one whom he would be glad to recommend, leading Jean Charost to say to himself, "If the post of lackey to the duke's secretary be so desirable, how desirable must be the post of secretary itself!"

The discussion continued during the whole of the second course, each having a good deal to say in favor of his nominee, and each a jest to launch at the person recommended by any other.

"There is Pierre Crouton," said one elderly gentleman. "He was born upon my estate, near Charenton, and a brisker, more active lad never lived. He has had good instruction, too, and knows every corner of Paris from the Bastile to the Tour de Nesle."

"Well acquainted with the little Châtelet, likewise," said Monsieur Blaize. "I have heard that the jailer's great dogs will not even bark at him. But there is Matthew Borne, the son of old James Borne, who died in the duke's service long ago."

"Ay," said another, "poor James, when he was old, and battered to pieces, married the pretty young grisette, and this was her son. It's a wise son that knows his own father. Pray, what has become of her, Monsieur Blaize? You should know, if any one does."

"I know nothing about her," said the *écuyer*, somewhat sharply. "Her son came to me, asking a recommendation. I have given him that, and that's all I know."

"Trust to me, trust to me, my young friend," said the maître d'hôtel, in a whisper, to Jean Charost. "I will find the lad to suit you before nightfall. Come to me in half an hour, and you shall have a choice."

Jean Charost promised to follow his counsels, and soon after the little party broke up.

Strange is the sensation with which a young man encounters the first half hour of solitary thought in a new situation. Have you forgotten it, dear reader? Yes--perhaps entirely; and yet you must have experienced it at some time. When you first went to join your regiment; when, after all the bustle, and activity, and embarrassment, and a little sheepishness, and a little pride, and a little awkwardness perhaps, and perhaps all the casualties of the first mess dinner, you sat down in your barrack-room, not so much to review the events of the day, as to let the mind settle, and order issue out of chaos: you have felt it then. Or, when you have joined a squad of lawyer's clerks, or entered a merchant's counting-house, or plunged into a strange city, or entered a new university, and passed through all the initiations, and sat down in the lull of the evening or the dead of night, to find yourself alone--separate not only from familiar faces, and things associated with early associations, but from habitual thoughts and sensations, from family customs and domestic habits: you must have felt it then, and experienced a solitude such as a desert itself can hardly give.

Seated in his writing-room, without turning a thought or a look to his baggage, which had been placed at the door for himself to draw in, Jean Charost gave himself up to thought--I believe I might better say to sensation. He felt his loneliness, more than thought of it, and Memory, with one of those strange vagaries, in which she delights as much as Fancy, skipped at once over a period of fourteen or fifteen months, and carried him back at once to the small château of Brecy, and to the frugal table in his mother's hall. The quaint, long windows, with one pointed arch within another, and two or three pale yellow warriors of stained glass, transmitting the discolored rays upon the floor. The high-backed chair, never used since his father's death, standing against the wall, with a knob in the centre, resting against the iron chausses of an antiquated suit of armor, the plain oaken board in the middle of the room, and his mother and the two maids spinning in the sunniest nook, came up before his eyes almost as plainly as they had appeared the year and a half before. He heard the hound howling in the court-yard, and the song of the milk-maid bringing home the pail upon her head, and the song of the bird, which used to sit in March mornings on the topmost bough of an ash-tree, which had rooted itself on an inner tower, somewhat neglected and dilapidated. For a moment or two he was at home again. His paternal dwelling-place formed a little picture apart in his room in the Parisian palace, and the cheerful sunshine, pouring from early associations, formed a strange and striking contrast with the sort of dark isolation which he felt around him.

The contrast, perhaps, might have been as great if he had compared the present with days more recently passed; for in the house of Jacques Cœur he had been, from the first, at home; but still his mind did not rest upon it. It reverted to those earlier days; and he sat gazing on the floor, and wishing himself--notwithstanding the eagerness of youthful hope, the buoyancy of youthful spirits, the impetuosity of youthful desires--wishing himself once more in the calm and happy bosom of domestic life, and away from splendid scenes devoid of all warm and genial feelings, where gold and jewels might glitter and shine, but where every thing was cold as the metal, and hard as the stone.

It was a boy's fancy. It was the fancy of an hour. He knew that the strangeness would soon pass away. Young as he was, he was aware that the spirit, spider-like, speedily spins out threads to attach itself to all the objects that surround it, however different to its accustomed haunts, however strange, and new, and rough may be the points by which it is encompassed.

At length he started up, saying to himself, "Ah, ha! the half hour must be past;" and quitting the room without locking the door behind him, he threaded his way through the long passage to the office of the maître d'hôtel.

The Italian seemed to have got through the labors of the day, and seated in a large chair, with his feet in velvet slippers, extended to the fire, was yielding after the most improved method to the process of digestion. He was neither quite awake, nor quite asleep, and in that benign state of semi-somnolence which succeeds a well considered meal happily disposed of. The five or ten minutes which Jean Charost was behind his time had been favorable, by enabling him to prolong his comfortable repose, and he received the young gentleman with the utmost benevolence, seating him by him, and talking to him in a quiet, low, almost confidential tone, but not at first touching upon the subject which brought his young visitor there. On the contrary, his object in inviting him seemed to have been rather to give him a general idea of the character of those by whom he was surrounded, and of what would be expected from him by the duke himself, than to recommend him a lackey.

Of the duke he spoke in high terms, as in duty bound, but of the duchess in higher terms still; mingling his commendations, however, with expressions of compassion, which led Jean Charost to believe that her married life was not as happy as her virtue merited. The young listener, however, discovered that the good signor had accompanied the duchess from her father's court at Milan, and had a hereditary right to love and respect her.

All the principal officers of the duke's household were passed one by one in review by the good maître d'hôtel, and although the prince and his lady were both spoken of with profound respect, none of the rest escaped without some satirical notice, couched in somewhat sharp, though by no means bitter terms. Even Monsieur Blaize himself was not exempt. "He is the best, the most upright, and the most prudent man in the whole household," said the signor; "just in all his proceedings, with a little sort of worldly wisdom, not the slightest tincture of letters, a great deal of honest simplicity, and is, what we call in Italy, 'an ass.'"

Such a chart of the country, when we can depend upon its accuracy, is very useful to a young man in entering a strange household; but, nevertheless, Jean Charost, though grateful for the information he received, resolved to use his own eyes, and judge for himself. To say the truth, he was not at all sorry to find the good maître d'hôtel in a communicative mood; for the curiosity of youth had been excited by many of the events of the morning, and especially by the detention and examination which he had undergone immediately after his arrival. That some strange and terrible event had occurred, was evident; but a profound and mysterious silence had been observed by every one he had seen in the palace regarding the facts. The subject had been carefully avoided, and no one had even come near it in the most unguarded moment. With simple skill he endeavored to bring round the conversation to the point desired, and at length asked, straightforwardly, what had occurred to induce the the duke's officers to put him and several others in a sort of arrest, as soon as he had entered the gates. He gained nothing by the attempt, however. "Ah, poor lady! ah, sweet lady!" exclaimed the master of the hotel, in a sad tone. "But

we were talking, my young friend, of a varlet fitted for your service. I have got just the person to suit you. He is as active as a squirrel, as gay as a lark, understands all points of service for horse or man, and never asks any questions about what does not concern him--a most invaluable quality in a prince's household. If he has any fault, he is too chaste; so you must mind your morals, my young friend. His wages are three crowns a month, and your cast-off clothes, with any little gratuity for good service you may like to bestow. He will be rated on the duke's household, and nourished at his expense; but you will need a horse for him, which had better be provided as soon as possible. I advise you strongly to take him; but, nevertheless, see him first, and judge for yourself. He will be with you some time to-day; and now I must to work again. Ah, ha! It is a laborious life. Good-day, my son--good-day."

Jean Charost took his leave, and departed; but he could not help thinking that his instructive conversation with the maître d'hôtel had been brought to a somewhat sudden close by his own indiscreet questions.

CHAPTER VIII.

Great silence pervaded the palace of the Duke of Orleans, or, at least, that part of it in which Jean Charost's rooms were situated, during the rest of the day. He thought he heard, indeed, about half an hour after he had left the maître d'hôtel, some distant sounds in the same building, and the blast of a trumpet; but whether the latter noise proceeded from the streets or from the outer court, he could not tell. Every thing was still, however, in the corridor hard by. No one was heard passing toward the apartments of the duke, and the young man was somewhat anxious in regard to the prince's long delay. What were to be his occupations, what was expected of him, he knew not; and although he was desirous of purchasing another horse, in accordance with the hint given him by Signor Lomelini, the maître d'hôtel, he did not like to venture out, lest his royal employer should arrive, and require his presence.

The unpacking and arrangement of his baggage afforded him some occupation, and when that was completed, he took out a book--a rare treasure, possessed by few in those days--and continued to read till the crooked letters of the copyist's hand began to fade upon the vellum, as early night approached. He was just closing the page, when there was a tap at the door, and a short, slight young man presented himself, some four or five-and-twenty years of age, but not much taller than a youth of fourteen or fifteen. He was dressed very plainly, in a suit of gray cloth, and the light was not sufficient to show much more; but every thing he had on seemed to have a gay and jaunty air, and his cap, even when he held it in his hand, exhibited a sort of obliquity of direction, which showed it to be impossible ever to keep it straight upon his head.

There was no need of asking his name or business, for both were related in the fewest possible words before he had been an instant in the room.

"I am Martin Grille," he said, "and I have come to be hired by your lordship."

"Then I suppose you take it for granted that I will hire you?" said Jean Charost, with a smile.

"Signor Lomelini sent me," replied the young man, in a confident tone.

"He sent you to see if you suited me," replied Jean Charost.

"Of course," replied the young man. "Don't I?"

Jean Charost laughed. "I can not say," he answered. "You must first tell me what you can do."

"Every thing," replied the other.

Jean Charost mused, thinking to himself that a person who could do every thing was exactly the one to suit him, in a situation in which he did not know what to do. He answered, however, still half meditating, "Then I think, my good friend Martin, you are just the man for me."

"Thank your lordship," replied Martin Grille, without waiting for any addition to the sentence; but, before Jean Charost could put in a single proviso, or ask another question, the door opened, and, by aid of the light from the window in the corridor behind it, the young gentleman saw a tall, dark figure entering the room. The features he could not distinguish; but there was something in the air and carriage of the newcomer which made him instantly rise from his seat, and the moment after, the voice of the Duke of Orleans said, "What in darkness, my young friend! My people have not taken proper care of you. Who is that?"

The question applied to Martin Grille, who was retreating out of the room as fast as his feet could carry him; and Jean Charost replied, placing a chair for the duke, "Merely a servant, your highness, whom I have been engaging--an appendage which, coming from humbler dwellings, I had forgotten to provide myself with till I was here."

"Ah! these people--these people!" said the duke; "so they have forced a servant upon you already, though there are varlets enough in this house to do double the work that is provided for them. However, perhaps it is as well. But I will see to these affairs of yours for the future. Take no such step without consulting me, and do so freely; for Jacques Cœur has interested me in you, and I look upon it that he has rather committed you to my charge, than placed you in my service. Come hither with me into a place where there is more light. Heaven knows, my thoughts are dark enough."

Thus saying, he turned to the door, and Jean Charost followed him along the corridor till they reached what had been pointed out as his toilet-chamber, at the entrance of which stood two of the duke's attendants, who threw open the door at his approach. Followed by Jean Charost, he passed silently between them into a large and well-lighted room, and seating himself, fell into a deep fit of thought, which lasted for several minutes. At length he raised his head, and looked up in the young man's face for a moment or two without speaking; but then said, "I can not to-night. I wished to give you information and directions as to your conduct and occupations here; but my mind is very heavy, and can only deal with weighty things. Come to me to-morrow, after mass, and you shall have some hints that may be serviceable to you. At present sit down at that table, and draw me up a paper, somewhat similar to that which I dictated this morning, but more at large. The terms of accommodation have been accepted as to general principles, but several particulars require explanation. You will find the notes there--in that paper lying before you. See if you can put them in form without reference to me."

Jean Charost seated himself, and took up the pen; but, on perusing the notes, he found his task somewhat difficult. Had it been merely a letter on mercantile business to some citizen of Genoa or Amalfi that he was called upon to write, the matter would have been easy; but when it was a formal proposal, addressed to "The High and Mighty Prince John, Duke of Burgundy," he found himself more than once greatly puzzled. Twice he looked up toward the Duke of Orleans; but the duke remained in profound thought, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes bent upon a distant spot on the floor; and Jean Charost wrote on, striving to do his best, but not certain whether he was right or wrong.

For more than half an hour the young man continued writing, and then said, in a low voice, "It is done, your highness."

The duke started, and held out his hand for the paper, which he read carefully twice over. It seemed to please him, for he nodded his head to his young companion with a smile, saying, "Very well--better than I expected. But you must change that word--and that. Choose me something more forcible. Say impossible, rather than difficult; and positively, rather than probably. On these points there must be no doubts left. Then make me a fair copy. It shall go this very night."

Jean Charost resumed his seat, and executed this task also to the full satisfaction of the Duke of Orleans. When all was complete, and the letter sealed and addressed, the duke rang the little *clochette*, or silver bell upon his table, and one of the attendants immediately entered. To him he gave the epistle, with directions for its transmission by a proper officer, and the man departed in silence. For a moment or two the duke remained without speaking, but gazing in the face of Jean Charost, as if considering something he saw there attentively; and at length he said to himself, "Ay--it is as well. Get your cloak, M. de Brecy," he continued. "I wish you to go a few steps with me. Bring sword and dagger with you. There, take a light, as there is none in your chamber."

The young secretary hurried away, and in two minutes returned to the duke's door; but the attendant would not suffer him to enter till he had knocked and asked permission. When admitted, he found the duke equipped for going forth, his whole person enveloped in a large, plain mantle, and his head covered with a chaperon or hood, which concealed the greater part of his face. "Now follow me," he said; and passing the attendant, to whom he gave some orders in a low voice, he led the way through that corridor and another, then descended a flight of steps, and issued out by a small door into the gardens. Taking his way between two rows of trees, he made direct for the opposite wall, opened a door in it with a key which he carried with him, and, in a moment after, Jean Charost found himself in a narrow street, along which a number of persons were passing. "Keep close," said the Duke of Orleans, after he had closed the door; and then advancing with a quick pace between the wall and the houses opposite, he led the way direct into the Rue St. Antoine. The night was clear and bright, though exceedingly cold, and the Parisian world were all abroad in the streets; but the duke and his young companion passed unnoticed in the crowd.

At length they reached the gate of that large building at which the young secretary had seen the man apply for admission on the preceding night, and there the duke stopped, and rang the same bell. A wicket door was immediately opened by a man in the habit of a monk, with a lantern in his hand, and the duke, slightly lifting his *cornette*, or chaperon, passed in without speaking, followed by his young secretary. Taking his way across a long, stone-paved court to the main building, he entered a large vestibule where a light was burning, and in which was found an old man busily engaged in painting, with rich hues of blue, and pink, and gold, the capital letters in a

large vellum book. To him the duke spoke for a moment or two in a low tone, and the monk immediately took a lantern, and led the way into the interior of the monastery, which was much more silent and quiet than such abodes were usually supposed to be. At the end of the second passage, the little party issued forth upon a long cloister forming one side of a quadrangle, and separated from the central court by an open screen of elaborately carved stone work. Here the old monk turned, and gave a sidelong glance at Jean Charost, lifting his lantern a little, as if to see him more distinctly, and the Duke of Orleans, seeming to take this as a hint, paused for an instant, saying, "Wait for me here, M. De Brecy; I will not be long." He then walked on, and Jean Charost was left to perambulate the cloister in solitude, and nearly in darkness. The stars, indeed, were out, and the rising moon was pouring her silvery rays upon the upper story on the opposite side of the quadrangle, peeping in at the quaint old windows, and illuminating the rich tracery of stone. There seemed something solemn, and yet fanciful, in the picture she displayed. The cold shadows of the tall, fine pillars, and their infinitely varied capitals; the spouts sticking out in strange forms of beasts and dragons; the heads of angels and devils in various angles, and at the ends of corbels, with the fine fret-work of some tall arches at one corner of the court, gave ample materials for the imagination to work with at her will; while the general aspect of the whole was gloomy, if not actually sad. The mass of buildings around, and the distance of that remote quadrangle from the street, deadened the noises of the great city, so that nothing was heard for some time but an indistinct murmur, like the softened roar of the sea.

In the building itself all was still as death, till the slow footfall of a sandal was heard approaching from the side at which the Duke of Orleans had disappeared. A moment or two after, the old monk came back with a lantern, and paused to speak a few words with the young man from the world without. "It is a bitter cold night, my son," he said, "and the duke tells me he has come hither with you alone. He risks too much in these evil times, methinks."

"I trust not," replied Jean Charost. "A good prince should have nothing to fear in the streets of his brother's capital."

"All men have enemies, either within or without," replied the monk; "and no man can be called good till he is in heaven. Have you been long with the duke, my son? He says you are his secretary."

"I have been in his highness's service but a few hours," replied Jean Charost.

"He trusts you mightily," answered his ancient companion. "You should be grateful for his great confidence."

"I am so, indeed, father," replied Jean Charost; "but I owe his confidence to the kind recommendations of another, rather than to any merits of my own."

"Modestly answered, for one so young," replied the monk. "Methinks you have not been long in courts, my son. They tell me that modesty is soon lost there, as well as truth."

"I trust that I shall lose neither there," replied Jean Charost, "or I would soon betake myself afar from such bad influence. I do not hold that any thing a court could give would repay a man for loss of honesty."

"Well, I know little of courts," answered the old man, "and perhaps there is scandal in the tales they tell; but one thing is certain--it is very cold, and I will betake me to my books again. Good-night, my son;" and he walked on.

Jean Charost began again to pace and repace the cloister, fancying, but not quite sure, that he heard the murmur of voices down the passage through which the monk had taken his way. Shortly after, he saw a tall, gray figure flit across the moonlight, which had now reached to the grass in the centre of the quadrangle. It was lost almost as soon as seen, and no sound of steps met the young man's ear. He saw it distinctly, however, and yet there was a sort of superstitious awe came over him, as if the being he beheld were not of the same nature with himself. He walked on in the same direction which it seemed to have taken, but, ere he reached the corner of the quadrangle, he saw another figure come forth from one of the passages which branched off from the cloister, and easily recognized the walk and bearing of the Duke of Orleans. But suddenly that gray figure came between him and the duke, and a deep-toned, hollow voice was heard to say, "Bad man, repent while you have yet time! Your days are numbered! The last grains of sand shake in the hour-glass; the moon will not change thrice, and find you among the living!"

The duke seemed to stagger back, and Jean Charost darted onward; but before he reached the spot, the stranger was gone.

"Follow him not--follow him not!" cried the Duke of Orleans, catching the arm of his young secretary, who was impulsively hurrying in pursuit of the man who had put forth what seemed to his ears a daring threat against the brother of his king; "follow him not, but come hither;" and, taking Jean Charost's arm, he pursued his way through the long passages of the monastery to the vestibule, where sat the old monk busily illuminating his manuscript.

Till they reached that room the duke uttered not a word, except his brief injunction not to follow. But there he seated himself upon a bench, with a face very pale, and beckoning up the old man, spoke to him for several moments in a low tone of voice.

"I really can not tell," said the monk, aloud. "We have no such brother as you describe; no one has passed here."

"He must have passed you, methinks," replied Jean Charost, unable to resist. "He came from the passage down which you went the moment after you had left me, and I fancied I heard him speak with you."

"Not so, my son, not so," replied the monk, eagerly; "I saw no one but yourself, and spoke with no one."

The Duke of Orleans sat and mused for a few moments; but then raised himself to his full height, and threw back his shoulders, as if casting off a weight; and, taking the arm of Jean Charost, quitted the convent, merely saying, "This is very strange!"

They soon reached the small postern gate in the garden wall, and entered the precincts of the palace; but as they were approaching the building itself, the duke paused for a moment, saying to his young companion, "Not a word of this strange occurrence to any one. Sup in your own room, and be with me to-morrow at the hour I named."

His tone was somewhat stern, and Jean Charost made no reply, thinking, however, that he was very likely to go without his supper, as he had no one to send for it. But when he entered his room he found matters considerably changed, probably in consequence of some orders which the duke had given as they were going out. A sconce was lighted on the wall, and a cresset, lamp hung from the ceiling by an iron chain directly over the table. A large fire of logs was blazing on the hearth; and, a moment or two after, an inferior servant entered to ask if he had any commands.

"Your own varlet, sir, will be here to-morrow," he said; "and in the mean time, I have his highness's commands to attend upon you."

Jean Charost contented himself with ordering some supper to be brought to him, and asking some questions in regard to the hours and customs of the household; and, after all his wants had been attended to, he retired to rest, without quitting his own room again, judging that the duke's command to sup there had been given as a sort of precaution against any indiscretion upon his part, and implied a desire that he should not mingle with the general household that night. He knew not what the hour was, and it could not have been very late. But there was nothing to keep him awake, except a memory of the strange events of the day, and the light heart of youth soon shakes off such impressions, so that he slept readily and well.

CHAPTER IX.

Long before the hour appointed for him to wait upon the duke, Jean Charost was up and dressed, expecting every moment to see the servant he had engaged present himself, but no Martin Grille appeared. The attendant of the duke, who had waited upon him the preceding evening, brought him a breakfast not to be despised, consisting of delicacies from various parts of France, and a bottle of no bad wine of Beaugency; but he could tell nothing of Martin Grille, and by the time the meal was over, the hour appointed by the duke had arrived.

On being admitted to the prince's dressing-chamber, Jean Charost found him in his *robe de chamber*, seated at a table, writing. His face, the young man could not help thinking, was even graver and sadder than on the preceding night; but he did not raise his eyes at the secretary's entrance, and continued to write slowly, often stopping to correct or alter, till he had covered one side of the paper before him. When that was done, he handed the sheet to the young secretary, saying, "There, copy me that;" and, on taking the paper, Jean Charost was surprised to see that it was covered with verse; for he was not aware that the duke possessed any of that talent which was afterward so conspicuous in his son. He seated himself at the table, however, and proceeded to fulfill the command he had received, not without difficulty, for the duke's writing, though large and bold, was not very distinct.

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To will and not to do,
  Alas! how sad!
Man and his passions too
  Are mad--how mad!

Oh! could the heart but break
  The heavy chain
That binds it to this stake
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  Of earthly pain,

And see for joys all pure,
  And hopes all bright,
For pleasures that endure,
  And wells of light,

And purge away the dross
  With life allied,
I ne'er had mourn'd love's loss,
  Nor ever cried.

To will and not to do,
  Alas! how sad!
Man and his passions too
  Are mad--how mad!
```

"Read it, read it," said the Duke of Orleans; and, with some timidity, the young secretary obeyed, feeling instinctively how difficult it is to give in reading the exact emphasis intended by the writer. He succeeded well, however. The duke was pleased, perhaps as much with his own verses as with the manner in which they were read. But, after a few words of commendation, he fell into a fit of thought again, from which he was at length startled by the slow tolling of the bell of a neighboring church. He raised his eyes suddenly to the face of Jean Charost as the sounds struck upon his ear, and gazed at him with a strange, inquiring, but sorrowful expression of countenance, as if he would fain have asked, "Do you know what that bell means? Can you comprehend the feelings it begets in me?"

The young man bent his eyes gravely to the ground, and that sort of reverence which we all feel for deep grief, and the sort of awe excited, especially in young minds, by the display of intense passion, gave his countenance naturally an expression of sympathy and sorrow.

A moment after, the duke started up, exclaiming, "I can not let her go without a look or a tear! Come with me, my friend, come with me. God knows I need some support, even in my wrong, and my weakness, and my punishment."

"Oh, that I could give it you, sir!" said Jean Charost, in a low tone; but the duke merely grasped his arm, and, leaning heavily upon him, quitted the chamber by a door through which Jean Charost had not hitherto passed. It led into the prince's bed-room, and from that, through what seemed a private passage, to a distant suite of rooms on another front of the house. The duke proceeded with a rapid but irregular pace, while the bell was still heard tolling, seeming to make the roof shudder with its slow and heavy vibrations. Through five or six different vacant chambers, fitted up with costly decorations, but apparently long unused, the prince hurried forward till he reached that side of the house which looked over the wall of the gardens into the Rue Saint Antoine, but there he paused before a window, and gazed forth.

There was nothing to be seen. The street was almost deserted. A youth in a fustian jacket and wide hose, with a round cap on his head--evidently some laboring mechanic--passed along toward the Bastile, gazing forward with a look of stupid eagerness, and then set off running, as if to see some sight which he was afraid would escape him; and still the bell was heard tolling slow and solemnly, and filling the whole air with melancholy trembling.

The duke quitted his hold of Jean Charost and crossed his arms upon his breast, setting his teeth hard, as if there were a terrible struggle within, in which he was determined to conquer.

A moment after, a song rose upon the air--a slow, melancholy chant, well marked in time, with swelling flow and softening cadence, and now a pause, and then a full burst of song, sometimes one or two voices heard alone, and then a full chorus; but all sad, and solemn, and oppressive to the spirit. At length a man bearing a banner appeared, and then two or three couple of mendicant friars, and then a small train of Celestin monks in their long, flowing garments, and then some boys in white gowns with censers, then priests in their robes, and then two white horses drawing a car, with a coffin upon it--a closed coffin, which was not usual in those days at the funerals of the great. Men on horseback and on foot followed, but Jean Charost did not clearly distinguish who or what they were. He only saw the priests and the boys with their censers, and the Celestins in their white gowns and their black scapularies, and the coffin, and the flowers that strewed it, even in the midst of winter, in an indistinct and confused manner, for his attention was strongly called in another direction, though he did not venture to look round.

The moment the head of the procession had appeared from beyond one of the flanking towers of the garden wall, the Duke of Orleans had laid a hand upon his shoulder, and grasped him tight, as if for support. Heavier and heavier pressed the hand, and then the young man felt that the prince's head was bowed down and rested upon him, while the long-drawn, struggling breath--the gasp, as if existence were coming to an end--told the terrible anguish of his spirit.

Solemn and slow the notes of the chant rose up as the procession swept along before the gates of the palace, and the words of the penitent King of Israel were heard ascending to the sky, and praying the God of mercy and of power to pardon and to succor. The grasp of the hand grew less firm, but the weight pressed heavier and heavier; and, turning suddenly round, Jean Charost cast his arm about the duke, from an instinctive feeling that he was falling to the ground.

The prince's face was deadly pale, and his strong limbs shook as if with an ague. Bitter tears, too, were on his cheeks, and his lips quivered. "Get me a chair," he said, faintly, grasping the pillar between the windows; "I feel ill--get me a chair."

Although almost afraid to leave him lest he should fall, Jean Charost hurried to obey, brought forward one of the large arm-chairs, and, placing his hand under the duke's arm, assisted him to seat himself in it. Then gazing anxiously in his face, he beheld an expression of deep and bitter grief, such as he had never seen before; no, not even in his mother's face when his father's dead body was brought back to his paternal hall. The young man's heart was touched; the distinction of rank and station was done away, in part; sympathy created a bond between him and one who was comparatively a stranger, and, kneeling at the prince's side, he kissed his hand, saying, "Oh, sir, be comforted. Death ever strikes the dearest and the best beloved. It is the lot of humanity to possess but for a season that which we value most. It is a trial of our faith to yield unrepining to him who lent that which he takes away. Trust--trust in God to comfort and to compensate!"

The duke shook his head sadly. "Trust in God!" he repeated, "and him have I offended. His laws have I broken. Young man, young man, you know not what it is to see the bitter consummation of what you yourself have done--to behold the wreck you have made of happiness--the complete desolation of a life once pure, and bright, and beautiful--all done by you. Yes, yes," he added, almost wildly, "I did it all--what matter the instruments--what signifies it that the dagger was not in my hand? I was the cause of all--I tore her from a peaceful home, where she had tranquillity, if not love--I blasted her fair name--I broke up her domestic peace--I took from her happiness--I gave her penitence and remorse--I armed the hand that stabbed her. Mine, mine is the whole crime, though she has shared the sorrow and endured the punishment."

"But there is mercy, sir," urged Jean Charost; "there is mercy for all repentance. Surely Christ died not in vain. Surely he suffered not for the few, but for the many. Surely his word is not false, his promises not idle! 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give ye rest.' He spoke of the weariness of the heart, and the burden of the spirit--He spoke to all men. He spoke to the peasant in his hut, to the king upon his throne, to the saint in his cell, to the criminal in his dungeon, to the sorrowful throughout all the earth, and throughout all time; and to you, oh prince--He spoke also unto you! Weary and heavy laden are you with your grief and your repentance; turn unto him, and he will give you rest!"

There was something in the outburst of fervid feeling with which the young man spoke, from the deep interest that had been excited in him by all he had seen and heard, which went straight home to the heart of the Duke of Orleans, and casting his arm around him, he once more leaned his head upon his shoulder, and wept profusely. But now they seemed to be somewhat calmer tears he shed--tears of grief, but not altogether of despair; and when he lifted his head again, the expression of deep, hopeless bitterness was gone from his face. The chant, too, had ceased in the street, though a faint murmur thereof was still heard in the distance.

"You have given me comfort, Jean," he said; "you have given me comfort, when none else, perhaps, could have done so. You are no courtier, dear boy. You have spoken, when others would have stood in cold and reverent silence. Oh, out upon the heartless forms that cut us off from our fellow-men, even in the moment when the intensity of our human sufferings makes us feel ourselves upon the level of the lowliest! Out upon the heartless forms that drive us to break through their barrier into the sphere of passion, as much in pursuit of human sympathies as of mere momentary pleasure! Come with me, Jean. It is over--the dreadful moment is past--I will seek him to whom thou hast pointed--I will seek comfort there. But on this earth, the hour just passed has forged a tie between thee and me which can never be broken. Now I can understand how thou hast won so much love and confidence; it is that thou hast some heart, where all, or almost all, are heartless."

Thus saying, he raised himself with the aid of the young man's arm, and walked slowly back to his own apartments by the way he had come.

When they had entered his toilet-chamber, the duke cast himself into a chair, saying, "Now leave me, De Brecy; but be not far off. I need not tell you not to speak of any thing you have seen. I know you will not. I will send for you soon; but I must have time for thought."

Jean Charost withdrew and sought his own room; but it is not to be denied that the moment was a perilous one for his favor with the Duke of Orleans. It is a very dangerous thing to witness the weaknesses of great men--or those emotions which they look upon as weaknesses. Pride, vanity, doubt, fear, suspicion, all whisper hate against those who can testify that they are not so strong as the world supposes. Alas, that it should be so! But so it is; and it was but by a happy quality in the mind of the Duke of Orleans--the native frankness and generosity of his disposition--that Jean Charost escaped the fate of so many who have witnessed the secret emotion of princes. Happily for himself, he knew not that there was any peril, and felt, though in a different sense, that, as the prince had said, there was a new tie between him and his royal master.

CHAPTER X.

At the corner of a street, on the island which formed the first nucleus round which gathered the great city of Paris, was a small booth, protruding from a little, ill-favored house, some three or four hundred yards from the church of Nôtre Dame. This booth consisted merely of a coarse wooden shed, open in front, and only covered overhead by rough, unsmoothed planks, while upon a rude table or counter, running along the front, appeared a number of articles of cutlery, knives, great rings, and other iron ware, comprising the daggers worn, and often used in a sanguinary manner, by the lower order of citizens; for, though the possessor of the stall was not a regular armorer by profession, he did not think himself prohibited from dealing in the weapons employed by his own class. Written in white chalk upon a board over the booth were the words, "Simon, dit Caboche, Maître Coutellier."

Behind the table on which his goods were displayed appeared the personage to whom the above inscription referred: a man of some forty-five or forty-six years of age, tall, brawny, and powerful, with his huge arms bare up to the elbows, notwithstanding the severity of the weather. His countenance was any thing but prepossessing, and yet there was a certain commanding energy in the broad, square forehead and massive under jaw, which spoke, truly enough, the character of the man, and obtained for him considerable influence with people of his own class. Yet he was exceedingly ugly; his cheek bones high and prominent; his eyes small, fierce, and flashing, and his nose turned up in the air, as if in contempt of every thing below it. His skin was so begrimed with dirt, that its original color could with difficulty be distinguished; but it was probably of that dark, saturnine brown, which seldom looks completely clean; for his hair was of the stiff, black, bristly nature which usually goes with that complexion.

Limping about in the shop beside him was a creature, which even youth--usually so full of its own special charms--could not render beautiful or graceful. Nature seemed to have stamped upon it, from its birth, the most repulsive marks. It was a boy of some ten or twelve years old, but still his eyes hardly reached above the table on which the cutler's goods were displayed; but, by a peculiarity not uncommon, the growth which should have been upright had, by some obstacle, been forced to spread out laterally, and the shoulders, ribs, and hips were as broad as those of a grown man. The back was humped, though not very distinctly so; the legs were both short, but one was shorter than the other; and one eye was defective, probably from his birth. So short, so stout, so squared was the whole body, that it looked more like a cube, with a large head and very short legs, than a human form; but, though the gait was awkward and unsightly to the eyes, that little creature was possessed of singular activity, and of very great strength, notwithstanding his deformity.

It was a curious thing to see the father and the son standing together: the one with his great, powerful, well-developed limbs, and the other with his minute and apparently slender form. One could hardly believe that the one was the offspring of the other. Yet so it was. Maître Simon was the father of that deformed dwarf, whose appearance would have been quite sufficient to draw the hooting boys of Paris after him when he appeared in the streets, had not the vigor and unmerciful severity of his father's arm kept even the little vagabonds of the most turbulent city in the world in awe.

That which might seem most strange, though in reality it was not so at all, was the doting fondness of the stern, powerful father for that misshapen child. It seems a rule of Nature, that where she refuses to any one the personal attractions which, often undeservedly, command regard, she places in the bosom of some other kindred being that strong affection which generously gives gratuitously the love for which there seems so little claim.

The father and the son had obtained, first from the boys of the town, and then from elder people, the nicknames of the big Caboche and the little Caboche, and, with a good-humor very common in France, they had themselves adopted these epithets without offense; so that the cutler was constantly addressed by his companions merely as Caboche, and had even placed that title over his door. During the hours when he tended his shop, or was engaged in the manual labors of his trade, the boy was almost always with him, limping round him, making observations upon every thing, and enlivening his father's occupations by a sort of pungent wit, perhaps a little smacking of buffoonery, which, if not a gift, could be nowhere so well acquired as in the streets of Paris, and in which the hard spirit of the cutler greatly delighted.

Nevertheless, the characters of the father and the son were not less strongly in contrast than their corporeal frames. Notwithstanding an occasional moroseness and acerbity, perhaps engendered by a sad comparison of his own physical powers with those of others of his age, there was in the boy's nature a fund of kindly sympathies and gentle affections, which characterized his actions more than his words: and as we all love contrasts, the secret of his father's strong affection for him might be, in part, the opposition between their several dispositions.

It was about three o'clock in the day, the hour when Parisians are most abroad; but the cold kept many within doors, and but one person had stopped at the booth to buy.

"Trade is ruined," said big Caboche, in a grumbling tone. "No business is doing. The king's sickness and his brother's influence have utterly destroyed the trade of the city. Armorers, and embroiderers, and dealers in idle goldsmiths' work, may make a living; but no one else can gain his bread. There has not been a single soul in the shop this morning, except an old woman who wanted an ax to cut her meat, because it was frozen."

"My father," replied the boy, "it was not the king nor the Duke of Orleans that made the Seine freeze, or pinched old Joaquim's nose, or burned old Jeannette's flannel coat, or kept any of the folks in who would have been out if it had not been so cold. Don't you see there is nobody in the street but those who have only one coat, and that a thin one. They come out because the frosty sunshine is better than no shine at all; and, though they keep their hands in their pockets, they won't draw them out, because you won't let them have goods without money, and they have not money to buy goods. But here comes Cousin Martin, as fine as a popinjay. It must have snowed feathers, I think, to have clothed his back so gayly."

"Ah, the scapegrace!" exclaimed Caboche "I should think that he had just been plundering some empty-headed master, if my pot had not reason to know that he has had no master to plunder for these last three months. Well, Master Never-do-well, what brings you here in such smart plumes? Violet and yellow, with a silver lace, upon my life! If you are so fully fledged, methinks you can pick up your own grain without coming to mine."

"And so I can, and so I will, uncle," replied our friend Martin Grille, pausing at the entrance of the booth to look at himself from head to foot, in evident admiration of his own appearance. "Did you ever see any thing fit better? Upon my life, it is a perfect marvel that any man should ever have been made so perfectly like me as to have worn these clothes before, without the slightest alteration! Nobody would believe it."

"Nobody will believe they are your own, Cousin Martin," said the deformed boy, with a grin.

"But they are my own, Petit Jean," answered Martin Grille, with a very grand air; "for I have bought them, and paid for them; and though they may have been stolen, for aught I know, before I had them, I had no hand in the stealing, *foi de valet*."

"Ah," said Caboche, dryly, "men always gave you credit for more ingenuity than you possess, and they will in this instance also. I always said you were a good-humored, foolish, hair-brained lad, without wit enough to take a bird's nest or bamboozle a goose; but people would not believe me, even when you were clad in hodden gray. What will they think now, when you dance about in silk and broadcloth?"

"Why they'll think, good uncle, that I have all the wit they imagined, and all the honesty you knew me to have. But I'll tell you all about it, that my own relations, at least, may have cause to glorify themselves."

"Get you gone--get you gone," cried the cutler, in a rough, but not ill-humored tone. "I don't want to know how you got the clothes."

"Tell me, Martin, tell me," said the boy; "I should like to hear, of all things. Perhaps I may get some in the same way, some day."

"Mayhap," answered Martin Grille, seating himself on a bench, and kindly putting his arm round the deformed boy's neck. "Well, you must know, Petit Jean, that there is a certain Signor Lomelini, who is maître d'hôtel to his highness the Duke of Orleans--"

"Big Caboche growled out a curse between his teeth; for while pretending to occupy himself with other things, he was listening to the tale all the time, and the Duke of Orleans was with him an object of that strange, fanciful, prejudiced hatred, which men of inferior station very often conceive, without the slightest cause, against persons placed above them.

"Well, this Signor Lomelini--"

"There, there," cried Caboche; "we know all about that long ago. How his mule put its foot into a hole in the street, and tumbled him head over heels into the gutter, and you picked him out, and scraped, and wiped him, and took him back clean and sound, though desperately frightened, and a little bruised. We recollect all about that, and what gay day-dreams you built up, and thought your fortune made. Has he recollected you at last, and given you a cast off suit of clothes? He has been somewhat tardy in his gratitude, and niggardly, too."

"All wrong, uncle mine, all wrong!" replied Martin Grille, laughing. "There has been hardly a day on which I have not seen him since, and when I hav'n't dined with you, I have dined at the Hôtel d'Orleans. He found out what you never found out: that I was dexterous, serviceable, and discreet, and many has been the little job which required dispatch and secrecy which I have done for him."

"Ay, dirty work, I trow," growled Caboche; but Martin Grille proceeded with his tale, without heeding his uncle's accustomed interruptions.

"Well, Signor Lomelini always promised," he said, "to get me rated on the duke's household.

There was a prospect for a penniless lad, Petit Jean!"

"As well get you posted in the devil's kitchen," said Caboche, "and make you Satan's turnspit."

"But are you placed--but are you placed?" cried the deformed boy, eagerly.

"You shall hear all in good time," answered Martin Grille. "He promised, as I have said, to get me rated as soon as there was any vacancy; but the devil seemed in all the people. Not one of them would die, except old Angelo, the squire of the stirrup, and Monsieur De Gray, the duke's secretary. But those places were far too high for me."

"I see not why they should be," answered the deformed boy, "except that the squire is expected to fight at his lord's side, and the secretary to write for him; and I fancy, Cousin Martin, thou wouldst make as bad a hand at the one as the other."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Caboche; "he hit thee there, Martin."

"On my life! I don't know," answered Martin Grille; "for I never tried either. However, yesterday afternoon the signor sent for me, and told me that the duke had got a new secretary--quite a young man, who knew very little of life, less of Paris, and nothing of a court: that this young gentleman had got no servant, and wanted one; that he had recommended me, and that I should be taken if I could recommend myself. I went to him in the gray of the evening, to set off my apparel the better, but I found the youth not quite so pastoral as I expected, and he began to ask me questions. Questions are very troublesome things, and answers still more so; so I made mine as short as possible."

"And he engaged you," cried the boy, eagerly.

"On my life! I can hardly say that," replied Martin Grille. "But the Duke of Orleans himself just happened to come in at the nick of time, when I was beginning to get a little puzzled. So I thought it best to take it for granted I was engaged; and making my way as fast as possible out of the august presence of my master, and my master's master, I went away to Signor Lomelini and told him I was hired, all through his influence. So, then, he patted me on the shoulder, and called me a brave lad. He told me, moreover, to get myself put in decent costume, and wait upon the young gentleman early the next morning."

"Ay, that's the question," cried Caboche; "where did you get the clothes? Did you steal them from your new master the first day; for you will not say that Lomelini gave them to you. If so, men have belied him."

"No," said Martin, in an exceedingly doubtful tone, "no--I can't say he exhibits his money. What his own coin is made of, I can not tell. I never saw any of it that I know of. He pays out of other men's pockets though, and he has been as good as his word with me."

"How so?" asked the cutler.

"Why, you must know," answered Martin, with an important air, "that every servant in the duke's house is rated on the duke's household. Each gentleman, down to the very pages, has one or more valets, and they are all on the household-book. To prevent excess, however, and with a paternal solicitude to keep them out of debt, the maître d'hôtel takes upon himself the task of paying all the valets, sending in to the treasurer a regular account against each master every month, to be deducted from that master's salary; and, as it is the custom to give earnest to a valet when he is engaged, I persuaded the signor to advance me a sufficient number of crowns to carry me on silver wings to a frippery shop."

"Where you spent the last penny, Cousin Martin," said the deformed boy, with a sly smile.

"No, I did not, Petit Jean," replied Martin Grille; "for I brought one whole crown to you. There, my boy; you are a good lad, and I love you dearly, though you do break your sharp wit across my hard head sometimes--take it, take it!"

The boy looked as if he would very much like to have the crown, but still put it away from him, with fingers itching as much to clutch it as Cæsar's on the Lupercal.

"Take it," repeated Martin Grille. "I owe your father much more than that."

"You owe me nothing," answered Caboche, quickly; and then added in a softened tone, as he saw how eagerly the boy looked at the piece of money: "you may take it, my son. That will show Martin that I really think he owes me nothing. What I have given him was given for blood relationship, and what he gives you is given in the same way."

The boy took it, exclaiming, "Thank you, Martin--thank you. Now I will buy me a viol of my own; for neighbor Pierrot says I spoil his, just because I make it give out sounds that he can not."

"Ay, thou had'st always a hankering after music," said Martin Grille. "Be diligent, be diligent. Petit Jean, and play me a fine tune on your fiddle at my return; for we are all away to-morrow morning by the crow of the cock."

"Where to?" exclaimed Caboche, eagerly. "More wrangling toward, I warrant. Some day I shall have to put on the salad and corselet myself, for this strife is ruining France; and if the Duke of Orleans will not let his noble cousin of Burgundy save the country, all good men must join to force him."

"Ay, ay, uncle. You always take a leap in the dark when the Duke of Orleans' name is mentioned. There's no wrangling, there's no quarreling, there's no strife. All is peace and good-will between the two dukes; and this is no patched up business, but a regular treaty, which will last till you are in your grave, and Petit Jean is an old man. We shall see bright days yet, for all that's come and gone. But the truth is, the duke is ill, and this business being happily settled, he goes off for his Castle of Beauté to-morrow, to have a little peace and quiet."

"Ill! what makes him ill?" asked the cutler. "If he had to work from morning till night to get a few sous, or to stand here in this cold shop all day long, with nobody coming in to buy, he'd have a right to be ill. But he has every thing he wants, and more than he ought to have. What makes him ill?"

"Ah, that I can't say," answered Martin Grille. "There has something gone wrong in the household, and he has been very sad; but great men's servants may use their eyes, but must hold their tongues. God mend us all."

"Much need of it," answered Caboche, "and him first. Well, I would rather be a rag-picker out of the gutter than one of your discreet, see-every thing, say-nothing serving-men--your curriers of favor, your silent, secret depositories of other men's wickedness. What I see I must speak, and what I think, too. It is the basest part of pimping, to stand by and say nothing. Out upon such a trade."

"Well, uncle, every one loves his own best," answered Martin Grille. "I, for instance, would not make knives for people to cut each other's throats with. But for my part, I think the best plan is for each man to mind his own business, and not to care for what other people do. I have no more business with my master's secrets than with his purse, and if he trusts either the one or the other with me, my duty is to keep them safely."

By his tone, Martin Grille seemed a little nettled; but the rough cutler only laughed at him, saying, "Mind, you do that, nephew of mine, and you will be the very prince of valets. I never knew one who would not finger the purse, or betray a secret, if occasion served; but thou art a phœnix in thy way, so God speed thee and keep thee honest."

"I say amen," answered Martin Grille, turning to leave the booth; "I only came to wish you both good-by; for when a man once sets out from Paris there is no knowing when he may return again."

"Oh, he is certain to come back some time," replied the cutler. "Paris is the centre of all the world, and every thing is drawn toward it by a force not to be resisted. So fare you well, my good nephew, and let us see you when you come back."

Martin promised to come and visit the cutler and his son as soon as he returned, and then sauntered away, feeling himself as fine in his new clothes as a school-boy in a holiday suit.

The cutler resumed his avocations again; but could not forbear some grumbling observations upon valets and valetry, which perhaps he might have spared, had he understood his nephew's character rightly. About quarter of an hour, however, after the young man had left the shop, a letter, neatly tied and sealed, was brought by a young boy, apparently one of the choristers of some great church or cathedral. It was addressed "To Martin Grille;" and, whatever might be his curiosity, Caboche did not venture to open it, but sent the lad on to the palace of the Duke of Orleans, telling him he would find his nephew there.

CHAPTER XI.

I know few things more pleasant than a stroll through Paris, as I remember it, in a fine early winter's morning. There was an originality about the people whom one saw out and abroad at that period of the day--a gay, cheerful, pleasant originality--which is not met with in any other nation. Granted that this laughing semblance was but the striped skin of the tiger, and that underneath there was a world of untamable ferocity, which made the cat-like creature dangerous to play with; yet still the sight was an agreeable one, one that the mind's eye rested upon with sensations of pleasure. The sights, too, had generally something to interest or to amuse--very often something that moved the feelings; but more generally something having a touch of the

burlesque in it, exciting a smile, though seldom driving one into a laugh.

Doubtless the same was the case on the morning when the Duke of Orleans and his household set out from his brother's capital; for the Parisians have always been Parisians, and that word, as far as history shows us, has always meant one thing. It was very early in the morning, too. The sun hardly tipped the towers of Nôtre Dame, or gilded the darker and more sombre masses of the Châtelet. The most matutinal classes--the gatherers of rags: the unhappy beings who pilfered daily from unfastened doors and open entries: the peasants coming into market: the laborers going out with ax or shovel: even the roasters of chestnuts (coffee was then unknown) were all astir, and many a merry cry to wake slumbering cooks and purveyors was heard along the streets of the metropolis. Always cheerful except when ferocious, the population of Paris was that day in gayer mood than usual, for the news that a reconciliation had taken place between the Dukes of Orleans and Burgundy, whose feuds had become wearisome as well as detrimental, had spread far and wide during the preceding evening, and men anticipated prosperous and peaceful times, after a long period of turbulence and disaster. Seldom had the Duke of Orleans gone forth from the metropolis in such peaceful array. Sometimes he had galloped out in haste with a small body of attendants, hardly enough in number to protect his person; sometimes he had marched forward in warlike guise, to do battle with the enemy. But now he proceeded quietly in a horse-litter, feeling himself neither very well nor very ill. His saddle-horse, some pages, squires, and a few men-at-arms followed close, and the rest of the attendants, who had been selected to go with him, came after in little groups as they mounted, two or three at a time. The whole cavalcade did not amount to more than fifty persons--no great retinue for a prince of those days; but yet, in its straggling disorder, it made a pretty long line through the streets, and excited a good deal of attention in the multitude as it passed. But the distance to the gates was not great, and the whole party soon issued forth through the very narrow suburbs which then surrounded the city, into the open country beyond. To tell the truth, though the whole land was covered with the white garmenture of winter, it was a great relief to Jean Charost to find his sight no longer bounded by stone walls, and his chest no longer oppressed by the heavy air of a great city. The sun sparkling on the snow, the branches of the trees incrusted with frost, the clear blue sky without a cloud, the river bridged with its own congealed waters, all reminded him of early days and happy hours, and filled his mind with the memory of rejoicing.

One or two of the elder and superior officers of the duke's household had mounted at the same time with himself, and were riding along close by him. But there was no sympathetic tie between them; they were old, and he was young; they were hackneyed in courts, and he was inexperienced; they were accustomed to all the doings of the household in which he dwelt, and to him every thing was fresh and new. Thus they soon gathered apart, as it were, though they were perfectly courteous and polite to the duke's new secretary; for by this time he was known to all the attendants in that capacity, and the more politic heads shrewdly calculated upon his acquiring, sooner or later, considerable influence with their princely master. But they talked among themselves of things they knew and understood, and of which he was utterly ignorant; so that he was suffered to ride on with uninterrupted thoughts, enjoying the wintery beauty of the landscape, while they conversed of what had happened at St. Denis, or of the skirmish at Toul, or of the march into Aquitaine, or gossiped a little scandal of Madame De * * * * and Monsieur De * * * *.

Insensibly the young man dropped behind, and might be said to be riding alone, when an elderly man, in the habit of a priest, ambled up to his side on a sleek, well-fed mule. His hair was very white, and his countenance calm and benignant; but there was no very intellectual expression in his face, and one might have felt inclined to pronounce him, at the first glance, a very simple, good man, with more rectitude than wit, more piety than learning. There would have been some mistake in this, for Jean Charost soon found that he had read much, and studied earnestly, supplying by perseverance and labor all that was wanting in acuteness.

"Good morning, my son," said the old man, in a frank and familiar tone. "I believe I am speaking to Monsieur De Brecy, am I not? his highness's secretary."

"The same, sir," replied Jean Charost; "though I have not been long in that office."

"I know, I know," replied the good priest. "You were commended to his favor by my good friend Jacques Cœur. I was absent from the palace till last night, or I would have seen you before. I am his highness's chaplain and director--would to Heaven I could direct him right; but these great men--"

There he stopped, as if feeling himself treading upon dangerous ground, and a pause ensued; for Jean Charost gave him no encouragement to go on in any discussion of the duke's doings, of which probably he knew as much as his confessor, without any great amount of information either.

The priest continued to jog on by his side, however, turning his head very frequently, as if afraid of being pursued by something. Once he muttered to himself, "I do believe he is coming on;" and then added, a moment after, in a relieved tone, "No, it is Lomelini."

They had not ridden far, after this exclamation, when they were joined by the maître d'hôtel, who seemed on exceedingly good terms with the chaplain, and rather in a merry mood. "Ah, Father Peter!" he exclaimed; "you passed me in such haste, you would neither see nor hear me.

What was it lent wings to your mule?"

"Oh, that fool, that fool!" cried the good father. "He has got on a black cloak like yours, signor--stolen it from some one, I dare say--and he declares he is a doctor of the university, and must needs chop logic with me."

"What was his thesis?" asked Lomelini, laughing heartily. "He is grand at an argument, I know; and I have often heard him declare that he likes to spoil a doctor of divinity."

"It was no thesis at all," answered Father Peter. "He propounded a question for debate, and asked me which of the seven capital sins was the most capital. I told him they were all equally heinous; but he contended that could not be, and said he would prove it by a proposition divided into three parts and three members, each part divided into six points--"

"Let us hear," cried Lomelini. "Doubtless his parts and points were very amusing. Let us hear them, by all means."

"Why, I did not stay to hear them myself," replied Father Peter. "He began by explaining and defining the seven capital sins; and fearing some greater scandal--for all the boys were roaring with laughter--I rode on and left him."

"Ah, father, father! He will say that he has defeated you in argument," replied Lomelini; and then added, with a sly glance at Jean Charost, "the sharpest weapon in combat with a grave man is a jest."

The good father looked quite distressed, as if to be defeated in argument by a fool were really a serious disgrace. With the natural kindliness of youth, Jean Charost felt for him, and, turning the conversation, proceeded to inquire of the maître d'hôtel who and what was the person who had driven the good chaplain so rapidly from the field.

"Oh, you will become well acquainted with him by-and-by, my son," answered Lomelini, who still assumed a sort of paternal and patronizing air toward the young secretary. "They call him the Seigneur André in the household, and his lordship makes himself known to every body--sometimes not very pleasantly. He is merely the duke's fool, however, kept more for amusement than for service, and more for fashion even than amusement; for at bottom he is a dull fellow; but he contrives occasionally to stir up the choler of the old gentlemen, and, when the duke is in a gay humor, makes him laugh with their anger."

"To be angry with a fool is to show one's self little better than a fool, methinks," answered Jean Charost; but Lomelini shook his head, with his usual quiet smile, saying, "Do not be too sure that he will not provoke you, Monsieur De Brecy. He has a vast fund of malice, though no great fund of wit, and, as you may see, can contrive to torment very grave and reverend personages. I promised you a hint from time to time, and one may not be thrown away in regard to Seigneur André. There are two or three ways of dealing with him which are sure to put him down. First, the way which Monsieur Blaize takes: never to speak to him at all. When he addresses any of his witticisms to our good friend, Monsieur Blaize stares quietly in his face, as if he spoke to him in an unknown tongue, and takes care not to give him a single word as a peg to hang a rejoinder upon. Another way is to break his head, if he be over saucy, for he is mighty careful of his person, and has never attacked young Juvenel de Royans since he cuffed him one morning to his heart's content. He has no reverence for any thing, indeed, but punishment and fisticuffs. He ventured at first to break his jests on me, for whom, though a very humble personage, his highness's officers generally have some respect."

"May I ask how you put a stop to this practice?" asked Jean Charost.

"Oh, very easily," replied the maître d'hôtel. "I listened to all he had to say quietly, answered him as best I might, a little to the amusement of the by-standers, and did not fare altogether ill in the encounter; but Seigneur André found his *levrée*; for supper somewhat scanty and poor that night. He had a small loaf of brown bread, a pickled herring, and some very sour wine. Though it was all in order, and he had wine, fish, and bread, according to the regulations of the household for evening *levrées*, he thought fit to complain to the master-cook. The cook told him that all his orders were taken from me. He did not know what to make of this, but was very peaceable for a day or two afterward. Then he forgot his lesson, and began his impertinence again. He had another dose that night of brown bread, salt herring, and vinegar, and it made so deep an impression on his mind that he has not forgotten it yet."

"Well, I do think it is impious," said Father Peter, in a tone of melancholy gravity. "I do, indeed."

"What, to give a fool a pickled herring as a sort of corrective of bad humors?" asked Lomelini.

"No, no," replied the chaplain, peevishly "But to keep such poor, benighted creatures in great houses for the purpose of extracting merriment from their infirmities. It is making a mockery of the chastisement of God."

"Pooh, pooh," said Lomelini. "What can you do with them? If you do not keep them in great houses, you would be obliged to shut them up in little ones; and, I will answer for it, Seigneur

André would rather be kept as a fool in the palace of the Duke of Orleans than pent up as a madman in the hospitals. But here he comes to answer for himself."

"Then I won't stay to hear him," cried the chaplain, putting his mule into a quicker pace, and riding on after the litter of the Duke of Orleans, which was not above two hundred yards in advance.

"There he goes," cried Signor Lomelini. "Poor man! this fool is a complete bugbear to him. To Father Peter he is like a gnat, or a great fly, which keeps buzzing about our ears all night, and gives us neither peace nor rest."

As he spoke, the personage who had been so long the subject of their conversation rode up, presenting to the eyes of Jean Charost a very different sort of man from that which he had expected to see, and, in truth, a very different personage altogether from the poetical idea of the jester which has been furnished to us by Shakspeare and others. Seigneur André, indeed, was not one of the most famous of his class, and he has neither been embalmed in fiction nor enrolled in history. The exceptions I believe, in truth have been taken generally for the types, and if we could trace the sayings and doings of all the jesters downward from the days of Charlemagne, we should find that nine out of ten were very dull people indeed. His lordship was a fat, gross-looking man of the middle age, with a countenance expressive of a good deal of sensuality--dull and heavy-looking, with a nose glowing with wine; bushy, overhanging eyebrows, and a fat, liquorish under lip. His stomach was large and protuberant, and his legs short; but still he rode his horse with a good, firm seat, though with what seemed to the eyes of Jean Charost a good deal of affected awkwardness of manner. There was an expression of fun and joviality about his face, it is true, which was a very good precursor to a joke, and, like the sauce of a French cook's composing, which often gives zest to a very insipid morsel, it made many a dull jest pass for wit. His eye, indeed, had an occasional fire in it, wild, wandering, mysterious, lighted up and going out on a sudden, which to a physician might probably have indicated the existence of some degree of mental derangement, but which, with ordinary persons, served at once to excite and puzzle curiosity.

"Ah, reverend signor," he exclaimed, as he pulled up his horse by Lomelini's side, "I am glad to find you so far in advance. It betokens that all good things of life will be provided for--that we shall not have to wait three hours at Juvisy for dinner, nor be treated with goat's flesh and rye bread, sour wine and stale salad."

"That depends upon circumstances, Seigneur André," replied Lomelini. "That his highness shall have a good dinner, I have provided for; but, good faith, the household must look out for themselves. In any other weather you would find eggs enough, and the water is generally excellent, but now it is frozen. But let me introduce you to Monsieur De Brecy, his highness's secretary."

"Ha! I kiss his fingers," cried the jester. "I asked for him all yesterday, hearing of his advent, but was not blessed with his presence. They told me he was in the nursery, and verily he seems a blessed babe. May I inquire how old you are, Signor De Brecy?"

"Like yourself, Seigneur André," replied Jean Charost, with a smile; "old enough to be wiser."

"Marvelous well answered!" exclaimed the jester. "The dear infant is a prodigy! Did you ever see any thing like that?" he continued, throwing back his black cloak, and exhibiting his large stomach, dressed in his party-colored garments, almost resting on the saddle-bow.

"Yes, often," answered Jean Charost. "I have seen it in men too lazy to keep down the flesh, too fond of good things to refrain from what is killing them, and too dull in the brain to let the wit ever wear the body."

A sort of wild, angry fire came up in the jester's face, and he answered, "Let me tell you there is more wit in that stomach than ever you can digest."

"Perhaps so," answered Jean Charost. "I doubt not in the least you have more brain under your belt than under your cap; but it is somewhat soft, I should think, in both places."

Signor Lomelini laughed, but at the same time made a sign to his young companion to forbear, saying, in a low tone, "He won't forgive you easily, already. Don't provoke him farther. Here we are coming to that accursed hill of Juvisy, Seigneur André. Don't you see the town lying down there, like an egg in the nest of a long-tailed titmouse?"

"Or like a bit of sugar left at the bottom of a bowl of mulled wine," replied the jester. "But, be it egg or be it sugar, the horses of his highness seem inclined to get at it very fast."

His words first called the attention of both Lomelini and Jean Charost to what was going on before them, and the latter perceived with dismay that the horses in the litter--a curious and ill-contrived sort of vehicle--which had been going very slowly till they reached the top of the high hill of Juvisy, had begun to trot, and then to canter, and were now in high course toward a full gallop. The man who drove them, usually walking at the side, was now running after them as fast as he could go, and apparently shouting to them to stop, though his words were as unheeded by the horses as unheard by Jean Charost.

"Had we not better ride on and help?" asked the young gentleman, eagerly.

Lomelini shrugged his shoulders, replying, with a sort of fatalism hardly less ordinary in Italians than in Turks, "What will be, will be;" and the jester answered, "Good faith! though they call me fool, yet I have as much regard for my skin as any of them; so I shall not trot down the hill."

Jean Charost hardly heard the end of the sentence, for he saw that the horses of the litter were accelerating their pace at every instant, and he feared that some serious accident would happen. The duke was seen at the same moment to put forth his head, calling sharply to the driver, and the young secretary, without more ado, urged his horse on at the risk of his own neck, and, taking a little circuit which the broadness of the road permitted, tried to reach the front horse of the litter without scaring him into greater speed. He passed two groups of the duke's attendants before he came near the vehicle, but all seemed to take as much or as little interest in their master's safety as Lomelini and the jester, uttering, as the young man passed, some wild exclamations of alarm at the duke's peril, but taking no means on earth to avert it.

Jean Charost did not pause or stop to inquire, however, but dashed on, passed the litter, and got in front of the horses just at the moment that one of them stumbled and fell.

There was a steep, precipitous descent over the hillside, as the old road ran, down which there was the greatest possible risk of the vehicle being thrown; but, luckily, one of the shafts broke, and Jean Charost was in time to prevent the horse from doing any further damage, as he sprang up from his bleeding knees.

While the young man, jumping from the saddle, held the horses tight by the bridle, the driver and half a dozen attendants hurried up and assisted the prince to alight. Their faces were now pale and anxious enough; but the countenance of the duke himself was as calm and tranquil as if he had encountered no danger. Lomelini and the jester were soon upon the spot; and the latter thought fit to remark, with a sagacious air, that haste spoiled speed. "Your highness went too fast," he said; "and this young gentleman went faster still. You were likely to be at the bottom of the hill of Juvisy before you desired it, and he had nearly sent you thither sooner still in trying to stop you."

"You are mistaken, Seigneur André," said the duke, gravely. "The horse fell before he touched it; and even had it not been so, I would always rather see too much zeal than too little. He came in time, however, to prevent the litter going over."

Two of the squires instantly led forward horses for the prince to ride, as the litter, in its damaged state, was no longer serviceable. But the duke replied, "No, I will walk. Give me your arm, De Brecy; it is but a step now."

The little accident which had occurred undoubtedly served to confirm Jean Charost in the favor of the Duke of Orleans; but, at the same time, it made him a host of enemies. The tenants of a wasp's nest are probably not half as malicious as the household of a great man. The words of the jester had given them their cue, and the report ran through all the little cavalcade that Jean Charost had thrown the horse down in attempting to stop it.

CHAPTER XII.

There are periods in the life of every man daring which accidents, misadventures, annoyances even, if they be not of too great magnitude, are of service to him. When, from within or from without, some dark vapor has risen up, clouding the sunlight, and casting the soul into darkness--when remorse, or despair, or bitter disappointment, or satiety, or the dark pall of grief, has overshadowed all things, and left us in a sort of twilight, where we see every surrounding object in gloom, we bless the gale, even though it be violent, that arises to sweep the tempest-cloud from our sky. Still greater is the relief when any thing of a gentler and happier kind comes along with the breeze that dispels the mists and darkness, like a sun-gleam through a storm; and the little accident which had occurred, and the escape from danger, did a great deal to rouse the Duke of Orleans from a sort of apathetic heaviness which had hung upon him for the last two or three days.

Dinner had been prepared for him at the great inn at Juvisy; but, with one of those whims in which high and mighty princes indulged frequently in those days, he paused before the gates of the old abbey, on the left hand side of the road, saying, in a low tone, to Jean Charost, but with a gay smile, "We will go in and dine with the good fathers. They are somewhat famous for their

cheer, and it must be about the dinner hour."

The little crowd of attendants had followed; slowly behind their princely master, leaving the distance of a few paces between him and them, for reverence' sake; and he now beckoned up Lomelini, and told him to go forward and let the household dine, adding, "We will dine at the abbey."

"How many shall remain with your highness?" asked Lomelini, with a profound bow.

"None, signor," replied the duke; "none but Monsieur De Brecy. Go on--I would be incognito;" and turning up the path, he struck the bell at the gates with the iron hammer that hung beside it.

"Now, De Brecy," he said, in a light and careless tone, very different from any his young companion had ever heard him use before, "here we forget our names and dignities. I am Louis Valois, and you Jean Charost, and there are no titles of honor between us. Some of the good friars may have seen me, and perhaps know me; but they will take the hint, and forget all about me till I am gone. I would fain see them without their frocks for awhile. It will serve to divert my thoughts from sadder things."

With a slow and faltering step, and mumbling something, apparently not very pleasant, as he came, an old monk walked down to the *grille*; or iron gate of the convent, with the keys in his hand indeed, but an evident determination not to use them, except in case of necessity. Seeing two strangers standing at the gate, he first spoke with them through the bars, and it required some persuasion to induce him to open and let them pass, although, to say sooth, the duke's announcement that he came to ask the hospitality of the refectory, was spoken more as a command than a petition, notwithstanding the air of easy familiarity which he sought to give it.

"Well, well; come in," he said, at length; "I have nothing to do with it, but to open and shut the door. The people within will tell you whether you can eat with them or not. They eat enough themselves, God wot, and drink too; but they are not over-fond of sharing with those they don't know, except through the buttery hole or the east wicket; and there it is only what they can't eat themselves. Ay, we had different times of it when Abbot Jerome was alive."

Before the long fit of grumbling was at an end, the Duke of Orleans and his young companion were at the inner door of the building; and a little bell, ringing from a distant corner, gave notice that the mid-day meal of the monks was about to begin.

"Come along--come along, Jean," said the duke, seeming to participate in the eagerness with which several monks were hurrying along in one direction; "they say the end of a feast is better than the beginning of a fray; but, to say truth, the beginning is the best part of either."

On they went; no one stopped them--no one said a word to them. The impulse of a very voracious appetite was upon the great body of the monks, and deprived them of all inclination to question the strangers, till they were actually at the door of the refectory, where a burly, barefooted fellow barred the way, and demanded what they wanted. "A dinner," answered the Duke of Orleans, with a laugh. "You are hospitable friars, are you not?"

The man gazed at him for a moment without reply, but with a very curious expression of countenance, ran his eye over the duke's apparel, which, though by no means very splendid, was marked by all the peculiar fopperies of high station; then gave a glance at Jean Charost, and then replied, in a much altered tone, "We are, sir. But it so happens that to-day my lord abbot has visitors who dine here. Doubtless he will not refuse you hospitality, if you let him know who it is demands it. He has with him Monsieur and Madame Giac, and their train, high persons at the court of Burgundy. Who shall I say are here?"

"Two poor simple gentlemen in need of a dinner," replied the duke, in a careless tone--"Louis Valois and Jean Charost by name. But make haste, good brother, or the pottage will be cold."

The man retired into the refectory, the door of which was continually opening and shutting as the monks passed in; and Jean Charost, who stood a little to the right of the duke, could see the monk hurry forward toward a gay party already seated at the head of one of the long tables, with the abbot in the midst.

He returned in a few seconds with another monk, and ushered the duke and his young companion straight up to the table of the abbot, an elderly man of jovial aspect, who seemed a little confused and embarrassed. He rose, sat down again, rose, once more, and advanced a step or two.

The Duke of Orleans met him half way with a meaning smile, and a few words passed in a low tone, the import of which Jean Charost did not hear. The duke, however, immediately after, moved to a vacant seat some way down the table, and beckoned Jean Charost to take a place beside him. The young secretary obeyed, and had a full opportunity, before a somewhat long grace was ended, of scanning the faces of the guests who sat above him.

On the abbot's right hand was a gentleman of some forty years of age, gayly dressed, but of a countenance by no means prepossessing, cold, calculating, yet harsh; and next to him was placed a young girl of some thirteen or fourteen years of age, not at that time particularly remarkable

for her beauty, but yet with an expression of countenance which, once seen, was not easily to be forgotten. That expression is difficult to be described, but it possessed that which, as far as we can judge from very poor and not very certain portraits, was much wanting in the countenances of most French women of the day. There was soul in it--a look blending thought and feeling--with much firmness and decision even about the small, beautiful mouth, but a world of soft tenderness in the eyes.

On the other side of the abbot sat a gay and beautiful lady, in the early prime of life, with her face beaming with witching smiles; and Jean Charost could not help thinking he saw a very meaning glance pass between the Duke of Orleans and herself. No one at the table, indeed, openly recognized the prince; and, although the young secretary had little doubt that his royal master was known to more than one there present, it was clear the great body of the monks were ignorant that he was among them.

The fare upon the table did not by any means belie the reputation of the convent. Delicate meats, well cooked; fish in abundance, and of various kinds; game of every sort the country produced; and wine of exceedingly delicate flavor, showed how completely field, forest, tank, and vineyard were laid under tribute by the good friars of Juvisy. Nor did the monks seem to mortify their tongues more than the rest of their bodies. Merriment, revelry--sometimes wit, sometimes buffoonery--and conversation, often profane, and often obscene, ran along the table without any show of reverence for ears that might be listening. The young man had heard of such things, but had hardly believed the tale; and not a little scandalized was he, in his simplicity, at all he saw and heard. That which confounded him more than all the rest, however, was the demeanor of the Duke of Orleans. He did not know how often painful feelings and sensations take refuge in things the most opposite to themselves--how grief will strive to drown itself in the flood of revelry--how men strive to sweeten the cup of pain with the wild honey-drops of pleasure. From the first moment of his introduction to the duke up to that hour, he had seen him under but one aspect. He had been grave, sad, thoughtful, gloomy. Health itself had seemed affected by some secret sorrow; and now every thing was changed in a moment. He mingled gayly, lightly in the conversation, gave back jest for jest with flashing repartee, encouraged and shared in the revelry around him, and drank liberally, although there was a glowing spot in his cheek which seemed to say there was a fire within which wanted no such feeding.

The characters around would bear a long description; for monastic life--begun generally when habits of thought were fixed--had not the power ascribed by a great orator to education, of dissolving the original characters of men, and recrystallizing them in a different form. At one part of the table there was the rude broad jester, rolling his fat body within his wide gown, and laughing riotously at his own jokes. At a little distance sat the keen bright satirist, full of flashes of wit and sarcasm, but as fond of earthly pleasures as all the rest; and a little nearer was the man of sly quiet humor, as grave as a judge himself, but causing all around him to roar with laughter. The abbot, overflowing with the good things of this life, and enjoying them still with undiminished powers, notwithstanding the sixty years and more which had passed over his head, was evidently well accustomed to the somewhat irreverent demeanor of his refectory, and probably might not have relished his dinner without the zest of its jokes. Certain it is, at all events, though his own parlor was a more comfortable room, and universal custom justified his dining in solitude, he was seldom absent at the hour of dinner, and only abstained from being present at supper likewise, lest he should hear and see more than could be well passed over in safety.

When the meal was at an end, however, the abbot rose, and, inviting his lay guests to his own particular apartments, left his monks to conduct the exercises of the afternoon as they might think fit. With his cross-bearer before him, he led the way, followed by the rest in the order which the narrowness of the passages compelled them to take; and Jean Charost found himself coupled, for the time, with the young girl he had seen on the opposite side of the table. He was too much of a Frenchman to hesitate for a moment in addressing her; for, in that country, silence in a woman's society is generally supposed to proceed either from awkwardness or rudeness. She answered with as little constraint; and they were in the full flow of conversation when they entered a well-tapestried room, which, though large in itself, seemed small after the great hall of the refectory.

The abbot, and the nobleman who had sat by his side, in whom Jean Charost recognized the Monsieur De Giac whom he had seen by torch-light in the streets of Paris, were already talking to each other with some eagerness, while the Duke of Orleans followed a step or two behind, conversing in low tones with the beautiful lady who had sat upon the abbot's other hand.

Gay and light seemed their conference; and both laughed, and both smiled, and both whispered, but not apparently from any reverence for the persons or place around them. But no one took any notice. Monsieur De Giac was very blind to his wife's coquetry, and the abbot was well accustomed to the feat of shutting his eyes without dropping his eyelids. Nay, he seemed to think the merriment hardly sufficient for the occasion; for he ordered more wines to be brought, and those the most choice and delicate of his cellar, with various preserved fruits, gently to stimulate the throat to deeper potations.

"Not very reverend," said Jean Charost, in answer to some observation of the young lady, shortly after they entered, while the rest remained scattered about in different groups. "I wonder if every monastery throughout France is like this."

"Very like, indeed," answered his fair companion, with a smile. "Surely this is not the first religious house you have ever visited."

"The first of its kind," replied Jean Charost; "I have been often in the Black Friars at Bourges, but their rule is somewhat more austere, or more austerely practiced."

"Poor people," said the girl. "It is to be hoped there is a heaven, for their sakes. These good folks seem to think themselves well enough where they are, without going further. But in sorry truth, all monasteries are very much like this--those that I have seen, at least."

"And nunneries?" asked Jean Charost.

"Somewhat better," she answered, with a sigh. "Whatever faults women may have, they are not such coarse ones as we have seen here to-night; but I know not much about them, for I have been long enough in one only to judge of it rightly; and now I feel like a bird with its prison doors unclosed, because I am going to join the court of the Queen of Anjou: that does not speak ill of the nunnery, methinks. Who knows, if they reveled as loud and high there as here, but I might have loved to remain."

"I think not," answered her young companion, "if I may judge by your face at dinner. You seemed not to smile on the revels of the monks."

"They made my head ache," answered the girl; and then added, abruptly, "so you are an observer of faces, are you? What think you of that face speaking with the abbot?"

"Nay, he may be your father, brother, or any near relation," answered Jean Charost. "I shall not speak till I know more."

"Oh, he is nothing to me," replied the girl. "He is my noble Lord of Giac, who does me the great honor, with my lady, his wife, of conveying me to Beaugency, where we shall overtake the Queen of Anjou. His face would not curdle milk, nor turn wine sour; but yet there is something in it not of honey exactly."

"He seems to leave all the honey to his fair lady," replied Jean Charost.

"Yes, to catch flies with," replied the girl; and then she added, in a lower tone, "and he is the spider to eat them."

The wine and the preserved fruits had by this time been placed upon a large marble table in the centre of the hall; and a fair sight they made, with the silver flagons, and the gold and jeweled cups, spread out upon that white expanse, beneath the gray and fretted arches overhead, while on the several groups around in their gay apparel, and the abbot in his robes, standing by the table, with a serving brother at his side, the many-colored light shone strongly through the window of painted glass.

"Here's to you, noble sir, whom I am to call Louis Valois, and to your young friend, Jean Charost," said the abbot, bowing to the duke, and raising a cup he had just filled. "I pray you do me justice in this excellent wine of Nuits."

"I will but sip, my lord," replied the duke, taking up a cup. "I have drank enough already somewhat to heat me."

"Nay, nay, good gentleman," cried the fair lady with whom he had been talking, "let me fill for you! Drink fair with the lord abbot, for very shame, or I will inform the Duke of Orleans, who passes here, they say, to-day."

The last words were uttered with a meaning smile; but the duke let her pour the wine out for him, drank it down, and then, with a graceful inclination to the company, took a step toward the door, saying, "The Duke of Orleans has gone by, madam. At least, his train passed us while we were at the gates. My lord abbot, I give you a thousand thanks for your hospitality. Ladies all, farewell;" and then passing Madame De Giac, he added, in a whisper, which reached, however, the ears of Jean Charost who was following. "In Paris, then."

The lady made no answer with her lips; but her eyes spoke sufficiently, and to the thoughts of Jean Charost somewhat too much.

The serving brother opened the door of the parlor for the guests to pass out, and he had not yet closed it, when the name of the Duke of Orleans was repeated from more than one voice within, and a merry peal of laughter followed.

The duke hastened his steps, holding the arm of his young companion; and though the smile still lingered on his lips for awhile, yet before they had reached the gate of the convent, it had passed away. Gradually he fell into a fit of deep thought, which lasted till they nearly descended to Juvisy. Then, however, he roused himself, and said, with an abrupt laugh, "I sometimes think men of pleasure are mad, De Brecy."

"I think so too, your highness," replied Jean Charost.

The duke started, and looked suddenly in his face; but all was calm and simple there; and, after a moment's silence, the prince rejoined, "Too true, my young friend; too true! A lucid interval often comes upon them, full of high purposes and good resolves: they see light, and truth, and reality for a few short hours, when suddenly some accident--some trifle brings the fit again, and all is darkness and delusion, delirious dreams, and actions of a madman. I have heard of a bridge built of broken porcelain; and such is the life of a man of pleasure. The bridge over which his course lies, from time to eternity, is built of broken resolutions, and himself the architect."

"A frail structure, my lord, by which to reach heaven," replied Jean Charost, "and methinks some strong beams across would make us surer of even reaching earthly happiness."

"Where can one find them?" asked the duke.

"In a strong will," answered Jean Charost.

The duke mused for a moment or two, and then suddenly changed the conversation, saying, "Who was the girl you were speaking with?"

"In truth, your highness, I do not know," replied Jean Charost. "She said that she was going, under the escort of Monsieur and Madame De Giac, to Beaugency."

"Oh, then, I know," replied the duke. "It is the fair Agnes, whom my good aunt talked about. They say she has a wit quite beyond her years. Did you find it so?"

"I can not tell," replied Jean Charost, "for I do not know her age. She seemed to me quite a girl; and yet spoke like one who thought much and deeply."

"You were well matched," said the duke, gayly; and, at the same moment, some of his attendants came up, and the conversation stopped for the time.

CHAPTER XIII.

The cool twilight of a fine winter's evening filled the air as the train of the Duke of Orleans approached his château of Beauté. Standing on a high bank, with the river flowing in sight, and catching the last rosy rays, which still lingered in the sky after the sun was set, the house presented a grand, rather than a graceful appearance, though it was from the combination of beautiful forms and rich decoration with the defensive strength absolutely requisite in all country mansions at that day, that it derived its name of Beauté. The litter had been repaired at Juvisy, and the Duke of Orleans had taken possession of it again; but as the cavalcade wound up the ascent toward the castle, the prince put his head out, and ordered one of the nearest attendants to call Lomelini to him.

"I am ill, Lomelini," he said, as soon as the maître d'hôtel rode up; "I am ill. Go forward and see that my bed-chamber is prepared."

"Had I not better send back for your highness's chirurgeon?" asked Lomelini. "'Tis a pity he was left behind in Paris."

"No, no," replied the prince; "let him stay where he is. He overwhelms me with his talk of phlebotomy and humors, his calculations of the moon, and his caption of fortunate hours. 'Tis but a little sickness that will pass. Besides, there is the man at Corbeil. He can let blood, or compound a cooling potion."

As soon as the cavalcade had entered the court-yard of the château, the duke was assisted from his litter, and retired at once to his chamber, leaning upon the arm of Lomelini, who was all attention and humble devotion. The rest of the party then scattered in different directions, most of those present knowing well where to betake themselves, and each seeking the dwelling-place to which he was accustomed. Jean Charost, however, had no notion where he was to lodge, and now, for the first time, came into play the abilities of his new servant, Martin Grille. His horses were stabled in a minute--whether in the right place or not, Martin stopped not to inquire--and, the moment that was done, divining well the embarrassment of an inexperienced master, the good man darted hither and thither, acquiring very rapidly, from the different varlets and pages, a vast amount of information regarding the château and its customs.

He found Jean Charost walking up and down a large hall, which opened directly, without any vestibule, from the principal door of entrance, and plunged so deeply was he in meditation, that

he seemed to see none of the persons who were passing busily to and fro around him. The revery was deep, and something more: it was not altogether pleasant. Who, in the cares and anxieties of mature life, does not sometimes pause and look back wistfully to the calmer days of childhood, decking them with fanciful memories of joys and sports, and burying in forgetfulness the troubles and sorrows which seemed severe at the time. The two spirits that are in man, indeed, never exercise their influence more strongly in opposition than in prompting the desire for peace, and the eagerness for action.

Jean Charost was busy at the moment with the unprofitable, fruitless comparison of the condition in which he had lately lived and his present station. The calm and tranquil routine of ordinary business; the daily occupation, somewhat monotonous, but without anxiety, or even expectation; the peaceful hours for study, for thought, or for exercise, when not engaged in the service of no very exacting master, acquired a new and extraordinary interest in his eyes now that ambition was gratified, and he appeared to be in the road to honor and success. It was not that he was tired of the Duke of Orleans's service: it was not that he misappreciated the favors he received, or the kindness with which he had been treated; but the look back or the look forward makes a great difference in our estimate of events and circumstances, and he felt that full appreciation of the past which nothing that is not past can altogether command. Yet, if he strove to fix upon any point in regard to which he had been disappointed, he found it difficult to do so. But there was something in the whole which created in his breast a general feeling of depression. There was a sensation of anxiety, and doubt, and suspicion in regard to all that surrounded him. A dim sort of mist of uncertainty hung over the whole, which, to his daylight-loving mind, was very painful. One half of what he saw or heard he did not comprehend. Men seemed to be speaking in a strange, unlearned language--to be acting a mystery, the secret of which would not be developed till near the end; and he was pondering over all these things, and asking himself how he should act in the midst of them, when Martin Grille approached, and, in a low tone, told him all that he had discovered, offering to show him where the secretary's apartments were situated.

"But can I be sure that the same rooms are destined for me?" asked Jean Charost.

"Take them, sir, take them," answered Martin Grille; "that is to say, if they are good, and suit you. The only quality that is not valued at a court is modesty. It is always better to seize what you can get, and the difficulty of dispossessing you, nine times out of ten, makes men leave you what you have taken. Signor Lomelini is still with the duke; so that you can ask him no questions. You must be lodged some where, so you had better lodge yourself."

Jean Charost thought the advice was good, especially as night had by this time fallen, and a single cresset in the hall afforded the only light, except when some one passed by with a lamp in his hand. He followed Martin Grille, therefore, and was just issuing forth, when Juvenel de Royans, and another young man of the same age, came in by the same door out of which he was going. At the sight of the young secretary, De Royans drew back with a look of affected reverence, and a low inclination of the head, and then burst into a loud laugh. Jean Charost gazed at him with a cold, unmoved look, expressive, perhaps, of surprise, but nothing else, and then passed on his way.

"Those gentlemen will bring themselves into trouble before they have done," said Martin Grille. "That Monsieur De Royans is already deep in the bad books."

"No deeper than he deserves," answered Jean Charost. "But perhaps they may find they have made a mistake before they have done."

"Ah, good sir, never quarrel with a courtier," said the servant. "They are like wary fencers, and try to put a man in a passion in order to throw him off his guard. But here are your rooms, at the end of this passage. That door is the back entrance to the duke's apartments. The front is on the other corridor."

With some lingering still of doubt, Jean Charost took possession of the rooms, which he found more convenient than those he had inhabited in Paris, and, by the aid of Martin Grille, all was speedily put in order. The hour of supper soon arrived, and, descending to the general table of the household, he found a place reserved for him by Monsieur Blaize, but a good deal of strange coldness in the manners of all around. Even the old *écuyer*; himself was somewhat distant and reserved; and it was not till long afterward that Jean Charost discovered how much malice any marks of favor from a prince can excite, and to how much falsehood such malice may give birth. His attempt to stop the horses of the litter had been severely commented on, as an act of impertinent forwardness, by all those who ought to have done it themselves; and they and every one else agreed, notwithstanding the duke's own words, that the attempt had only served to throw one of the horses down. The only person who seemed cordial at the table was the good priest, Father Peter; but the chaplain could afford very little of his conversation to his young friend, being himself, during the whole meal, the butt of the jester's wit, to which he could not refrain from replying, although, to say sooth, he got somewhat worsted in the encounter. All present were tired, however, and all retired soon to rest, with the exception of Jean Charost, who sat up in his bed-room for two or three hours, laying out for himself a course of conduct which would save him, as far as possible, from all minor annoyances. Nor was that course altogether ill devised for the attainment of even higher objects than he proposed.

"I will live in this household," he thought, "as far as possible, by myself. I will seek my own amusements apart, if I can but discover at what time the duke is likely to want me. Any who wish for my society shall seek it, and I will, keep all familiarity at a distance. I will endeavor to avoid all quarrels with them; but, if I am forced into one, I will try to make my opponent rue it."

At an early hour on the following morning the young man went forth to inquire after the duke's health, and learned from one of the attendants at his door that he had passed a bad and feverish night. "I was bidden to tell you, sir," said the man, "if you presented yourself, that his highness would like to see you at three this evening, but will not want you till then."

This intimation was a relief to Jean Charost; and, returning to his room, where he had left Martin Grille, he told him to prepare both their horses for along ride.

"Before breakfast, sir?" asked the man.

"Yes, immediately," replied the young secretary. "We will breakfast somewhere, Martin, and dine somewhere too; but I wish to explore the country, which seemed beautiful enough as we rode along."

"Monstrous white, sir," replied Martin Grille. "However, you had better take some arms with you, for we may chance to miss the high-road, I being in no way topographical. The country in this neighborhood does not bear the best reputation."

Jean Charost laughed at his fears, and ere half an hour was over they were on their horses' backs and away. The morning was bright and pleasant, notwithstanding the keen frostiness of the air. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees, and the sun was shining cheerfully, though his rays had no effect upon the snow. There was a silence, too, over the whole scene, as soon as the immediate vicinity of the castle was passed, which was pleasant to Jean Charost, cooped up as he had been for several months previously in the close atmosphere of a town. From a slow walk, he urged his horse on into a trot, from a trot into a canter, and when at length the wood which mantled the castle was passed, and the road opened out upon the rounded side of the hill, boyhood's fountain of light spirits seemed reopened in his heart, and he urged his horse on into a wild gallop over the nearly level ground at the top.

Martin Grille came panting after. He was not one of the best horsemen in the world, and, though he clung pretty fast to his steed's back, he was awfully shaken. That gay gallop, however, had a powerful moral effect upon the good varlet. Bad horsemen have always a great reverence for good ones. Martin Grille's esteem for his master's talents had been but small before, simply because his own worldly experience, his intimate knowledge of all tricks and contrivances, and the facile impudence and fertility of resources, which he possessed as the hereditary right of a Parisian of the lower orders, had enabled him to direct and counsel in a thousand trifles which had embarrassed Jean Charost simply because he had been unaccustomed to deal with them. But now, when Martin saw his easy mastery of the strong horse, and the light rein, the graceful seat, the joyous hilarity of aspect with which the young man bounded along, while he himself was clinging tight to the saddle with a fearful pressure, the sight made him feel an inferiority which he had never acknowledged to himself before.

At length, Jean Charost stopped, looked round and smiled, and Martin Grille, riding up, exclaimed, in a half-dolorous half-laughing tone, "Spare me, sir, I beseech you. You forget I am not accustomed to such wild capers. Every man is awkward, I find, in a new situation; and though I can get on pretty well at procession pace, if my horse neither kicks nor stumbles, I would rather be excused galloping over hillsides, for a fortnight at least, till my leather and his leather are better acquainted."

"Well, well," answered his master, "we will go a little more slowly, though we must have a canter now and then, if but to make the snow fly. We will ride on straight for that village where the church tower is peeping up over the opposite side of the hill."

"There is a thick wood between us and it," said Martin Grille.

"Doubtless the wood has a road through it," answered his master; and, without further discussion, rode on.

The wood, or rather forest--for it was a limb of the great forest of Corbeil--of which Martin Grille spoke, lay in the hollow between two gentle ranges of hills, upon one of which he and his master were placed at the moment. It was deeper, more extensive, and more intricate than it had appeared to Jean Charost, seeing across from slope to slope, but not high enough to look down upon it as a map. As he directed his horse toward it, however, he soon came upon a road marked out by the track of horses, oxen, and carts, showing that many a person and many a vehicle had passed along it since the snow had fallen; and even had he clearly comprehended that his servant really entertained any apprehensions at all, he would only have laughed at them.

On entering the wood, the snow upon the ground, shining through the bare stems of the trees and the thin, brown branches of the underwood, at first showed every object on either hand for several yards into the thicket. Even the footprints of the hare and the roe-deer could be seen; and Jean Charost, well accustomed to forest sports in his boyhood, paused at one spot, where the bushes were a good deal beaten down, to point out the marks to his servant, and say, "A boar has

been through here."

Some way further on, the wood became thicker, oaks and rapidly deciduous trees gave way to the long-persistent beech; and beneath the tall patriarchs of the forest, which had been suffered to grow up almost beyond maturity, a young undergrowth, reserved for firewood, and cut every thirteen or fourteen years, formed a screen into which the eye could not penetrate more than a very few feet. Every here and there, too, were stunted evergreens thickening the copse, and bearing upon their sturdy though dwarfish arms many a large mass of snow which they had caught in its descent toward the ground. Across the road, in one place, was a solid mass of ice, which a few weeks before had been running in a gay rivulet; and not twenty yards further was a little stream of beautiful, limpid water, without a trace of congelation, except a narrow fringe of ice on either bank.

Here Jean Charost pulled up his horse, and then, slackening the rein, let the beast put down his head to drink. Martin Grille did so likewise; but a moment after both heard a sound of voices speaking at some little distance on the left.

"Hark! hark!" whispered Martin Grille. "There are people in the wood--in the very heart of the wood."

"Why, where would you find woodmen but in the wood?" asked Jean Charost. "You will hear their axes presently."

"I hope we shall not feel them," said Martin Grille, in the same low tone. "I declare that the only fine wood scenery I ever saw has been at the back of the fire."

"They have got a fire there," said Jean Charost, pointing onward, but a little to the left. "Don't you see the blue smoke curling up through the trees into the clear, cool air?"

"I do indeed, sir," said Martin Grille. "Pray, sir, let us turn back. It's not half so pretty as a smoky chimney."

"Are you a coward?" asked Jean Charost, turning somewhat sharply upon him.

"Yes, sir," replied Martin, meekly: "desperate--I have an uncle who fights for all the family."

"Then stay where you are, or go back if you like," replied his master. "I shall go and see who these folks are. You had better go back, if you are afraid."

"Yes, sir--no, sir," replied Martin Grille. "I am afraid--very much afraid--but I won't go back. I'll stay by you if I have my brains knocked out--though, good faith, they are not much worth knocking just now, for they feel quite addled--curd--curd; and a little whey, too, I have a notion. But go on, sir; go on. They are not worth keeping if they are not worth losing."

Jean Charost rode on, with a smile, pitying the man's fears, but believing them to be perfectly idle and foolish. The district of Berri, his native place, had hitherto escaped, in a great degree, the calamities which for years had afflicted the neighborhood of Paris. There was too little to be got there, for the plundering bands, which had sprung up from the dragon's teeth sown by the wars of Edward the Third of England and Philip and John of France, or those which had arisen from the contentions between the Orleans and Burgundian parties, to infest the neighborhood of Bourges; and while the Parisian, with his mind full of tales brought daily into the capital of atrocities perpetrated in its immediate vicinity, fancied every bush, not an officer, but a thief, his young master could hardly bring himself to imagine that there was such a thing as danger in riding through a little wood within less than half a league of the château of the Duke of Orleans.

He went on then, in full confidence, for some fifty or sixty yards further; but then suddenly stopped, and raised his hand as a sign for his servant to do so likewise. Martin Grille almost jumped out of the saddle, on his master's sudden halt, and drew so deep a snorting sort of sigh that Jean Charost whispered, with an impatient gesture, "Hush!"

The fact was, his ears had caught, as they rode on, a sound coming from the direction where rose the smoke, which did not altogether satisfy him. It was an exceedingly blasphemous oath--in those days, common enough in the mouths of military men, and not always a stranger to the lips of kings, but by no means likely to be uttered by a plain peasant or honest wood-cutter.

He listened again: more words of similar import were uttered. It was evident that the approach of horses over the snow had not been heard, and that, whoever were the persons in the wood, they were conversing together very freely, and in no very choice language.

Curiosity seized upon Jean Charost, who was by no means without his faults, and, quietly swinging himself from his horse's back, he gave the rein to Martin Grille, saying, in a whisper, "Here, hold my horse. I want to see what these people are about. If you see danger--and you have put the fancy into my head too--you may either bring him up to me, or ride away as fast as you can to the château of Beauté, and tell what has happened."

"I will do both, sir," said Martin Grille, with his head a good deal confused by fear. "That is to say, I will first bring him up to you, and then ride away. But I do see danger now. Hadn't you

better get up again?"

Jean Charost walked on with a smile; but, after going some ten or fifteen paces, he slackened his speed, and, with a light step, turned in among the bushes, where there was a little sort of brake between two enormous old beech-trees. Martin Grille watched him as he advanced, and kept sight of him for some moments, while quietly and slowly he took his way forward in the direction of the smoke, which was still very plainly to be seen from the spot where the valet sat. It is not to be denied that Martin's heart beat very fast, and very unpleasantly, as much for his master as for himself perhaps; and certainly, as the dry twigs and bramble stalks made a thicker and a thicker sort of mist round Jean Charost's receding figure, the good man both gave him up for lost, and felt that he had conceived a greater affection for him than he had before imagined. He had a strong inclination, notwithstanding his fears, to get a little nearer, and was debating with himself whether he should do so or not, when all doubt and hesitation was put to an end by a loud shout, and a fierce volley of oaths from the wood. Nature would have her way; Martin Grille turned sharp round, struck his spurs into the horse's sides, and never stopped till he got to the gates of the château.

A party of armed men was instantly collected on his report, with good Monsieur Blaize at their head, without waiting to seek casque or corselet; and compelling Martin Grille, very unwillingly, to go with them, they hurried on in the direction he pointed out, over the hill, and down toward the verge of the wood. They had not reached it, however, when, to the surprise of all, they beheld Jean Charost walking quietly toward them, bearing something in his arms, and, on approaching nearer, they perceived, with greater astonishment than ever, that his burden was a young child, wrapped in somewhat costly swaddling-clothes.

CHAPTER XIV.

Many, eager, and loud were the inquiries of the party who came to the rescue of Jean Charost, regarding his adventures since Martin had left him; but their curiosity was left unsatisfied. All he thought fit to tell them amounted merely to the facts that he had been surrounded and seized, before he was prepared to resist, by a party which appeared to consist of common robbers; that for some time his life had seemed in danger; and that, in the end, his captors, after having emptied his purse, had consented to let him go, on condition that he would carry away the child with him, and promise to take care of it for six years. He had been made to take an oath also, he stated, neither to pursue the party who had captured him, nor to give any description of their persons; and, notwithstanding the arguments of the duke's retainers, and especially of Monsieur Blaize, who sought to persuade him that an oath taken in duress was of no avail, he resolutely kept his word.

The old *écuyer*; seemed mortified and displeased; but he did not hesitate long as to his own course; and, leaving the young secretary and Martin Grille to find their way back to the château of Beauté as they could, he dashed on into the wood with his companions, swearing that he would bring in the marauders, or know the reason why.

He was disappointed, however. The place where the captors of Jean Charost had been enjoying themselves was easily found by the embers of the fire round which they had sat; but they themselves were gone, leaving nothing but an empty leathern bottle and some broken meat behind them. The tracks of the horses' feet, too, could be traced for some distance; but, after they entered the little road through the wood, they became more indistinct amid other footprints and ruts, and, although Monsieur Blaize and his companions followed them, as they thought, to the village beyond, they could obtain no information from the peasantry. No one would admit that they had seen any one pass but Matthew So-and-so, the farmer; or the priest of the parish, on his mule; or the baillie, on his horse; or some laborers with wagons; and, after a two hours' search, the party of the duke's men returned to the castle, surly and disappointed, and resolved to spare no means of drawing all the particulars from Jean Charost.

In the mean time, the young secretary had returned to the little hamlet which had gathered round the foot of the château of Beauté, making Martin Grille, who was somewhat ashamed of the part he had acted in the morning's adventures, carry the infant in his arms--a task for which he was better fitted than Jean Charost himself; for, to say truth, he made no bad nurse, and one of his many good qualities was a great love for children. At the hamlet, Jean Charost paused, and went into one or two of the cottages inquiring for Angelina Moulinet; but he had to go down quite to the foot of the hill before he found the house of the person of whom he was in search. It was small, but much neater than most of the rest, and, on opening the door, he found a little scene of domestic happiness which pleased the eye. A young husband and wife, apparently tolerably well to do in life, were seated together with two children, the husband busily engaged in carving out a

pair of *sabots*, or wooden shoes, from an old stump of willow, and the wife spinning as fast as she could get her fingers to go. The boy was, of course, teazing a cat; the little girl, still younger, was crawling about upon her hands and knees, and rolling before her a great wooden ball, probably of her father's handiwork. The fire burned bright; every thing about the place was clean and comfortable; and the whole formed a pleasant scene of calm mediocrity and rural happiness, better than all the Arcadias that ever were dreamed of.

The wife rose up when the well-dressed young gentleman entered, and the husband inclined his head without leaving off his operations upon the *sabot*. But both looked a little surprised when Martin Grille followed his master into the cottage, carrying an infant in his arms, and Angelina Moulinet, with the kindly tact which never abandons a woman, put down her distaff and went to look at the baby, comprehending at once that some strange accident had brought it there, and willing to smooth the way for explanation.

"What a beautiful little girl!" she exclaimed "Come, Pierrot, look what a beautiful child!"

"Is it a little girl?" said Jean Charost, in perfect simplicity; "I am sure I did not know it."

"Lord bless me! sir," cried the good woman "don't you see?"

"All I see," replied Jean Charost, "is, that it is an infant which has accidentally been cast upon my hands; and I wish to know, Madame Moulinet, if you will take care of it for me?"

The young woman looked at her husband, and the husband gazed with some astonishment at Jean Charost, murmuring at length, though with evident deference to his better half, "I think we have enough of our own."

"I do not expect you to take charge of this child," said Jean Charost, "without proper payment. I will engage that you shall be well rewarded for your pains."

"But, sir, we do not know you," said the man; and his wife in the same breath inquired, "Pray, sir, who sent you to us?"

Jean Charost hesitated; and then taking the child from Martin Grille, told him to leave the cottage for a moment.

The good valet obeyed; but, being blessed with the faculty of other valets, he took up a position on the outside of the house which he fancied would enable him to use both his hearing and his sight. Neither served him much, however; for, though he saw good Angelina Moulinet take the child from Jean Charost's arms, and the latter bend down his head toward herself and her husband as they stood together, as if saying a few words to them in a low tone, not one of those words reached his ear through the cottage window. He could make nothing of the gestures, either, of any of the party. Angelina raised her eyes toward the sky, as if in some surprise; and Pierrot crossed his arms upon his chest, looking grave and thoughtful. The moment after, both were seen to speak quickly together, and the result of the consultation, if it was one, was made manifest by Jean Charost leaving the child with them and coming out of the cottage door.

"Now give me my horse," said the young gentleman; and then added, while Martin unfastened the bridle from the iron ring, "Remember this house, Martin; you will have to bring some money here for me to-night."

"I will not forget it, sir," replied Martin Grille; and then added, with a laugh, "and I will bring the money safely, which is more than many a varlet could say of himself;" but before the last words were uttered, his young master was in the saddle and on his way toward the château.

Under a sharp-pointed arch which formed the gateway, two or three of the duke's men were lounging about; and the moment Jean Charost appeared, one of them advanced to his horse's side, saying, "His highness has been inquiring for you, sir."

"Is it three of the clock yet?" asked Jean Charost, somewhat anxiously.

"Not two yet, sir," replied the man; and springing from his horse, the young secretary hurried on toward the apartments of the duke. He was admitted instantly, and found his princely master seated in a chair, dressed in a light-furred dressing-gown, and sadly changed in appearance, even since the preceding day. His face was very pale, his eye heavy, and his lips parched; but still he smiled with a good-humored, though not gay expression of countenance, saying, "I hope they have not recalled you from any amusement, De Brecy; for I did not think I should want you till three. But I feel ill, my friend, and there are very busy thoughts in my mind."

He paused for a moment or two, looking down thoughtfully on the table, and then added, slowly, "When the brain is full--perhaps the heart too--of these eager, active, tireless emmets of the mind, called thoughts, we are glad to drive some of them forth. Alas! De Brecy, how rarely does a prince find any one to share them with!"

He paused again, and Jean Charost did not venture a reply. He would have fain said, "Share them with me;" but he felt that it would be presumptuous, and he remained silent till the duke at length went on. "You are different from the rest of the people about me, De Brecy; from any one I

have ever had--unhackneyed in the world--not ground down to nothing by the polishing of a court. There is something new and fresh about you; somewhat like what I once was myself. Now, what am I? By starts a wise man, by starts a fool."

"Oh no, my prince," cried Jean Charost, "I can not believe that. 'Tis but temptation leads you for a moment from the path of wisdom; the sickness, as it were, of an hour. But the life is healthy; the heart is sound."

The prince smiled, but went on, apparently pursuing the course of his own thoughts. "To know what is right--to do what is wrong--to feel a strong desire for good, and constantly to fall into evil, surely this is folly; surely it is a life of folly--surely it is worse than if one did not know what ought to be, as a blind man can not be charged with stupidity for running against a wall, which any other would be an idiot not to avoid."

He looked up in the young secretary's face, and Jean Charost, encouraged by his tone, ventured to reply, "It wants but a strong will, sir. You have a strong will against your enemies, I know; why not have a strong will against yourself?"

"I have, De Brecy--I have," replied the duke. "But my strong will against myself is just like my strong will against my enemies--very potent for the time, but easily mollified; a peace is proposed--favorable terms of compromise offered, and lo! I and myself are friends again, and all our mutual offenses forgiven."

He spoke with a smile, for the figure amused his fancy; but the next instant he started up, saying, "It is time that this should come to an end. My will is now powerful, and my future course shall be different. I will take my resolutions firmly--I will shape my course--I will lay it down in writing, as if on a map, and then very shame will prevent my deviating. Sit down. De Brecy, sit down, and write what I shall dictate." Jean Charost seated himself, took some paper which was upon the table, and dipped a pen in the ink, while the duke stood by his side in such a position that he could see the sheet under his secretary's hand, on which he gazed for a minute or two with a thoughtful, half-absent look. The young man expected him every moment to begin the dictation of the resolutions which he had formed; but at length the duke said, in an altered tone, "No need of that; it would show a doubt of myself, of which I trust there is none. No, no; true resolution needs not fetters. I have resolved enough; I will begin to act. Give me that fur cloak, De Brecy, and go and see if the picture-gallery be warmed. Tell one of the varlets at the door to pile logs enough upon the fire, and to wait there. Then return to me."

Without reply, Jean Charost quitted the room, and told one of the two attendants who were seated without to show him the way to the picture-gallery--an apartment he had never yet heard of. The man led him on along the corridor, to a door at no great distance, which he opened; and Jean Charost, the moment after, found himself in a long, narrow sort of hall, extending across the whole width of the building, and lighted from both ends. It was divided into three separate portions, by columns on either side, and the walls between were covered with pictures nearly to the top. To our eyes these paintings might seem poor and crude; but to the eyes of Jean Charost they were, like those which he had seen at the Hôtel d'Orleans, in Paris, perfect marvels of art. Before he paused to examine any of them, he ordered more wood to be thrown upon the fire, which was burning faintly in the great fire-place in the centre; and while the attendant had gone to bring the wood from a locker, he walked slowly toward the western end of the gallery, where, upon a little strip of white silk, suspended between the two columns, appeared in large letters the word "AMORI." On entering that portion of the gallery, he was not at all surprised, after reading the inscription, to find that it contained nothing but portraits of women. All seemed very beautiful; and though the faces were all strange to him, he had no difficulty in recognizing many of the persons whom the portraits were intended to represent, for the names, in most instances, were inscribed in large letters on the frame.

A general look around filled him with astonishment, and a sort of consternation at the daring levity which had gathered together, under so meaning an inscription, the portraits of some of the most celebrated ladies in France. But he did not pause long, for the fire was soon arranged and kindled into a blaze; and he returned, as he had been directed, to the chamber of the duke.

"Now," said the prince, as he entered, "is all ready?"

"It is, sir," answered Jean Charost; "but the air is still chilly, and, in truth, your highness does not look well. Were it not better to pause for awhile?"

"No, no," replied the Duke of Orleans, quickly, but not sharply; "let us go at once, my friend. I will put such a seal upon my resolutions, that neither I nor the world shall ever forget them."

He drew the fur cloak tighter round him, and walked out of the room, leaning heavily on the young secretary's arm. As he passed, he bade both the men at the chamber-door follow; and then walking into the gallery, he turned directly to that portion of it which Jean Charost had examined. There, seating himself in a chair near the centre of the room, while the two servants stood at a little distance behind, he pointed to a picture in the extreme southwestern corner, and bade Jean Charost bring it to him. It was the picture of a girl quite young, less beautiful than many of the others, indeed, but with the peculiar beauty of youth; and when the Duke of Orleans had got it, he let the edge of the frame rest upon his knee for a moment or two, and gazed upon the face in

silence.

Jean Charost would have given a great deal to be able to see the duke's heart at that moment, and to trace there the emotions to which the contemplation of that picture gave rise. A smile, tender and melancholy, rested upon the prince's face; but the melancholy deepened into heavy gloom as he continued to gaze, and the smile rapidly departed.

"I might spare this one," he said. "Poor thing! I might spare this one. The grave has no jealousies--" He gazed again for a single instant, and then said, "No, no--all--all. Here, take it, and put it in the fire."

Turning his head, he had spoken to one of the attendants; but the man seemed so utterly confounded by the order, that he repeated the words, "On the fire?" as he received the picture from the prince's hands.

"Yes--on the fire," said the duke, slowly and sternly; and then pointing to another, he added, "Give me that."

Jean Charost brought it to him, when it met with the same fate, but with less consideration than the other. Another and another succeeded; but at length a larger one than the rest was pointed out by the duke, and the young secretary paused for an instant before it, utterly confounded as he read beneath the name of the Duchess of Burgundy. It fared no better than the rest, and another still was added to the flames. But then the duke paused, saying, "I am ill, my friend--I am ill. I can not go on with this. I leave the task to you. Stay here with these men, and see that every one of the pictures in this room, as far as yonder two columns on either side, be burned before nightfall, with one exception. I look to you to see the execution of an act which, if I die, will wipe out a sad stain from my memory. You hear what I say," he continued, turning to the two attendants; and was then walking toward the centre door of the gallery, when Jean Charost said, "Your highness mentioned one exception, but you did not point it out."

The duke laid his hand upon his arm, led him to the side of the room, and pointed to a picture nearly in the centre, merely uttering the word "That!"

On the frame was inscribed the words, "Valentine, Duchess of Orleans;" and, after having gazed at it for a moment in silence, the prince turned and quitted the room.

When he was gone, Jean Charost remained for a few minutes without taking any steps to obey his command. The two men stood likewise, with their arms crossed, in a revery nearly as grave as that of the young secretary; but their thoughts were very different from his. He comprehended, in a degree, the motives upon which the prince acted, and felt how strong and vigorous must be the resolution, and yet how painful the feelings which had prompted the order he had given. Nay more, his fancy shadowed forth a thousand accessories--a thousand associations, which must have hung round, and connected themselves with that strong act of determination which his royal master had just performed--sweet memories, better feelings, young hopes, ardent passions, kindly sympathies, wayward caprices, volatile forgetfulness, sorrow, regret, and mourning, and remorse. A light, as from imagination, played round the portraits as he gazed upon them. The spirits of the dead, of the neglected, of the forgotten, seemed to animate the features on the wall, and he could not but feel a sort of painful regret that, however guilty, however vain, however foolish might be the passion which caused those speaking effigies to be ranged around, he should have been selected to consign them to that destroying element which might devour the picture, but could not obliterate the sin.

At length he started from his revery, and began the appointed work, the men obeying habitually the orders they received, although doubts existed in their minds whether the prince was not suffering from temporary insanity in commanding the destruction of objects which they looked upon only as rare treasures, without the slightest conception of the associations which so often in this world render those things most estimable in the eyes of others, sad, painful, or perilous to the possessor.

In about an hour all was completed; and I am not certain that what I may call the experience of that hour--the thoughts, the sensations, the fancies of Jean Charost--had not added more than one year to his mental life. Certain it is, that with a stronger and a more manly step, and with even additional earnestness of character, he walked back to the apartments of the duke, and knocked for admission. A voice, but not that of the prince, told him to come in, after a moment's delay, and he found the maître d'hôtel in conference with his master.

"Come in, De Brecy," said the duke. "Leave us, Lomelini. You are his good friend, I know. But I have to speak with him on my own affairs, not on his. With them I have naught to do, and it were well for others not to meddle either. So let them understand."

The maître d'hôtel retired, bowing low; and, after remaining a moment or two in thought, the duke raised his eyes to the young secretary's face, saying, in a somewhat languid tone, "Were you ever in this part of the country before, De Brecy?"

"Never, your highness," replied Jean Charost.

"You have met with an adventure in the wood, I hear," said the duke, "and did not tell me of

it."

"I did not think it right to intrude such subjects on your highness," answered the young man. "Had there been any thing to lead to it, I should have told you at once."

"Well, well," said the duke, "you shall tell me hereafter;" and then he added, somewhat irritably, "they have broken through my thoughts with these tales. I want you to do me a service."

"Your highness has but to command," said Jean Charost.

"I am ill, De Brecy," said the duke. "I feel more so than I ever did before; indeed, I have been rarely ill, and, perhaps--But that matters not. Whatever be the cause, I have a strange feeling upon me, a sort of presentiment that my life will not be very long extended. You heard the announcement that was made to me by man or shadow--I know not, and care not what--in the convent of the Celestins. But it is not that which has produced this impression, for I had forgotten it within an hour; but I feel ill; and I see not why there should not be influences in external and invisible things which, speaking to the ear of the soul, without a voice, announce the approach of great changes in our state of being, and warn us to prepare. However that may be, the feeling is strong upon me. I have ordered an imperial notary to be sent for, in order that I may make my will. In it I will show the world how I can treat my enemies--and my friends also; for I may show my forgetfulness of the injuries of the one, without failing in my gratitude to the other."

He leaned his head upon his hand for a moment or two, and then added, "I long earnestly to see my wife. Yet from causes that matter not to mention, I do not wish to send her a long letter, telling her of my state and of my feelings. I have, therefore, written a few lines, merely saying I am indisposed here at Beauté. I know that they will induce her to set out immediately from Blois, where she now is, and it must be the task of the messenger to prepare her mind for the changes that she *must*, and the changes that she may find here. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do, sir," replied Jean Charost, "fully."

"I should wish him, also," said the duke, "in case my own lips should not be able to speak the words, to tell her, that whatever may have been my faults, however passion, or vanity, or folly may have misled me, I have ever retained a deep and affectionate regard for her virtues, her tenderness, and her gentleness. I could say more--much more--I will say more if ever I behold her again. But let her be assured that my last prayer shall be to call down the blessing of God upon her head, and entreat his protection for her and for our children."

While he spoke, he continued to hold a sealed letter in his hand, and gazed at Jean Charost very earnestly. Nevertheless, he seemed to hesitate, and when he paused, he looked down upon the paper, turning it round and round, without speaking, for several minutes. Then, however, as if he had decided at length, he looked up suddenly, saying, "There is none I can send but Lomelini or yourself. Joigni is a rough brute, though bold and honest. Blaize has no heart, and very little understanding. Monluc would frighten her to death; for were he to see me now, he would think me dead already. There is none but you or Lomelini then. In some respects, it were better to send him. He is of mature age, of much experience, accurate and skillful in his dealings and passably honest; not without heart either, affectionately attached to her, as well he may be, brought up and promoted by her father; but there is in him a world of Italian cunning, a great deal of cowardly timidity, and an all-absorbing, sense of his own interests, the action of which we can never altogether count upon. Besides, she loves him not. I know it--I am sure of it, although she is too gentle to complain. He came hither as her servant. He found it more for his interest to be mine. She can not love him. But enough of that. I have conceived a regard for you, De Brecy, and you will find proofs of it. It is not a small one that I send you on this mission. There is something in the freshness of your character and in the frankness of your nature which will win confidence, and I wish you to set off at once for Blois. Bear this letter to the duchess, tell her in what state I am--but kindly, gently--and accompany her back hither. What men will you want with you? The country is somewhat disturbed, but I do not think there is much danger."

"One who knows the way will suffice, my lord," replied De Brecy. "A small party may pass more easily than a large one. I will only beg a stout horse from your highness's stables, which my man can lead, and which may both carry what we need by the way, and serve me in case of any accident to my own. I will undertake to deliver the letter, if I live to the end of the journey."

"Perhaps you are right in choosing small attendance," said the duke. "I will send you a stout fellow to accompany you, who knows every rood of the road. He is but a courier, but he makes no bad man-at-arms in case of need; and, though I would not have you go fully armed, I think it were as well if you wore a *secret*; beneath your ordinary dress."

"I have no arms of any kind with me but my sword and dagger, sir," replied Jean Charost, "and I do not think I shall need more."

"Yes--yes, you may," replied the duke. "Stay; I will write a word to Lomelini. He will procure you all that is needful;" and, drawing some paper toward him, the duke wrote, with a hand which shook a good deal, the following words: "Signor Lomelini, put Armand Chauvin under the orders of Monsieur De Brecy upon a journey which he has to take for me. Command the armorer to furnish him with what ever arms he may require, and the chief *écuyer*; to let him take from the

stable what horses he may select, with the exception of gray Clisson, the Arab jennet, my own hackney, and my three *destriers*. ORLEANS."

"There," said the duke, "there. Here is an order on the treasurer, too, for your expenses; and now, when will you set out?"

"In an hour," replied Jean Charost.

"Can you get ready so soon?" the prince inquired.

"I think so, your highness," replied the young secretary. "I shall be ready myself, if the two men are prepared."

"So be it, then," said the Duke of Orleans. "I will go lie down on my bed again, for I am weary in heart and limb."

CHAPTER XV.

No season is without its beauty, no scene without its peculiar interest. If the great mountain, with its stony peak shooting up into the sky, has sublimity of one kind, the wide expanse of open country, moor, or heath, or desert, with its limitless horizon and many-shaded lines, has it of another. To an eye and a heart alive to the impressions of the beautiful and the grand, something to charm and to elevate will be found in almost every aspect of nature. The storm and the tempest, as well as the sunshine and the calm, will afford some sources of pleasure; and, as the fading away of the green leaf in the autumn enchants the eye by the resplendent coloring produced, decay will be found to decorate, and ruin to embellish.

Take a winter scene, for instance, with the whole country covered with a white mantle of the snow, the trees and the forests raising themselves up brown and dim, the masses of dark pines and firs standing out almost black upon the light ground from which they rise, and the view extending far over a nearly level country, with here and there a rounded hill rising detached and abruptly from the plain, perhaps unbroken in its monotonous line, perhaps crowned by the sharp angles and hard lines of fortress or town. The description does not seem very inviting. But let us show how this scene varied during the course of the evening, as three travelers rode along at a quick pace, although their horses seemed somewhat tired, and the distance they had journeyed had undoubtedly been considerable. Toward three o'clock a heavy, gray cloud, apparently portending more snow, stretched over the greater part of the sky, cutting off the arch of the concave, and seeming like a flat canopy spread overhead. To the southwest the heavens remained clear, and there the pall of cloud was fringed with gold, while from underneath streamed the horizontal light, catching upon and brightening the slopes, and throwing the dells into deeper shadow. The abrupt hills looked blue and grand, and raised their heads as if to support the heavy mass of gray above. Gradually, as the sun descended lower, that line of open sky became of a brighter and a brighter yellow. The dun canopy parted into masses, checkering the heavens with black and gold. The same warm hues spread over every eminence, and, as the sun descended further still, a rosy light, glowing brighter and brighter every instant, touched the snowy summits of the hills, flooded the plain, and seeking out in all its sinuosities the course of the ice-covered river, flashed back from the glassy surface as if a multitude of rubies had been scattered across the scene, while the gray wood, which fringed the distant sky, blazed, with a ruddy brightness pouring through the straggling branches, as if a vast fire were kindled on the plains beyond.

It was the last effort of the beauty-giving day, and all those three travelers felt and enjoyed it in their several ways. The sun went down; the hills grew dark and blue; every eminence, and even wave of the ground, appeared to rise higher to the eye; the grayness of twilight spread over all the scene; but still, upon the verge of the sky, lingered the yellow light for full half an hour after day was actually done. Then, through the broken cloud, gleamed out the lustrous stars, like the brighter and the better hopes that come sparkling from on high after the sunshine of this life is done, and when the clouds and vapors of the earth are scattering away.

Still the three rode on. An hour before, there had been visible on the distant edge of the sky a tall tower like that of a cathedral, and one or two spires and steeples scattered round. It told them that a town was in that direction--the town to which they were bending their steps; but all was darkness now, and they saw it no more. The road was fair, however, and well tracked: and though it had been intensely cold during the greater part of the day, the evening had become somewhat milder, as if a thaw were coming on. A light mist rose up from the ground as they entered the wood, not sufficient to obscure the way, but merely to throw a softening

indistinctness over objects at any distance, and, as they issued forth from among the larger trees, upon a piece of swampy ground, covered with stunted willows, Jean Charost, for he was at the head of the party, fancied he saw a light moving along at some little distance on the left.

"There is some one with a lantern," he said, turning to a stout man who was riding beside him.

"*Feu follet*," replied the other. "We must not follow that, my lord, or we shall be up to our neck in a quagmire."

"Why, such exhalations are not common at this time of year, Chauvin," replied the young man.

"Exhalations or no exhalations," rejoined the other, "they come at all times, to mislead poor travelers. All I know is, that the short road to Pithiviers turns off a quarter of a league further on."

"Exhalations!" said Martin Grille; "I never heard them called that name before. Malignant spirits, I have always heard say, who have lured many a man and horse to their death. Don't follow it, sir; pray, don't follow it. That would be worse than the baby business."

Jean Charost laughed, as he replied, "I shall only follow the guidance of Monsieur Chauvin here. He will lead me better than any lantern. But it certainly does seem to me that the light moves on by our side. It can not be more than two or three hundred yards distance either."

"That's their trick, sir," said Chauvin. "They always move on, and seem quite near; but if you hunted them, you would never come up with them, I can tell you. I did so once when I was a boy, and well-nigh got drowned for my pains. Hark! I thought I heard some one calling. That's a new trick these devils have got, I suppose, in our bad times."

All pulled up their horses and listened; but heard nothing more, and rode on again, till, just as they were beginning to ascend a little rise where the snow had been drifted off the road, and the horses' hoofs rang clear upon the hard ground, a loud shout was heard upon the left.

"Halloo, halloo! who goes there?" cried a I voice some fifty or sixty yards distant. "Give us some help here. We have got into a quagmire, and know not which way to turn."

"For Heaven's sake, don't go, sir," cried Martin Grille. "It's a new trick of the devil, depend upon it, as Monsieur Chauvin says."

"Pooh, nonsense," replied Jean Charost; and then raising his voice, he cried, "Who is it that calls?"

"What signifies that," cried a stern voice.

"If you are Christians, come and help us. If you are not, jog on your way, and the devil seize you."

"Well, call again as we come, to guide us to you," said Jean Charost, "for there is no need of us getting into the quagmire too."

"Let me go first, sir, and sound the way," said the courier.

"Halloo, halloo!" cried two or three voices, as a signal; and, following the sound, Jean Charost and the courier, with Martin Grille a good way behind, proceeded slowly and cautiously toward the party of unfortunate travelers, till at length they could descry something like a group of men and horses among the willows, about twenty yards distant. It is true, some of the horses seemed to have no legs, or to be lying down, and one man dismounted, holding hard by a willow.

"Keep up, keep up--we are coming to you," replied Jean Charost. "It is firm enough here, if you could but reach us."

The guide, who was in advance, suddenly cried, "Halt, there!" and, at the same moment, his horse's fore feet began to sink in the ground.

"Here, catch my rein, Chauvin," cried the young secretary, springing to the ground; "I think I see a way to them."

"Take care, sir--take care," cried the courier.

"No fear," answered Jean Charost; "from tree to tree must give one footing. There are some old roots, too, rising above the level. Stay there, Chauvin, to guide us back." Proceeding cautiously, trying the firmness of every step, and sometimes springing from tree to tree, he came within about six feet of the man whom he had seen dismounted, and, calling to him to give him his hand, he leaned forward as far as he could, holding firmly the osier near which he stood with his left arm. But neither that personage nor his companions were willing to leave their horses behind them, and it was a matter of much more difficulty to extricate the beasts than the men; for some of them had sunk deep in the marsh, and seemed to have neither power nor inclination to struggle. Nearly an hour was expended in efforts, some fruitless and others successful, to get the animals out; but at length they were all rescued, and Jean Charost found his little party increased

by six cavaliers, in a somewhat woeful plight.

The man whom he had first rescued, and who seemed the principal personage of the troop, thanked him warmly for his assistance, but in a short, sharp, self-sufficient tone which was not altogether the most agreeable.

"Where are you going, young man?" he said, at length, as they were remounting their horses.

"To Pithiviers," answered Jean Charost, as laconically.

"Then we will go with you," replied the other; "and you shall guide us; for that is our destination too."

"That will depend upon whether your horses can keep up with mine," replied Jean Charost; "for I have spent more time here than I can well spare."

"We will see," replied the other, with a laugh; "you have rendered us one service, we will try if you can render us another, and then thank you for both at the end of our journey."

"Very well," replied Jean Charost, and rode on.

The other kept by his side, however; for the tall and powerful horse which bore him seemed none the worse for the accident which had happened. Armand Chauvin and Martin Grille followed close upon their young leader, and the other five strangers brought up the rear.

The rest of the journey, of well-nigh two leagues, passed without accident, and the two foremost horsemen were gradually led into something like a general conversation, in which Jean Charost's new companion, though he could not be said to make himself agreeable, showed a great knowledge of the world, of life, of courts, of foreign countries; and displayed a somewhat rough but keen and trenchant wit, which led his young fellow-traveler to the conclusion that he was no common man. The last two miles of the journey were passed by moonlight, and Jean Charost had now an opportunity of distinguishing the personal appearance of his companion, which perhaps was more prepossessing than his speech. He was a man of the middle age, not very tall, but exceedingly broad across the chest and shoulders; and his face, without being handsome, had something fine and commanding in it. He rode his horse with more power than grace, managing him with an ease that seemed to leave the creature no will of his own, and every movement, indeed, displayed extraordinary personal vigor, joined with some dignity. His dress seemed rich and costly, though the colors were not easily distinguished. But the short mantle, with the long, furred sleeves, hanging down almost to his horse's belly, betokened at once, to a Frenchman of those days, the man of high degree.

Although the young secretary examined him certainly very closely, he did not return the scrutiny, but merely gave him a casual glance, as the moonlight fell upon him, and then continued his conversation till they entered the town of Pithiviers.

"To what inn do we go, Chauvin?" asked Jean Charost, as they passed in among the houses; but, before the other could answer, the stranger exclaimed, "Never mind--you shall come to my inn. I will entertain you--for to-night, at least. Indeed," he added, "there is but one inn in the place worthy of the name, and my people are in possession of it. We will find room for you and your men, however; and you shall sup with me--if you be noble, as I suppose."

"I am, sir," replied Jean Charost, and followed where the other led.

As they were entering the principal street, which was quiet and still enough, the stranger pulled up his horse, called up one of his followers, and spoke to him in a language which Jean Charost did not understand. Then turning to the young gentleman, he said, "Let us dismount. Here is a shorter way to the inn, on foot. Your men can go on with mine."

Jean Charost hesitated; but, unwilling to show doubt, he sprang from his horse's back, after a moment's consideration, gave the rein to Martin Grille, and walked on with his companion up a very narrow street, which seemed to lead round the back of the buildings before which they had just been passing.

The stranger walked slowly, and, as they advanced, he said, "May I know your name, young gentleman?"

"Jean Charost de Brecy," replied the duke's secretary; and, though he had a strong inclination, he refrained from asking the name of his companion in return. There was a something, he could not well tell what, that inspired respect about the stranger--a reverence without love; and the young secretary did not venture to ask any questions. A few moments after, a small house presented itself, built of stone, it is true, whereas the others had been mainly composed of wood; but still it was far too small and mean in appearance to accord with the idea which Jean Charost had formed of the principal *auberge*; of the good town of Pithiviers. At the door of this house, however, the elder gentleman stopped, as if about to enter. The door was opened almost at the same moment, as if on a preconcerted plan, and a man appeared with a torch in his hand.

Jean Charost hesitated, and held back; but the other turned, after ascending the three steps

which led to the door, and looked back, saying, "Come in--what are you afraid of?"

The least suspicion of fear has a great influence upon youth at all times, and Jean Charost was by no means without the failings of youth, although early misfortune and early experience had rendered him, as I have before said, older than his years.

"I am not afraid of any thing," he replied, following the stranger. "But this does not look like an inn."

"It is the back way," replied the other; "and you will soon find that it is the inn."

Thus saying, he walked through a narrow passage which soon led into a large court-yard, the man with the torch going before, and displaying by the light he carried a multitude of objects, which showed the young secretary that his companion had spoken nothing but the truth, and that they were, indeed, in the court-yard of one of those large and very handsome *auberges*--very different from the *cabarets*, the *gites*, and *repues*, all inns of different classes at that time in France.

Two or three times as they went, different men, some in the garb of the retainers of a noble house dressed in gaudy colors, some in the common habiliments of the attendants of an inn, came from different parts of the court toward the man who carried the torch; but as often, a slight movement of his hand caused them to fall back again from the path of those whom he was lighting.

Right in front was a great entrance door, and a large passage from which a blaze of light streamed forth, showing a great number of people coming and going within; but to the left was a flight of half a dozen stone steps leading to a smaller door, now closed. To it the torch-bearer advanced, opened it, and then drew back reverently to let those who followed pass in. A single man, with a cap and plume, appeared within, at a little distance on the left, who opened the door of a small room, into which the stranger entered, followed by his young companion. Jean Charost gave a rapid glance at the man who opened the door, whose dress was now as visible as it would have been in daylight, and perceived, embroidered in letters of gold upon his cap, just beneath the feather, the words "*Ich houd*." They puzzled him; for though he did not remember their meaning, he had some recollection of having heard that they formed the motto, or rallying words, of some great man or some great faction.

The stranger advanced quietly to a chair, seated himself, turned to the person at the door who had given him admittance, and merely pronounced the word "Supper."

"For how--" said the attendant, in an inquiring tone, and it is probable that he was about to add the word "many," with some title of reverence or respect, but the other stopped him at once, saying, "For two--speak with Monsieur D'Ipres, and take his orders. See that they be obeyed exactly."

Then turning to Jean Charost, he said, in a good-humored tone, "Sit, sit, my young friend. And now let me give you thanks. You rendered me a considerable service--not, perhaps, that it was as great as you imagine; for I should have got out somehow. These adventures always come to an end, and I have been in worse quagmires of various kinds than that; but you rendered me a considerable service, and, what is more to the purpose, you did it boldly, skillfully, and promptly. You pleased me, and during supper you shall tell me more about yourself. Perhaps I may serve you."

"I think not, sir," replied Jean Charost; "for I desire no change in my condition at the present moment. As to myself, all that I have to say--all, indeed, that I intend to say, is, that my name, as I told you, is Jean Charost, Seigneur De Brecy; that my father fought and died in the service of his country; and that I am his only child; but still most happy to have rendered you any service, however inconsiderable."

The other listened in profound silence, with his eyes bent upon the table, and without the slightest variation of expression crossing his countenance.

"You talk well, young gentleman," he said, "and are discreet, I see. Do you happen to guess to whom you are speaking?"

"Not in the least," replied Jean Charost. "I can easily judge, sir, indeed, that I am speaking to no ordinary man--to one accustomed to command and be obeyed; who may be offended, perhaps, at my plain dealing, and think it want of reverence for his person that I speak not more frankly. Such, however, is not the case, and assuredly I can in no degree divine who you are. You may be the King of Sicily, who, I have been told, is traveling in this direction. The Duke de Berri, I know you are not; for I have seen him very lately. I am inclined to think, from the description of his person, however, that you may be the Count of St. Paul."

The other smiled, gravely, and then replied, "The first ten steps you take from this door after supper, you will know; for the greatest folly any man commits, is to believe that a secret will be kept which is known to more than one person. But for the next hour we will forget all such things. Make yourself at ease: frankness never displeases me: discretion, even against myself, always pleases me. Now let us talk of other matters. I have gained an appetite, by-the-way, and am

wondering what they will give me for supper. I will bet you a link of this gold chain against that little ring upon your finger, that we have lark pies, and wine of Gatinois; for, on my life and soul, I know nothing else that Pithiviers is famous for--except blankets; odds, my life, I forgot blankets, and this is not weather to forget them. Prythee, throw a log on the fire, boy, and let us make ourselves as warm as two old Flemish women on Martinmas eve. But here comes the supper."

He was not right, however. It was the same attendant whom Jean Charost had before seen, that now returned and whispered a word or two in his lord's ear.

"Ha!" said the stranger, starting up "Who is with her? Our good friend?"

"No," replied the other. "He has gone on, for a couple of days, to Blois, and she has no one with her but a young lady and the varletry."

"Beseech her to come in and partake our humble meal," cried the other, in a gay tone. "Tell her I have a young guest to sup with me, who will entertain her young companion while I do my *devoir*; toward herself. But tell her we lay aside state, and that she condescends to sup with plain John of Valois. Ah, my young friend! you have it now, have you?" he continued, looking shrewdly at Jean Charost, who had fallen into a fit of thought. "Well--well, let no knowledge spoil merriment. We will be gay to-night, whatever comes to-morrow."

Almost as he spoke, the door was again thrown open, and fair Madame De Giac entered, followed by the young girl whom Jean Charost had seen at Juvisy.

CHAPTER XVI.

Two servants, one an elderly, grave, and silent personage, with the air of knowing much and saying little, which is the proper characteristic of experienced serving-men; the other a sharp, acute young varleton, with eyes full of meaning and fun, which seemed to read a running commentary upon all he heard and saw, waited upon the guests at supper. With simple good sense Jean Charost took things as he found them, without inquiring into matters which did not immediately affect himself. Whatever rank and station he might mentally assign to his entertainer, he merely treated him according to the station he had assigned himself, with perfect politeness and respect, but with none of the subservient civility of a courtier.

Madame De Giac, upon her part, taking the hint which had been sent to her, at once cast off all restraint more completely than Jean Charost thought quite becoming, especially in the presence of her young companion. But she noticed him personally with a gay smile and a nod of the head, and he saw that she spoke in a whisper afterward with her entertainer. The young girl greeted him kindly, likewise, and the meal passed in gay and lively talk, not unseasoned with a fully sufficient quantity of wine. Now the wine of Gatinois has effects very like itself, of a light, sparkling, exhilarating kind, producing not easily any thing like drunkenness, but elevating gently and brightly, even in small portions. The effect is soon over, it is true; but the consequences are not so unpleasant as those of beverages of a more heady quality, and the high spirits generated are like the sparkling bubble on the cup, soon gone, leaving nothing but a tranquil calm behind them.

"How is our friend, Louis of Valois?" asked Madame De Giac, with a gay laugh, when the meal was nearly ended. "He was in unusual high spirits when we met you and him, Monsieur De Charost, at the Abbey of Juvisy."

"His spirits, madame, were like the cream upon your glass," replied Jean Charost; "too sparkling to last long. He has been very ill since."

"Ha!" said their entertainer, with a sudden start. "Ill! Has he been ill? Is he better?"

"I trust he is, sir," answered Jean Charost, somewhat dryly. "Better in some respects he certainly is."

There was a something--perhaps we might call it an instinct--which led the young gentleman to believe that tidings of the duke's illness would not be altogether disagreeable to the personage who sat opposite to him, and to say truth, he was unwilling to gratify him by any detailed account. The other seemed, however, not to interest himself very deeply in the matter; that topic was soon dropped; and Madame De Giac and the stranger continued talking together in an under tone, sometimes laughing gayly, sometimes conversing earnestly, but seeming almost to forget, in the freedom of their demeanor toward each other, the presence of the two younger people, who, made up the party of four.

Between Jean Charost and his fair companion the conversation, strange to say, was much graver than between their elders. It too, however, was carried on in a low tone, and, in fact, the party was thus completely divided into two for some time.

"I wish I were out of this companionship," said the fair Agnes, at length; "Madame De Giac is far too wise a woman for me. Experience of the world, I suppose, must come, but I would fain have it come piece by piece, and not wholesale."

"Do you think it so evil a thing, then?" asked Jean Charost.

"I do not know," answered the girl; "and we are often afraid of what we do not know. Did you ever plunge into a stream or a lake, and stand hesitating for a minute on the bank, wishing you could tell how cold the water would be? Well, it is so with me, standing on the brink of the world into which I am destined to plunge. I am quite sure the waters thereof will not be as warm as my own heart; but I would know how cold they are--enough merely to refresh, or enough to chill me."

We need not pursue the conversation on these themes further. The meal concluded, and the table was cleared. The entertainer said something in a low tone to his fair companion, and she answered with a coquettish air,

"Not yet--not yet. Find something to amuse us for another hour. Have you no fool--no jongleur--no minstrel--nothing to wile away the time?"

"Faith, I came badly provided," replied the other, "not knowing what happy fortune was prepared for me on the road. But I will see--I will see what can be done. The people will bring in comfits, surely, and I will ask what the town can afford."

A few minutes after, the servants returned, as he expected, with some dried fruits, and wine of a higher quality, and the stranger asked a question or two in a whisper, to which the other replied in the same tone.

"An astrologer!" rejoined the first; "an astrologer! That will do admirably. We will all have our fortunes told. Go for him quietly, and mind, betray no secrets. I hope every one here, as in duty bound, has the hour, and day, and minute of his birth by heart. Your godfathers and godmothers have failed sadly if they have neglected this essential point of information. For my own part, I have had my horoscope so often drawn, that if all the misfortunes befall me which have been prognosticated, I shall need to live to the age of Methuselah to get them all into one life, to say nothing of being killed five different times in five different manners."

Every one smiled, but none felt convinced that the speaker doubted the truth of the predictions at which he scoffed; for it was a habit in those times, as well as in most others, for men to pretend want of belief in that which they believe most firmly, and a trust in judicial astrology was almost as essential a point of faith as a reliance in any of the blessed Virgins which were then scattered through the various towns of Europe. No one denied that he was furnished with all the dates for having his destiny accurately read by the stars, and only one person present showed any reluctance to hear the words of destiny from the lips of the astrologer. Strange to say, that one was the gay, bold, dashing Madame De Giac, who seemed actually fearful of learning the secrets of the future. In all hollow hearts there are dark recesses, the treasured things of which are watched over with miserly fear, lest any eye should see them and drag them to the light.

She objected, in a sportive tone, indeed, but with a wandering and timid look, sometimes pettishly declaring that she positively would not consent to have all the misfortunes of life displayed before her ere their time, and sometimes laughingly asserting that her noble lord hated astrologers, and that, therefore, she was bound to have nothing to do with them.

The conduct of their entertainer, however, puzzled and surprised Jean Charost more than her reluctance. They were evidently friends of old date--perhaps something more; and during the whole evening he had been paying her every soft and tender attention with a gallantry somewhat too open and barefaced. Now, however, he first laughed and jested with her, insisting, in gay and lively tones, but with his eyes fixed upon her keenly, and almost sternly, and then ceased all tone of entreaty, and used very unlover-like words of command. A reddish spot came into his cheek too, and a dark frown upon his brow; and his last words were, as some steps sounded along the passage, "You must, and you shall," uttered in a low, hoarse voice, which seemed to come from the very depth of his chest.

The next instant, the attendant entered with a man dressed in a very peculiar manner. He was small, mean-looking, aged, and miserably thin, with a beard as white as snow, but eyebrows as black as ink. All the features were pinched and attenuated, and the shriveled skin pale and cadaverous; but the face was lighted up by a pair of quick, sharp, intensely black eyes, that ran like lightning over every object, and seemed to gain intelligence from all they saw. He wore a black gown, open in front, but tied round the middle by a silver cord. His feet were bare and sandaled, and on his head he had a wide black cap, from the right side of which fell a sort of scarf crossing the right shoulder, and passing under the girdle on the left hip. A small dagger in a silver sheath, a triangle, and a circle of the same metal, and an instrument consisting of a tube with a glass at either end--the germ of the future telescope--hung in loops from his belt, and with

a large wallet, or *escarcelle*, completed his equipment.

On entering the room, the astrologer saluted no one, and moved not his bonnet from his head, but advanced calmly into the midst of the little circle with an air which gave dignity even to his small and insignificant figure, and, looking round from face to face, said, in a sweet but very piercing voice, "Here I am. What do you want with me?"

There was very little reverence in his tone, and Jean Charost's companion of the way replied, with an air of some haughtiness, "Sir wise man, you do not know us, or you would wait to hear our pleasure. You shall learn what we want with you very speedily, however."

"Pardon, your highness," replied the astrologer; "I know you all. But your men might show more reverence to science, and not drag me, like a culprit, from my studies, even at the command of John, duke of Burgundy."

"Ah! the fools have been prating," said the duke, with a laugh; but the astrologer answered quickly, "The stars have been prating, your highness, though your men have held their peace. Before you set foot in this town, I knew and told many persons that you would be here this day; that you would meet with an accident by the way, and be saved from it by the servant of an enemy. Ask, and satisfy yourself. There are people in this very house who heard me."

"The servant of an enemy!" repeated the Duke of Burgundy, thoughtfully, and rolling his eyes with a sort of suspicious glance toward Jean Charost. "The servant of an enemy! But never mind that; we have eaten salt together."

"I said not an enemy, but the servant of an enemy," rejoined the astrologer. "You and he best know whether I am right or not."

"I think not," replied Jean Charost. "The Duke of Orleans has given his hand to his highness of Burgundy, and he is not a man to play false with any one."

"Well spoken, good youth," answered the duke. "I believe you from my heart;" but still there was a frown upon his brow, and, as if to conceal what he felt, he turned again to the astrologer, bidding him commence his prediction.

"My lord the duke," replied the astrologer, "the hour and moment of your nativity are well known to me; but it is very useless repeating to you what others have told you before. Some little variation I might make by more or less accurate observation of the stars; but the variation could but be small, and why should I repeat to you unpleasant truths. You will triumph over most of your enemies and over many of your friends. You will be the arbiter of the fortunes of France, and affect the fate of England. You will make a great name, rather than a good one; and you will die a bloody death."

"That matters not," replied the duke. "Every brave man would rather fall on the field of battle than die lingering in a sick-chamber, like a hound in his kennel."

"I said not on the field of battle," answered the astrologer. "That I will not undertake to say, and from the signs I do not think it."

"Well, well, it skills not," answered the duke, impatiently. "It is enough that I shall survive my enemies."

"Not all of them," said the astrologer; "not all of them."

The duke waved his hand for him to stop; and, pointing to Madame De Giac, exclaimed, with a somewhat rude and discourteous laugh, "Here, tell this lady her destiny. She is frightened out of her wits at the thought of hearing it; but, by the Lord, I wish to hear it myself, for she has a strange art of linking the fate of other people to her own."

"She has, indeed," replied the astrologer.

"Methinks when she was born," said the duke, laughing, "Venus must have been in the house of Mars."

"Your highness does not understand the science," said the astrologer, dryly. "Madame, might I ask the date of your nativity?"

In a faltering tone, Madame De Giac gave him the particulars he required, and he then took some written tables from his wallet, and examined them attentively.

"It is a fortunate destiny," he said, "to be loved by many--to retain their love--to succeed in most undertakings. Madame, be satisfied, and ask no more."

"Oh, I ask nothing," replied Madame De Giac. "'Twas but to please the duke."

"But I must ask something," said the duke; and, drawing the astrologer somewhat aside, he whispered a question in his ear, while Madame De Giac's bright eyes fixed upon them eagerly.

To whatever was the duke's question, the astrologer replied, aloud, "As much as she possibly can," and the fair lady sank back in her chair with a look of relief, though the answer might possibly bear several meanings.

The duke's face was more cheerful, however, when he turned round; and, pointing to Madame De Giac's young companion, he said, "Come, let us have some happy prediction in her favor."

The astrologer gazed at her with a look of some interest, and so earnestly that the color rose in her cheek, and a certain fluttering grace of expression passed over her countenance, which made it look, for the first time, to the eyes of Jean Charost quite beautiful, foreshadowing what she was afterward to become. She made no hesitation, however, in telling the day, hour, and minute of her birth, and the astrologer consulted his tables again; but still paused in silence for a moment or two, though the Duke of Burgundy exclaimed more than once, "Speak--speak!"

"My science is either wrong," the astrologer said, at length, "or thine is, indeed, an extraordinary destiny. Till nineteen years have passed over thy head, all is quiet and peaceful. Then come some influences, not malign, but threatening. Some evil will befall thee which would be ruinous to others; but thy star triumphs still, and rises out of the clouds of the seventh house in conjunction with Mars, also in the ascendant. From that hour, too, the destiny of France is united with thine own. Mighty monarchs and great warriors shall bow before thee. Queens shall seek thy counsel, and even those thou hast wronged shall cling to thee for aid and for support."

"Oh, no--no," exclaimed Agnes, stretching forth her beautiful hands, with a look and attitude of exquisite grace. "I will wrong no one. Tell me not that I will wrong any one; it is not in my nature--can it be my destiny?"

"One wrong," replied the astrologer, "repaired by many a noble act. But I see more still. France shall have cause to bless thee. A comet--a fiery comet--shoots forth across the sky, portending evil; but thy star rules it, and the evil falls upon the enemies of France. The comet disappears in fire, and thy star still shines out in the ascendant, bright, and calm, and triumphant to the end. But the end comes too soon--alas! too soon."

"So be it," said the young girl, in a tranquil tone. "Life, I think, must be feeling. I would not outlive one joy, one power, one hope. So be it, I say. Death is not what I fear, but wrong. Oh, I will never commit a wrong."

"Then, pretty maid, you will be more than mortal," said the Duke of Burgundy; "for we all of us do wrong sometimes, and often are obliged to do so that great good may spring out of small evil."

Agnes was silent, and the astrologer turned to Jean Charost, who readily told him all he desired to know; for such was the general faith in judicial astrology at that time in France, that no man was left ignorant by his parents of the precise hour and minute of his birth, in order that the stars might be at any time consulted, in case of need.

The astrologer smiled kindly on him, but John of Burgundy asked, impatiently, "What say you, man of the stars, is this youth's fate any way connected with mine?"

"It is, prince," replied the astrologer. "It has been once; it shall be again. I find it written that he shall save you from some danger; that he shall suffer for your acts; that he shall be faithful to all who trust him; that he shall be present at your death; and try, but try in vain, to save you."

"Good!" said the duke, in a musing tone. "Good!" And then he added, in a lower voice, as if speaking to himself, "I will let him go, then."

The words reached Jean Charost's ears, and, for the first time, he comprehended that he had run some risk that night. Although somewhat inexperienced in the world, he was well aware that the caprices of princes, and of the favored of the earth, are not easy to be calculated; and he would have given a great deal to be out of that room, notwithstanding the pleasant evening he had spent therein. To show any thing like alarm or haste, however, he knew well might frustrate his own purpose; and, affecting as much ease as possible, he conversed with his young companion and the astrologer, while the Duke of Burgundy spoke a word or two in the usual low tone to Madame De Giac. What the treacherous woman suggested might be difficult to tell exactly, but only a few moments had elapsed when the elder attendant, who had before appeared, re-entered the room, saying, "This young gentleman's lackey is importunate to see him, and will take no denial."

Jean Charost instantly rose, saying, "It is time, then, that I should humbly take my leave, your highness. I knew not that it was so late."

"Nay, stay a while," said the Duke of Burgundy, with a very doubtful smile. "This bright lady tells me that you are an intimate of my fair cousin the Duke of Orleans, and that it is probable you go upon some occasion of his. Good faith! you must tell me before you depart whither you go, and for what purpose."

"Your highness will, I am sure, demand neither," replied Jean Charost. "Hospitality is a princely quality, but has its laws; and gratitude for small services well becomes the Duke of Burgundy far too much for him either to detain or to interrogate a humble servant of his cousin

the Duke of Orleans. As for the lady's information, she makes a slight mistake. I am his highness's servant, not his intimate; and certainly her intimacy with him, if I may judge from all appearances, is greater than my own."

The Duke of Burgundy turned a quick and irritable glance upon Madame De Giac; but Jean Charost had made a great mistake. We never render ourselves any service by rendering a disservice to one whom another loves. It was a young man's error; but he well divined that the fair marchioness had prompted the duke to detain him, and thinking to alarm her by a hint of what he had seen at Juvisy, he had gone beyond the proper limit, and made a dangerous enemy.

After he had spoken, the young secretary took a step toward the door; but the Duke of Burgundy's voice was instantly heard saying, in a cold, stern, despotic tone, "Not so fast, young man. Stay where you are, if you please." Then putting his hand upon his brow, he remained musing for a moment, and said, still thoughtfully, "We must know your errand."

"From me, never, sir," replied Jean Charost.

"Boy, you are bold," thundered forth the duke, with his eyes flashing.

"I am so, your highness," replied Jean Charost, in a voice perfectly firm, but with a respectful manner, "because I stand in the presence of a prince bearing a high name. I know he has concluded treaties of friendship and alliance with my royal master of Orleans, and I am confident that he will never even think of forcing from his kinsman's servant one word regarding his due and honorable service. You have heard what this good man has said, that I am faithful to those I serve. Were I your servant, I would sacrifice my life sooner than reveal to any other your secrets committed to my charge; and though, in truth, my business now is very simple, yet, as I have no permission to reveal it, I will reveal it to no one; nor do I believe you will ask me. Such, I know, would be the conduct of the Duke of Orleans toward you; such, I am sure, will be your conduct toward him."

"Fool! You are no judge of the conduct of princes," replied the duke; and then, for a moment or two, he remained silent, gnawing his lip, with his brow knit, and his eyes cast down.

A low, sweet voice, close by Jean Charost, whispered timidly, "Do not enrage him. When too much crossed, he is furious."

"Well," said the duke, at length, "I will not force you, young man. Doubtless you are making a mystery where there is none; and by refusing to answer a very simple question, which any prince might ask of another's messenger--especially," he added, with a grim smile, "where there is such love as between my cousin of Orleans and myself--you have almost caused me to believe that there is some secret machination against me. Go your ways, however; and thank your good stars that sent you to help me out of the quagmire, or your ears might have been somewhat shorter before you left this room."

The young man's cheek glowed warmly, and his lips quivered; but the same sweet voice whispered, "Answer not. But leave not the town to-night. Conceal yourself somewhere till daylight. You will be followed if you go."

Jean Charost took no apparent notice; but bowing low to the Duke of Burgundy, who turned away his eyes with haughty coldness, and inclining his head to Madame De Giac, who looked full at him with her sweet, serpent smile, he quitted the room with a calm, firm step, and the attendant closed the door behind him.

As soon as he was gone, the duke exclaimed, with a low, bitter laugh, "On my life! he lords it as if he were of the blood royal."

"Honesty is better than royal blood," said the astrologer.

"How now, charlatan!" cried the duke, turning fiercely upon him; but then, his thoughts flowing suddenly in a different direction, he gazed upon the young lady from beneath his bent brows, saying, "What was it you whispered to him, fair maid?"

"Simply to be cautious, and not to enrage your highness needlessly," replied Agnes, with the color slightly mounting in her cheek.

"By my faith, he needed such a caution," rejoined the prince; and then, turning to the astrologer, he asked, "What was it you said about his being present at my death?"

"I said, sir, that in years to come," the astrologer replied--"long years, I trust--that youth would be present at your death, and try to avert it."

Burgundy mused for a moment, and then muttered, with a low laugh, "Well, it may be so. But tell us, good man, what foundation have we for faith in your predictions? Are you a man of note among your tribe?"

"Of no great note, sir," answered the astrologer; "yet not altogether unknown, either. I was once astrologer to the city of Tours; but they offended me there, and I left them. I am, however,

one of the astrologers of the court of France--have my appointment in due form, and have my salary of a hundred and twenty livres. This shows that I am no tyro in my art. But we trust not to any fame gained at the present. Our predictions extend over long years, and our renown is the sport of a thousand accidents. Men forget them ere they are verified, or connect not the accomplishment with the announcement. Often, very often too, we are passed from the earth, and our names hardly remembered, when the events we have prognosticated are fulfilled. I have told you the truth, however, and you will find it so. When you do, remember me."

"Well, well," said the duke, in his abrupt, impatient manner; and then turning to the attendant, he said, "Take him away. Bid Monsieur De Villon give him four crowns of gold. Tell Peter, and Godet, and Jaillou to get their horses ready. I have business for them. Then return to me. I shall rest early to-night, and would have the house kept quiet."

While the attendant conducted the astrologer from the room, the duke spoke, for a moment or two, in a low and familiar tone with Madame De Giac, and then, resuming his stateliness, bowed courteously to her, but somewhat coldly to her young companion, and, opening the door for them with his own hands, suffered them to pass out.

CHAPTER XVII.

Human weaknesses and human follies, human vices and human crimes, are undoubtedly very excellent and beneficial things. It may seem paradoxical to say that the fact of one man cutting another man's throat, or of another ruining a friend's peace, robbing him of his fortune, or depriving him of his honor, can have any beneficial result whatsoever; or that the cunning, the selfishness, the credulity, the ignorance, the fanaticism, the prejudice, the vanity, the absurdity or the passion of the many millions who at various times have exhibited themselves with such appendages about them, should have conferred boons upon the whole or any part of society. And yet, dearly beloved reader, I am not at all sure that--considering man's nature as man's nature is and looking at society as I see it constituted around me--I am not at all sure, I say, that the very greatest crimes that ever were committed have not produced a greater sum of enjoyment and of what people vulgarly term happiness, than they have inflicted pain or discomfort--that is to say, as far as this world is concerned: I don't deal with another.

Not very fond am I of painting disagreeable pictures of human nature; but yet one can not shut one's eyes; and if it has been our misfortune to be in any spot or neighborhood where something very wicked has been perpetrated, the sums of pleasure and of pain produced are forced into the two scales, where we may weigh them both together, if we choose but to raise the balance. Take the worst case that ever was known: a murder which has deprived a happy family--four young children and an amiable wife--of a father and a husband--poor things, they must have suffered sadly, and the father not a little, while his brains were being knocked out. 'Tis a great amount of evil, doubtless. But now let us look at the other side of the account. While they are weeping, one near neighbor is telling the whole to another near neighbor, and both are in that high state of ecstasy which is called a terrible excitement. They are horrified, very true; but, say what they will, they are enjoying it exceedingly. It has stirred up for them the dull pond of life, and broken up the duckweed on the top. Nor is the enjoyment confined to them. Every man, woman, and child in the village has his share of it. Not only that, but wider and wider, through enlarging circles round, newspapers thrive on it, tea-tables delight in it, and multitudes rejoice in the "Barbarous Murder!" that has lately been committed. I say nothing of the lawyers, the constables, the magistrates, the coroner. I say nothing of the augmented gratuities to the one, or the increased importance of the other; of the thousands who grin and gape with delight at the execution; but I speak merely of the pleasure afforded to multitudes by the act itself, and the report thereof. Nor is this merely a circle spreading round on one plane, such as is produced by a stone dropped into the water, but it is an augmenting globe, the increment of which is infinite. The act of the criminal is chronicled for all time, affords enjoyment to remote posterity, and benefits a multitude of the unborn generation. The newspaper has it first; the romance writer takes it next; it is a subject for the poet--a field for the philosopher; and adds a leaf to the garland of the tragic dramatist.

What would the world have done if Macbeth had not murdered Duncan, or Œdipus had not done a great many things too disagreeable to mention?

This is a wicked world, undoubtedly; but, nevertheless, the most virtuous enjoy its wickedness very much, in some shape or another.

The above is my short excuse for deviating from my usual course, as I am about to do, and betraying, as I must, some of the little secret tricks of a science of great gravity practiced in

former days by bearded men, but now fallen into the hands of old women and Egyptians.

Jean Charost, in issuing forth from the Duke of Burgundy's presence, found Martin Grille in a deplorable state of anxiety concerning him, and, to say the truth, not without cause. It was in vain, however, that the poor man endeavored to draw his young master into some secret corner to confer with him apart. The whole house was occupied by the attendants of the Duke of Burgundy or of Madame De Giac; and, although the young secretary felt some need of thought and counsel, he soon saw that the only plan open to him was to mount his horse as speedily as possible and quit the inn. Armand Chauvin, the courier or *chevaucheur*; of the Duke of Orleans, was sitting in the wide hall of the inn, with a pot of wine before him, apparently taking note of nothing, but, in reality, listening to and remarking every thing that passed; and toward him Jean Charost advanced, after having spoken a single word to Martin Grille.

"The horses must be rested by this time, Armand," said the young gentleman, aloud. "You had better get them ready, and let us go on."

"Certainly, sir," replied the man, rising at once; and then, quickly passing by the young gentleman, he added, in a whisper, "They are saddled and bridled; follow quick. The horseboys are paid."

Jean Charost paused for a moment, spoke a word or two, in a quiet tone, to Martin Grille, with the eyes of a dozen men, in all sorts of dresses, upon them, and then sauntered out to the door of the inn. The stable was soon reached, the horses soon mounted, and, in less than five minutes after he had quitted the presence of the Duke of Burgundy, Jean Charost was once more upon the road to Blois.

Twice the young gentleman looked back up the street in the clear moonlight. Nobody was seen following; but he could hear some loud calls, as if from the stables of the inn, and turning to the courier, he said, "I fear our horses are not in fit case to ride a race to-night."

"I think not, sir," replied the man, briefly. "We had better get out of the town, and then turn into a wood."

"I know a better plan than that," replied Martin Grille. "Let us turn down here by the back of the town, and take refuge in the house of the astrologer. He will give us refuge for the night, and the duke departs by sunrise to-morrow."

"Do you know him?" demanded Jean Charost. "I thought you had never been in Pithiviers before."

"Nor have I," replied the man. "But I'll tell you all about it by-and-by. He will give us lodging, I will answer for it--hide us in his cabinet of the spheres, among his other curiosities, and those who seek will seek for us in vain. But there is no time to be lost. Mine is the best plan, depend upon it."

"Perhaps it is," replied Jean Charost, turning his horse's head. "We might be overtaken ere we could reach any other place of concealment. My horse moves as if his joints were frozen. Come on, Monsieur Chauvin. Do you know the house, Martin?"

"Well, sir--right well," replied the valet. "Hark! I hear horses stamping;" and riding on, down a side street, he turned back to the east, passing along between the old decayed wall and the houses of the suburb.

Little was said as they rode, for every ear was on the alert to catch any sounds from the main street, lest, mayhap, their course should be traced, and they should be followed.

It is hardly possible for any one in the present day--at least for any dweller in the more civilized parts of earth, where order is the rule and disorder the exception--to form any correct idea of those times in France, when order was the exception, and disorder the rule; when no man set out upon a journey without being prepared for attack and defense; when the streets of a great city were in themselves perilous places; when one's own house might, indeed, be a castle, but required to be as carefully watched and guarded as a fortress, and when the life of every day was full of open and apparent danger--when, in short, there was no such thing as peace on earth, or good-will among men. Yet it is wonderful how calmly people bore it, how much they looked upon it as a matter of course, how much less anxiety or annoyance it occasioned them. Just as an undertaker becomes familiar with images of death, and strangely intimate with the corpses which he lays out and buries, jokes with his assistant in the awful presence of the dead, and takes his pot of beer, or glass of spirits, seated on the coffin, with the link of association entirely cut by habit, and no reference of the mind between his fate and the fate of him whom he inters; so men, by the effect of custom, went through hourly peril in those times, saw every sort of misery, sorrow, and injustice inflicted on others, and very often endured them themselves, merely as a matter of course, a part of the business of the day.

I do not, and I will not pretend, therefore, that Jean Charost felt half the annoyance or apprehension that any one of modern days would experience, could he be carried back some four or five centuries; but he did feel considerable anxiety, not so much lest his own throat should be cut, though that was quite within the probabilities of the case, as lest he should be seized, and

the letters of the Duke of Orleans which he bore taken from him. That anxiety was considerably aggravated, as he rode along, by hearing a good deal of noise from the streets on the right, orders and directions delivered in loud tones, the jingle of arms, and the dull beat of horses' hoofs upon ground covered by hardened snow. For a moment or two it was doubtful whether the pursuers--if pursuers they were--would or would not discover that he had quitted the highway and follow on his track; but at length Armand Chauvin, who had hardly spoken a word, said, in a tone of some relief, "They have passed by the turning. They will have a long ride for their pains. Heaven bless them with a snow-shower, and freeze them to the saddle!"

"There's the house, sir," said Martin Grille, pointing to a building of considerable size, the back of which stood out toward the dilapidated wall somewhat beyond the rest, with a stone tower in the extreme rear, and a light burning in one of the windows.

"I should like to hear how you know, all about this place, Master Martin," replied his young master, "and whether you can assure me really a good reception."

"That I'll answer for--that I'll answer for," cried Martin Grille, gayly. "Oh, you men of battle and equitation can't do every thing. We people of peace and policy sometimes have our share in the affairs of life. This way, sir--this way. The back door into the court is the best. On my life! if I were to turn astrologer any where, it should be at Pithiviers. They nourish him gayly, don't they? Every man from sixty downward, and every woman from sixteen upward, must have their horoscope drawn three times a day, to keep our friend of the astrolabe in such style as this?"

As he spoke, he rode up to a pair of great wooden gates in the wall, and dismounting from his horse, pushed them open. Bending their heads a little, for the arch was not very high, Jean Charost and the *chevaucheur*; rode into a very handsome court-yard, surrounded on three sides by buildings, and having at one corner the tower which they had before observed. Martin Grille followed, carefully closed the gates, and fastened them with a wooden bar which lay near, to prevent any one obtaining as easy access as himself. Then advancing to a small back door, he knocked gently with his hand, and almost immediately a pretty servant girl appeared with a light.

"Ah, my pretty demoiselle! here I am again, and have brought this noble young gentleman to consult the learned doctor," said Martin Grille, as soon as he saw her. "Is he at home now?"

"No, kind sir," answered the girl, giving a coquettish glance at Jean Charost and his companion. "Two rude men came and dragged him away from his supper almost by force; but I dare say he will not be long gone."

"Then we will come in and wait," said Mar tin Grille. "Where can we put our horses this cold night?"

The girl seemed to hesitate, although her own words had certainly led the way to Martin's proposal. "I don't know where to put you or your horses either," she said, at length; "for there is a gentleman waiting, and it is not every one who comes to consult the doctor that wishes to be seen. Pedro the Moor, too, is out getting information about the town; so that I have no one to ask what to do."

"Well, we don't want to be seen either," replied Martin Grille; "so we will just put our horses under that shed, and go into the little room where the doctor casts his nativities."

"But he's in there--he's in there," said the girl; "the tall, meagre man with the wild look. I put him in there because there's nothing he could hurt. No, no; you fasten up your horses, and then come into the great hall. I think the man is as mad as a March hare. You can hear him quite plain in the hall; never still for a moment."

The girl's plan was, of course, followed; and, passing through a low and narrow door, arched with stone, according to the fashion of those days, Jean Charost and his two companions were ushered into a large room, from the end of which two other doors led to different parts of the building.

The maid left the lamp which she carried to give the strangers some light, but the greater part of the room remained in obscurity; nor, probably, would it have exhibited any thing very interesting to the eyes of Jean Charost; for all the walls seemed to be covered with illuminated pieces of vellum, each figuring the horoscope of some distinguished man long dead. Those of Charlemagne, Pope Benedict the Eighth, Julius Cæsar, Alexander the Great, Homer, and Duns Scotus, were all within the rays of the lamp, and the young secretary looked no further, but, turning to Martin Grille, asked once more, but in a low tone, how he happened to have made himself acquainted so thoroughly with the astrologer's house and habits.

"Why bless you, sir," replied the lackey, "when I saw you carried off by a man I knew nothing about, and found myself in an inn where not even the landlord would tell who his guests were, I got frightened, and as it is a part of my business to know every thing that may be of service to you, I bethought me how I might best get information. As every town in France has its astrologer, either official or accidental, I determined I would find him out, and I seduced one of the *marmitons*; to show me the way hither for a bribe of two sous. Very little had I in my pocket to consult an astrologer with; but we Parisians have a way of bartering one piece of news for another; and as information regarding every body and every thing is what an astrologer is always

in search of, I trucked the tidings of your arrival at the *auberge*; for the name of the great man whose servants had possession of the inn. That frightened me still more; but the learned doctor bought an account of all that had happened to us on the road with a leathern bottle of the finest wine that was ever squeezed out of the grape, and added over and above, that Madame de Giac, the duke's mistress, was expected at the inn, and had sent her husband away to Blois. That frightened me more than ever."

"Why so?" asked Jean Charost. "Why should you be frightened by any of these things you heard? Their highnesses of Burgundy and Orleans are now in perfect amity I understand, and Madame de Giac, when I saw her before, seemed any thing but ill disposed toward my royal master."

"Ah! sir," replied Martin Grille; "the amity of princes is a ticklish thing to trust to; and the friendship of a lady of many loves is somewhat like the affection of a spider. God send that the Duke of Burgundy be as well disposed to the royal duke as you think, and that Madame de Giac work no mischief between them; for the one, I think, is as sincere as the other, and I would not trust my little finger in the power of either, if it served their purpose to cut it off."

"Nay," answered Jean Charost; "I certainly do not now think that the Duke of Burgundy is well disposed to his highness of Orleans; for I have had good reason to believe the contrary."

"There is no one believes he is, but the duke himself," said Armand Chauvin. "His highness is too frank. He rides out in a furred gown to meet a man armed with all pieces. But hark! how that man is walking about! He must be troubled with some unquiet spirit."

All listened in silence for a moment or two, and a slow, heavy footfall was heard pacing backward and forward in the adjoining room, from which the hall was only separated by one of the doors that has been mentioned. Jean Charost thought that he heard a groan too, and there was something in the dull and solemn tread, unceasing and unvaried as it was, that had a gloomy and oppressive effect.

No one spoke for several minutes, and the time of the astrologer's return seemed long; but at length the steps in the adjoining room ceased, the door was thrown open, and a low, deep voice exclaimed, "If you have returned, why do you keep me waiting? Ha! strangers all!"

The speaker, who had taken one step into the room, was, as the maid had described him, a tall, thin, gaunt man, of the middle age, with a stern, wild, impetuous expression of countenance. His gray hair and his gray beard seemed not to have been trimmed for weeks, and his apparel, though costly, was negligently cast on. There was a wrinkle between his brows, so deep that one might have laid a finger in it, fixed and immovable, as if it had grown there for years, deepening with time. But the brow, with its heavy frown, seemed the only feature that remained at rest; for the eye flashed and wandered, the lip quivered, and the nostrils expanded, as if there were an infinite multitude of emotions passing ever through the heart, and writing their transient traces oil the countenance as they went.

He paused for a single moment, almost in the doorway, holding a lamp high in his hand, and glancing his eyes from the face of Martin Grille, who was next to him, to that of Armand Chauvin, and then to the countenance of Jean Charost. As he gazed at the latter, however, a look of doubt, and then of recognition, came upon his countenance, and taking another step forward, he exclaimed, "Ha! young man; is that you? Something strange links our destiny together. I came hither to inquire of Fate concerning you; and here you are, to meet me."

"I am glad to see you without your late companions, sir," replied Jean Charost. "I feared you might be in some peril."

"No danger--no danger," answered the other. "They were ruffians--but what am I? Not a man there but had fought under my pennon on fields of honorable warfare. Wrong, injustice, baseness, ingratitude, had made gallant soldiers low marauders--what has the same made me--a demon, with hell in my heart, with hell behind me, and hell before!"

He paused for an instant, and pressed his hand hard upon his brow; then raising his eyes again to the face of Jean Charost, he said, in a tone more calm, but stern and commanding, "Come with me, youth--I would speak with you alone;" and he returned to the other chamber.

"For the blessed Virgin's sake, don't go with him, sir," exclaimed Martin Grille.

"You had better not, Monsieur De Brecy," said Armand Chauvin. "The man seems mad."

"No fear, no fear," answered Jean Charost, walking toward the door.

"Well, give one halloo, and you shall have help," said Chauvin; and the young gentleman passed out and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Martin Grille looked at Armand Chauvin, and Armand Chauvin at Martin Grille, but neither spoke; for Armand was by nature somewhat taciturn, and the other, though he did not venture in the presence of the *chevaucheur*; to put his ear or his eye to the keyhole, remained listening as near the door as possible, with a good deal of apprehension it is true, but still more curiosity. The conversation, however, between Jean Charost and the stranger commenced in a low tone, and gave nothing to the hall but an indistinct murmur of voices. Very speedily, however, the tones began to be raised; Jean Charost himself spoke angrily; but another voice almost drowned his, pouring forth a torrent of invectives, not upon him, it would seem; for the only sentence completely heard showed that some other person was referred to. "There is every sort of villain in the world," cried the voice; "and he is a villain of the damnedest and the blackest dye. The cut-throat and the thief, the swindler, the traitor, are all scoundrels of their kind; but what is he who--"

The voice fell again; and Martin Grille, turning to his companion, grasped his arm, saying, "Go in--go in. He will do him some mischief, I am very much afraid."

"I am not so much accustomed to be afraid, either for myself or for other people," answered Chauvin. "The young gentleman will call out if he wants me."

Almost at the same moment, without the sound of any opening door from the street, the astrologer entered the room with a hurried step and somewhat disturbed look. "Ha! my friend," he said, as his eyes fell on Martin Grille. "Where is your young master?"

"Within there," replied Martin, "with that other devil of a man. Don't you hear how loud they are talking?"

Without reply or ceremony, the astrologer opened the door leading into the other room, entered and closed it again; but during the brief moment of his passing in both Martin and Chauvin caught a sight of the figures within. Jean Charost was standing with his arms crossed upon his chest, in an attitude of stern and manly dignity which neither of them had ever before seen him assume, while the stranger, as if exhausted by the burst of passion to which he had given way, was cast negligently on a seat, his arm resting on a table, and his head bowed down with the gray locks falling loose upon his forehead. Martin Grille felt sure he perceived large tear drops rolling over his cheeks; but the door was closed in an instant, and he saw no more.

From the moment of the astrologer's entrance the conversation was carried on in a low tone; but it lasted nearly three quarters of an hour, and at the end of that time the door again opened, and the three who were in the inner chamber came out into the hall.

"Now I am ready to go," said Jean Charost. "Unfasten the horses, Martin Grille."

"I thought we were to stay here all night, sir," replied Chauvin, "and I think, sir, you had better consider what you do. I may tell you now, what I did not mention before, that the bearing on my cap very soon betrayed that I belonged to the Duke of Orleans, and I heard bets made among the Burgundy people that we should not go five miles before we were brought back. There was a great deal of talk about it that I don't remember, as to whether his highness would keep you or let you go at all; but all agreed that if he did let you go, you would not go far without being stopped and searched. I took no notice, and pretended not to hear; but I slipped out quietly and saddled the horses."

"You did well, Chauvin," replied the young secretary. "But I must not delay when there is a possibility of going forward. This gentleman agrees to show us a less dangerous way than the high-road, and I am determined to put myself under his guidance. The responsibility be upon my head."

"Well, sir, I have nothing to do but obey," replied the *chevaucheur*, and took a step toward the door.

"Stay a moment," said the astrologer. "I have ordered you some refreshment, and I have two words to write to the noble duke, Monsieur De Brecy. Tell him I am his faithful servant ever, and that I greatly regret to have to warn him of such impending danger."

"I beseech you, my good friend," replied Jean Charost, "send your warning by some other messenger; first, because I may be long upon the way, and tidings of such importance should reach his highness soon; secondly, because I would fain not be a bird of evil omen. Great men love not those who bring them bad tidings. But the first reason is the best. I will take your letter, however unwillingly, but eight-and-forty hours must elapse ere I can reach Blois. I shall then have to wait the pleasure of the duchess, and then return, probably, by slow journeys; valuable

time will be lost, and your intelligence may come too late."

"So be it," said the astrologer; "although--"

But before he could finish the sentence, a tawny colored man, dressed somewhat fantastically, in a white tunic and large turban, entered the room bearing in bottles and silver cups. "You have seldom tasted such wine as this," said the astrologer, offering the first cup he poured out to the tall gaunt stranger. "Take it, my lord. You are my early friend and patron; and you must not depart without drinking wine in my house. It will do you good, and raise your spirits."

"I would not have them raised," replied the stranger, putting aside the cup. "False happiness is not what I desire. I have had too much of that already. My misery is pure, if it be bitter. I would not mingle it with a fouler thing."

Those were the only words he spoke from that moment till the whole party reached the neighborhood of Chilleurs aux Rois.

Martin Grille drank his cup of wine, and hastened to bring out the horses. Armand Chauvin drank likewise, and followed him in silence, and when the astrologer accompanied his two noble guests to the court-yard, they found a tall, powerful gray horse held ready by the Moor. Jean Charost took leave of his host with a few courteous words; but the stranger mounted in silence, rode out as soon as the gates were open, and turning at once to the right, led the way quite round the town, crossed a small stream, and then, by paths with which he seemed perfectly well acquainted, dashed on at a quick pace to the westward, leaving the others to come after as best they could, much to the inconvenience, be it said, of poor Martin Grille, whose horse stumbled continually, as horses will do with bad riders.

Jean Charost kept generally by the stranger's side, and once or twice spoke a few words to him; but he received no answer, and through the long night they rode on, even after the moon had gone down, without drawing a rein till, just at the gray of the morning, they distinguished a church steeple, at the distance of about half a mile on the right. There the stranger pulled up his horse suddenly, and said, "Chilleurs aux Rois."

"Here, I suppose, we are safe," said Jean Charost.

"Quite safe," was the brief reply. "Fare you well--remember!"

"I always remember my given word," replied Jean Charost; "where can I see or hear from you in case of need?"

The stranger gazed at him with a grim dark smile; turned his horse's head and galloped away.

CHAPTER XIX.

The curiosity of Martin Grille was greatly excited. The curiosity of Martin Grille could not rest. He had no idea of a master having a secret from a valet. What were valets made for? he asked himself. What could they do in the world if there was any such thing as a secret from them? He determined he would find out that of his master, and he used every effort, trusting to Jean Charost's inexperience to lead him into any admission--into any slip of the tongue--which would give one simple fact regarding the stranger whom they had met at Pithiviers, relying on his own ingenuity to combine it with what he had already observed, so as to make some progress on the way to knowledge. But Jean Charost foiled all his efforts, and afforded him not the slightest hint of any kind, greatly raising his intellect in the opinion of his worthy valet, but irritating Martin's curiosity still further.

"If there be not some important secret," thought the man, "why should he be so anxious to conceal it?" and he set to work to bring Armand Chauvin into a league and confederacy for the purpose of discovering the hidden treasure.

Armand, however, not only rejected all his overtures, but reproved him for his curiosity. "I know not what is the business of valets, Master Martin," he said; "but I know my own business. The *chevaucheur* should be himself as secret as the grave. Should know nothing, see nothing, hear nothing, except what he is told in the way of his business. If a secret message is given him to convey, he should forget it altogether till he sees the person to whom it is to be delivered, and then forget it again as soon as it is given. Take my advice, Master Martin, and do not meddle with your master's secrets. Many a man finds his own too heavy to bear, and many a man has been hanged for having those of other people."

Martin Grille did not at all like the idea of being hanged, and the warning quieted him from Orleans, where it was given, to the good town, of Blois; but still he resolved to watch narrowly in after days, and to see whether, by putting piece and piece together, he could not pluck out the heart of Jean Charost's mystery.

The three horsemen rode into the town of Blois at eventide, just as the sun was setting; and, according to the directions he had received, Jean Charost proceeded straight to the ancient château, which, when somewhat altered from its then existing form, was destined to be the scene of many tragic events in French history.

Though the face of the world has remained the same, though mountain and valley stand where valley and mountain stood, though towns and fortresses are still to be found where towns and fortresses then existed, the changes of society have been so great, the relations between man and man, and between man and all external things, have been so much altered, that it is with difficulty we bring our mind to comprehend how certain things, all positive facts, existed in other days, and to perceive the various relations--to us all strange and anomalous--which thus arose. It is probable that the Duke of Orleans did not possess a foot of land in the town of Blois besides the old château, and that he did not hold that in pure possession. But, either as appanage or fief, he held great territories in the central and southwestern parts of France, which yielded him considerable revenue in the shape of dues, tolls, and taxes, gave him the command of many important towns, and placed in his hands, during life, a number of magnificent residences, kept up almost entirely by services of vassals or other feudal inferiors. Shortly before this time, the Duchy of Aquitaine had been thus conceded to him, and Orleans, Blois, and a number of small cities had been long in his possession. Thus the château of Blois was at this time held by him, if not in pure property, yet in full possession, and afforded a quiet retreat, if not exactly a happy residence, to a wife whom he sincerely loved, without passion, and esteemed, even while he neglected.

Removed from the scenes of contention which were daily taking place near the capital--contention often dignified by the name of war, but more deserving that of anarchy--the town of Blois had enjoyed for many years a peaceful and even sluggish calm, for the disorders of many other parts of France, of course, put a stop to peaceful enterprise in any direction, either mental or physical. There seemed no energy in the place; and the little court there held by the Duchess of Orleans, as well as the number of persons who usually resided in the town as a place of security, afforded the only inducements to active industry.

As Jean Charost rode along through the streets, there were shops which might be considered gay, as the world then went; there were persons of good means and bright clothing, and a number of the inferior class taking an hour's exercise before the close of day. But there was none of the eager bustle of a busy, thrifty city, and the amusement-loving people of France seemed solely occupied with amusement in the town of Blois.

At the gates of the old castle, the draw-bridge was found down, the portcullis raised, two lazy guards were pitching pieces of stone into a hole dug in the middle of the way, and wrangling with each other about their game. Both started up, however, as the three horsemen came slowly over the bridge, and one thrust himself in the way with an air of military fierceness as he saw the face of a stranger in the leader of the party. The next moment, however, he exclaimed, "Ah! pardie: Chauvin is that you? Who is this young gentleman?"

"I am secretary to his highness the Duke of Orleans," replied Jean Charost; "and I bear a letter to the duchess to deliver into her own hands."

Admission was not difficult to obtain; and Jean Charost was passed from hand to hand till he found himself in the interior of that gloomy building, which always seems to the visitor of modern times redolent of bloody and mysterious deeds.

A grave and respectable-looking man at length showed Jean Charost into a handsomely-furnished room in one of the towers which looked out in the direction of Tours; and, seating himself upon a large window-seat, forming a coffer for firewood, he gazed out upon the scene below and saw the sun set over the world of trees beneath him. Darkness came on rapidly, but still he was suffered to remain alone, and silence brooded over the whole place, unbroken even by a passing footfall. All was so still that he could have fancied that some one was dead in the place, and the rest were silent mourners.

At length a slow, quiet footfall in the distance met his ear, coming along with easy, almost drowsy pace, till the same old man appeared, and conducted him through a length of passages and vacant rooms to the presence of the Duchess of Orleans.

She was seated in a large arm-chair, with a table by her side, and was dressed almost altogether in black; but to the eyes of Jean Charost she seemed exceedingly beautiful, with finely-shaped features, bright eyes, and an expression of melancholy which suited well the peculiar cast of her countenance. She gazed earnestly at Jean Charost as he advanced toward her, and said, as soon as she thought him near enough, "You come from his highness, I am told. How is my dear husband?"

"Not so well as I could wish, madam," replied Jean Charost; "but this letter which I have the

honor to present will tell you more."

The duchess held out her fair hand for the epistle, but it trembled greatly as she took it; and the young secretary would not venture to look in her face as she was reading, for he knew that she would be greatly agitated. She was so, indeed; but she recovered herself speedily, and, speaking still with a slight foreign accent, demanded further details.

"He says only that he is ill," she exclaimed. "Tell me, sir--tell me how he really is. Did you see him? Yes, you must have seen him, for he says you are his secretary. Has he concealed any thing in this letter? Is it necessary that I should set out this night? I am quite ready. He must be very ill," she added, in a low and melancholy tone, "or he would not have sent for me."

"His highness is ill, madam," replied Jean Charost, "seriously ill, I fear; but I trust not dangerously so. The contentions in which he has lately been engaged with the Duke of Burgundy, but which are now happily over--"

"Oh, that house of Burgundy! that house of Burgundy!" said the duchess, in a low, sad tone.

"These, and many other anxieties," continued Jean Charost, "together with much fatigue, have produced, what I should suppose, some sort of fever, and a great depression of mind--a melancholy--which probably makes his highness imagine his illness even greater than it is. I should think, however, madam, that by setting out this night you would not greatly accelerate your journey. The roads are difficult and somewhat dangerous--"

"Nevertheless, I will go," replied the duchess; and putting her hand before her eyes, she seemed to fall into thought for a few moments. Jean Charost saw some tear-drops trickle through her fingers, and the young man, inexperienced as he was, felt how many emotions might mingle with those tears. He withdrew his eyes, and fixed them on the ground, and at length the duchess said, "Will you call my attendants, sir, from the ante-room? I must make preparation."

She pointed, as she spoke, to a different door to that by which the young gentleman had been introduced, and Jean Charost walked toward it, bowing to the princess, as if taking leave. She stopped him, however, to bid him return in a few minutes, saying, with a sad smile, "My thoughts are too busy, Monsieur De Brecy, to attend to courtesy; but I beseech you, take care of yourself as if you were an inmate of the house. My husband seems to have much confidence in you, and desires that you should accompany me. If you are too much fatigued to do so to-night, you can follow me to-morrow, and will doubtless overtake me in time."

"Not too much fatigued myself, madam," replied Jean Charost; "but I fear my horses could not go far. If there be time, I will provide others."

"Oh, that will be easily managed," she answered. "There are always horses enough here. I will see that you are mounted."

The young gentleman then proceeded to the ante-room, where he found a bevy of young girls, each seated demurely at her embroidery frame, under the eye of an elder lady. Gay glances were shot at him from every side, but he contented himself with simply announcing the duchess's commands, and then proceeded in search of his companions of the road. He found that Armand Chauvin was completely at home in the château of Blois, and had made Martin Grille quite familiar with the place already; nor did the young gentleman himself feel any of that shy timidity which he had experienced when, as a stranger, unknown to all around him, he had first taken up his abode in the Hôtel d'Orleans. There was a subdued and quiet tone, too, about the court of the duchess, very different from the gay and somewhat insolent demeanor of her husband's younger attendants; and the young secretary, now known as such, was treated with all courtesy, and obtained every thing he could desire for the refreshment of himself and his horses. Gradually, however, the bustle of preparation spread from the apartments of the duchess through the rest of the house, accompanied by the report of her being about to set out that very night to join her husband at Beauté. All were eager to know the cause and the particulars, and an old major-domo ventured to come into the hall where Jean Charost was seated with some wine and meat before him, to extract every information that he could upon the subject. He received very cautious answers, however, and ere he had carried his questions far, he was interrupted by the entrance of the *chevaucheur*, in some haste and apparent alarm.

"They tell me, Monsieur De Brecy," he said in his abrupt manner, "that the duchess sets forth to-night."

Jean Charost nodded his head.

"Have you told her," asked Chauvin, "that the Duke of Burgundy is on the road between this and the Seine?"

"No," answered Jean Charost, starting up, his mind seizing at once the vague idea of danger. "Surely he would not--"

"Humph!" said Armand Chauvin. "There is no knowing what he would not."

"Indeed, there is not," said the old major-domo; "and methinks the duchess should send out a

party of *piqueurs*; to bring him in, or clear the way of him."

"I had better tell her," said Jean Charost thoughtfully. "If there be danger, she will judge of it better than I can."

"I will show you the way, sir--I will show you the way," said the old major-domo, with officious civility. "This way, if you please--this way."

When again admitted to the presence of the duchess, the young secretary informed her that he had met with the Duke of Burgundy at Pithiviers, but excused his not having mentioned the fact before on the ground of not apprehending any danger in consequence of the recent reconciliation of the houses of Burgundy and Orleans. It soon became evident to him, however, that all the friends and attendants of the Duke of Orleans, although he himself had seemed perfectly confident of his cousin's good faith, looked upon the late reconciliation as but a hollow deceit, which would be set at naught by the Duke of Burgundy as soon as it suited his convenience. The duchess evidently shared in this general feeling; but still she determined to pursue her first intention, and merely took the precaution of ordering her escort to be doubled.

"I believe," she said, "that there is not a man goes with me who will not shed the last drop of his blood in my defense and you, too, Monsieur De Brecy, will do the same out of love for my dear husband."

"Right willingly, madam," replied Jean Charost: "but I trust you may escape all peril."

The duchess soon dismissed him again, telling him that there would be ample time for him to take some repose; that their preparations would not be complete till nearly midnight; but Jean Charost contented himself with a short sleep in a large arm-chair in the hall, and then started up from the blessed, dreamless slumber of youth, refreshed and ready for new exertion. About an hour after, the midnight march began. The litter of the princess, containing herself and her youngest son, was drawn by four white mules; but in advance were eight or ten men-at-arms, cased in plate armor, and lance in hand. A large body followed the litter; and on either side of it rode several of the noble retainers of the house of Orleans more lightly armed, among whom was Jean Charost. The moon shone out brightly; and as her pale rays fell upon the duchess's litter with its white curtains, and upon another, containing some of her female attendants, which followed, and glistened upon the steel casques and corselets of the men-at-arms as they wound in and out along the banks of the river, the whole formed a scene strangely exciting to the imagination of Jean Charost, who had seen little, for many years, of any thing like military display. The march passed quietly enough, and for the first three or four days no incident of any kind occurred which is worthy of detail. On many occasions the young secretary had the opportunity of conversing with the duchess; and her quiet gentleness, the strong, unshaken, uncomplaining affection which she showed toward her husband with all his faults, together with native graces unhardened, and personal beauty hardly touched by time, made Jean Charost marvel greatly at the wayward heart of man, and ask himself, with doubt and almost fear, if ever he himself could be brought to sport with or neglect the affections of a being such as that.

In the neighborhood of Pithiviers, it was ascertained that the Duke of Burgundy had retired from that part of the country two days before, turning his steps toward Paris; and the Duchess of Orleans, freed from all apprehensions, sent back the military part of her escort to Blois, remarking, with a smile, to Jean Charost, "I must not, except in case of need, go to my husband with such a body of armed men, as if I came to take his castle by storm."

"I can assure you, madam," replied the young secretary, laying some emphasis on the words, "you will find that it is surrendered to you at discretion."

At the next halting-place the litter stopped, about an hour before sunset. There were few attendants around; the old major domo was somewhat slow in dismounting, and Jean Charost, who was sooner on foot, drew back the curtains to permit the duchess to alight. She had hardly set her foot to the ground, however, when a hard, powerful hand was laid upon the young secretary's shoulder, and a hollow voice said, aloud, "Young man, God will bless you. I find you are faithful and true amid the false and the deceitful."

Both the duchess and Jean Charost turned suddenly to look at the speaker. The latter recognized him at once as the stranger whom he had seen at Pithiviers, and on one occasion before; but the duchess drew a little back, murmuring, with a look of alarm, "Who is that person?"

"Strange to say, madam," replied the young secretary, "I can not tell your highness. I have seen him once or twice in somewhat singular circumstances; but his name I do not know."

As soon as the stranger had uttered the words above mentioned, he had crossed his arms upon his breast and moved away, hardly noticed by the attendants in the bustle of arrival; but the duchess followed him still with her eyes; and then, as she walked on, she repeated twice the stranger's words, "You are faithful and true amid the false and the deceitful;" and then, looking earnestly in Jean Charost's face, she added, "Will you be faithful and true to me also, young gentleman?"

"I am sure he will, mother," said her young son, who was holding her hand; and Jean Charost

replied, "To all who trust me, I will be so, madam. When I am not, I pray God that I may die."

CHAPTER XX.

When within a few miles of the château of Beauté, Armand Chauvin was sent forward to announce the near approach of the duchess; and she herself, though the weather was still intensely cold, notwithstanding the brightness of the sunshine, ordered the curtains of the litter to be looped up, in order that she might see the castle before she actually reached it. Her anxiety evidently increased as they came nearer and nearer the dwelling of her husband. And who is there, after being long absent from those they love, who does not, on approaching the place of their abode, feel a strange, thrilling anxiety in regard to all that time may have done? It is at that moment that the uncertainty of human fate, the hourly peril of every happiness, the dark possibilities of every moment of existence seem to rush upon the mind at once. I have often thought that, if man could but know the giddy pinnacle upon which his fortunes ever stand, the precipices that surround him on every side; the perils above, below, around, life would be intolerable. But he is placed in the midst of friendly mists, that conceal the abysses from his eye, and is led on by a hand--in those mists equally unseen--which guides his steps aright, and brings him home at length. It is only the intense anxiety of affection for those we love that ever wafts the vapors away, even for a moment, and gives us a brief sight of the dangers that surround our mortal being, while the hand of the Almighty Guide remains concealed, and but too often untrusted.

While still at some miles' distance from the castle, the towers and pinnacles were seen peeping over the shoulder of a wooded hill, and then they were lost again, and seen, and lost once more. The duchess then beckoned up Jean Charost to the side of her litter, conversed with him some time, and asked him many questions: how long he had been with the duke, who commended him to her husband's service, what was his family and his native place. She asked, too, more particularly regarding her husband's health, whether his illness had been sudden, or announced by any previous symptoms of declining health; but she asked not one question regarding his conduct, his habits, or any of his acts. She did not need to ask, indeed; but, even if she had not known too well, still she would have abstained.

At length the hill was climbed, the wood was passed, the gate of the château of Beauté was in view, with attendants already marshaled on each side of the draw-bridge, to honor the duchess's reception. As soon as the head of her little escort appeared upon the road, a page ran into the ward-room of the great tower, and the next instant another figure came forth with that of the boy, and advanced along the bridge. Greatly to Jean Charost's joy and satisfaction, he recognized the figure of the duke, and when he looked toward the duchess, he saw a bright and grateful drop sparkling in her eyes, which, in spite of a struggle to repress it, rolled over and moistened her cheek. Another moment, and the duke stood beside the litter; the mules stopped, and, bending forward, he cast his arms around his wife. She leaned her head upon his shoulder, and there must have shed tears; but they were soon banished, and all parties bore a look of joy. Jean Charost could not help remarking, however, that the duke was very pale, and looked older by some years than when he had last seen him. But still, there was one thing very satisfactory in his aspect to the eyes of the young man. There was a gladness, a lightness of expression, an affectionate earnestness in his greeting of the duchess which, from all he had heard and knew, he had not expected. There was great satisfaction, too, on the faces of all the elder attendants. Lomelini looked quite radiant, and even Monsieur Blaize forgot his ancient formality, and suffered his face to overrun with well-pleased smiles. He laid a friendly grasp, too, upon Jean Charost's arm, as the duke and duchess passed into the château, and walked on with him across the court, saying, in a low voice, "You have done a good service, my young friend, in bringing that lady back to this house, which might well atone for a great number of faults. She has not been here for four years."

"I hope I have not accumulated many faults to atone for, good sir," answered Jean Charost, smiling. "If I have, I am unconscious of them."

"Oh, of course, that is between you and your own conscience," answered Monsieur Blaize, in an off-hand kind of way. "It is no business of mine."

"I am glad to hear, at least, that it is not you I have offended," answered Jean Charost. "You were my first friend in the household, Monsieur Blaize, and I should be very sorry to give you any cause for reproach."

"Oh, no--no!" answered the old *écuyer*. "You have done nothing against me at all. But as to the duchess--how has she passed the journey? Did she meet with any difficulty or misadventure by

the way?"

"None whatever," answered the young secretary. "None were apprehended, I presume." And then, judging Monsieur Blaize more clear-sightedly than might have been expected in so young a man, he added, "Had there been any danger, of course the duke would have sent yourself or some gentleman of military experience."

Monsieur Blaize was evidently well satisfied with the reply; but still he rejoined, "Perhaps I could not well be spared from this place during his highness's illness. We were in great consternation here, I can tell you, my young friend."

"Has he been very ill, then?" asked the secretary.

"For two days after you were gone," replied Monsieur Blaize, "no one thought to see him rise from his bed again; and he himself evidently thought his last hours were coming. He sent for notaries, made his will, and was driven at length to get a leech from Paris--a very skillful man indeed. He consulted the moon, and the aspect of the stars; chose the auspicious moment, gave him benzoin and honey, besides a fever drink, and some drops, of which he would not tell the secret, but which we all believed to be potable gold. It is wonderful, the effect they had. He announced boldly that, at the change of the moon, on the third day, the duke would be better; and so it proved. His highness watched anxiously for the minute, and immediately the clock struck he declared that he felt relieved, to our very great joy. Since that time, he has continued to improve: but he can not be called well yet. And now, if you will take my advice, you will go and order yourself something to eat at the buttery, and then lie down and rest; for you look as haggard and worn as an old courtier. It was too heavy a task to put upon a boy like you."

Jean Charost, during the whole of this conversation, had been carrying on in his own mind, as we so continually do, a separate train or undercurrent of thought, as to what could be the faults which good Monsieur Blaize seemed to impute to him; and he came to conclusions very naturally which proved not far from the truth. There was but one point in his whole history in regard to which there was any thing like mystery, and he judged rightly that, if men were inclined to attribute to him any evil act, they must fix upon that point as a basis. He was determined to learn more, if possible, however; and, in reply to Monsieur Blaize's advice to get food and rest, he said, laughingly, "Oh no, Monsieur Blaize, before I either eat or sleep, I must go down to the hamlet, to see my baby."

"Well, you speak of it coolly enough," replied Monsieur Blaize.

"Why should I not?" answered Jean Charost, quickly. But the old gentleman suddenly turned away and left him; and Jean Charost was at once convinced that some calumny had been circulated among the household in regard to the child which had been so strangely thrown upon his hands. By early misfortunes and difficulties he had been taught to decide rapidly and energetically, and his mind was soon made up on the present occasion, to seek the first opportunity of telling his own story to the Duke of Orleans, and explaining every thing, as far as it was in his power to explain. In the mean while, however, as soon as he had given some directions to Martin Grille, he strolled down to the hamlet and sought out the house of Madame Moulinet. He knocked first with his hand, and there being no answer, though he thought he heard the voices of persons within, he opened the door and entered at once into the kitchen. Madame Moulinet was seated there, with the child upon her knee; but the door on the opposite side of the room was closing just as Jean Charost went in, and he caught a glance of a black velvet mantle, before it was actually shut.

"How thrives the child, Madame Moulinet?" asked Jean Charost, looking down upon the infant with a glance of interest, but with none of that peculiar admiration which grown women feel and grown men often affect for a very young baby.

The good woman assured him that the child was doing marvelously, and Jean Charost then proceeded to inquire whether any one, during his absence, had been to visit or inquire after it.

"Oh, a quantity of people from the castle, sir," answered the good dame; "that saucy young fellow De Royans among the rest, and old Monsieur Blaize, and the chaplain, and the fool, God wot! But beside that--" and she dropped her voice to a lower tone--"one evening, just as we were going to bed, there came a strange, wild-looking gentleman, with long gray hair, who seemed so mad he frightened both me and my husband. He asked a number of questions. Then he stared at the child for full five minutes, and cried out at length, 'Ah! she doubtless looked once like that,' and then he threw down a purse upon the table with fifty gold crowns in it. So the little maid has got her little fortune already."

"Did you not know him?" asked Jean Charost.

"I never saw him in my life before," replied the woman; "and, in truth, I did not know how to answer any one when they asked me about the child, as you were gone, and had not told me what to say; so all I could tell them was that you had brought her here, had paid well for nursing her, and had commanded me to take good care of her in the name of my good father's old lord."

"And was that wild-looking man not your father's old lord?" asked Jean Charost, in a tone of much surprise.

"Lord bless your heart, no sir," replied Madame Moulinet. "A hand's breadth taller, and not half so stout--quite a different sort of man altogether."

Jean Charost mused in silence; but he asked no further questions, and shortly after returned to the château.

In passing through the court-yard, the first person the young gentleman encountered was Seigneur André the fool, who at once began upon the subject of the child with a good deal of malevolence. "Ah, ha! Mr. Secretary," he said, "I want to roam the forests with you, and find out the baby-tree that bears living acorns. On my faith, the duke ought to knight you with his own hand, being the guide of ladies, and the protector of orphans, the defender of women and children."

"My good friend," replied Jean Charost, "I think he ought to promote you also. I have heard of a good many gentlemen of your profession; but all the rest are mere pretenders to you. The others only call themselves fools; you are one in reality;" and with these tart words, excited as much, perhaps, by some new feeling of doubt and perplexity in his own mind, as by the jester's evident ill will toward him, he walked on and sought his own chamber.

The rest of the day passed without any incident worthy of notice, except some little annoyance which the young secretary had to endure from a very general feeling of ill will toward him among those who had been longer in the service of the Duke of Orleans than himself. He was unconscious, indeed, of deserving it, but one of the sad lessons of the world was being learned: that success and favor create bitter enemies; and he had already made some progress in the study. He took no notice, therefore, of hints, jests, and insinuations, but sought his own room as soon as supper was over, and remained reading for nearly an hour. At the end of that time, one of the duke's menial attendants entered, saying briefly, "Monsieur De Brecy, his highness has asked to see you in his toilet chamber."

Jean Charost followed immediately, and found the duke seated in his furred dressing-gown, as if prepared to retire to rest. His face was grave, and there was a certain degree of sternness about it which Jean Charost had never remarked there before. He spoke kindly, however, and bade the young gentleman be seated.

"I hear from the duchess, my friend," he said, "that you have well and earnestly executed the task I gave you to perform, and I thank you. I wish, however, to hear some more particular account of your journey from your own lips. You arrived, it seems, at Blois sooner than I imagined you could have accomplished the journey. You must have ridden hard."

"I lost no time, your highness," answered Jean Charost; "but an event happened on the road which made me ride one whole night without stopping, although the horses were very tired. It is absolutely necessary, when you have leisure, that I should relate to your highness all the particulars of that night's adventure, as they may be of importance, the extent of which I can not judge."

The duke smiled with a well-pleased look. "Tell me all about it now," he said. "I shall not go to bed for an hour; so we shall have time enough."

Succinctly, but as clearly and minutely as possible, Jean Charost then related to the prince all that had occurred between himself and the Duke of Burgundy, and took especial care to mention his visit to the house of the astrologer, and his having been guided by a stranger on the way to Blois. The duke listened with a countenance varying a good deal, sometimes assuming an expression of deep grave thought, and at others of gay, almost sarcastic merriment. At length he laughed outright.

"See what handles," he said, "men will make of very little things! But truth and honesty will put down all. I am glad you have frankly told me all this, De Brecy."

Then he paused again for a moment or two, and added, abruptly, "My good cousin of Burgundy--he was always the most curious and inquisitive of men. I do believe this was all curiosity, my friend. I do not think he meant you any evil, or me either. He wanted to know all; for he is a very suspicious man."

"I think, sir, he is one of the most disagreeable men I ever saw," replied Jean Charost. "Even his condescension has something scornful in it."

"And yet, De Brecy," replied the duke, "out of this very simple affair of your meeting with John of Burgundy, there be people who would have fain manufactured a charge against you."

Jean Charost gazed in the duke's race with some surprise, never having dreamed that the intelligence of what had occurred on the road could have reached him so soon. "I am surprised that Armand should attribute any evil to me, sir," he said; "for he must have seen how eager I was to escape."

"Acquit poor Armand," said the duke. "He had naught to do with the affair; but you have enemies in this house, De Brecy, who will find that their master understands courts and courtiers, and will never shake my good opinion of you, so long as you are honest and frank with

me. They set on that malicious fool, André, to pick out some mischief from Armand Chauvin. He got him to relate all that had happened, and then, when I sent for the fool to divert me for half an hour, he told me, with his wise air, that you had had a secret interview with the Duke of Burgundy, which lasted several hours. It is strange how near half a truth sometimes comes to a whole lie! They have not been wanting in their friendship for you during your absence. Nevertheless, I doubt not you could explain all their tales as easily as you have done this--even if you have committed some slight indiscretion, I have no right to tax you. Well, well--good-night. Some day I will say something more, as your friend--as one who has more experience--as one who has suffered, if he has sinned."

"I thank your highness," replied Jean Charost, "and will not presume to intrude upon you further to-night; but there is one matter of much importance to myself--of none to your highness--which I would fain communicate to you for counsel and direction in my inexperience, when you can give me a few minutes' audience."

"Ha!" said the duke; but as he spoke the clock of the castle struck eleven, and saying, "To-morrow morning--to-morrow morning I will send for you," he suffered the young secretary to retire.

CHAPTER XXI.

In the court-yard of the château of Beauté--a long, but somewhat narrow parallelogram--were assembled most of the male members of the Duke of Orleans's household, two days after the return of Jean Charost from Blois. Some were on horseback, and some on foot; and nine or ten of the younger men were armed with a long ash staff, shaped somewhat like a lance, while the rest of the party were in their ordinary riding-dresses, with no arms but the customary sword and dagger. All these were gathered together at one end of the court, while a trumpeter, holding his trumpet with its bell-shaped mouth leaning on his hip, was placed a little in advance.

At the other end of the court stood a column of wood, perhaps six feet in height, surmounted by a grotesque-looking carved image, representing the upper part of a man, with both arms extended, and a long, heavy cudgel in each hand. After a moment's pause, and a consultation among the elder heads, one of the inferior servants was sent forward for purposes that will speedily be shown, to act as, what was called, master of the *Quintain*; but he took care to place himself beyond the sweep of the cudgel in the hand of the image so called.

The sport about to begin was of very ancient date, and had been generally superseded by somewhat more graceful exercises; but the Duke of Orleans was very fond of old customs, and had revived many chivalrous sports which had fallen out of use. At a signal from Monsieur Blaize, who was on foot, the trumpeter put his instrument of noise to his lips, and blew a blast which, well understood, ranged the young cavaliers instantly in line, and then, after a moment's pause, sounded a charge. One of the party instantly sprung forward, lance in rest, toward the Quintain, aiming directly at the centre of the head of the figure. He was quite a young lad, and his arm not very steady, so that he somewhat missed his mark, and struck the figure on the cheek. Moving on a pivot, the Quintain whirled round under the blow, with the arms still extended, and, as the horse carried the youth on, he must have received a tremendous stroke from the wooden cudgel on his back, had he not bent down to his horse's neck, so that the blow passed over him. Some laughed; but Juvenel de Royans, who was the next but one to follow, exclaimed aloud, "That's not fair."

"Quite fair, I think," replied Jean Charost, who was near.

"What do you know about it?" cried the other, impetuously. "Keep yourself to pens, and things you understand."

"I may, perhaps, understand it better than you, Monsieur De Royans," replied Jean Charost, quite calmly. "It is the favorite game at Bourges, and we consider that the next best point to hitting the Quintain straight, is to avoid the blow."

"That's the coward's point, I suppose," said Juvenel de Royans.

"Hush! hush!" cried Monsieur Blaize. "Silence, sir. Sound again, trumpet!"

Another ran his course, struck the Quintain better, but did not dismount it; and De Royans succeeded striking the figure right in the middle of the forehead, and shaking the whole post, but still leaving the wooden image standing.

The great feat of the game was, not only to aim the spear so fair as to avoid turning the figure in the least, but so low that the least raising of the point at the same time threw it backward from its pivot. But this was a somewhat dangerous manœuvre; for the chest of the image being quite flat, and unmarked by any central point, the least deviation to the right or left swung round one of the cudgels with tremendous force, and the young gentleman did not venture to attempt it.

Jean Charost, however, who, as a mere boy, had been trained to the exercise by his father, aimed right at the breast; but he paid for his temerity by a severe blow, which called forth a shout of laughter from De Royans and his companions. Others followed, who fared as badly, without daring as much.

Each time the Quintain was moved, the servant who had been sent forward readjusted it with the greatest care, and when each of the young men had run his course, the troop commenced again.

The rivalry between De Royans and De Brecy was by this time a well-understood thing in the château, and little heed was paid to the running of the rest till it came to the turn of the former. He then, with a sort of mock courtesy, besought Jean Charost to take his turn, saying, "You are the superior officer, sir, and, to say truth, I would fain learn that dexterous trick of yours, if you venture upon it again."

"I certainly shall," replied Jean Charost, "and I shall be happy to teach you that, or better things. I will run first. The Quintain is not straight," he continued, calling to the master of the Quintain. "Advance the right arm an inch."

There was some little dispute as to whether the Quintain was straight or not, but in the end the trumpet again sounded. Jean Charost, with a better aim, hit the figure in the middle of the chest, and raising his arm lightly at the same instant, threw it back upon the ground. Then wheeling his horse, while the servant replaced it, he returned to his post. But no one said "Well done," except old Monsieur Blaize; and Juvenel de Royans bit his lip, with a red spot on his cheek.

Rash, confident, and angry, he took no pains to see that the figure was exactly straight, but dashed forward when the trumpet sounded, resolved not to be outdone, aiming directly at the chest. Whether his horse swerved, or the figure was not well adjusted, I do not know; but he hit it considerably to the right of the centre, and, as he was carried forward, the merciless cudgel struck him a blow on the back of the neck which hurled him out of the saddle to the ground.

Jean Charost did not laugh; but he could not refrain from a smile, which caught De Royans's eyes as he led his horse back again. The latter was dizzy and confused, however, and for a moment, after he had given his horse to a servant, he stood gnawing his lip, without uttering a word to any one. At length, as the others were running their course, however, he walked up to the side of Jean Charost, who was now a little apart from the rest, and some quick words and meaning glances were seen to pass between them. Their voices grew louder; De Royans touched the hilt of his sword; and Jean Charost nodded his head, saying something in a low tone.

"For shame! for shame!" said Monsieur Blaize, approaching; but, ere he could add more, a casement just above their heads opened, and the voice of the Duke of Orleans was heard.

"Juvenel de Royans," he said, "have you any inclination for a dungeon? There are cells to fit you under the castle; and, as I live, you shall enjoy one if you broil in my household. I know you, sir; so be warned. De Brecy, come here; I want you."

Jean Charost immediately dismounted, gave his horse to Martin Grille, and ascended to the gallery from which the Duke of Orleans had been watching the sports of the morning. It was a large room, communicating, by a door in the midst and a small vestibule, with that famous picture-gallery which has been already mentioned. Voices were heard talking beyond; but the duke, after his young secretary's arrival, continued for a few minutes walking up and down the same chamber in which Jean Charost found him, leaning lightly on his arm.

"I know not how it is, my young friend," he said, in a sort of musing tone, "but the people here are clearly not very fond of you. However, I must insist that you take no notice whatever of that peevish boy, De Royans."

"I am most willing, sir," said Jean Charost, "to live at peace with him and every one else, provided they will leave me at peace likewise. I have given neither him nor them any matter for offense, and yet I will acknowledge that since my first entrance into your highness's household, I have met with little but enmity from any but good Monsieur Blaize and Signor Lomelini, who are both, I believe, my friends."

The duke mused very gravely, and then replied, "I know not how it is. To me it seems that there is nothing in your demeanor and conduct but that which should inspire kindness, and even respect. And yet," he continued, after a moment's pause, his face brightening with a gay, intelligent smile, not uncommon upon it when that acuteness, which formed one point in his very varied character, was aroused, by some accidental circumstance, from the slumber into which it sometimes fell--"and yet I am a fool to say I do not know how it is. I do know right well, my young friend. Men of power and station do not enough consider that all who surround them are more or less engaged in a race, whose rivalry necessarily deviates into enmity; and their favor, whenever

it is given, is followed by the ill will of many toward the single possessor. The more just and the more generous of the competitors content themselves with what they can obtain, or, at all events, do not deny some portion of merit to a more fortunate rival; but the baser and the meaner spirits--and they are the most numerous--not only envy, but hate; not only hate, but calumniate."

"I am most grateful, sir, for all your kindness toward me," replied Jean Charost; "but I can not at all attribute the enmity of Monsieur de Royans, or any of the rest, to jealousy of your favor, for from the moment I entered your household it was the same."

"Oil and water do not easily mix," answered the duke. "The qualities for which I esteem you make them hate you; not that your character and mine are at all alike--very, very different. But there be some substances, which, though most opposite to others, easily mingle with them; others which, with more apparent similarity, are totally repugnant. Your feelings are not my feelings, your thoughts not my thoughts, yet I can comprehend and appreciate you; these men can not."

"I am afraid, sir," said Jean Charost, "that I owe your good opinion more to a prepossession in my favor than to any meritorious acts of my own; for, indeed, I have had no opportunity of serving you."

"Yes, you have, greatly," replied the duke; "not perhaps by acts, but by words, which prove often the greatest services. He who influences a man's mind, De Brecy, affects him more than he who influences his mere earthly fortunes. I have often thought," he continued, in a musing tone, "that we are never sufficiently grateful to those by whose writings, by whose example, by whose speech, our hearts, our feelings, or our reason have been formed and perfected. The mind has a fortune as well as the body, and the latter is inferior to the former. But set your mind at rest; they can not affect my opinion toward you. There is but one thing which has puzzled me a little; this child, which they tell me has been placed by you at one of the cottages hard by, I would fain know who are its parents."

"On that subject I can tell your highness nothing," replied Jean Charost; "but the whole history, as far as I can give it, I will give."

"Hush!" said the duke, looking toward the picture-gallery, the door from which was opened by the duchess at that moment.

"There is nothing, sir, that I am afraid or ashamed to tell before the duchess," replied Jean Charost. "The case may be strange; but, as far as it affects me, it is a very simple one."

"Well, then," said the duke, turning to the duchess, who was advancing slowly and somewhat timidly, "you shall speak on, and your narrative shall be our morning's amusement."

His whole air changed in a moment; and, with a gay and sparkling look, he said to the duchess, "Come hither, my sweet wife, and assist at the trial of this young offender. He is charged before me of preaching rather than practicing, of frowning, like a Franciscan, on all the lighter offenses of love; and yet, what think you, I am told he has a fair young lady, who has followed him hither, and is boarded by him in one of the cottages just below the castle, when I do believe that, were I but to give a glance at any pretty maiden, I should have as sour a look as antique abbess ever gave to wavering nun."

The duchess looked in Jean Charost's face for an instant, and then said, "I'll be his surety, sir, that the tale is false."

"Not so, indeed, your highness," replied Jean Charost. "The tale is mostly true; but the duke should have added that this fair maid can not be three months old."

"Worse and worse!" cried the duke; "you can not escape penance for one sin, my friend, by pleading a still greater one. But tell us how all this happened; let us hear your defense."

"It is a plain and true one, sir," replied Jean Charost. "The very morning after our arrival here, I rode out for exercise, accompanied only by my lackey, Martin Grille. In a wood, perhaps four miles distant, we saw the smoke of a fire rising up not far from the road. My man is city born, and full of city fears. He fancied that every tree concealed a plunderer, and though he did not infect me with his apprehensions, he excited my curiosity about this fire; so--"

"Judging that a fire must have some one to light it," said the duke, "you went to see. That much has been told in every nook of the house, from the garret to the guest-chamber. What happened next?"

"I tracked the marks of horse's feet," said Jean Charost, "from the road through the wood, some hundred yards into the bushes, catching the smoke still rising blue among the dark brown trees, and, of course, appearing nearer as I went. I heard people talking loud, too, and therefore fancied that I could get still nearer without being seen. But suddenly, two men, who were lying hid hard by the path I had taken, started out and seized me, crying 'Here is a spy--a spy!' A number of others rushed up shouting and swearing, and I was soon dragged on to the spot where the fire was lighted, which was a small open space beneath an old beech-tree. There I found some three or four others lying on the snow, all fully armed but one. Horses were standing tied around.

A lance was here and there leaning against the trees, and battle-axes and maces were at many a saddle-bow; but I must say that the harness was somewhat rusty, and the faces of my new acquaintances not very clean or trim. The one who was unarmed, and who I supposed was a prisoner like myself, stood before the fire with his arms crossed on his chest. He was a tall man of middle age, with his hair very gray, somewhat plainly dressed, but with an air of stern, grave dignity not easily forgotten."

"Had he no arms at all?" asked the duke.

"None whatever, sir," replied Jean Charost; "not even sword or dagger. One large, bulky man, lying as quietly on the snow as if it had been a bed of down, had his feet to the fire, and, resting between them, I saw, to my surprise, a young child, well wrapped up, with nothing but the face peeping out, and sleeping soundly on a bed of pine branches. I should weary your highness with all that happened. At first it seemed that they would take my life, vowing that I had come to spy out their movements; then they would have had me go with them and make one of their band, giving me the choice of that or death. As I chose the latter, they were about to give it me without much ceremony, when the unarmed man interfered, in a tone of authority I had not expected to hear him use. He commanded them, in short, to desist; and, after whispering for a moment or two with the bulky man I have mentioned, he pointed to the child, and told me that, if I would swear most solemnly to guard and protect her, to be a father to her, and to see that she was nourished and educated in innocence and truth, they would let me go."

"Did you know the man?" asked the Duke of Orleans, with a look of more interest than he had before displayed.

"No, sir," replied the young secretary. "A faint, faint recollection of having somewhere seen a face like his I assuredly did feel; but he certainly seemed to know me, spoke of me as one attached to your highness, and asked how long I had left Paris. His words were wild and whirling, indeed; a few sentences he would speak correctly enough; but they seemed forced from him, as if with pain, straining his eye upon the fire or upon the ground, and falling into silence again as soon as they were uttered."

"Was he some merchant, perhaps?" asked the duke; "some one who has had dealings with our friend, Jacques Cœur?"

"He was no merchant, sir," said Jean Charost; "but I think, if ever I did see him before, it must have been with Jacques Cœur, for he had dealings with many men of high degree; and I doubt not that this person, however plain his garb and strange his demeanor, is a man of noble blood and a high name."

The young man paused, as if there were more to be said which he hesitated to utter; and then, after giving a somewhat anxious glance toward the duchess, he added, "I may remember more incidents hereafter, sir, which I will not fail to tell you."

"Did he give you no sign or token with this child," asked the duke, "by which one may trace her family and history? Did he tell you nothing of her parents?"

"He said he was not her father," replied Jean Charost, gravely; "but that was all the information he afforded. He gave me this ring, too," continued the young man, producing one, "and a purse of gold pieces to pay for her nourishment."

The duke took the ring and examined it carefully; but it was merely a plain gold circle without any distinctive mark. Nevertheless, Jean Charost thought his master's hand shook a little as he held the ring, and the duchess, who was looking over her husband's shoulder, said, "It is a strange story. Pray, tell me, Monsieur de Brecy, was this gentleman the same who spoke to you at the inn-door upon the road?"

"The same, madam," replied Jean Charost.

"Who was he? Did you ever see him before?" asked the duke, turning toward his wife with an eager look.

"Never," answered the duchess; "but he was a very singular and distinguished-looking man. He was a gentleman assuredly, and I should think a soldier; for he had a deep scar upon the forehead which cut straight through the right eyebrow."

The duke returned the ring to Jean Charost in silence; but the moment after he turned so deadly pale that the duchess exclaimed, "You are ill, my lord. You have exerted yourself too much to-day. You forget your late sickness, and how weak you are."

"No, no," replied the duke. "I feel somewhat faint: it will pass by in a moment. Let us go into the picture-gallery. I will sit down there in the sunshine."

Without reply, the duchess put her arm through his, and led him onward to the gallery, making a sign for Jean Charost to follow; and the duke, seating himself in a large chair, gazed over the walls, still marked by a lighter color here and there where a picture had lately hung.

"Those walls must be cleaned," he said, at length; "though I doubt if the traces can be obliterated."

"Oh, yes," answered the duchess, in a tone of sportive tenderness; "there is no trace of any of man's acts which can not be effaced, either by his own deeds, or his friend's efforts, or his God's forgiveness."

She spoke to his thoughts rather than to his words, and the duke took her hand, and pressed his lips upon it. Then, turning to Jean Charost, he pointed to the picture of the duchess, saying, "Is not that one worthy to remain when all the rest are gone?"

"Most worthy, sir," replied the young secretary, a little puzzled what to answer. "The others were mere daubs to that."

"What, then, you saw them?" said the duchess.

"His hands burned them," replied the duke.

"That strange man whom we met," replied the duchess, "declared that he was faithful and true, where all were false and deceitful; and so he will be to us, Louis. Trust him, my husband--trust him."

"I will," replied the duke. "But here comes Lomelini."

The duchess drew herself up, cast off the tender kindliness of her look, and assumed a cold and icy stateliness; and the duke, inclining his head to Jean Charost, added, "Leave us now, my young friend. This afternoon or evening I shall have need of you. Then we will speak further; so be not far off."

Jean Charost bowed and retired; and, turning to the maître d'hôtel, the duke said, in a low voice, "Set Blaize, or some one you can trust, to watch that young man. There have been high words between him and Juvenel de Royans. See that nothing comes of it. If you remark any thing suspicious, confine De Royans to his chamber, and set a guard."

"Does your highness mean De Royans alone or both?" asked Lomelini, softly.

"De Royans," answered the duke, sharply. "The one in fault, sir--the one always in fault. See my orders in train of execution, and then return."

CHAPTER XXII.

All great events are made up of small incidents. The world is composed of atoms, and so is Fate. A man pulling a small bit of iron under a gun performs an act, abstractedly of not much greater importance than a lady when she pins her dress; but let this small incident be combined with three other facts: that of there being a cartridge in the gun; that of twenty thousand men all pulling their triggers at the same moment; that of there being twenty thousand men opposite, and you have the glorious event of a great battle, with its long sequence of misery and joy, glory and shame, affecting the world, perhaps, to the end of time.

Two little incidents occurred at the château of Beauté during the day, the commencement of which we have just noticed, not apparently very much worthy of remark, but which, nevertheless, must be noted down in this very accurate piece of chronology. The first was the arrival of a courier, whose face Jean Charost knew, though it was some time before he could fix it to the neck and shoulders of a man whom he had seen at Pithiviers, not in the colors of the house of Burgundy, but in those of fair Madame de Giac. The letter he bore was addressed to the Duke of Orleans, and it evidently troubled him--threw him into a fit of musing--occupied his thoughts for some moments--and made the duchess somewhat anxious lest evil news had reached her lord.

He did not tell her the contents of the note, however, nor return any answer at the time, but sent the man away with largesse, saying he would write.

The next incident was another arrival, that of a party of three or four gentlemen from Paris who were invited to stay at the château of Beauté that night, and who supped with the duke and duchess in the great hall. The duke's face was exceedingly cheerful, and his health was evidently improved since the morning, when some secret cause seemed to have moved and depressed him a great deal.

The conversation principally turned upon the events which had lately taken place in Paris. They were generally of little moment; but one piece of intelligence the strangers brought was evidently, to the duke at least, of greater importance than the rest. The guests reported confidently that the unhappy king, Charles the Sixth, had shown decided symptoms of one of those periodical returns to reason which checkered with occasional bright gleams his dark and melancholy career. The duke seemed greatly pleased, mused upon the tidings, questioned his informant closely, but uttered not his own thoughts, whatever they might be, and retired to rest at an early hour.

During the whole of that day, without absenting himself for any length of time from his own apartments, Jean Charost wandered a good deal about the castle, and, to say sooth, looked somewhat impatiently for Juvenel de Royans in every place where he was likely to be met with. He did not find him any where, however; and, on asking Signor Lomelini where he should find the young gentleman, he was informed, dryly, that Monsieur De Royans was particularly engaged in some affairs of the duke's, and would not like to be disturbed.

The evening passed somewhat dully for Jean Charost, for he confined himself almost altogether to his own apartments, expecting every moment that the prince would send for him; but in this he was disappointed. He did not venture to retire to rest till nearly midnight; but then he slept as soundly as in life's happiest days; and he was only awakened in the morning by the sound of a trumpet, announcing, as he rightly judged, the departure of the preceding evening's guests.

He was dressing himself slowly and quietly, when Martin Grille bustled into the room, exclaiming, "Quick, sir, quick! or you will have no breakfast. Have you not heard the news? The duke sets out in half an hour for Paris, and you will be wanted, of course. Half the household stays here with the duchess. We go with twenty lances and the lay brethren, of which class--praised be God for all things!--you and I may consider ourselves."

"I have had no commands," replied Jean Charost; "but I will be ready, at all events."

Not many minutes elapsed, however, ere a notification reached him that he would be required to accompany the prince to the capital. All speed was made, and breakfast hastily eaten; but haste was unnecessary, for an hour or two elapsed before the cavalcade set out, and it did not reach Paris till toward the close of the day. The duke looked fatigued; and, as he dismounted in the court-yard of his hotel, he called Lomelini to him, saying, "Let me have some refreshment in my own chamber, Lomelini. Send to the prior of the Celestins, saying that I wish to see him to-morrow at noon. There will be a banquet, too, at night. Twelve persons will be invited, of high degree. De Brecy, I have something to say to you."

He then walked on up the steps into the house, Jean Charost following close; and after a moment or two, he turned, saying in a low voice, "Come to me as the clock strikes nine--come privately--by the toilet-chamber door. Enter at once, without knocking."

Several of the other attendants were following at some distance; but the duke spoke almost in a whisper, and his words were not heard. Jean Charost bowed, and fell back; but Lomelini, who had now become exceedingly affectionate again to the young secretary, said in his ear, "Come and sup in my room in half an hour. They will fare but ill in the hall to-night; for nothing is prepared here; but we will contrive to do better."

A few minutes afterward, the duke having been conducted to his chamber door, the attendants separated, and Jean Charost betook himself to his own rooms, where Martin Grille was already busily engaged in arranging his apparel in the large fixed coffers with which each chamber was furnished. There was a sort of nervous anxiety in the good man's manner, which struck his master the moment he entered; but laying his sword on the table, and seating himself by it, Jean Charost fell into a quiet, and somewhat pleasing fit of musing, just sufficiently awake to external things to remark that ever and anon Martin stopped his work and gave a quick glance at his face. At length the young gentleman rose, made some change in his apparel, removed the traces of travel from his person, and buckled on his sword again.

"Pray, sit," said Martin Grille, in a tone of fear and trepidation. "pray, sir, don't go through the little hall; for that boisterous, good-for-nothing bully, Juvenel de Royans, is there all alone, watching for you, I am sure. He was freed from his arrest this morning, and he would have fallen upon you on the road, I dare say, if there had not been so many persons round."

"His arrest?" said Jean Charost. "How came he in arrest?"

"On account of his quarrel with you yesterday morning. Monsieur De Brecy," replied Martin Grille. "Did you not know it? All the household heard of it."

"I have been deceived," answered Jean Charost. "Signor Lomelini told me he was engaged when I inquired for him. But you are mistaken, Martin: a few sharp words do not make exactly a quarrel, and there was no need of placing De Royans under arrest. It was a very useless precaution; so much so, indeed, that I think you must be mistaken. He must have given some offense to the duke: he gave none to me that could not easily be settled."

He then paused for a moment or two in thought, and added, "Wait here till I return, and if De

Royans should come, tell him I am supping with Signor Lomelini, but will be back soon. Do as I order you, and make no remonstrance, if you please."

Thus saying, he left the room, and bent his steps at once toward the little hall, leaving at some distance on the right the great dining-hall, from which loud sounds of merriment were breaking forth. He hardly expected to find Juvenel de Royans still in the place where Martin Grille had seen him; for the sound of gay voices was ever ready to lead him away. On opening the door, however, the faint light in the room showed him a figure at the other end, beyond the table, moodily pacing to and fro from one side of the room to the other; and Jean Charost needed no second glance to tell him who it was. He advanced directly toward him, taking a diagonal line across the hall, so that De Royans could not suppose he was merely passing through.

The young man instantly halted, and faced him; but Jean Charost spoke first, saying, "My varlet told me, Monsieur De Royans, that you were here alone, and as I could not find you yesterday, when I sought for you, I am glad of the opportunity of speaking a few words with you."

"Sought for me!" cried De Royans. "Methinks no one ought to have known better where I was than yourself."

"You are mistaken," replied Jean Charost. "I asked Signor Lomelini where I could find you, and he told me you would be occupied all day in some business of the duke's."

"The lying old pander!" exclaimed De Royans, bitterly. "But our business may be soon settled, De Brecy. If you are inclined to risk a thrust here, I am ready for you. No place makes any difference in my eyes."

"In mine it does," replied Jean Charost, very quietly.

"You are not a coward, I suppose," cried the young man, impetuously.

"I believe not," replied Jean Charost; "and there are few things that I should be less afraid of than risking a thrust with you, Monsieur de Royans, in any proper place and circumstances. Here, in a royal house, you ought to be well aware we should subject ourselves, by broiling, to disgraceful punishment, and we can well afford to wait for a more fitting opportunity, which I will not fail to give you, if you desire it."

"Of course I do," replied Juvenel de Royans.

"I do not see the of course," replied Jean Charost. "I have never injured you in any thing, never insulted you in any way, have borne, perhaps too patiently, injury and insult from you, and have certainly the most cause to complain."

"Well, I am ready to satisfy you," exclaimed De Royans, with a laugh, "on horseback or on foot, with lance and shield, or sword and dagger. Do not let us spoil a good quarrel with silly explanations. We are both of one mind, it seems; let us settle preliminaries at once."

"I have not time to settle all preliminaries now," replied Jean Charost; "for I am expected in another place; but so far we can arrange our plan. The day after to-morrow I will ask the duke's permission to go for three days to Mantes. I will return at once to Meudon. You can easily get out of Paris for an hour or two, and join me there at the *auberge*. Then a ten minutes' walk will place us where we can settle our dispute without risk to the survivor."

"On my life, this is gallant!" cried De Royans, with a considerable change of expression. "You are a lad of spirit after all, De Brecy."

"You have insulted my father's memory by supposing otherwise," replied Jean Charost. "But do not let us add bitterness to our quarrel. We understand each other. Whenever you hear I am gone to Mantes, remember you will find me the next day at Meudon--and so good-night."

Thus saying, he left him, and hurried to the eating-room of Lomelini, who would fain have extracted from him what the duke had said to him as they passed into the house; but Jean Charost was upon his guard, and, as soon as supper was over, returned to his own chamber.

Martin Grille, though he had quick eyes, could discover no trace of emotion on his young master's countenance; and desperately tired of his solitary watch, he gladly received his dismissal for the night. A few minutes after, Jean Charost issued from his room again, and walked with a silent step to the door of the duke's toilet-chamber. No attendants were in waiting, as was usual, and following the directions he had received, he opened the door and entered. He was surprised to find the prince dressed in mantle and hood, as if ready to go out; but upon the table before him was lying a perfumed note, open, and another fastened, with rose-colored silk, and sealed.

"Welcome, De Brecy," said the duke, with a gay and smiling air; "I wish you to render me a service, my friend. You must take this note for me to-night to the house of Madame De Giac, give it into her own hand, hear what she says, and bring me her answer. I shall be at the queen's palace, near the Porte Barbette."

The blood rushed up into Jean Charost's face, covering it over with a woman-like blush. It was the most painful moment he had ever as yet experienced in existence. His mind instantly rushed to a conclusion from premises that he could hardly define to his own mind, much less explain to the Duke of Orleans. He fancied himself employed in the basest of services--used for the most disgraceful of purposes; and yet nothing had been said which could justify him in refusing to obey. Whether he would or not, however, and before he could consider, the words "Oh, sir!" burst from his lips, and his face spoke the rest plainly enough.

The Duke of Orleans gazed at him with a frowning brow and a flashing eye, and then demanded, in a loud, stern tone, "What is it you mean, sir?"

Jean Charost was silent for an instant, and then replied, with painful embarrassment, "I hardly know what I mean, your highness--I may be wrong, and doubtless am wrong--but I feared that the errand on which your highness sends me might be one unbecoming me to execute, and which your highness might afterward regret to have given." He had gone the step too far, so dangerous with the spoiled children of fortune.

The anger of the duke was excessive. He spoke loud and sharply, reproached his young secretary for presuming upon his kindness and condescension, and reproved him in no very measured terms for daring to intermeddle with his affairs; and Jean Charost, feeling at his heart that he had most assuredly exceeded, perhaps, the bounds of due respect, had come to conclusions for which there was no apparent foundation, and had suffered his suspicions to display themselves offensively, stood completely cowed before the prince. When the duke at length stopped, he answered, in a tone of sincere grief, "I feel that I have erred, sir, greatly erred, and that I should have obeyed your commands without even presuming to judge of them. Pray remember, however, that I am very young, perhaps too young for the important post I fill. If your highness dismisses me from your service, I can not be surprised; but believe me, sir, wherever I go, I shall carry with me the same feelings of gratitude and affection which had no small share in prompting the very conduct which has given you just offense."

"Affection and gratitude!" said the duke, still in an angry tone. "What can affection and gratitude have to do with disobedience to my commands, and impertinent intrusion into my affairs?"

"They might, sir," answered Jean Charost; "for your highness communicated to me at a former time some regrets, and I witnessed the happiness and calm of mind which followed the noble impulses that prompted them. Gratitude and affection, then, made me grieve to think that this very letter which I hold in my hand might give cause to fresh regrets, or perhaps to serious perils; for I am bound to say that I doubt this lady; that I doubt her affection or friendship for your highness; that I am sure she is linked most closely to your enemies."

"You should not have judged of my acts at all," replied the Duke of Orleans. "What I do not communicate to you, you have no business to investigate. Your judgment of the lady may be right or wrong; but in your judgment of my conduct you are altogether wrong. There is nothing in that note which I ever can regret, and, could you see its contents, you would learn at once the danger and presumption of intruding into what does not concern you. To give you the lesson, I must not sacrifice my dignity; and though, in consideration of your youth, your inexperience, and your good intentions, I will overlook your error in the present instance, remember it must not be repeated."

Jean Charost moved toward the door, while the duke remained in thought; but, before he reached it, the prince's voice was heard, exclaiming, in a more placable tone, "De Brecy, De Brecy, do you know the way?"

"As little in this case as in the last," replied Jean Charost, with a faint smile.

"Come hither, come hither, poor youth," cried the duke, holding out his hand to him good-humoredly. "There; think no more of it. All young men will be fools now and then. Now go and get a horse. You will find my mule saddled in the court. Wait there till I come. I am going to visit my fair sister, the queen, who is ill at the Hôtel Barbette, and we pass not far from the place to which you are going. I will direct you, so that you can not mistake."

Jean Charost hurried away, and was ready in a few minutes. In the court he found a cream-colored mule richly caparisoned, and two horses saddled, with a few attendants on foot around; but the duke had not yet appeared. When he did come, four of the party mounted, and rode slowly on through the moonlight streets of Paris, which were now silent, and almost deserted. After going about half a mile, the duke reined in his mule, and pointing down another street which branched off on the right, directed Jean Charost to follow it, and take the second turning on the left. "The first hotel," he added, "on the right is the house you want. Then return to this street, follow it out to the end, and you will see the Hôtel Barbette before you. Bring me thither an account of your reception."

His tone was grave, and even melancholy; and Jean Charost merely bowed his head in silence. He gave one glance at the duke's face, from which all trace of anger had passed away, and then they parted--never to meet again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Standing in the street, at the door of the house to which he had been directed, Jean Charost found a common-looking man, whose rank or station was hardly to be divined by his dress; and drawing up his horse beside him, he asked if Madame De Giac lived there.

"She is here," replied the man. "What do you want with her?"

"I have a letter to deliver to her," answered lean Charost, briefly.

"Give it to me," replied the man.

"That can not be," answered the young secretary. "It must be delivered by me into her own hand."

"Who is it from?" inquired the other. "She does not see strangers at this hour of the night."

The young secretary was somewhat puzzled what to reply, for a lingering suspicion made him unwilling to give the name of the duke; but he had not been told to conceal it, and seeing no other way of obtaining admission, he answered, after a moment's consideration, "It is from his highness of Orleans, and I must beg you to use dispatch."

"I will see if she will admit you," replied the man; "but come into the court, at all events. You will soon have your answer."

Thus saying, he opened the large wooden gates of the yard, and, as soon as Jean Charost had entered, closed and fastened them securely. There was a certain degree of secrecy and mystery about the whole proceeding, a want of that bustle and parade common in great houses in Paris, which confirmed the preconceived suspicions of Jean Charost, and made him believe that a woman of gallantry was waiting for the visit of a prince whose devotion to her sex was but too well known. Dismounting, he stood by his horse's side, while the man quietly glided through a door, hardly perceivable in the obscurity of one dark corner in the court-yard. The moon had already sunk low, and the tall houses round shadowed the whole of the open space in which the young secretary stood, so that he could but little see the aspect of the place, although he had ample time for observation.

Nearly ten minutes elapsed before the messenger's return; but then he came, attended by a page bearing a flambeau, and, in civil terms, desired the young gentleman to follow him to his mistress's presence.

Through ways as narrow and as crooked as the ways of love usually are, Jean Charost was conducted to a small room, which would nowadays probably be called a boudoir, where, even without the contrast of the poor, naked stone passages through which he had passed, every thing would have appeared luxurious and splendid in the highest degree. Rumor attributed to the beautiful lady whom he went to visit, a princely lover, who some years before had commanded an army against the Ottomans, had received a defeat which rendered him morose and harsh throughout the rest of life, but had acquired, during an easy captivity among the Mussulmans, a taste for Oriental luxury, which never abandoned him. All within the chamber to which Jean Charost was now introduced spoke that the lady had not been uninfluenced by her lover's habits. Articles of furniture little known in France were seen in various parts of the room; piles of cushions, carpets of innumerable dyes, and low sofas or ottomans; while, even in the midst of winter, the odor of roses pervaded the whole apartment. Madame de Giac herself, negligently dressed, but looking wonderfully beautiful, was reclining on cushions, with a light on a low table by her side, and, on the approach of Jean Charost, she received him more as an old and dear friend than a mere accidental acquaintance. A radiant smile was upon her lips; she made him sit down beside her, and in her tone there was a blandishing softness, which he felt was very engaging. For a minute or two she held the letter of the Duke of Orleans unopened in her hand, while she asked him questions about his journey from Pithiviers to Blois, and his return. At length, however, she opened the billet and read it, not so little observed as she imagined herself; for Jean Charost's eyes were fixed upon her, marking the various expressions of her countenance. At first, her glance at the note was careless; but speedily her eyes fixed upon the lines with an intense, eager look. Her brow contracted, her nostril expanded, her beautiful upper lip quivered, and that fair face for an instant took upon it the look of a demon. Suddenly, however, she recollected herself, smoothed her brow, recalled the wandering lightning of her eyes and folding the note, she curled it between her fingers, saying, "I must write an answer, my dear young friend. I will not be long; wait for me here;" and rising gracefully, she gathered her flowing

drapery around her, and passed out by a door behind the cushions.

The door was closed carefully; but Jean Charost had good reason to believe that the time of Madame De Giac was occupied in other employment than writing. A murmur of voices was heard, in which her own sweet tones mingled with others harsher and louder. The words used could not be distinguished, but the conversation seemed eager and animated, beginning the moment she entered, and rising and falling in loudness, as if the speakers were sometimes carried away by the topic, sometimes fearful of being overheard.

Jean Charost was no great casuist, and certainly, in all ordinary cases, he would have felt ashamed to listen to any conversation not intended for his ears. Neither, on this occasion, did he actually listen. He moved not from his seat; he even took up and examined a beautiful golden-sheathed poniard with a jeweled hilt, which lay upon the table where stood the light. But there was a doubt, a suspicion, an apprehension of he knew not what in his mind, which, if well-founded, might perhaps have justified him in his own eyes in actually trying to hear what was passing; for assuredly he would have thought it no want of honor thus to detect the devices of an enemy. The voice of Madame De Giac was not easily forgotten by one who had once heard it; and the rougher, sterner tones that mingled in the conversation seemed likewise familiar to the young secretary's ear. Both those who were speaking he believed to be inimical to his royal master. He heard nothing distinctly, however, but the last few words that were spoken.

It would seem that Madame De Giac had approached close to the door, and laid her hand upon the lock, and the other speaker raised his voice, adding to some words which were lost, the following, in an imperative tone, "As long as possible, remember--by any means!"

Madame De Giac's murmured reply was not intelligible to the young secretary; but then came a coarse laugh, and the deeper voice answered, "No, no. I do not mean that; but by force, if need be."

"Well, then, tell them," said the fair lady; but what was to be told escaped unheard by Jean Charost; for she dropped her voice lower than ever, and, a moment after, re-entered the room.

Her face was all fair and smiling, and before she spoke, she seated herself again on the cushions, paused thoughtfully, and, looking at the dagger which the young gentleman replaced as she entered, said playfully, "Do not jest with edged tools. I hope you did not take the poniard out of its sheath. It comes from Italy--from the very town of the sweet Duchess of Orleans; and they tell me that the point is poisoned, so that the slightest scratch would produce speedy death. It has never been drawn since I had it, and never shall be with my will."

"I did not presume to draw it," said Jean Charost. "But may I crave your answer to his highness's note?"

"How wonderfully formal we are," said Madame De Giac, with a gay laugh. "This chivalrous reverence for the fair, which boys are taught in their school days, is nothing but a sad device of old women and jealous husbands. It is state, and dress, and grave surroundings, De Brecy, that makes us divinities. A princess and a page, in a little cabinet like this, are but a woman and a man. Due propriety, of course, is right; but forms and reverence all nonsense."

"Beauty and rank have both their reverence, madam," replied Jean Charost. "But at the present moment, all other things aside, I am compelled to think of his highness's business; for he is waiting for me now at the Hôtel Barbette, expecting anxiously, I doubt not, your answer."

The conversation that followed does not require detail. Madame De Giac was prodigal of blandishments, and, skilled in every female art, contrived to while away some twenty minutes without giving the young secretary any reply to bear to his master.

When at length she found that she could not detain him any longer without some definite answer, she turned to the subject of the note, and contrived to waste some more precious time on it.

"What if I were to send the duke a very angry message?" she said.

"I should certainly deliver it," replied Jean Charost. "But I would rather that you wrote it."

"No, I have changed my mind about that," she answered. "I will not write. You may tell him I think him a base, ungrateful man, unworthy of a lady's letter. Will you tell him that?"

"Precisely, madam; word for word," replied Jean Charost.

"Then you are bolder with men than women," replied the lady, with a laugh slightly sarcastic. "Stay, stay; I have not half done yet. Say to the duke I am of a forgiving nature, and, if he does proper penance, and comes to sue for pardon, he may perhaps find mercy. Whither are you going so fast? You can not get out of this enchanted castle as easily as you think, good youth; at least not without my consent."

"I pray, then, give it to me, madam," said Jean Charost; "for I really fear that his highness will be angry at my long delay."

"Poor youth! what a frightened thing it is," said the lady. "Well, you shall go; but let me look at the duke's note again, in case I have any thing to add;" and she unfolded the billet, which she still held in her hand, and looked at it by the light. Again Jean Charost marked that bitter, fiend-like scowl come upon her countenance, and, in this instance, the feelings that it indicated found some expression in words.

"Either you or his priest are making a monk of him," she said, bitterly; "but it matters not. Tell him what I have said." And murmuring a few more indistinct words to herself, she rang a small silver bell which lay upon the cushions beside her, and the man who had given Jean Charost admission speedily appeared.

The lady looked at him keenly for an instant, and the young secretary thought he saw a glance of intelligence pass from his face to hers.

"Light this young gentleman out," said Madame De Giac. "You are a young fool, De Brecy," she added, laughingly; "but that is no fault of yours or mine. Nature made you so, and I can not mend you; and so, good-night."

Jean Charost bowed low, and followed the man out of the room; but, as he did so, he drew his sword-hilt a little forward, not well knowing what was to come next. Madame De Giac eyed him with a sarcastic smile, and the door closed upon him.

The man lighted him silently, carefully along the narrow, tortuous passage, and down the steep stair-case by which he had entered, holding the light low, that he might see his way. When they reached the small door which led into the court, he unbolted it, and held it back for the young gentleman to go forth; but the moment Jean Charost had passed out, the door was closed and bolted.

"Not very courteous," thought Jean Charost. "But doubtless he takes his tone from his lady's last words. What a dark night it is?"

For a minute or two, in the sudden obscurity after the light was withdrawn, he could discern none of the objects around him, and it was not till his eye had become more accustomed to the darkness that he discovered his horse standing fastened to a ring let into the building. He detached him quickly, and led him to the great gates; but here a difficulty presented itself. The large wooden bar was easily removed, and the bolts drawn back; but still the gates would not open. The young gentleman felt them all over in search of another fastening; but he could find none; and he then turned to a little sort of guardroom on the right of the entrance, attached to almost all the large houses of Paris in that day, and transformed, in after and more peaceable times, into a porter's lodge. All was dark and silent within, however: the door closed; and no answer was returned when the young gentleman knocked. He then tried another door, in the middle of the great façade of the building; but there, also, the door was locked, and he could make no one hear. His only resource, then, was the small postern by which he had been admitted; but here also he was disappointed, and he began to comprehend that he was intentionally detained. He was naturally the more impatient to escape; and, abandoning all ceremony, he knocked hard with the hilt of his dagger on the several doors, trying them in turns. But it was all in vain. There were things doing which made his importunity of small consequence.

With an angry and impatient heart, and a mind wandering through a world of conjecture, he at length thrust his dagger back into the sheath, and stood and listened near the great gates, determined, if he heard a passing step in the street, to call loudly for assistance. All was still, however, for ten minutes, and then came suddenly a sound of loud voices and indistinct cries, as if there was a tumult at some distance. Jean Charost's heart beat quick, though there seemed no definite link of connection between his own fate and the sounds he heard. A minute or two after, however, he was startled by a nearer noise--a rattling and grating sound--and he had just time to draw his horse away ere the gates opened of their own accord, and rolled back without any one appearing to move them. A hoarse and unpleasant laugh, at the same moment, sounded on Jean Charost's ear, and, looking forth into the street, he saw two or three dark figures running quickly forward in one direction.

CHAPTER XXIV.

There was in Paris an old irregular street, called the Street of the Old Temple, which had been built out toward the Porte Barbette at a period when the capital of France was much smaller in extent than in the reign of King Charles the Sixth. No order or regularity had been preserved, although one side of the street had for some distance been kept in a direct line by an antique

wall, built, it is said, by the voluntary contributions or personal labors of different members of the famous Order of the Temple, the brethren of which, though professing poverty, were often more akin to Dives than to Lazarus. The other side of the street, however, had been filled up by the houses and gardens of various individuals, each walking in the light of his own eyes, and using his discretion as to how far his premises should encroach upon, how far recede from the highway. Thus, when sun or moon was up, and shining down the street, a number of picturesque shadows crossed it, offering a curious pattern of light and shade, varying with every hour.

A strange custom existed in those days, which has only been perpetuated, that I know of, in some towns of the Tyrol, of affixing to each house its own particular sign, which served, as numbers do in the present day, to distinguish it from all others in the same street. Sometimes these signs or emblems projected in the form of a banner from the walls of the house, overhanging the street, and showing the golden cross, or the silver cross, or the red ball, the lion, the swan, or the hart, to every one who rode along. Sometimes, with better taste, but perhaps with less convenience to the passenger in search of a house he did not know, the emblem chosen by the proprietor was built into the solid masonry, or placed in a little Gothic niche constructed for the purpose. The latter was generally the case where angel, or patron saint, prophet, or holy man was the chosen device, and especially so when any of the persons of the Holy Trinity, for whom the Parisians seemed to have more love than reverence, gave a name to the building.

Thus, at the corner of the Street of the Old Temple, and another which led into it, a beautiful and elaborate niche with a baldachin of fretted stone, and a richly-carved pediment, offered to the eyes of the passers-by a very-well executed figure of the Virgin, holding in her arms the infant Savior, and from this image the house on which it was affixed obtained the name of the *Hôtel de Nôtre Dame*. Notwithstanding the sanctity of the emblem, and the beauty of the building--for it was of the finest style of French architecture, then in its decay--the house had been very little inhabited for some twenty or thirty years. It had been found too small and incommodious for modern taste. Men had built themselves larger dwellings, and, although this had not been suffered to become actually dilapidated, there were evident traces of neglect about it--casements broken and distorted, doors and gates on which unforbidden urchins carved grotesque faces and letters hardly less fantastical, moldings and cornices time-worn and moldering, and stones gathering lichen and soot with awful rapidity.

All was darkness along the front of that house. No torches blazed before it; no window shot forth a ray; and the sinking moon cast a black shadow across the street, and half way up the wall on the other side.

Nevertheless, in one room of that house there were lamps lighted, and a blazing fire upon the hearth. Wine, too, was upon the table, rich, and in abundance; but yet it was hardly tasted; for there were passions busy in that room, more powerful than wine. It was low in the ceiling, the walls covered with hangings of leather which had once been gilt, and painted with various devices but from which all traces of human handiwork had nearly vanished, leaving nothing but a gloomy, dark drapery on the wall, which seemed rather to suck in than return the rays. It was large and well proportioned, however. The great massy beams which, any one could touch with their hand, were supported by four stout stone pillars, and the whole light centered in the middle of the room, leaving a fringe, as it were, of obscurity all round. If numbers could make any place gay, that room or hall would have been cheerful enough; for not less than seventeen or eighteen persons were collected there, and many of them appeared persons of no inferior degree. Each was more or less armed, and battle-axes, maces, and heavy swords lay around; but a solemn, gloomy stillness hung upon the whole party. It was evidently no festal occasion on which they met. The wine, as I have said, had no charms for them; conversation had as little.

One tall powerful man sat before the chimney with his mailed arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes fixed upon the flickering blaze in the fire-place. Another was seated near the table, drawing, with the end of a straw, wild, fantastic figures on the board with some wine which had been spilled. Some dull men at a distance nodded, and others, with their hands upon their brows, and eyes bent down, remained in heavy thought.

At length one of them spoke, "Tedious work this," he said. "Action suits me best. I love not to lie like a spider at the bottom of his web, waiting till the fly buzzes into his nest. Here we have been five or six long days, and nothing done. I will not wait longer than to-morrow's sunrise, whatever you may say, Ralph."

The other, who was gazing into the fire, turned his head a little, answering in a gruff tone, "I tell you he is now in Paris. He arrived this very evening. We shall hear more anon."

The conversation ceased; for no one else took it up, and each of the speakers fell into silence again.

Some quarter of an hour passed, and then the one who was at the table started and seemed to listen.

There was certainly a step in the passage without, and the moment after there was a knock at the door. One of those within advanced, and inquired who was there.

"Ich Houde," answered a voice, and immediately the door was unlocked, and a ponderous bolt

withdrawn.

All eyes were now turned toward the entrance, with a look which I do not know how to describe, except by saying it was one of fierce expectation. At first the obscurity at the further side of the room prevented those who sat near the light from seeing who it was that entered; but a broad-chested, powerful man, wrapped in a crimson mantle, with a very large hood thrown back upon his shoulders, and on his head a plain brown barret cap with a heron's feather in it, advanced rapidly toward the table, inquiring, "Where is Actonville?"

His face was deadly pale, and even his lips had lost their color; but there was no emotion to be discovered by the movement of any feature. All was stern, and resolute, and keen.

"Here," said the man who had been sitting by the fire, rising as he spoke.

The other advanced close to him, and spoke something in a whisper. Actonville rejoined in the same low tone; and then the other answered, louder, "I have provided for all that. Thomas of Courthose will bear him a message from the king. Be quick; for he will soon be there."

"How got you the news, sir?" asked Actonville.

"By the fool, to be sure--by the fool!" replied the other. "It is all certain; though a fool told it."

"The moon must be up," said Actonville. "Were it not better to do it as he returns?"

"He will have many more with him," answered the man who had just entered; "and the moon is down."

"Oh, moon or no moon, many or few," exclaimed the man who had been sitting at the table, "let us about it at once. Brave men fear no numbers; and only dogs are scared by the moon." Some more conversation, brief, sharp, and eager, sometimes in whispers, sometimes aloud, occupied a space, perhaps, of three minutes, and then all was the bustle of preparation. Swords, axes, maces were taken up, and a few inquiries were made and answered.

"Are the horses all ready?" asked one.

"They only want unhooking," replied another.

"The straw is piled up in both the rooms." said a third. "Shall I fire it now?"

"No, no! Are you mad?" replied Actonville "Not till it is done."

"Then I'll put the lantern ready," replied the other.

"Where will you be, sir?" asked Actonville.

"Close at hand," replied the man in the crimson mantle. "But we lose time. Go out quietly, one by one, and leave the door open. Put out the lights, William of Courthose. I have a lantern here, under my cloak."

The lights were immediately extinguished, and, by the flickering of the fire, eighteen shadowy forms were seen to pass out of the room like ghosts. Through the long passage from the back to the front of the house, they went as silently as their arms would permit, and then gliding down the irregular side of the road, one by one, they disappeared from their rank to lay in wait in what the prophet calls "the thievish corners of the streets."

The man who had last joined them remained alone, standing before the fire. His arms were crossed upon his chest; a lantern which he had carried stood on the ground by his side; and his eyes were fixed upon a log from which a small thin flame, yellow at the base, and blue at the top, rose up, wavering fitfully. He watched it for some five or six minutes. Suddenly it leaped up and vanished.

"Ha!" said that dark, stern man, and turned him to the door. Ere he reached it, there was a loud outcry from without--a cry of pain and strife. He paused and trembled. What was in his bosom then? God only knows. Man never knew.

CHAPTER XXV.

The gates of the Hôtel Barbette--formerly the Hôtel Montaigne--opened instantly to the Duke

of Orleans, and he was kept but a moment in the great hall ere the queen gave an order for his admission, although still suffering from illness. He found the beautiful but vindictive Isabella in bed; but that formed no objection in those days to the reception of visitors by a lady of even queenly rank; and, after having embraced his fair sister-in-law, he sat down by her bedside, and the room was soon cleared of the attendants.

"You have received my note, Louis?" she said, laying her hand tenderly upon his; for there is every reason to believe that the Duke of Orleans was the only one toward whom she ever entertained any sincere affection.

"I did, sweet Isabella," answered the duke; "and I came at once to see what was your will."

"How many men brought you with you?" asked the queen. "I hope there is no fool-hardiness, Orleans?"

"Oh, in Paris I have plenty," replied the duke; "hard upon five hundred. The rest I left with Valentine at Beauté, for she is going to Château Thierry to gather all her children together. But if you mean how many I have brought hither to-night, good faith! Isabella, not many--two men on horseback, and half a dozen on foot."

"Imprudent man!" exclaimed the queen. "Do you not know that Burgundy is here?"

"Oh yes," answered the Duke of Orleans. "He supped with me this night, quite in a tranquil way."

"Be not deceived--be not deceived, Louis of Orleans," answered the queen. "Who can feign friendship and mean enmity so well as John of Burgundy? And I tell you that, to my certain knowledge, he is caballing against you even now. Your life is never safe when you are near him unless you be surrounded by your men-at-arms."

"Well, then, we do not play an equal game," replied the duke; "for his life is as safe with me as with his dearest friend."

"Did he know that you were coming hither?" asked the queen, with an anxious look.

"Assuredly," replied the duke; but then he added, with a gay laugh, "He suspected, I fancy, from his questions, that I was going elsewhere first, though I told him I was not."

"Where--where?" demanded the queen.

"To Madame De Giac's," replied the Duke of Orleans, with a look of arch meaning.

"The serpent!" muttered Isabella. "And you have not been?"

"Assuredly not," replied her brother-in-law. "Then he knows you have come here," said Isabella, thoughtfully; "and the way back will be dangerous. You shall not go, Orleans, till you have sent for a better escort."

"Well, kind sister, if it will give you ease, it shall be done," replied the duke. "I will tell one of my men to bring me a party of horse from the hotel."

"Let it be large enough," said the queen, emphatically.

The duke smiled, and left the room in search of his attendants; but neither of his two squires could be found. Heaven knows where they were, or what they were doing; but the queen had a court of very pretty ladies at the Hôtel Barbette, who were not scrupulous of granting their conversation to gay young gentlemen. A young German page, fair-haired and gentle, lolled languidly on a settle in the great hall, but he knew little of Paris, and the Duke of Orleans sent for one of his footmen, and ordered him to take one of the squires' horses, return to the Hôtel d'Orleans, and bring up twenty lances with in an hour. He then went back to the chamber of the queen, and sat conversing with her for about ten minutes, when they were interrupted' by the entrance of one of her ladies, who brought intelligence that a messenger from the Hôtel St Pol had arrived, demanding instant audience of the duke.

"Who is he?" asked Isabella, gazing at the lady, her suspicions evidently all awake. "How did they know at the Hôtel St. Pol that his highness was here?"

"It is Thomas of Courthose, your majesty," replied the lady; "and he says he has been at the Hôtel d'Orleans, whence he was sent hither."

"By your good leave, then, fair sister, we will admit him," said the duke; and in a minute or two after Thomas of Courthose, one of the immediate attendants of the king, was ushered into the room. He was not a man of pleasing aspect: black-haired, down-looked, and with the eyes so close together as to give almost the appearance of a squint; but both the duke and the queen knew him well, and suspicion was lulled to sleep.

Approaching the Duke of Orleans, with a lowly reverence, first to the queen and then to him, the man said, "I have been commanded by his royal majesty to inform your highness that he

wishes to see you instantly, on business which touches nearly both you and himself."

"I will obey at once," replied the duke. "Tell my people, as you pass, to get ready. I will be in the court in five minutes."

"Stay, Orleans, stay!" cried the queen, as the man quitted the room. "You had better wait for your escort, dear brother."

The duke only laughed at her fears, however, representing that his duty to the king called for his immediate obedience, and adding, "I shall go safer by that road than any other. They know that I came hither late, and will conclude that I shall return by the same way. If Burgundy intends to play me any scurvy trick--arrest, imprison, or otherwise maltreat me--he will post his horsemen in that direction, and by going round I shall avoid them. Nay, nay, Isabella, example of disobedience to my king shall never be set by Louis of Orleans."

The queen saw him depart with a sigh, but the duke descended to the court without fear, and spoke gayly to his attendants, whom he found assembled.

"We do not know what to do, sir," said one of the squires, stepping forward. "Leonard has taken away one of the horses, and now there is but one beast to two squires."

"Let his master mount him, and the other jump up behind," said the duke, laughing. "Did you never see two men upon one horse?"

In the mean while his own mule was brought forward, and, setting his foot in the stirrup, the duke seated himself somewhat slowly. Then, looking up to the sky, he said, "The moon is down, and it has become marvelous dark. If you have torches, light them."

About two minutes were spent in lighting the torches, and then the gates of the Hôtel Barbette were thrown open. The two squires on one horse went first, and the duke on his mule came after, the German page following close, with his hand resting on the embossed crupper, while two men, with torches lighted, walked on either side. The porter at the gates looked after them for a moment as they took their way down the Street of the Old Temple, and then drew to the heavy leaves, and barred the gates for the night.

All was still and silent in the street, and the little procession walked on at a slow pace for some two hundred yards. The torch-light then seemed to flash upon some object suddenly, which the horse bearing the two squires had not before seen, for the beast started, plunged, and then dashed violently forward down the street, nearly throwing the hindmost horseman to the ground. The duke spurred forward his mule somewhat sharply, but he had not gone a dozen yards when an armed man darted out from behind the dark angle of the neighboring house. Another rushed out almost at the same moment from one of the deep, arched gateways of the time, and a number more were seen hurrying up, with the torch-light flashing upon cuirasses, battle-axes, and maces. Two of the light-bearers cast down their torches and fled; a third was knocked down by the rush of men coming up; and at the same moment a strong, armed hand was laid upon the Duke of Orleans's rein.

The dauntless prince spurred on his mule against the man who held it, without attempting to turn its head; and it would seem that he still doubted that he was the real object of attack, for while the assassin shouted loudly, "Kill him--kill him!" he raised his voice loud above the rest, exclaiming, "How now; I am the Duke of Orleans!"

"'Tis him we want," cried a deep voice close by; and as the duke put his hand to the hilt of his sword, a tremendous blow of an ax fell upon his wrist, cutting through muscle, and sinew, and bone. The next instant he was struck heavily on the head with a mace, and hurled backward from the saddle. But even then there was one found faithful. The young German boy who followed cast himself instantly upon the body of his lord, to shield him from the blows that were falling thick upon him. But it was all in vain. The battle-ax and the mace terminated the poor lad's existence in a moment; his body was dragged from that of the prostrate prince; and a blow with a spiked iron club dashed to pieces the skull of the gay and gallant Louis of Orleans.

Shouts and cries of various kinds had mingled with the fray, but after that last blow fell there came a sudden silence. Three of the torches were extinguished; the bearers were fled. One faint light only flickered on the ground, throwing a red and fitful glare upon the bloody bodies of the dead, and the grim, fierce countenances of the murderers.

In the midst of that silence, a man in a crimson mantle and hood came quickly forward, bearing a lantern in his hand.

The assassins showed no apprehension of his presence, and holding the light to the face of the dead man, he gazed on him for an instant with a stern, hard, unchanged expression, and then said, "It is he!"

Perhaps some convulsive movement crossed the features from which real life had already passed away, for that stern, gloomy man snatched a mace from the hand of one standing near, and struck another heavy blow upon the head of the corpse, saying, "Out with the last spark!"

There were some eight or ten persons immediately round the spot where the prince had fallen; but others were scattered at a little distance up and down the street. Suddenly a voice cried, "Hark!" and the sound of a horse's feet was heard trotting quick.

"Away!" cried the man in the red mantle. "Fire the house, and disperse. You know your roads. Away!"

Then came a distant cry, as if from the gates of the queen's palace, of "Help! help! Murder! murder!" but, the next moment, it was almost drowned in a shout of "Fire! fire!" Dark volumes of smoke began to issue from the windows of the Hôtel Nôtre Dame, and flashes of flame broke forth upon the street, while a torrent of sparks rushed upward into the air. All around the scene of the murder became enveloped in vapor and obscurity, with the red light tinging the thick, heavy wreaths of smoke, and serving just to show figures come and go, still increasing in number, and gathering round the fatal spot in a small, agitated crowd. But the actors in the tragedy had disappeared. Now here, now there, one or another might have been seen crossing the bloody-looking haze of the air, and making for some of the various streets that led away from the place of the slaughter, till at length all were gone, and nothing but horrified spectators of their bloody handiwork remained.

Few, if any, remained to look at the burning house, and none attempted to extinguish the flames; for the cry had already gone abroad that the Duke of Orleans was murdered, and the multitude hurried forward to the place where he lay. Those who did stop for an instant before the Hôtel Nôtre Dame, remarked a quantity of lighted straw borne out from the doors and windows by the rush of the fire, and some of them heard the quick sound of hoofs at a little distance, as if a small party of horse had galloped away from the back of the building.

Few thought it needful, however, to inquire for or pursue the murderers. A sort of stupor seemed to have seized all but one of those who arrived the first. He was a poor mechanic; and, seeing an armed man, with a mace in his hand, glide across the street, he followed him with a quick step, traced him through several streets, paused in fear when the other paused, turned when he turned, and dogged him till he entered the gates of the Hôtel d'Artois, the residence of the Duke of Burgundy.

In the mean while, the body of the unhappy prince, and that of the poor page who had sacrificed his life for him, were carried into a church hard by. The news spread like lightning through the whole town; neighbor told it to neighbor; many were roused from their sleep to hear the tidings, and agitation and tumult spread through Paris. Every sort of vague alarm, every sort of wild rumor was received and encouraged.

The Queen Isabella of Bavaria, horrified and apprehensive, caused herself to be placed in a litter, and carried to the Hôtel St. Pol. A number of loyal noblemen, believing the king's own life in danger, armed themselves and their followers, and turned the court of the palace into a fortress. But the followers of the deceased duke remained for some hours almost stupefied with terror, and only recovered themselves to give way to rage and indignation, which produced many a disastrous consequence in after days. In the mean time, the church of the White Friars was not deserted. The brethren themselves gathered around the dead bodies, and, with tapers lighted, and the solemn organ playing, chanted all night the services of the dead. High nobles and princes, too, flocked into the church with heavy hearts and agitated minds. The Duke of Bourbon and the venerable Duke of Berri were the first. Then came the King of Navarre, then the Duke of Burgundy, and then the King of Sicily, who had arrived in Paris only on the preceding morning.

All were profuse of lamentations, and of execrations against the murderers; but none more so than the Duke of Burgundy, who declared that "never, in the city of Paris, had been perpetrated so horrible and sad a murder."[2] He could even weep, too; but while the words were on his lips, and the tears were in his eyes, some one pulled him by the cloak, and turning round his head, he saw one of his most familiar servants. Nothing was said; but there was a look in the man's eyes which demanded attention, and, after a moment or two, the duke retired with him into the chapel of St. William.

"They have taken one of those suspected of conniving at the murder," whispered the man.

"Which? Who--who is he?" asked the duke, eagerly.

"No one your highness knows," replied the man, gazing in the duke's face, though the chapel was very dark. "He is a young gentleman, said to be the duke's secretary, Monsieur Charost de Brecy."

The duke stamped with his foot upon the ground, saying, with an oath, "That may ruin all. See that he be freed as soon as possible, before he is examined."

"It can not be done, I fear," rejoined the man, in the same low tone. "He is in the hands of William de Tignonville, the *prévôt*. But can not the murder be cast on him, sir? They say he and the duke were heard disputing loud this night; and that, on the way to the Hôtel Barbette, he suddenly turned and rode away from his royal master."

"Folly and nonsense!" said the duke, impatiently; and then he fell into a fit of thought, adding,

in a musing tone, "This must be provided for. But not so--not so. Well, we will see. Leave him where he is. He must be taught silence, if he would have safety."

CHAPTER XXVI.

We must now once more follow the course of Jean Charost. It has been said that when the gates of the house of Madame De Giac (by a contrivance very common at that time in Paris for saving the trouble of the porter and the time of the visitor, but with which he was unacquainted) rolled back on their hinges, without the visible intervention of any human being, he saw several persons running up the street in the direction which he himself intended to take. Man has usually a propensity to hurry in the same course as others, and, springing on his horse's back, Jean Charost spurred on somewhat more quickly than he might have done had he seen no one running. As he advanced, he saw, in the direction of the Porte Barbette, a lurid glare beginning to rise above the houses, and glimmering upon large rolling volumes of heavy smoke The next instant, loud voices, shouting, reached his ear; but with the cries of fire he fancied there were mingled cries of murder. On up the street he dashed, and soon found himself at the corner of the Street of the Old Temple; but he could make nothing of the scene before his eyes. The house in front was on fire in various places, and would evidently soon be totally destroyed; but though there were a number of people in the street, running hither and thither in wild disorder, few stopped before the burning building even for a single moment, and most hurried past at once to a spot somewhat further down the street.

All who had collected as yet were on foot though he could see a horse further up toward the city gate; but while he was looking round him with some wonder, and hesitating whether he should first go on to inquire what was the matter where the principal crowd was collected, or ride at once to the Hôtel Barbette, a man in the royal liveries, with a halbert in his hand, crossed and looked hard at him. Suddenly another came running up the street, completely armed except the head, which was bare. The man with the halbert instantly stopped the other, apparently asking some question, and Jean Charost saw the armed man point toward him, exclaiming, "He must be one of them--he must be one of them." The next moment they both seized his bridle together; but they did not both retain their hold very long; for while he of the halbert demanded his name and business there, threatening to knock his brains out if he did not answer instantly, the armed man slipped by on the other side of the horse, turned round the corner of the street, and was lost to sight.

Jean Charost's name and business were soon explained; but still the man kept hold of his bridle. Two or three persons gathered round; and all apparently conceded that a great feat had been accomplished in making a prisoner, although there was no suspicious circumstance about him, except his being mounted on horseback, when all the rest were on foot. They continued to discuss what was to be done with him, till a large body of people came rushing down from the Hôtel Barbette, among whom the young secretary recognized one of the squires and two of the lackeys of the Duke of Orleans. To them Jean Charost instantly called, saying, "There is something amiss here. Pray explain to these men who I am; for they are stopping me without cause, and I can not proceed to join his highness."

"Why did you leave him so suddenly an hour ago?" cried the young squire, in a sharp tone. "You came with us from the Hôtel d'Orleans, and disappeared on the way. You had better keep him, my friends, till this bloody deed is inquired into."

Then turning to Jean Charost again, he added, "Do you not know that the duke has been foully murdered?"

The intelligence fell upon the young man's ear like thunder. He sat motionless and speechless on his horse, while the party from the Hôtel Barbette passed on; and he only woke from the state of stupefaction into which he was cast, to find his horse being led by two or three persons through the dark and narrow streets of Paris, whither he knew not. His first distinct thoughts, however, were of the duke rather than himself, and he inquired eagerly of his captors where and how the horrible deed had been perpetrated.

They were wise people, and exceedingly sapient in their own conceit, however. The queen's servant laughed with a sneer, saying, "No, no. We won't tell you any thing to prepare you for your examination before the *prévôt*. He will ask you questions, and then you answer him, otherwise he will find means to make you. We are not here to reply to your interrogatories."

The sapient functionary listened to no remonstrances, and finding his efforts vain, Jean Charost rode on in silence, sometimes tempted, indeed, to draw his sword, which had not yet

been taken from him, and run the man with the halbert through the body; but he resisted the temptation.

At length, emerging from a narrow street, they came into a little square, on the opposite side of which rose a tall and gloomy building, without any windows apparent on the outside, except in the upper stories of two large towers, flanking a low dark archway. All was still and silent in the square; no light shone from the windows of that gloomy building; but straight toward the great gate they went, and one of the men rang a bell which hung against the tower. A loud, ferocious barking of dogs was immediately heard; but in an instant the gates were opened by a broad-shouldered, bow-legged man, who looked gloomily at the visitors, but said nothing; and the horse of Jean Charost was led in, while the porter drove back four savage dogs (which would fain have sprang at the prisoner); and instantly closed the gates. The archway in which the party now stood extended some thirty feet through the heavy walls, and at the other end appeared a second gate, exactly like the first; but the porter made no movement to open it, nor asked any questions, but suffered the queen's servant to go forward and ring another bell. That gate was opened, but not so speedily as the other, and a man holding a lantern appeared behind, with another personage at his side, dressed in a striped habit of various colors, which made Jean Charost almost believe that they had a buffoon even there. From the first words of the queen's servant, however, he learned that this was the jailer, and his face itself, hard, stern, and bitter, was almost an announcement of his office.

Nevertheless, he made some difficulty at first in regard to receiving a prisoner from hands unauthorized; but at length he consented to detain the young secretary till he could be interrogated by the *prévôt*. The captors then retired, and the jailers made their captive dismount and enter a small room near, where sat a man in black, writing. His name, his station, his occupation was immediately taken down, and then one of those harpies called the *valets de geôle*; was called, who instantly commenced emptying his pockets of all they contained, took from him his sword, dagger, and belt, and even laid hands upon a small jeweled *fermail*, or clasp; upon his hood. The young man offered no resistance, of course; but when he found himself stripped of money, and every thing valuable, he was surprised to hear a demand made upon him for ten livres.

"This is a most extraordinary charge," he said, looking in the face of the jailer, who stood by, though it was the valet who made the demand.

"Why so, boy?" asked the man, gruffly. "It is the jailage due. You said your name was Jean Charost, Baron De Brecy. A baron pays the same as a count or a countess."

"But how can I pay any thing, when you have taken every thing from me?" asked the young secretary.

"Oh, you are mistaken," said the jailer, with a rude laugh. "I see you are a young bird. All that has been taken from you, except the fees of the jail, will be restored when you go out, if you ever do. But you must consent with your own tongue to my taking the money for my due, otherwise we shall put you to sleep in the ditch, where you pay half fees, and I take them without asking."

"Take it, take it," said Jean Charost, with a feeling of horror and dismay that made him feel faint and sick. "Treat me as well as you can, and take all that is your right. If more be needed, you can have it."

The jailer nodded his head to the valet, who grinned at the prisoner, saying, "We will treat you very well, depend upon it. You shall have a clean cell, with a bed four feet wide, and only two other gentlemen in it, both of them of good birth, though one is in for killing a young market-woman. He will have his head off in three days, and then you will have only one companion."

"Can not I be alone?" asked Jean Charost.

"The law is, three prisoners to one bed," replied the valet of the jail, "and we can't change the custom--unless you choose to pay"--he added--"four deniers a night for a single bed, and two for the place on which it stands."

"Willingly, willingly," cried the young man, who now saw that money would do much in a jail, as well as elsewhere. "Can I have a cell to myself?"

"To be sure. There is plenty of room," replied the jailer. "If you choose to pay the dues for two other barons, you can have the space they would occupy."

Jean Charost consented to every thing that was demanded; the fees were taken by the jailer; the rest of the money found upon him was registered by the man in black, who seemed a mere automaton; and then he was led away by the valet of the jail to a small room not very far distant. On the way, and for a minute or two after his arrival in the cell, the valet continued to give him rapid but clear information concerning the habits and rules of the place. He found that, if he attempted to escape, the law would hold him guilty of whatever crime he was charged with; that he could neither have writing materials, nor communicate with any friend without an application to one of the judges at the Châtelet; that all the law allowed a prisoner was bread and water, and, in the end, that every thing could be procured by money--except liberty.

Jean Charost hesitated not then to demand all he required, and the valet, on returning to the jailer, after having thrice-locked and thrice-bolted the door, informed his master that the young prisoner was a "good orange," which probably meant that he was easily sucked.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Do you recollect visiting the booth of a cutler? In that very booth, the day after the arrest of Jean Charost, might be seen the intelligent countenance of the deformed boy, Petit Jean, peering over the large board on which the wares were exposed, and saluting the passers-by with an arch smile, to which was generally added an invitation to buy some of the articles of his father's manufacture. The race *gamin*; is of very ancient date in the city of Paris, where witty and mischievous imps are found to have existed in great abundance as far as recorded history can carry us. It must be owned, too, that a touch of the *gamin*; was to be found in poor Petit Jean, although his corporeal infirmities prevented him from displaying his genius in many of the active quips and cranks in which other boys of his own age indulged. On the present occasion, when he was eager to sell the goods committed to his charge, he refrained, as far as possible, from any of his sharp jests, so long as there was any chance of gaining the good-will of a passing customer, and the *gamin*; spirit fumed off in a metaphor: but a surly reply, or cold inattention, generally drew from him some tingling jest, which might have procured him a drubbing had not his infirmities proved a safeguard.

"What do you lack, Messire Behue?" he cried, as a good fat currier rolled past the booth. "Sure, with such custom as you have, your knives must be all worn out. Here, buy one of these. They are so sharp, it would save you a crown a day in time, and your customers would not have to wait like a crowd at a morality."

The good-natured currier paused, and bargained for a knife, for flattery will sometimes soften even well-tanned hides; and Petit Jean, contented with his success, assailed a thin, pale, sanctimonious-looking man who came after, in much the same manner.

But this personage scowled at him, saying, "No, no, boy. No more knives from your stall. The last I bought bent double before two days were over."

"That's the fault of your cheese, Peter Guimp," answered the boy, sharply. "It served Don Joachim, the canon of St. Laurent, worse than it served our knife, for it broke all the teeth out of his head. Ask him if it didn't."

"You lie, you little monster!" said the cheesemonger, irritably. "It was as bad iron as ever was sharpened."

"Not so hard as your heart, perhaps," answered Petit Jean; "but it was a great deal sharper than your wit; and if your cheese had not been like a millstone, it would have gone through it."

The monger of cheeses walked on all the faster for two or three women having come up, all of whom but one, an especial friend of his own, were laughing at the saucy boy's repartee.

"Ah, dear Dame Mathurine," cried Petit Jean, addressing the grave lady, "buy a new bodkin for your cloak. It wants one sadly, just to pin it up with a jaunty air."

"Don't Mathurine me, monkey," cried the old woman, walking on after the cheesemonger; and the boy, winking his eye to the other women, exclaimed aloud, "Well, you are wise. A new bodkin would only tear a hole in the old rag. She wore that cloak at her great-grandmother's funeral when she was ten years old, and that is sixty years ago; so it may well fear the touch of younger metal."

"Well, you rogue, what have you to say to me?" said a young and pretty woman, who had listened, much amused.

"Only that I have nothing good enough for your beautiful eyes," answered the boy, promptly; "though you have but to look at the things, to make them shine as if the sun was beaming on them."

This hit told well, and the pretty *bourgeoise*; very speedily purchased two or three articles from the stall. She had just paid her money, when Martin Grille, with a scared and haggard air, entered the booth, and asked the boy where his father was, without any previous salutation.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Martin?" asked Petit Jean, affectionately. "You come in like

a stranger, and don't say a word to me about myself or yourself, and look as wild as the devil in a mystery. What is it you want with my father in such a hurry?"

"I am vexed and frightened, Petit Jean," replied poor Martin, with a sigh. "I am quite at my wit's end, who never was at my wit's end before. Your father may help me; but you can't help at all, my boy."

"Oh, you don't know that," answered the other. "I can help more than people know. Why, I have sold more things for my father in three hours, since he went up to the Celestins to see the body of the Duke of Orleans, than he ever sold in three days before."

"Ah, the poor duke! the poor duke!" cried Martin, with a deep sigh.

"Well, well, come sit down," said Petit Jean. "My father will be in presently, and in the mean while, I'll play you a tune on my new violin, and you will see how I can play now."

Martin Grille seated himself with an absent look, leaned his forehead upon his hands, and seemed totally to forget every thing around him in the unwonted intensity of his own thoughts. But the boy, creeping under the board on which the wares were displayed, brought forth an instrument of no very prepossessing appearance, tried its tune with his thumb, as if playing on a guitar, and then seating himself at Martin Grille's knee, put the instrument to his deformed shoulder.

There be some to whom music comes as by inspiration. All other arts are more or less acquired. But those in whom a fine sensibility to harmony is implanted by Nature, not unfrequently leap over even mechanical difficulties, and achieve at once, because they have conceived already. Music must have started from the heart of Apollo, as wisdom from the head of Jove, without a childhood. Little had been the instruction, few, scanty, and from an incompetent teacher, the lessons which that poor deformed boy had received. But now, when the bow in his hand touched the strings, it drew from them sounds such as a De Beriot or a Rhode might have envied him the power of educing; and, fixing his large, lustrous eyes upon his cousin's face, he seemed to speak in music from his own spirit to the spirit of his hearer. Whether he had any design, and, if so, what that design was, I can not tell; perhaps he did not know himself; but certain it is, that the wandering, wavering composition that he framed on the moment seemed to bear a strange reference to Martin's feelings. First came a harsh crash of the bow across all the strings--a broad, bold discord; then a deep and gloomy phrase, entirely among the lower notes of the instrument, simple and melodious, but without any attempt at harmony; then, enriching itself as it went on, the air deviated into the minor, with sounds exquisitely plaintive, till Martin Grille almost fancied he could hear the voices of mourners, and exclaimed, "Don't Jean! don't! I can not bear it!"

But still the boy went on, as if triumphing in the mastery of music over the mind, and gradually his instrument gave forth more cheerful sounds; not light, not exactly gay, for every now and then a flattened third brought back a touch of melancholy to the air, but still one could have fancied the ear caught the distant notes of angels singing hope and peace to man.

The effect on Martin Grille was strange. It cheered him, but he wept; and the boy, looking earnestly in his face, said, with a strange confidence, "Do not tell me I have no power, Martin. Mean, deformed, and miserable as I am, I have found out that I can rule spirits better than kings, and have a happiness within me over which they have no sway. You are not the first I have made weep. So now tell me what it is you want with my father. Perhaps I may help you better than he can."

"It was not you made me weep, you foolish boy," said Martin Grille; "but it was the thought of the bloody death of the poor Duke of Orleans, so good a master, and so kind a man; and then I began to think how his terrible fate might have expiated, through the goodness of the blessed Virgin, all his little sins, and how the saints and the angels would welcome him. I almost thought I could hear them singing, and it was that made me cry. But as to what I want with your father, it was in regard to my poor master, Monsieur De Brecy, a kind, good young man, and a gallant one, too. They have arrested him, and thrown him into prison--a set of fools!--accusing him of having compassed the prince's death, when he would have laid down his life for him at any time. But all the people at the hotel are against him, for he is too good for them, a great deal; and I want somebody powerful to speak in his behalf, otherwise they may put him to the torture, and cripple him for life, just to make him confess a lie, as they did with Paul Laroche, who never could walk without two sticks after. Now I know, your father is one of the Duke of Burgundy's men, and that duke will rule the roast now, I suppose."

"Strong spirits seek strong spirits," said the boy, thoughtfully; "and perhaps my father might do something with the duke. But Martin," he continued, after a short and silent pause, "do not you have any thing to do with the Duke of Burgundy! He will not help you. I do not know what it is puts such thoughts in my head. But the king's brother had an enemy; the king's brother is basely murdered; his enemy still lives heartily; and it is not him I would ask to help a man falsely accused. Stay a little. They took me, three days ago, to play before the King of Navarre, and I am to go to-day, with my instrument, to play before the Queen of Sicily. I think I can help you, Martin, if she will but hear me. This murder, perhaps, may put it all out, for she was fond of the duke, they tell me; but I will send her word, through some of her people, when I go, that I have

got a dirge to play for his highness that is dead. She will hear that, perhaps. Only tell me all about it."

Martin Grille's story was somewhat long; but as the reader already knows much that he told in a desultory sort of way to his young cousin, and the rest is not of much importance to this tale, we will pass over his account, which lasted some twenty minutes, and had not been finished five when Caboche himself entered the booth in holiday attire. His first words showed Martin Grille the good sense of Petit Jean's advice, not to speak to his father in favor of Jean Charost.

"Oh ho! Martin," cried Caboche, in a gruff and almost savage tone, "so your gay duke has got his brains knocked out at last for his fine doings."

"For which of his doings has he been so shamefully murdered?" asked Martin Grille, with as much anger in his tone as he dared to evince.

"What, don't you know?" exclaimed Caboche. "Why, it is in every body's mouth that he has been killed by Albert de Chauny, whose wife he carried off and made a harlot of. I say, well done, Albert de Chauny; and I would have done the same if I had been in his place."

"Then Monsieur De Brecy is proved innocent," said Martin Grille, eagerly.

"I know nothing about that," answered Caboche. "He may have been an accomplice, you know; but that's no business of mine. I went up to see the duke lie at the Celestins. There was a mighty crowd there of men and women; but they all made way for Caboche. He makes a handsome corpse, though his head is so knocked about; but he'll not take any more men's wives away, and now we shall have quiet days, I suppose, though I don't see what good quiet does: for whether the town is peaceful or not, men don't buy or sell nowadays half as much as they used to do."

There was a certain degree of vanity in his tone as he uttered the words, "All made way for Caboche," which was very significant; and his description of the appearance of the Duke of Orleans made Martin Grille shudder. He remained not long with his rough uncle, however; but, after having asked and answered some questions, he took advantage of a moment when Caboche himself was busy in rearranging his cutlery and counting his money, to whisper a few words to Petit Jean regarding a meeting in the evening, and then parted from him, saying simply, "Remember!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

There was a great crowd in the court of the Hôtel d'Anjou--lackeys, and pages, and men-at-arms; but the court was a very large one, with covered galleries on either hand, and the number of retainers present was hardly seen. From time to time some great lord of the court arrived, and proceeded at once into the palace, leaving his followers to swell some of the little groups into which the whole body of the people assembled had arranged themselves. To one particular point the eyes of all present were most frequently directed, and it was only when one of the princes of the blood royal, the Dukes of Berri or Bourbon, or the King of Navarre arrived, that the mere spectators of the scene could divert their eyes from a spot where a young and handsome lad, who had not yet seen twenty years, stood in the midst of a group of the *prévôt's*; guard with fetters on his limbs.

By half past three o'clock, several of the princes and the Royal Council had entered the building, and were conducted at once to a large hall on the ground floor, where every thing was dark and sombre as the occasion of the meeting. The ceiling was much lower than might have been expected in a chamber of such great size; but the decorations which it displayed were rich and costly, showing the rose, an ancient emblem of the house of Anjou, in red, and green, and gold, at the corner of every panel; for the ceiling, like the rest of the room, was covered with dark oak. The walls were richly embellished; but the want of light hid the greater part of the delicate carving, and scarcely allowed a secretary, seated at the table, to see the letters on the paper on which he was writing.

Most of the members of the council had arrived; the Duke of Berri himself was present; but two very important personages had not yet appeared, namely, the Duke of Anjou (titular king of Sicily), and the Duke of Burgundy. The Duke of Berri, nevertheless, gave orders that the business of the day should proceed, while he sent a lackey to summon the Duke of Anjou; and very shortly after, that prince entered the room, inquiring, as he advanced to the table, if the *prévôt*; had yet arrived.

"No, fair cousin," replied the Duke of Berri; "but we may as well get over the preliminaries.

The facts attending the finding of the body must be read, in the first place."

"I have read the whole of the *procès verbal*," replied the King of Sicily. "Go on--go on, I will be back immediately."

The Duke of Berri seemed somewhat displeased to see his cousin quit the hall again; but the investigation proceeded. All the facts regarding the assassination of the Duke of Orleans which had been collected were read by the secretary from the papers before him; and when he had done, he added, "I find, my lords, that a young gentleman, the secretary of the late duke, who was not with him at the Hôtel Barbette, was arrested by one of her majesty's servants at the scene of the murder, in very suspicious circumstances, shortly after the crime was perpetrated. Is it your pleasure that he be brought before you?"

"Assuredly," replied the Duke of Berri. "I have seen the young gentleman, and judged well of him. I can not think he had any share in this foul deed. Are there any of my poor nephew's household here who can testify concerning him?"

"Several, your highness," answered the secretary. "They are in the ante-room."

"Let them also be called in," said the Duke of Berri; and in a minute or two, Jean Charost, heavily ironed, was brought to the end of the table, and a number of the Duke of Orleans's officers, the jester, and the chaplain appeared behind them.

The Duke of Berri gazed at the young man sternly; but with Jean Charost, the first feelings of grief, horror, and alarm had now given way to a sense of indignation at the suspicions entertained against him, and he returned the duke's glance firmly and unshrinkingly, with a look of manly confidence which sat well even upon his youthful features.

"Well, young gentleman," said the Duke of Berri, at length, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"In what respect, my lord?" asked Jean Charost, still keeping his eyes upon the duke; for the stare of all around was painful to him.

"In answer to the charge brought against you," answered the Duke of Berri.

"I know of no charge, your highness," answered Jean Charost. "I only know that while proceeding, according to the orders of my late beloved lord, to rejoin him at the Hôtel Barbette. I was seized by some men at one corner of the Rue Barbette, just as I was pausing to look at a house in flames, and at a crowd which I saw further down the street; that then, without almost any explanation, I was hurried to prison, and that this morning I have been brought hither, with these fetters on my limbs, which do not become an innocent French gentleman."

"It is right you should near the charge," answered the duke. "Is the man who first apprehended him here present?"

The tall, stout lackey of the queen, who had been the first to seize the young secretary's bridle, now bustled forward, full of his own importance, and related, not altogether without embellishment, his doings of the preceding night. He told how, on hearing from the flying servants of the Duke of Orleans that their lord had been attacked by armed men in the street, he had snatched up a halbert and run to his assistance; how he arrived too late, and then addressed himself to apprehend the murderers. He said that Jean Charost was not riding in any direction, but sitting on his horse quite still, as if he had been watching from a distance the deed just done; and that a gentleman of good repute, who had hastened, like himself, to give assistance, had pointed out the young secretary as one of the band of assassins, and even aided to apprehend him. He added various particulars of no great importance in regard to Jean Charost's manner and words, with the view of making out a case of strong suspicion against him.

"You hear the charge," said the Duke of Berri, when the man had ended; "what have you to say?"

"I might well answer nothing, your highness," replied Jean Charost; "for, so far as I can see, there is no charge against me, except that I checked my horse for an instant to look at a crowd and a house in flames. Nevertheless, if you will permit me, I will ask this man a question or two, as it may tend to bring some parts of this dark affair to light."

"Ask what you please," answered the duke; and Jean Charost turned to the servant, and demanded, it must be confessed, in a sharp tone, "Was the man who pointed me out to you armed or unarmed?"

"Completely armed, except the head," replied the lackey, looking a little confused.

"What had he in his hand?" demanded Jean Charost.

"A mace, I think," answered the man; "an iron mace."

"Did he tell you how he came completely armed in the streets of Paris at that hour of the night?" asked Jean Charost.

"He said he came forth at the cries," answered the servant.

"How long may it take to arm a man completely, except the head?" asked the young gentleman.

"I don't know," answered the servant; "I don't bear arms."

"I do," answered Jean Charost; "and so do these noble lords; nor is it probable that a man could shuffle on his armor in time to be there on the spot so soon, unless he were well armed before. Now tell me, what was this man's name?"

The man hesitated; but the Duke of Berri thundered from the head of the table, "Answer at once, sir. You have said he was a gentleman of good repute; you must therefore know him. What was his name?"

"William of Courthose," answered the man; "the brother of the king's valet de chambre."

"Where is he?" asked the Duke of Berri, so sternly, that the man became more and more alarmed, judging that his stupid activity might not prove so honorable to himself as he had expected.

"I do not know rightly, your highness," he replied. "His brother told me to-day he had gone to Artois."

There was a silence all through the room at this announcement. Jean Charost asked no more questions. Several of the council looked meaningly in each other's faces, and the Duke of Berri gazed thoughtfully down at the table.

The chaplain of the late Duke of Orleans, however, and Seigneur André, his fool, moved round and got behind the prince's chair.

The former bent his head, and said a few words in a low tone; and the duke instantly looked up, saying, "It seems, Monsieur De Brecy, that there was a quarrel between yourself and my unhappy nephew. You were heard speaking loud and angrily in his apartments; you left him half way to the Hôtel Barbette. Explain all this!"

"There was no quarrel, my lord," replied Jean Charost; "there could be no quarrel between an humble man like myself and a prince of the blood royal. His highness reproved me for something I had done amiss, and his voice was certainly loud when he did so. He pardoned me, however, on my apology, took me with him on his way to the Hôtel Barbette, sent me to deliver a letter and receive an answer, and commanded me to rejoin him at her majesty's house, which I was on the way to do when I was arrested."

"What was the cause of his reproving you?" asked the Duke of Berri; "to whom did he send you with a letter, and where did you pass the time from the moment you left him to the moment of your arrest? You had better, Monsieur De Brecy, give a full account of your whole conduct from the time of your arrival in Paris till the time of your apprehension."

Jean Charost looked down thoughtfully, and his countenance changed. To betray the secrets of the dead, to plant a fresh thorn in the heart of the Duchess of Orleans, already torn, as it must be, to explain how and why he had hesitated to obey his lord's commands, was what he would fain escape from at almost any risk; and his confidence in his own innocence made him believe that his refusal could do him no material damage.

"It will be better for yourself, sir, to be frank and candid," said the Duke of Berri; "a few words may clear you of all suspicion."

"I doubt it not, your highness," replied Jean Charost; "for as yet I see no cause for any. Were I myself alone concerned, I would willingly and at once state every act of my own and every word I uttered; but, my lord, in so doing, I should be obliged to give also the acts and words of my noble master. They were spoken to me in confidence, as between a frank and generous prince and his secretary. He is dead; but that absolves me not from the faithful discharge of my duty toward him. What he confided to me--whither he sent me--nay, even more, the very cause of his reproving me, which involves some part of his own private affairs, I will never disclose, be the consequence what it may; and I do trust that noble princes and honorable gentlemen will not require an humble secretary, as I am, to betray the secrets of his lord."

"You are bound, sir, by the law, to answer truly any questions that the king's council may demand of you," said the King of Navarre, sternly; "if not, we can compel you."

"I think not, my lord," replied Jean Charost; "I know of no means which can compel an honorable man to violate a sacred duty."

"Ha, ha!" shouted Seigneur André; "he does not know of certain bird-cages we have in France to make unwilling warblers sing. Methinks one screw of the rack would soon make the pretty creature open its bill."

"I think so too," said the King of Navarre, setting his teeth, and not at all well pleased with

Jean Charost's reply. "We give you one more chance, sir; will you, or will you not, answer the Duke of Berri's questions? If not, we must try the extent of your obstinacy."

As he spoke he beckoned up to him the *prévôt*; of Paris, who had entered the hall a few minutes before, and spoke to him something in a whisper; to which the other replied, "Oh yes, sir, in the other chamber; the screw will do; it has often more power than the rack."

In the mean time, a struggle had been going on in the breast of Jean Charost.

It is often very dangerous to commit one's self by words to a certain course of action. So long as we keep a debate with ourselves within the secret council-chamber of our own bosom, we feel no hesitation in retracting an ill-formed opinion or a rash resolution; but when we have called our fellow-creatures to witness our thoughts or our determinations, the great primeval sin of pride puts a barrier in our way, and often prevents us going back, even when we could do so with honor.

Jean Charost was as faulty as the rest of our race, and perhaps it would be too much to say that pride had no share in strengthening his resolution; but, after a short pause, he replied, "My lord, the Duke of Berri, take it not ill of me, I beg your highness, that I say any questions simply regarding myself I will answer truly and at once; but none in any way affecting the private affairs of my late royal master will I answer at all."

"We can not suffer our authority to be set at naught," said the Duke of Berri, gravely; and the King of Navarre, turning with a heavy frown to the *prévôt*, exclaimed, "Remove him, Monsieur Tignonville, and make him answer."

Jean Charost turned very pale, but he said nothing; and two of the *prévôt's*; men laid their hands upon him, and drew him from the end of the table.

At the same moment, however, another young man started forward, with his face all in a glow, exclaiming, "Oh, my lords, my lords! for pity's sake, for your own honor's sake, forbear! He is as noble and as faithful a lad as ever lived--well-beloved of the prince whom we all mourn. Think you that he, who will suffer torture rather than betray his lord's secrets, would conspire his death?"

"It may be his own secrets he will not reveal," said the Duke of Berri.

"Meddle not with what does not concern you," cried the King of Navarre, sternly.

But Jean Charost turned his head as they were taking him from the room, and exclaimed, "Thank you, De Royans--thank you! That is noble and just."

He was scarcely removed when the Duke of Burgundy entered by the great entrance, and the King of Sicily by a small door behind the Duke of Berri. The former was alone, but the latter was followed by several of the officers of his household, and in the midst of them appeared a young girl, leaning on the arm of an elder woman dressed as a superior servant.

"I heard that Monsieur De Brecy was under examination," said Louis of Anjou, looking round, "accused of being accessory to the murder. Is he not here?"

"He has retired with a friend," said Seigneur André, who thought it his privilege to intermeddle with all conversation.

"The truth is, fair cousin," answered the King of Navarre, "we have found him a very obstinate personage to deal with, setting at naught the authority of the council, and refusing to answer the questions propounded to him. We have therefore been compelled to employ means which usually make recusants answer."

"Good God! I hope not," exclaimed the Duke of Anjou. "Here is a young lady who can testify something in his favor."

He turned as he spoke toward the young girl who had followed him into the hall, and who has more than once appeared upon the scene already. She was deadly pale, but those energies which afterward saved France failed her not now. She loosed her hold of the old servant's arm, on which she had been leaning, took a step forward, and, with her hands clasped, exclaimed, "In God's name, mighty princes, forbear! Send a messenger, if you would save your own peace, and countermand your terrible order. I know not why you have doomed an innocent man to torture, but right sure I am that somehow he has brought such an infliction on his head by honesty, and not by crime; by keeping his faith, not by breaking it."

"They are made for each other," said the King of Navarre, coldly. "They both speak in the same tone. Who is she, cousin of Sicily?"

"Mademoiselle De St. Geran--Agnes Sorel," answered the Duke of Anjou, in a low tone. "One of the maids of honor to my wife."

But Agnes took no notice of their half-heard colloquy, and, turning at once with quick decision and infinite grace toward the Duke of Burgundy, who sat with his head leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the table, she exclaimed, "My lord the Duke of Burgundy, I beseech you to

interfere. You know this young man--you know he is faithful and true--you know he refused to betray the secret of his lord, even at your command, and dared your utmost anger. You know he is not guilty."

"I do," said the Duke of Burgundy, rising, and speaking in a hoarse, hollow tone. "My lords, he is not guilty--I am sure. Suspend your order, I beseech you. Send off to the Châtelet, and let him--"

A deep groan, which seemed almost a suppressed cry, appeared to proceed from a door half way down the hall, and swell through the room, like the note of an organ.

"He is not far off, as you may hear," said the King of Navarre, with an indifferent manner. "Tell them to stop, if you please, fair cousin."

The Duke of Burgundy had waited to ask no permission, but was already striding toward the door. He threw it sharply open, and entered a small room having no exit, except through the hall; but he paused, without speaking, for a moment, although before his eyes lay poor Jean Charost strapped down upon a sort of iron bedstead, and one of the *prévôt's*; men stood actually turning a wheel at the head, which elongated the whole frame, and threatened to tear the unfortunate sufferer to pieces. For an instant, the duke continued to gaze in silence, as if desirous of seeing how much the unhappy young man could bear. But Jean Charost uttered not a word. That one groan of agony had burst from him on first feeling the *peine forte et dure*. But now his resolution seemed to have triumphed over human weakness, and, with his teeth shut and his eyes closed, he lay and suffered without a cry.

"Hold!" exclaimed the duke, at length. "Hold, Messire Prévôt. Unbind the young man. He is not guilty!"

The duke then slowly moved toward the door, and closed it sharply, while Jean Charost was removed from his terrible couch, and a little water given him to drink. He sat up, and leaned his head upon his hand, with his eyes still closed, and not even seeming to see who had come to deliver him. The *prévôt's*; men approached, and attempted, somewhat rudely, to place upon him his coat and vest, which had been taken off to apply the torture.

"Patience--patience, for a moment!" he said.

In the mean while, the Duke of Burgundy had approached close to him, and stood gazing at him with his arms crossed on his broad chest. "Can you speak, young man?" he said, at length.

Jean Charost inclined his head a little further.

"What was it you refused to tell the council?" asked the duke.

"Where the Duke of Orleans sent me last night," answered the young man, faintly.

"Faithful and true, indeed!" said the Duke of Burgundy; and then, laying his broad hand upon the youth's aching shoulder, he said, in a low tone, "If you seek new service, De Brecy, join me at Mons in a week. I will raise you to high honor; and remember--this you have suffered was not my doing. I came to deliver you. Now bring him in, *prévôt*, as soon as he can bear it."

When the duke returned to the hall, he found Agnes Sorel standing by the side of the Duke of Berri, although a chair had been placed for her by one of the gentlemen near; for in those days there was the brilliant stamp of chivalrous courtesy on all French gentlemen, in external things at least, though since blotted out by the blood of Lamballe and Marie Antoinette.

"Your testimony as to his general character and uprightness, my fair young lady," said the Duke of Berri, in a kindly tone, "will have the weight that it deserves with the council, but we must have something more definite here. We find that he was absent more than an hour from the duke's suite, when my poor nephew had ordered him to rejoin him immediately, and that this fearful assassination was committed during that period. He refuses to answer as to where he was, or what he was doing during that time. We will put the question to him again," he continued, looking toward the door at which Jean Charost now appeared, supported by two of the *prévôt's*; men, and followed by that officer himself. "Has he made any answer, Monsieur De Tignonville?"

"Not a word, your highness," replied the *prévôt*.

"Noble lad!" said Agnes Sorel, in a low voice, as if to herself; and then continued, raising her tone, "My lord the duke, I will tell you where he was, and what he was doing."

The Duke of Burgundy started, and looked suddenly up; but Agnes went on. "Although there be some men to whose characters certain acts are so repugnant that to suppose them guilty of them would be to suppose an impossibility, and though I and the mighty prince there opposite can bear witness that such is the case even in this instance, yet, lest he should bring himself into danger by his faithfulness, I will tell you what he will not speak, for I am bound by no duty to refrain. He was at the house of Madame De Giac, sent thither with a note by the Duke of Orleans. She told me so herself this morning, and lamented that a foolish trick she caused her servants to play him--merely to see how he, in his inexperience, would escape from a difficulty--had

prevented him from rejoining his princely master, though, as she justly said, her idle jest had most likely saved the young man's life."

"Skillfully turned," muttered the Duke of Burgundy between his teeth, and he looked up with a relieved expression of countenance.

"If my lords doubt me," continued the young girl, "let them send for Madame De Giac herself."

"Nay, nay, we doubt you not," said the Duke of Burgundy; "and so sure am I of the poor lad's innocence--although he offended me somewhat at Pithiviers--that I propose he should be instantly liberated, and allowed to retire."

"Open the door, but first clip the bird's wings," said Seigneur André. "He won't fly far, I fancy, after the trimming he has had."

The proposal of the Duke of Burgundy, however, was at once acceded to; and Louis of Anjou, whose heart was a kindly one, notwithstanding some failings, leaned across the table toward Agnes Sorel, saying, "Take him with you, pretty maid, and try what you and the rest can do to comfort him till I come."

Agnes frankly held out her hand to Jean Charost, saying, "Come, Monsieur De Brecy, you need rest and refreshment. Come; you shall have the sweetest music you have ever heard to cheer you, and may have to thank the musician too."

With feeble and wavering steps, the young gentleman followed her from the room; and the moment the door was closed behind them, the King of Sicily turned to the *prévôt*, saying, "This young man is clearly innocent, Monsieur De Tignonville. Do you not think so?"

"I have never thought otherwise, my lord," replied the *prévôt*.

"Well, then, sir," said the Duke of Berri, "you have doubtless used all diligence, as we commanded this morning, to trace out those who have committed so horrible a crime as the assassination of the king's own brother."

"All diligence have I used, noble lords and mighty princes," said De Tignonville, advancing to the edge of the table, and speaking in a peculiarly stern and resolute tone of voice; "but I have yet apprehended none of the assassins or their accomplices. Nevertheless, such information have I received as leads me to feel sure that I shall be able to place them before you ere many hours are over, if you will give me the authority of the council to enter and examine the houses of all the servants of the king and those of the princes--even of the blood royal; which, as you know, is beyond my power without your especial sanction."

"Most assuredly," replied the King of Sicily. "Begin with mine, if you please. Search it from top to bottom. There are none of us here who would stand upon a privilege that might conceal the murderer of Louis of Orleans."

"There can be no objection," said the Duke of Berri. "Search mine, when you please, Monsieur le Prévôt."

"And mine," said the Duke of Bourbon.

"And mine--and mine," said several of the lords of the council.

The Duke of Burgundy said nothing; but sat at the table, with his face pale, and his somewhat harsh features sharpened, though motionless. At length he started up from the table, and exclaimed, in a sharp, quick tone, "Come hither, Sicily--come hither, my fair uncle of Berri. I would I speak a word with you;" and he strode toward the great door, followed by the two princes whom he had selected.

Between the great door and that of an outer hall was a small vestibule, with a narrow stair-case on one side, on the lower steps of which some attendants were sitting, when the duke appeared suddenly among them.

"Avoid!" he said, in a tone so loud and harsh as to scatter them at once like a flock of frightened sheep. He then closed both the doors, looked up the stair-case, and drew the Duke of Berri toward him, whispering something in his ear in a low tone.

The venerable prince started back, and gazed at him with a look of horror. "It was a suggestion of the great enemy," said Burgundy, "and I yielded."

"What does he say--what does he say?" exclaimed the King of Sicily.

"That he--he ordered the assassination," answered the Duke of Berri, in a sad and solemn tone. "I have lost two nephews in one night!"

The Duke of Anjou drew back with no less horror in his face than that which had marked the countenance of the Duke of Berri; but he gave more vehement way to the feeling of reprobation which possessed him, expressing plainly his grief and indignation. He was brief, however, and

soon laid his hand upon the lock to open the door of the council-chamber again.

"Stay, stay, Louis," said the Duke of Berri. "Let us say nothing of this terrible truth till we have well considered what is to be done."

"Done!" repeated the Duke of Burgundy, gazing at them both with a look of stern surprise, as if he had fully expected that his acknowledgment of the deed was to make it pass uninvestigated and unpunished; and passing between his two relations, he too approached the door as if to go in.

But the Duke of Berri barred the way. "Go not into the council, fair nephew," he said. "It would not please me, nor any other person there, to have you among us now."

The Duke of Burgundy gave him one glance, but answered nothing; and, passing through the opposite door and the outer hall, mounted his horse and rode away, followed by his train.

"Let us break up the council, Louis," said the Duke of Berri, "and summon it for to-morrow morning. I will hie me home, and give the next hours to silent thought and prayer. You do the same; and let us meet to-morrow before the council reassembles."

"My thoughts are all confused," said the King of Sicily. "Is it a dream, noble kinsman--a bloody and terrible dream? Well, go you in. I dare not go with you. I should discover all. Say I am sick--God knows it is true--sick, very sick at heart."

Thus saying, he turned toward the stair-case, and while the Duke of Berri returned to those he had left, and broke up the council abruptly, the other prince proceeded slowly and gloomily toward his wife's apartments. When he reached the top of the stairs, however, and opened the door at which they terminated, a strain of the most exquisite music met his ear, sweet, slow, and plaintive, but yet not altogether melancholy.

Oh, how inharmonious can music sometimes be to the spirits even of those who love it best!

CHAPTER XXIX.

There are moments in life when even kindness and tenderness have no balm--when all streams are bitter because the bitterness is in us--when the heart is hardened to the nether millstone by the Gorgon look of despair--when happiness is so utterly lost that unhappiness has no degrees. There are such moments; but, thank God, they are few.

Heavy in heart and spirit, indignant at the treatment he had received, with his mind full of grief and horror at the dreadful death of a prince he had well loved, and with a body weary and broken with the torture he had undergone, still Jean Charost found comfort and relief in the soothing tenderness of Agnes Sorel, and of two or three girls somewhat older than herself, who lavished kindness and attention upon him as soon as they learned what had just befallen him. Some wine was brought, and fair hands gave it to him, and all that woman's pity could do was done. But Agnes had that morning learned the power of music, and, running away into an ante-room, she exclaimed, "Where is our sweet musician? Here, boy--here! Bring your instrument, and try and comfort him for whom you pleaded so hard just now. He needs it much."

Petit Jean rose instantly, paused for one moment to screw up a little one of the strings of his violin, and then followed into the inner room, giving a timid glance around over the fair young faces which were gathered about Jean Charost. But his eyes soon settled upon the sufferer with an inquiring look, which put the question as plainly as in words, "What is the matter with him?"

"They have put him to the torture," whispered Agnes; and the boy, after a moment's pause, raised his instrument to his shoulder and drew from it those sweet tones which the Duke of Anjou had heard. A short time before, he had played a dirge for the Duke of Orleans in the presence of the Queen of Sicily--I can hardly call it one of his own compositions, but rather one of his inspirations. It had been deep, solemn, almost terrible; but now the music was very different, sweet, plaintive, and yet with a mingling of cheerfulness every now and then, as if it would fain have been gay, but that something like memory oppressed the melody. It was like a spring day in the country--a day of early spring--when winter is still near at hand, though summer lies on before.

To enjoy fine and elaborate music aright, we require some learning, a disciplined and practiced ear; but those, I believe, who have heard the least music are more deeply affected by simple melodies. The sensations which Jean Charost experienced are hardly to be described, and when the boy ceased, he held out his hand to him, saying, "Thank you, thank you, my young

friend. You have done me more good than ever did leech to sick man."

"You have more to thank him for than that," said Agnes, with a smile, which brought out upon her face, not then peculiarly handsome, that latent, all-captivating beauty which was afterward her peril and her power. "Had it not been for him, neither the Queen of Sicily nor I would ever have heard of your danger."

"How can that be?" asked Jean Charost. "I do not know him--I never saw him."

"Nor I you," replied the boy; "but 'tis the story of the lion and the mouse that my grandmother told me. You have a lackey called Martin Grille. He is my cousin. You have been kind to him; he has been kind to me; and so the whole has gone in a round. He gave me the first crown he could spare; that helped me to buy this thing that speaks so sweetly when I tell it. It said to that young lady, and to the queen, to have pity; and they had pity on you; and so that went in a round too. But I must go now, for I have to meet Martin on the parvis, and I shall be too late."

"Stay a moment," said Agnes. "You have had no reward."

"Oh yes, I have," replied the boy. "Reward enough in setting him free."

"Nay, that was but justice," she answered. "Stay but a moment, and I will tell the queen you are going."

One of the other girls accompanied her, and two more dropped away before she returned. Another, who was elder, remained talking with Petit Jean, and asking him many questions as to how he had acquired such skill in music. The boy said, God sent it; that from his infancy he had always played upon any instrument he could get; that one of the chanters of Nôtre Dame had taught him a little, and a blind man, who played on the cornemuse, had given him some instruction. That was all that he could tell; but yet, though he showed no learning, he spoke of his beautiful art with a wild confidence and enthusiasm that the young denizen of an artificial court could not at all comprehend. At length Agnes returned alone, bearing a small silk purse in her hand, which she gave to the boy, saying, "The queen thanks you, Petit Jean; and bids you come to her again on Sunday night. To-day she can hear nothing that is not sad; but she would fain hear some of your gayer music."

"Tell Martin that I will be home soon," said Jean Charost. "Indeed, I see not why I should not go with you now. Methinks I could walk to the hotel."

"Nay," said Agnes, kindly; "you shall not go yet. The king has given me charge of you, and I will be obeyed. It will be better that he tell your servant to come hither, and inquire for Madame De Busserole, our superintendent. Then, when you have somebody with you, you can go in more safety. Tell him so, Petit Jean. I must let Madame De Busserole know, however, lest the young man be sent away."

"I will tell her," said the other maid of honor. "You stay with your friend, Agnes; for I have got that rose in my embroidery to finish. Farewell, Monsieur De Brecy. If I were a king, I would hang all the torturers and burn all the racks, with the man who first invented them in the middle of them." And she tripped gayly out of the room.

The boy took his departure at the same time; and Jean Charost and Agnes were left alone together, or nearly so--for various people came and went--during well-nigh an hour. The light soon began to fade, and a considerable portion of their interview passed in twilight; but their conversation was not such as to require any help from the looks. It was very calm and quiet. Vain were it, indeed, to say that they did not take much interest in each other. But both were very young, and there are different ways of being young. Some are young in years--some in mind--some in heart. Agnes and Jean Charost were both older than their years in mind, but perhaps younger than their years in heart; and nothing even like a dream of love came over the thoughts of either.

They talked much of the late Duke of Orleans, and Jean Charost told her a good deal of the duchess. They talked, too, of Madame De Giac; and Agnes related to him all the particulars of that lady's visit to her in the morning.

"Why she came, I really do not know," said the young girl. "Although she is a distant cousin of my late father's, there was never any great love between us, and we parted with no great tenderness two days after I saw you at Pithiviers. Her principal object seemed to be to tell me of your having visited her yesterday night, and to mention the foolish trick she played upon you. That she seemed very eager to explain--I know not why."

Jean Charost mused somewhat gloomily. There were suspicions in his breast he did not like to mention; and the conduct and demeanor of Madame De Giac toward himself were not what he could tell to her beside him.

"I love not that Madame De Giac," he said, at length.

"I never loved her," answered Agnes. "I can remember her before her marriage, and I loved her not then; but still less do I esteem her now, after having been more than ten days in her

company. It is strange, Monsieur De Brecy, is it not, what it can be that gives children a sort of feeling of people's characters, even before they have any real knowledge of them. She was always very kind to me, even as a child; but I thought of her then just as I think of her now, though perhaps I ought to think worse; for since then she has said many things to me which I wish I had never heard."

"How so!" asked Jean Charost, eagerly. "What has she said?"

"Oh, much that I can not tell--that I forget," answered Agnes, with the color mounting in her cheek. "But her general conversation, with me at least, does not please me. She speaks of right and wrong, honesty and dishonesty, as if there were no distinctions between them but those made by priests and lawyers. Every thing, to her mind, depends upon what is most advantageous in the end; and that is the most advantageous, in her mind, which gives the most pleasure."

"She may be right," answered Jean Charost, "if she takes the next world into account as well as this. But still I think her doctrines dangerous ones, and would not have any one to whom I wish well listen to them."

"I never do," answered Agnes; "but she laughs at me when I tell her I would rather not hear; and tells me that all these things, and indeed the whole world, will appear to me as differently ten years hence as the world now does compared with what it seemed to me as an infant. I do not think it; do you?"

"I can not tell," replied Jean Charost, gravely; "but I hope not; for I believe it would be better for us all could we always see the world with the eyes of childhood. True, it has changed much to my own view within the last few months; but it has changed sadly, and I wish I could look upon it as I did before. That can not be, however; and I suppose we are all--though men more than women--destined to see these changes, and to pass through them."

"Men can bear them better than women," answered Agnes. "A storm that breaks a flower or kills a butterfly, does not bend an oak or scare an eagle. Well, we must endure whatever be our lot; but I often think, Monsieur De Brecy, that, had the choice been mine, I would rather have been a peasant girl--not a serf, but a free farmer's daughter--with a tall, white cap, and a milk-pail on my arm, than a lady of the court, with all these gauds and jewels about me. If my poor mother had lived, I should never have been here."

Thus they rambled on for some time, till at length it was announced that Martin Grille was in waiting; and Jean Charost took his leave of his fair companion, pouring forth upon her at the last moment his thanks for all she had done to serve and save him. He was still stiff and weak, feeling as if every bone in his body had been crushed, and every muscle riven; but he contrived to reach the Hôtel d'Orleans, with the assistance of Martin Grille.

It was now quite dark; but in the vestibule, which has been often mentioned, a number of the unfortunate duke's servants and retainers were assembled, among whom Jean Charost perceived at once, by the dim light of the lanterns, the faces of the chaplain and Seigneur André. As soon as the latter saw him leaning feebly on his servant, he cried out, with an exulting laugh, "Ah, here comes the lame sparrow who was once so pert."

"Silence, fool!" cried a loud voice, "or I will break your head for you." And Juvenel de Royans came forward, holding out his hand to Jean Charost. "Let us be friends, De Brecy," he said. "I have done you some wrong--I have acted foolishly--like a boy; but this last fatal night, and this day, have made a man of me, and I trust a wiser one than I have ever shown myself. Forget the past, and let us be friends."

"Most willingly," replied Jean Charost. "But I must get to my chamber, De Royans, for, to say the truth, I can hardly drag my limbs along."

"Curses upon them!" replied De Royans "the cruel monsters, to torture a man for faithfulness to his lord! Let me help you, De Brecy." And, putting his strong arm through that of Jean Charost, he aided him to ascend the stairs, and with rough kindness laid him down upon his bed.

Here, during the evening, the young secretary was visited by various members of the household, though, to say truth, he was in no very fit state to entertain them. Lomelini came, with his soft and somewhat cunning courtesy, to ask what he could do for the young gentleman--doubting not that he would take a high place in the favor of the duchess. The chaplain came to excuse himself for having suggested certain questions to the king's counsel, and did it somewhat lamely.

Old Monsieur Blaize visited him, to express warm and hearty applause of the young man's conduct in all respects. "Do your *devoir*; as knightly in the field, my young friend," he said, "as you have done it before the council, and you will win your golden spurs in the first battle that is stricken."

Several of the late duke's knights, with whom Jean Charost had formed no acquaintance, came also to express their approbation; but praise fell upon a faint and heavy ear; for all he had passed through was not without consequences more serious than were at first apparent.

Martin Grille overflowed with joy and satisfaction so sincere and radiant at the escape of his master, that Jean Charost could not help being touched by the good valet's attachment. But, as a true Frenchman, he was full of his own part in the young gentleman's deliverance, attributing to himself and his own dexterity all honor and praise for the result which had been attained. He perceived not, for some time, in his self-gratulations, that Jean Charost could neither smile nor listen; that a red spot came in his cheek; that his eyes grew blood-shot, and his lip parched. At length, however, a few incoherent words alarmed him, and he determined to sit by his master's bedside and watch. Before morning he had to seek a physician; and then began all the follies of the medical art, common in those times.

For fourteen days, however, Jean Charost was utterly unconscious of whether he was treated well or ill, kindly or the reverse; and at the end of that time, when the light of reason returned, it was but faint and feeble. When first he became fully conscious, he found himself lying in a small room, of which he thought he recollected something. The light of an early spring day was streaming in through an open window, with the fresh air, sweet and balmy; and the figure of a middle-aged man, in a black velvet gown, was seen going out of the door.

The eyes of the young man turned from one object around him to another. There was a little writing-table, two or three wooden settles, a brazen sconce upon the wall, a well-polished floor of brick, an ebony crucifix, with a small fountain of holy water beneath it--all objects to which his eyes had been accustomed five or six months before. The figure he had seen going out, with its quiet, firm carriage, and easy dignity, was one that he recollected well; and he asked himself, "Was he really still in the house of Jacques Cœur, and was the whole episode of Agnes, and Juvenel de Royans, and the imprisonment, and the torture, and the Duke of Orleans nothing but a dream?"

CHAPTER XXX.

A week, a fortnight, a month; what are they in the long, long, boundless lapse of time? A point--a mere point on which the eye of memory hardly rests in the look-back of a lifetime, unless some of those marking facts which stamp particular periods indelibly upon the heart have given it a durable significance. Yet, even in so brief a space, how much may be done. Circumscribe it as you will--make it a single hour--tie down the passing of that hour to one particular spot; and in that hour, and on that spot, deeds may be written on eternity affecting the whole earth at the time, affecting the whole human race forever. No man can ever overestimate the value of the actions of an hour.

Within the period of Jean Charost's sickness and recovery, up to the time when he fully regained his consciousness, events had been going on around him which greatly influenced, not only his fate, but the fate of mighty nations. The operation, indeed, was not immediate; but it was direct and clear; and we must pause for a moment in the more domestic history which we are giving, to dwell upon occurrences of general importance, without a knowledge of which our tale could hardly be understood.

In confusion and dismay, accompanied by few attendants, and in a somewhat stealthy manner, John of Burgundy fled from Paris, after making his strange and daring confession of the murder of his near kinsman, and the brother of his king.

When informed of the avowal, the Duke of Bourbon, his uncle, and many other members of the king's council, expressed high displeasure that the Duke of Berri and the King of Sicily had suffered him to quit the door of the council-chamber, except as a prisoner; and perhaps those two princes themselves saw the error they had committed. Had they acted boldly and decidedly upon the mere sense of justice and right, France would have been spared many a bloody hour, a disastrous defeat, and a long subjugation. But when the time of repentance came, repentance was too late. The Duke of Burgundy was gone, and the tools of his revenge, though he had boldly named them, had followed their lord.

All had gone, as criminals flying from justice, and such was their terror and apprehension of pursuit, that they threw down spiked balls in the snow behind them as they went, to lame the horses of those who might follow. In the course of his flight, however, the Duke of Burgundy recovered in part his courage and a sense of his dignity. His situation was still perilous indeed; for he had raised enmity and indignation against him in the hearts of all the princes of the blood royal, and of many of the noblest men in France. Nay more, he had alienated the most sincere and the most honorable of his own followers, while the king himself, just recovered from one of his lamentable fits of insanity, was moved by every feeling of affection, and by the sense of justice and of honor, to punish the shameless murderer of his brother.

No preparation of any importance had been made to meet this peril; and the Duke of Burgundy was saved alone by the hesitating counsels of old and timid men, who still procrastinated till is was too late to act.

In the mean time, the murderer determined upon his course. He not only avowed, but attempted to justify the act upon motives so wild, so irrational, so destitute of every real and substantial foundation, that they could not deceive a child, and no one even pretended to be deceived. He accused his unhappy victim of crimes that Louis of Orleans never dreamed of--of aiming at the crown--of practicing upon the health and striking at the life of the king, his brother, by magical arts and devices. He did all, in short, to calumniate his memory, and to represent his assassination as an act necessary to the safety of the crown and the country. At the same time, he sent messengers to his good citizens of Flanders, to his vassals of Artois, to all his near relations, to all whom he could persuade or could command, to demand immediate aid and assistance against the vengeful sword which he fancied might pursue him, and he soon found himself at the head of a force with which he might set the power of his king at defiance. Lille, Ghent, Amiens, bristled with armed men, and John of Burgundy soon felt that the murder of his cousin had put the destinies of France into his hands.

While this was taking place in the north and west, a different scene was being enacted in Paris; a scene which, if the popular heart was not the basest thing that ever God created, the popular mind the lightest and most unreasonable, should have roused the whole citizens to grief for him whom they had lost, to indignation against his daring murderer. The Duchess of Orleans, accompanied by her youngest son, entered Paris as a mourner, and threw herself at the feet of her brother and her king, praying for simple justice. The will of the murdered prince was opened; and, though his faults were many and glaring, that paper showed, the frank and generous character of the man, and was refutation enough of the vile calumnies circulated against him. So firm and strong had been his confidence, so full and clear his intention of maintaining in every respect the agreement of pacification lately signed between himself and the Duke of Burgundy, that he left the guardianship of his children to the very man who had so treacherously caused his assassination. None of his friends, none who had ever served him, were forgotten, and the tenacity of his affection was shown by his remembering many whom he had not seen for years. It was not wonderful, then, that those who knew and loved him clung to his memory with strong attachment, and with a reverence which some of his acts might not altogether warrant. It would not have been wonderful if the generous closing of his life had taught the populace of Paris to forget his faults and to revere his character. But the herd of all great cities is but as a pack of hounds, to be cried on by the voice of the huntsman against any prey that is in view; and the herd of Paris is more reckless in its fierceness than any other on all the earth.

Fortune was with the Duke of Burgundy, and alas! boldness, decision, and skill likewise. He held a conference with the Duke of Berri, and the King of Sicily in his own city of Amiens, swarming with his armed men. He placed over the door of the humble house in which he lodged two lances crossed, the one armed with its steel head, the other unarmed, ungarlanded--a significant indication that he was ready for peace or war. The reproaches of the princes he repelled with insolence, and treated their counsels and remonstrances with contempt. Instead of coming to Paris and submitting himself humbly to the king, as they advised, he marched to St. Denis with a large force, and then, after a day's hesitation, entered the capital, armed cap-à-pie, amid the acclamations of the populace.

The Hôtel d'Artois, already a place of considerable strength, received additional fortifications, and all the houses round about it were filled with his armed men; but especial care was taken that the soldiery should commit no excess upon the citizens, and though he bearded his king upon the throne, and overawed the royal council, with the true art of a demagogue he was humble and courteous toward the lowest citizens, flattered those whom he despised, and eagerly sought to make converts to his party in every class of society, partly by corruption, and partly by terror. Wherever he went the people followed at his heels, shouting his name, and vociferating, "Noël, noël!" and gradually the unhappy king, oppressed by his own vassal, though adored by his people, fell back into that lamentable state from which he had but lately recovered.

Such was the state of Paris when Jean Charost raised his head, and gazed around the room in which he was lying. His sight was somewhat dim, his brain was somewhat dizzy; feeble he felt as infancy; but yet it was a pleasure to him to feel himself in that little room again, to fancy himself moving in plain mediocrity, to believe that his experience of courtly life was all a dream. What a satire upon all those objects which form so many men's vain aspirations!

When he had gazed at the window, and at the door, and at all the little objects that were scattered directly before his eyes, he turned feebly to look at things nearer to him. He thought he heard a sigh close to his bedside; but a plain curtain was drawn round the head of the bed, and he could only see from behind it part of a woman's black robe falling in large folds over the knee.

The little rustle that he made in turning seemed to attract the attention of the watcher. The curtain was gently drawn back, and he beheld his mother's face gazing at him earnestly. Oh, it was a pleasant sight; and he smiled upon her with the love that a son can only feel for a mother.

"My son--my dear son," she cried; "you are better. Oh yes, you are better?" And, darting to the door, she called to him who had just gone out, "Messire Jacques, Messire Jacques. He is awake now; and he knows me!"

"Gently, gently, dear lady," said Jacques Cœur, returning to the room. "We must have great quiet, and all will go well."

The widow sat down and wept, and the good merchant placed himself by the young man's side, looked down upon him with a fatherly smile, and pressed his fingers on the wrist, saying, "Ay, the Syrian drug has done marvels. Canst thou speak, my son?"

Jean Charost replied in a voice much stronger than might have been expected; but Jacques Cœur fell into a fit of thought even while he spoke, which lasted some two or three minutes, and the young man was turning toward his mother again, when the good merchant murmured, as if speaking to himself, "I know not well how to act--there are dangers every way. Listen to me, my son, but with perfect calmness, and let me have an answer from your own lips, which I can send to the great man whose messenger waits below. Two days ago we heard that the Duke of Burgundy had caused inquiries to be made concerning you, as where you were to be found, and when you had left the Hôtel d'Orleans. To-day he has sent a gentleman to inquire if you will take service with him. He offers you the post of second squire of his body, and promises knighthood on the first occasion. What do you answer, Jean?"

Jean Charost thought for a moment, and then laid his hand upon his brow; but at length he said, "'Twere better to tell him that I am too ill to answer, or even to think, but that I will either wait upon him or send him my reply in a few days."

"Wisely decided," said Jacques Cœur, rising. "That answer will do right well;" and, quitting the room, he left the door open behind him, so that the young man could hear him deliver the message word for word, merely prefacing it by saying, "He sends his humble duty to his highness, and begs to say--"

A rough voice, in a somewhat haughty tone, replied, "Is he so very ill, then, sir merchant? His highness is determined to know in all cases who is for him and who is against him. I trust you tell me true, therefore."

"You can go up, fair sir, and see," replied Jacques Cœur; "but I must beg you not to disturb him with any talk."

The other voice made no reply, but the moment after Jean Charost could hear a heavy step coming up the stairs, and a good-looking man, of a somewhat heavy countenance, completely armed, but with his beaver up, appeared in the doorway. He merely looked in, however, and the pale countenance and emaciated frame of the young gentleman seemed to remove his doubts at once.

"That will do," he said. "I can now tell what I have seen. The duke will expect an answer in a few days. If he dies, let him know, for there are plenty eager for the post, I can tell you."

Thus saying, he turned away and closed the door; and Madame De Brecy exclaimed, "God forbid that you should die, my son, or serve that bad man either."

"So say I too," replied Jean Charost. "I know not why you should feel so regarding him, dear mother, but I can not divest my mind of a suspicion that he countenanced, if he did not prompt, the death of the Duke of Orleans."

"Do you not know that he has avowed it?" exclaimed Madame De Brecy; but her son's face turned so deadly pale, even to the very lips, that Jacques Cœur interposed, saying gently, "Beware--beware, dear lady. He can not bear any such tidings now. He will soon be well enough to hear all."

His judgment proved right. From that moment every hour gave Jean Charost some additional strength; and that very day, before nightfall, he heard much that imported him greatly to know. He now learned that the Duchess of Orleans, after a brief visit to the capital to demand justice upon the murderers of her husband, had judged it prudent to retire to Blois, and to withdraw all the retainers of the late duke. Jean Charost, being in no situation to bear so long a journey, she had commended him especially to the care of Jacques Cœur, who had ridden in haste to Paris on the news of assassination. He now learned, also, that one of the last acts of the duke had been to leave him a pension of three hundred crowns--then a large sum--charged upon the county of Vertus, and that a packet addressed to him, sealed with the duke's private signet, and marked, "To be read by his own eye alone," had been found among the papers at the château of Beauté.

He would have fain heard more, and prolonged the conversation upon subjects so interesting to him, but Jacques Cœur wisely refused to gratify him, and contrived to dole out his information piece by piece, avoiding, as far as possible, all that could excite or agitate him. A pleasant interlude, toward the fall of evening, was afforded by the arrival of Martin Grille, whose joy at seeing his young master roused from a stupor which he had fancied would only end in death was touching in itself, although it assumed somewhat ludicrous forms. He capered about the room as if he had been bit by a tarantula, and in the midst of his dancing he fell upon his knees, and thanked God and the blessed Virgin for the miraculous cure of his young lord, which he attributed entirely to his having vowed a wax candle of three pounds' weight to burn in the Lady Chapel of the Nôtre Dame in case of Jean Charost's recovery. It seems that since the arrival of Madame de Brecy in Paris, she and Martin Grille had equally divided the task of sitting up all

night with her son; and well had the faithful valet performed his duty, for, without an effort, or any knowledge on his part, Jean Charost had won the enthusiastic love and respect of one who had entered his service with a high contempt for his want of experience, and perhaps some intention of making the best of a good place.

Well has it been said that force of character is the most powerful of moral engines, for it works silently, and even without the consciousness of those who are subject to its influence, upon all that approaches it. How often is it that we see a man of no particular brilliance of thought, of manner, or of expression, come into the midst of turbulent and unruly spirits, and bend them like osiers to his will. Some people will have it that it is the clearness with which his thoughts are expressed, or the clearness with which they are conceived, the definiteness of his directions, the promptness of his decisions, which gives him this power; but if we look closely, we shall find that it is force of character--a quality of the mind which men feel in others rather than perceive, and which they yield to often without knowing why.

The following morning rose like a wayward child, dull and sobbing; but Jean Charost woke refreshed and reinvigorated, after a long, calm night of sweet and natural sleep. His mother was again by his bedside, and she took a pleasure in telling him how carefully Martin Grille had preserved all his little treasures in the Hôtel d'Orleans, at a time when the assassination of the duke had thrown all the better members of the household into dismay and confusion, and left the house itself, for a considerable time, at the mercy of the knaves and scoundrels that are never wanting in a large establishment.

She was interrupted in her details by the entrance of the very person of whom she spoke, and at the same time loud cries and shouts and hurras rose up from the street, inducing Jean Charost to inquire if the king were passing along.

"No, fair sir," answered Martin Grille. "It is the king's king. But, on my life, my lord of Burgundy does not much fear rusting his armor, or he would not ride through the streets on such a day as this."

"Does he go armed, then?" asked Jean Charost.

"From head to foot," answered his mother; and Martin Grille added, "He is seldom without four or five hundred men-at-arms with him. Such a sight was never seen in Paris. But I must go my ways, and get the news of the day, for these are times when every man should know whatever his neighbor is doing."

"I fear your intelligence must stop somewhat short of that," said Jean Charost.

"I shall get all the intelligence I want," replied the valet, with a sapient nod of the head. "I have a singing bird in the court cage that always sings me truly;" and away he went in search of news.

During his absence, a consultation was held between Madame De Brecy, her son, and Jacques Cœur as to what was to be done in regard to the message of the Duke of Burgundy. "We have only put off the evil day," said Jacques Cœur, "and some reply must soon be given."

"My reply can be but one," answered Jean Charost; "that I will never serve a murderer; still less serve the murderer of my dear lord."

Madame De Brecy looked uneasy, and the face of Jacques Cœur was very grave.

"You surely would not have me do so, my dear mother?" said the young gentleman, raising himself on his arm, and gazing in her face. "You could not wish me, my good and honorable friend?"

"No, Jean, no," answered Jacques Cœur; "but yet such a reply is perilous; and before it is made, we must be beyond the reach of the strong arm that rules all things in this capital. You have had a taste, my son, of what great men will dare do to those who venture to oppose them, even in their most unjust commands. Depend upon it, the Duke of Burgundy will not scruple at acts which the king's council themselves would not venture to authorize. Why he should wish to engage you in his service I can not tell; but that he does so earnestly is evident, and refusal will be very dangerous, even in the mildest form."

"Some fanciful connection between my fate and his was told him one night by an astrologer," said Jean Charost. "That is the only motive he can have."

"Perhaps so," replied Jacques Cœur, thoughtfully; and then he added, the moment after, "and yet I do not know. His highness is not one to be influenced in his conduct by any visionary things; they may have weight with him in thought, but not in action. If he had been told that his death would follow the poor duke's as a natural consequence, he would have killed him notwithstanding. He must have seen something in you, my young friend, that he likes--that he thinks will suit some of his purposes."

"He has seen little of me that should so prepossess him," answered the young gentleman; "he has seen me peremptorily refuse to obey his own commands, and obstinately deny the council the

information they wanted, even though they tried to wring it out by torture."

"Probably the very cause," answered Jacques Cœur; "he loves men of resolution. But let us return to the subject, my young friend. Your answer must be somewhat softened. We must say that you are still too ill to engage in any service; that you must have some months for repose, and that then you will willingly obey any of his highness's just commands."

"Never, never!" answered Jean Charost, warmly; "I will never palter with my faith and duty toward the dead. If ever I can couch a lance against this duke's breast, I will aim it well, and the memory of my master will steady my arm; but serve him I will never, nor even lead him to expect it."

Jacques Cœur and Madame De Brecy looked at each other in silence; but they urged him no more; and the only question in their minds now was, what course they could take not to suffer the young man's safety to be periled in consequence of a resolution which they dared not disapprove.

In the midst of their consultation Martin Grille returned, evidently burdened with intelligence, and that not of a very pleasant character.

"What is to be done, I know not," he said, with much trepidation; "I can not, and I will not leave you, sir, whatever may come of it."

"What is the matter, Martin?" asked Jacques Cœur. "Be calm, be calm young man, and tell us plainly, whatever be the evil."

"Listen, then, listen," said Martin Grille, lowering his voice almost to a whisper. "An order is given out secretly to seize every Orleanist now remaining in Paris in his bed this night at twelve of the clock. It is true; it is true, beyond all doubt. I had it from my cousin Petit Jean, who got it from his father, old Caboche, now the Duke of Burgundy's right-hand man in Paris."

"Then we must go at once," said Jacques Cœur "Whatever be the risk, we must try if you can bear the motion of a litter, Jean."

"But all the gates are closed except two," said Martin Grille, "and they suffer no one to go out without a pass. News has got abroad of all this. The queen went yesterday to Melun. The King of Sicily, the Duke of Berri, the Duke of Britanny have fled this morning. The Duke of Bourbon has been long gone, and the Burgundians are resolved that no more shall escape."

Jacques Cœur gazed sternly down upon the floor, and Madame De Brecy wrung her hands in despair.

"Go, my friend, go," said Jean Charost; "you are not marked out as an Orleanist. Take my mother with you. God may protect me even here. If not, his will be done."

"Stay," cried Martin Grille, "stay! I have thought of a way, perhaps. Many of these Burgundian nobles are poor. Can not you lend one of them a thousand crowns, Monsieur Jacques, and get a pass for yourself and your family. He will be glad enough to give it, to see a creditor's back turned, especially when he knows he can keep him at arm's length as long as he will. I am sure my young lord will repay you."

"Repay me!" exclaimed Jacques Cœur, indignantly; "but your hint is a good one. I will act upon it, but not exactly as you propose. Some of them owe me enough already to wish me well out of Paris. Tell all my people to get ready for instant departure; and look for a litter that will hold two. I will away at once, and see what can be done."

"Have plenty of men with you, Messire Jacques," said Martin Grille, eagerly; "men that can fight, for there are Burgundian bands patrolling all round the city. I am not good at fighting, and my young lord is as bad as I am now."

"We must take our chance," said Jacques Cœur, and quitted the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was past ten o'clock at night, when a litter, escorted by four men on horseback, passed the gates of Paris. A short detention took place before the guards at the gates would suffer the party to proceed, and one man went into the guardhouse, and brought out a lantern to examine the inside of the litter and the countenances of the cavaliers. He used it also to examine the pass,

though, to say truth, he could not read a word, albeit an officer of some standing. In this respect none of his companions were in better case than himself; and they all declared that the handwriting was so bad that nobody on earth could read it. It seemed likely, at one time, that this illegibility of the writing, or want of the reading faculty on the part of the guards, might be made an excuse for detaining the whole party till somebody with better eyes or better instruction should come up. But one of the horsemen dismounted, saying, "I will read it to you;" and looking over the officer's shoulder, he proceeded thus, "I, William, Marquis De Giac, do hereby strictly enjoin and command you, in the name of the high and mighty prince, John, duke of Burgundy, to pass safely through the gates of Paris, without let or impediment, Maître Jacques Cœur, clerk, his wife, and three serving-men, and to give them aid and comfort in case of need, signed, De Giac."

"Is that it?" asked the officer, staring on the paper.

"Yes, don't you see?" answered Jacques Cœur, pointing with his finger. "To let pass the gates of the city of Paris."

"Well, well, go along," said the man; and, mounting his horse again, the merchant led the way; and the litter, with those that it contained, followed.

For a wonder, Martin Grille held his tongue all this time; but ere they had gone half a dozen furlongs, he approached the side of the litter, and, putting in his head, asked how his young master was.

"Better, Martin, better," replied Jean Charost. "Every hour I feel better."

"Well, thank God, we are out of the city," said Martin Grille. "My heart has been so often in my mouth during this last half hour, that I thought I should bite it if I did but say a word. I wonder which way we are to direct our steps now."

"Toward Bourges, Martin," replied Jacques Cœur, who was riding near.

"Toward Bourges!" said Martin Grille. "Then what's to become of the baby?"

"The baby!" repeated Madame De Brecy, in a tone as full of surprise as that in which Martin had repeated the words "toward Bourges."

"In Heaven's name, what baby?"

Jean Charost laid his hand gently on his mother, saying, "It is very true, dear mother. A young child--quite an infant--has been given into my care, and I have promised to protect and educate her."

"But whose child is she?" asked Madame De Brecy, in a tone of some alarm and consternation.

"I can not tell," replied her son. "I believe she is an orphan; but I am ignorant of all the facts."

"She is an orphan in a double sense," said Jacques Cœur, mingling in the discourse; "at least I believe so. I have nothing to guide me but suspicion, it is true; but my suspicion is strong. Ay, my young friend: you are surprised that I know aught of this affair; but a friend's eye is often as watchful as a parent's. I saw the child, some days after it was given into your charge, and there is a strong likeness--as strong as there can be between an infant and a grown person--between this poor thing and one who is no more."

"Who--who?" asked Jean Charost, eagerly.

"One whom you never saw," replied Jacques Cœur; and Jean Charost was silent; for although he himself entertained suspicions, his friend's words were quite adverse to them.

"It was well bethought of, Martin," continued Jacques Cœur, after a short pause. "We had better take our way by Beauté. It is not far round, and we shall all the sooner get within the posts of the Orleans party; for they are already preparing for war. We can not take the child with us, for she is too young to go without a nurse; but we can make arrangements for her coming hereafter; and of course that which you promised when in peril of your life had you refused, must be performed to the letter, my young friend."

"Assuredly," replied Jean Charost. "Can we reach Beauté to-night?"

"I fear not," answered the merchant. "But we must go on till we have put danger behind us. Now draw the curtains of the litter again, and try to sleep, my son. Sleep is a strange whiler away of weary hours."

But, though the pace of the horse-litter was drowsy enough, it was long before any thing like slumber came near the eyes of Jean Charost; and he had just closed them, with a certain sort of heaviness of the lids, when the words "Halt, halt, whoever you are!" were heard on all sides, together with the tramp of many horses, and the jingling of arms. Madame De Brecy and her son drew back the curtains instantly; and they then found that they were surrounded by a large party of men-at-arms, two or three of whom were conversing with Jacques Cœur, a little in advance.

The moon had somewhat declined; but it was shining on the faces of several of the group; and, after gazing out for a moment or two, Jean Charost exclaimed, "De Royans--Monsieur De Royans!"

His voice, which was weak, was at first not attended to; but, on repeating the call, one of the horsemen turned quickly round and rode up to the side of the litter.

"Ah, De Brecy, is that you?" cried the young, man, holding out his hand to him. "Here, Messire What's-your-name, we will believe you now; for here is one who has suffered enough for his faithfulness to the good duke. Why, how is this, De Brecy? In a litter--when we want every man in the saddle. But I heard you were very ill. You must get well soon, and strike a good stroke beside me and the rest, for the memory of our good lord, whom they sent to heaven before his time. Oh, if I could get one blow at that Burgundian's head, I would aim better than I did at the Quintain. Well, you shall come on with us to Juvisy, and we will lodge and entertain you."

Thus saying, Juvenel de Royans turned away, rode back to his companions, and gave them explanations which seemed satisfactory; for the merchant and his party were not only suffered to proceed, but obtained the escort of some forty or fifty men-at-arms, who had been about to return to Juvisy when they fell in with the little cavalcade of Jacques Cœur.

None of the many moral enigmas with which we are surrounded is more difficult of comprehension to the mind of a man of fixed and resolute character than the sudden changes which come upon more impulsive and volatile people. The demeanor of Juvenel de Royans was a matter of serious and puzzling thought to Jean Charost through the rest of the journey. He seemed so entirely changed, not only in feelings toward the young gentleman himself, but in disposition. Frank, active, impetuous as ever, he had, in the space of a few terrible weeks, lost the boyish flippancy of manner, and put on the manly character at once. Jean Charost could not understand it at all; and it seemed to him most strange that one who would willingly have cut his throat not a month before, should now, upon the establishment of one very slight link between them, treat him as a dear and ancient friend. Jean Charost was less of a Frenchman than Juvenel de Royans, both by birth and education; for the latter had been born in the gay and movable south, and had been indulged, if not spoiled, during all his early life; while the former had first seen the light in much more northern regions, and had received very early severe lessons of adversity. Neither, perhaps, had any distinct notion of the real causes of their former enmity; but Jean Charost was, at least, well satisfied that it should be terminated; and, as he was of no rancorous disposition, he gladly received the proffered friendship of his former adversary; though, to say sooth, he counted it at somewhat less than it was worth, on account of the suddenness with which it had arisen. He knew not that some of the trees which spring up the most rapidly are nevertheless the most valuable.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Let us abridge and improve French history. As it is generally written, it is quite susceptible of both abridgment and improvement.

The power of the Duke of Burgundy was without bounds in the city of Paris, and his daring and his ferocity were as boundless. He remembered ancient offenses as tenaciously as the Duke of Orleans had remembered kindnesses, and every one in Paris who had at any time shown enmity toward him either sought refuge in flight or stayed to receive abundant marks of his vindictive memory. But he had skill also, as well as daring; and especially that dark and politic skill which teaches the demagogue to turn the best and wisest deeds of an adversary to his disadvantage in the eyes of the people, and his own worst actions to the services of his own ambition. Oh, what a fool is The People! Always the dupe of hypocrisy and lies, always deceived by promises and pretenses, always the lover and the support of those who at heart most despise and condemn it. That great, many-headed fool followed the duke's path with acclamations wherever he appeared, although the evils under which they labored, notwithstanding all his promises, were augmented rather than diminished by his sway.

A hired sophist defended the assassination of the Duke of Orleans, in presence of the court and the university, and the people shouted loudly, though the excuse was too empty to deceive a child. The duke declared that the maladministration of Orleans compelled the continuance of the taxes promised to be repealed, and the people shouted loudly still. The Prévôt De Tignonville was punished and degraded for bringing two robbers to justice, though every one knew the real offense was his proposal to search the houses of the princes for the assassins of the Duke of Orleans; and still the people shouted.

Nevertheless, fortune was not altogether constant; and while the power of the duke increased in the capital, let him do whatever he would, a cloud was gathering round him from which he found it necessary to fly. The Duchess of Orleans cried loudly for vengeance; the Dukes of Bourbon, Brittany, and Berri armed for her support, and for the deliverance of the throne. The queen, having the dauphin with her, lent weight and countenance to the party, and gradually the forces of the confederates increased so far that Paris was no longer a safe asylum for the object of their just indignation.

It was then that a revolt took place in Liege, where the brother-in-law of the duke held the anomalous position of prince bishop; and Burgundy hurried away from Paris both to aid his relation, and to avoid the advance of the Orleanist army, without risking honor and power upon an unequal battle. For a short space his position was perilous. The strong-headed and turbulent citizens of Liege--no soft and silky burghers, as they are represented by the great novelist in an after reign--stout and hardy soldiers as ever were, dared the whole power of Burgundy. An enemy's army was in his rear; all the princes of the blood, the council, and most of the great vassals of France were against him; but he fought and won a battle, captured Liege, and turned upon his steps once more to overawe his enemies in France.

Time enough had been given for disunion to spread among the allied princes. William, count of Holland, interfered to gain over the queen to the Burgundian party, and a hollow peace was brought about, known as the peace of Chartres, which ended in the ascendency of the Duke of Burgundy, and the temporary abasement of his enemies.

Once more the vengeance of the duke was visited on the heads of all distinguished persons who had shown themselves even indifferent to his cause; but he forgot not his policy in his anger, and the spoils of his victims conciliated fresh partisans.

Intrigue succeeded intrigue for several years, and, in the midst of disasters and disappointments, the spirit of Valentine, duchess of Orleans, passed away from the earth (on which she had known little but sorrow), still calling for justice upon the murderers of her husband. Her children, however, were powerless at the time and it was not till the marriage of her eldest son with the daughter of the Count of Armagnac that the light of hope seemed to break upon them. Then began that famous struggle between the parties known in history as the Burgundians and Armagnacs. Paris became its great object of strife, and, during the absence of the Duke of Burgundy, it was surrounded, if not actually blockaded by the troops of Armagnac. The Orleanist party within the walls comprised many of the noblest and most enlightened men in France; but the lower classes of the people were almost to a man Burgundians, and, forming themselves into armed bands, under the leading of John of Troyes, a surgeon, and Simon Caboche, the cutler, they received the name of Cabochians, and exercised that atrocious ferocity which is the general characteristic of an ignorant multitude. There was a reign of terror in Paris in the fifteenth as well as in the eighteenth century, and many had cause to know that the red scarfs of Burgundy were dyed in blood. Anarchy and confusion still reigned within the walls: nor probably was the state of the country much better. But at length the Duke of Burgundy, unable to oppose his enemies in the field unaided, sought for and obtained the assistance of six thousand English archers, and entered Paris in triumph.

The offensive was soon after taken by the Burgundians, and the Duke of Berri was besieged in Bourges; but Frenchmen were disinclined to fight against Frenchmen, and a treaty as hollow as any of the rest was concluded under the walls of that place. Even while the negotiations went on, means were taken to open the eyes of the dauphin to the ambition of the Burgundian prince; and John, *sans peur*, saw himself opposed in the council by one who had long been subservient to his will.

But the duke found easy means to crush this resistance. The people of Paris were roused, at his beck, into tumult; the Bastile was besieged by the armed bands of Caboche and his companions, the palace of the dauphin invaded, and he himself reduced to the state of a mere prisoner. More bloodshed followed; and Burgundy at length found that an enraged multitude is not so easily calmed as excited. His situation became somewhat difficult. Although the dauphin was shut up in the Hôtel St. Pol, he found means of communicating with the princes of the blood royal without; and nothing seemed left for the Duke it Burgundy but an extension of the convention of Bourges to a general peace with all his opponents. This was concluded at Pontoise, much against the will of the Parisians; the dauphin was set at liberty; and the leaders of the Armagnac party were permitted to enter Paris. Burgundy soon found that he had made a mistake; that his popularity with the people was shaken, and his power over them gone. He was even fearful for his person; and well might he be so. But his course was speedily determined; and, after having failed in an attempt to carry off the dauphin while on a party of pleasure at Vincennes, he retired in haste to Flanders.

A complete change of scene took place; the creatures of the Duke of Burgundy were driven from power, and sanguinary retribution marked the ascendency of the Armagnac party.

The easiest labor of Hercules, probably, was the destruction of the hydra; for creatures with many heads are always weaker than those with one. Dissensions spread among the Armagnac faction. The queen and the dauphin disagreed; and the prince, finding the tyranny of the Armagnacs as hard to bear as that of the Burgundians, instigated the duke to return to Paris. John without fear, however, had not force sufficient to effect any great purpose; and, after an

ineffectual attempt to besiege the capital, he retired before a large army, gathered from all parts of France, with the king and all the princes of the blood at its head. Compiegne capitulated to the Armagnacs; Soissons was taken by assault; but Arras held out, and once more negotiations for peace commenced under its walls. A treaty was concluded by the influence of the dauphin, who was weary of being the shuttle-cock between two factions, and resolved to make himself master of the capital. His first effort, however, was frustrated, and he was compelled to fly to Bourges. With great adroitness, he then took advantage of a proposed conference at Corbeil between himself and the allied princes. He agreed to the meeting; but while they waited for him at Corbeil, he passed quietly on to Paris, made himself master of the capital, and seized the treasures which his mother had accumulated in that city. Three parties now appeared in France: that of the Duke of Burgundy; that of the allied princes; and that of the dauphin; and in the mean while, an acute enemy, with some just pretensions to certain portions of France, and unfounded claims to the crown itself, was watching from the shores of England for a favorable moment to seize upon the long-coveted possession. From the time of the treaty of Bretigny, wars and truces had succeeded each other between the two countries--hostilities and negotiations; and during the late dissensions, English alliance had been sought and found by both parties; but, at the same time, long discussions had taken place between the courts of France and England with the pretended object of concluding a general and definitive treaty of peace. Henry demanded much, however; France would grant little; offensive words were added to the rejection of captious proposals and suddenly the news spread over the country like lightning, that Henry the Fifth of England had landed in arms upon the coast of France.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A few miles from the strong town of Bourges, on the summit of a considerable elevation, was a château or castle, even then showing some signs of antiquity. It was not a very large and magnificent dwelling, consisting merely of the outer walls with their flanking towers, one tall, square tower, and one great mass stretching out into the court, and rising to the height of two stories. In a small, plain chamber, containing every thing useful and convenient, but nothing very ornamental, sat a young gentleman of three or four-and-twenty years of age, covered with corselet and back piece, but with his head and limbs bare of armor. Two men, however, were busily engaged fitting upon him the iron panoply of war. One was kneeling at his feet, fastening the greaves upon his legs; the other stood behind, attaching the pauldrons and pallets. On a table hard by stood a casque and plume, beside which lay the gauntlets, the shield, and the sword; and near the table stood a lady, somewhat past the middle age, gazing gravely and anxiously at the young man's countenance.

But there was still another person in the room. A young girl of some six or seven years of age had climbed up upon the gentleman's knee, and, was making a necklace for him of her arms, while ever and anon she kissed him tenderly.

"You must come back, Jean--you must come back," she said; "though dear mother says perhaps you may never come back--you must not leave your own little Agnes. What would she do without you?"

Jean Charost embraced her warmly, but he did not speak; for there were many emotions in his heart which he feared might make his voice tremble. Few who had seen him six or seven years before would have recognized in that tall, powerful young man, the slim, graceful lad who was secretary to the unfortunate Duke of Orleans; nor was the change, perhaps, less in his mind than in his person, for although he was of that character which changes slowly, yet all characters change. The oak requires a hundred years; the willow hardly twenty; and as one layer or circle grows upon another in the heart of the tree, so do new feelings come over man's spirit as he advances from youth to age. Each epoch in human life has the things pertaining to itself. The boy can never divine what the man will feel; the man too little recollects what were the feelings of the boy.

However, the change in Jean Charost, in consequence of the circumstances in which he had been placed, was somewhat different from that which might have been expected. He had become tenderer rather than harder in the last seven years, more flexible rather than more rigid. Till between seventeen and eighteen years of age, hard necessities, constant application, the everlasting dealing with material things, the guard which he had been continually forced to put upon himself--knowing that not only his own future fate might be darkened, but the happiness and deliverance of a parent might be lost by one false step--had all tended to give him an unyouthful sternness of principle and of demeanor, which had perhaps saved him from many evils, but had deprived him of much innocent enjoyment.

Since the death of the Duke of Orleans, however, acting altogether as his own master, seeing more of the general world, and with his mind relieved from the oppressive cares and anxieties which may be said to have frozen his youth, he had warmed, as it were, in the sunshine, and all the more gentle things of the heart had come forth and blossomed. I know not whether the love of that dear, beautiful child had not greatly aided the change--whether his tenderness for her, and her adoring fondness for him, had not called out emotions, natural but latent, and affections which only wanted something to cling round. Whenever he returned from any of the scenes of strife and trouble in which he embarked with the rest, one of his first thoughts was of Agnes. When he approached the gates of the old castle, his eyes were always lifted to see her coming to meet him. When he sought a time of repose in the plain and unadorned halls of his father, no gorgeous tapestry, no gilded ceiling, no painted gallery could have ornamented the place so well as the smiles of that sweet, young face. The balmy influence of innocent childhood was felt by him very strongly.

He was very indulgent toward her. His mother said he spoiled her. But he used to laugh joyfully, and declare that nothing could spoil his little Agnes; and, in truth, with him she was ever gentle and docile, seeming to love obedience to his lightest word.

And now he was going to leave her--to leave all he held most dear in life for a long much--for a fierce strife--for a struggle on which the fate of France depended. He was not without hope, he was not without confidence; but if almost all men feel some shade of dread when parting from a well-loved home on any ordinary occasion--if a chilling conviction of the dreary uncertainty of all earthly things comes upon them even--what must have been his sensations when he thought of all that might happen between the hours of parting and returning?

But the trumpet had sounded throughout the land. Every well-wisher of his country was called upon to forget his domestic ties, and selfish interests, and private quarrels, and arm to repel an invader. The appeal was to the hearts of all Frenchmen, and he must go. Nay more, he had taxed his utmost means, he had mortgaged the very bequest of the Duke of Orleans, he had done every thing--but impoverish his mother--in order to carry with him as many men as possible to swell the hosts of France.

The last piece of his armor was buckled on--Martin Grille took up the casque--a cup of wine was brought, and Jean Charost embraced his mother and the child.

"How hard your breast is, Jean," said the little girl.

"None too hard," said the mother. "God be your shield, my son. He is better than sword or buckler."

"Amen!" said Jean Charost, and left them.

Now let us change the scene once more, for this must be a chapter of changes. Stand upon this little hill with me, beside the great oak, and let us look on, as day breaks over the fair scene below us. See how beautifully the land slopes away there on the north, with the wooded heights near Blangy, and the church steeple on the rise of the hill, and the old castle hard by. How the light catches upon it, even before the day is fully risen! Even that piece of marshy ground, sloping gently up into a meadow, with a deep ditch cut here and there across it, acquires something like beauty from the purple light of the rising sun. There is a little coppice there to the westward, with a wind-mill, somewhat like that at Creçy, waving its slow arms on the gentle morning breeze. How peaceful it all looks; how calm. Can this narrow space, this tranquil scene, be the spot on which the destiny of a great kingdom is to be decided in an hour?

So, perhaps, thought a man placed upon the hill near Blangy, as he looked in the direction of Azincourt, one half of the steeple of which could be seen rising over the slope. Soon, however, that quiet scene became full of life. He saw a small body of some two hundred men run rapidly along under cover of the coppice, bending their heads, with no apparent arms, except what seemed an ax slung upon the shoulder of each. They carried long slim wands in their hands, it is true; but to the eye those wands were very unserviceable weapons. They reached the edge of a ditch upon the meadow, and there they disappeared. A loud flourish of martial music followed, and soon after, from behind the wood, came on, in steady array, a small body of soldiery. They could not have numbered more than one or two thousand men at the very most, and little like soldiers did they look, except in the even firmness of their line. There was no glittering steel to be seen. Casque and corselet, spear and banner were not there. Not even the foot-soldier's jack and morion could be descried among them; but, tattered, travel-worn, and many of them bare-headed, they advanced, with heavy tramp and steady countenance, in the same direction which had been taken by the others. The same long wands were in their hands, and each bore upon his shoulder a heavy, steel-pointed post, while a short sword or ax hung upon the thigh, and a well-stored quiver was within reach of the right hand. Before them rode a knight on horseback, with a truncheon in his hand, and behind them still, as they marched on, sounded the war-stirring trumpet.

The face of the man who stood there and watched was very pale, either with fear or some other emotion, and every now and then he approached a tree to which three horses were tied--one of which was fully caparisoned for war--examined the bridles, and saw that all was right, as if he were anxious that every thing should be ready, either for strife or flight. While he was thus employed, two other men came up, slowly climbing the hill from the eastward; but there was

nothing in the appearance of either to give any alarm to him who was watching there. The one was a round, short personage, with a countenance on which nature had stamped cheerful good-humor, though his eyes had now in them an expression of wild anxiety, which showed that he knew what scene was about to be enacted below. The other was a tall, gaunt man, far past the middle age, but his face betrayed no emotion. It was still and pale as that of death, and changed not even after they had reached a point where the whole array of the field was set out before them. His brow, however, wore a heavy frown; but that expression seemed habitual, and not produced by any transitory feeling. Both the strangers were habited in the long, gray gown of the monk, with a girdle of plain cord, and the string of beads attached; besides which, the elder man carried in his hand a staff, and a large ebony crucifix.

The moment their heads rose above the slope, so that they could see over into the plain beyond, the younger and the stouter man stopped suddenly, with a look of some alarm, as if the moving mass of soldiery had been close to him. "Jesu Maria!" he exclaimed; "are those the English, brother Albert? I did not know they were half to near."

The other answered nothing, and his countenance changed not while his eye ran over the whole country beneath him, with the calm, deliberate, marking look of a man who had beheld such scenes before.

Suddenly, on the right, over the tops of the trees, rose up a dense cloud of smoke, which, rolling in large volumes into the air, became tinged with a dark red hue, and speckled with sparks of fire.

"What is that? what is that?" cried the younger monk. "That must be some place on fire at Aubain."

"No, no," replied the other, speaking for the first time; "that is much nearer. It is either at Teneur, or at the farm of our priory of St. George. Can the English king have thrown out his right wing so far in order to take our army on the flank? If so, one charge would ruin him. But no; he is too wise for that. It must be a stratagem to deceive the Constable."

As he spoke, the first comer moved away from the horses and joined them, saying, "God help us! this is a terrible scene, good fathers."

The elder monk gazed at him with his motionless countenance, but answered nothing; and the younger one replied, much in his own tone, "A terrible scene, indeed, my son--a terrible scene, indeed! I know not whether it be more so to stand as a mere spectator, and witness such a sight as will soon be before us, or to mingle in the fray, and lose part of its horrors by sharing in its fury."

"Oh, I have no doubt which," answered the other. "My mind is quite made up on that subject."

"You may be a man of war," replied the other. "Indeed, these armed horses seem to speak it."

"No. I am a man of peace," rejoined the first-comer. "Those horses are my master's, not mine; and the fighting is his too. But he knows my infirmity, and leaves me here out of arrow-shot. The boy who was with me has run down the hill, to be nearer to our lord; but I, as in duty bound, stay where he placed me. I should like very much to know, however, what is the name of that farm-house and the two or three cottages there, at the edge of the meadow, with the deep ditch across it."

"That is called Tramecourt," replied the younger monk. "It is but a small hamlet; and I heard this morning that our riotous soldiers had driven all the people out of it, and eaten up all their stores. Why do you ask, my son?"

"Because I saw but now some two or three hundred men, coming from the side of Blangy, run down by the willows there, and disappear in the ditch."

"God's retribution!" said the elder monk, gravely. "Had not the soldiery driven out the peasantry, there would have been men to bear the news of the ambush."

"Think you it is an ambush, then?" asked the younger monk.

"Beyond doubt," replied the other; "and he who would do a good service to the army of France would mount yon horse, ride down toward Azincourt, and carry the tidings to the constable."

As he spoke, he fixed his eyes upon their lay companion, who seemed a little uneasy under their gaze. He fidgeted, pulled the points of his doublet, and then said, sturdily, "Well, I can not go. I must stay with the horses."

"Are you a coward?" asked the elder monk, in a low, bitter tone.

"Yes," replied the man, nonchalantly. "I am a desperate coward--have been so all my life. I have a reverent regard for my own skin, and no fondness for carving that of other people. If men have a peculiar fancy for poking holes in each other's bodies, I do not quarrel with them for it. Indeed, I do not quarrel with any one for any thing; but it is not my taste: it is not my trade. Why

should I make eyelet-holes in nature's jerkin, or have myself bored through and through, like a piece of timber under an auger?"

"Well, my son, wilt thou let me have a horse, that I may ride down and tell the constable?" asked the shorter of his two companions.

"There is hardly time," said the elder monk. "See, here comes a larger body of archers from the side of Blangy, and I can catch lance heads and banners rising up by Azincourt. The bloody work will soon begin."

"I would fain try, at all events," cried the other. "Man, wilt thou let me have a horse? I will bring him back to thee in half an hour, if ever I come back alive myself."

"Take him, take him," answered the other. "I am not the man to stop you. How could I resist two monks and three horses. Not the destrier--not the battle-horse. That is my lord's. Here, take the page's. Let me help thee on, father. Thou art so fat in the nether end that thou wilt never get up without a ladder. One time I was as bad a horseman as thyself, and so I have compassion on thy foibles. Have thou some upon mine."

The monk was soon settled in the saddle, and away he went down the hill, showing himself a better horseman, when once mounted, than the other had given him credit for.

As soon as he was gone, the elder monk fixed his eyes once more upon his companion, and said, in a low voice, "Have I not seen thee somewhere before?"

"I can't tell," answered the other. "I have seen you, I fancy; but if so, you gave no sign of seeing me, either by word or look. However, I am Martin Grille, the valet of the good Baron de Brecy. Perhaps that may give your memory a step to climb upon."

"It needs no step," answered the other. "I am all memory. Would to God I were not."

"Ay, now you look more as you did then, though not half so mad either," said Martin Grille. "You are older, too, and your cowl makes a difference."

"And there is a difference," replied the monk, in a tone of deep sadness. "Penitence and prayer, remorse and anguish--sated revenge, perhaps--a thirst assuaged--a thirst such as no desert traveler ever knew, quenched in blood and tears; all these have changed me. The fire has gone out. I am nothing but the ashes of my former self."

"Rather hot ashes, even yet," answered Martin Grille, "if I may judge by what you said about my cowardice just now. But look, look, good father. What will become of our fat brother there? Why he is riding right before that strong body of lances coming up from Blangy."

"He does not see them," answered the other, gravely. "He may reach the constable, even yet; for lo, now! there comes the power of France over the hill; and England on to meet her. By the holy rood! they make a gallant show, these great noblemen of France. Why, what a sea of archery and men-at-arms is here, with plumes and banners, lance and shield, and pennons numberless. I have seen many a stricken fight, and never but at Poictiers saw fairer array than that."

"Why, they will sweep the English from the face of the earth," said Martin Grille. "If that be all King Henry's power, it is but a morsel for the maw of such a monster as is coming down from Azincourt."

The monk turned toward him, and shook his head. "You know not these Englishmen," he said, with a sigh. "When brought to bay, they fight like wolves. I have heard my father tell of Creçy; and at Poictiers I was a page. On each field we outnumbered them as here, and at Poictiers we might have had them on composition had it pleased the king. But we forced them to fight, and fight they did, till the multitude fled before a handful, and order and discipline did what neither numbers nor courage could effect. Look you now, how skillfully this English king has chosen his place of battle, unassailable on either flank, showing a narrow front to his enemy, so as to render numbers of no avail. God send that they may not prove destructive."

"Ah, he is too late!" replied Martin Grille who had been watching the course of the other monk, who was riding straight toward the head of the ditch, where he had seen the archers conceal themselves. "He is too late, I fear."

His exclamation was caused by sudden movements observable in both armies. The English force had been advancing slowly in three bodies, each looking but a handful as compared with the immense forces of France, but in firm and close array, with little of that ornament and decoration which gilds and smoothes the rugged reality of war; but with many instruments of music playing martial airs, and seeming to speak of hope and confidence.

The French, on the other hand, who had lain quiet all the morning, as if intending to wait the attack of the enemy, had just spread out upon the slope in face of Azincourt, divided likewise into three vast bodies, with their wings overlapping, on either side, the flank of the English force. Splendid arms and glittering accoutrements made the whole line shine and sparkle; but not a sound was heard from among them, except now and then the shout of a commander. At the

moment of Martin Grille's exclamation, the advanced guard of the French had assumed a quicker pace, and were pouring down upon the English archery, as they marched up through a somewhat narrow space, inclosed between low thick copse, hedges, and swampy ground. This narrow field forked out gradually, becoming wider and wider toward the centre of the French host; and the English had just reached what we may call the mouth of the fork, with nearly fifteen thousand French men-at-arms, and archers before them, under the command of the constable in person. Slowly and steadily the Englishmen marched on, till within half bow-shot of the French line, headed by old Sir Thomas of Erpingham, who rode some twenty yards before the archery, with a page on either side, and nothing but a baton in his hand. When near enough to render every arrow certain of its mark, the old knight waved his truncheon in the air, and instantly the whole body of foot halted short. At the same moment, each man planted before him the spiked stake which he carried in his hand, and laid an arrow on the string of his bow. A dead silence prevailed along each line, unbroken except by the tramp of the advancing French. Sir Thomas of Erpingham looked along the line, from right to left, and then exclaimed, in a loud, powerful voice, "Now strike!" throwing his truncheon high into the air, and dismounting from his horse. Instantly, from the ditch on the left flank of the French, rose up the concealed archers, with bows already drawn; and well might Martin Grille exclaim that the monk was too late. The next instant, from one end of the English line to the other, ran the tremendous cheer which has so often been the herald of victory over land and sea; and the next, a flight of arrows as thick as hail poured right into the faces of the charging enemy. Knights and squires, and men-at-arms bowed their heads to the saddle-bow to avoid the shafts; but on they still rushed, each man directing his horse straight against the narrow front of the English, and pressing closer and closer together, so as to present one compact mass, upon which each arrow told. Nor did that fatal flight cease for an instant. Hardly was one shaft delivered before another was upon the string, and, mad with pain, the horses of the French cavalry reared and plunged among the crowd, creating as much destruction and disarray as even the missiles of their foe.

All then became a scene of strange confusion to the eyes of Martin Grille. The two opposing forces seemed mingled together. The English, he thought, were forced back, but their order seemed firmer than that of the French line, where all was struggling and disarray. Here and there a small space in one part of the field would become comparatively clear, and then he would see a knight or squire dragged from his horse, and an archer driving the point of his sword between the bars of his helmet. The figure of the monk was no longer to be discerned, for he had long been enveloped in the various masses of light cavalry and camp-followers which whirled around the wings of the French army--of little or no service in the battle to those whom they Served, and only formidable to an enemy in case of his defeat.

The monk, who stood beside Martin Grille, remained profoundly silent, though his companion often turned his eye toward him with an inquiring look, as if he would fain have asked, "How, think you, goes the strife?" But, though no words were uttered, many were the emotions which passed over his countenance. At first all was calm, although there was a straining of the eye beneath the bent brow, like that of the eagle gazing down from its rocky eyrie on the prey moving across the plain below. Then came a glance of triumph, as some two or three hundred of the French men-at-arms dashed on before their companions, and hurled themselves upon the English line, in the vain effort to break the firm array of the archery. But when he saw the troops mingling together, and the heavy pressure of the French chivalry one upon the other, each impeding his neighbor, and leaving no room for any one but those in the front rank to strike a blow, his brow grew dark, his eye anxious, and his lip quivered. For a moment more, he continued silent; but then, when he saw the English arrows dropping among the ranks of his countrymen, the horses rearing and falling with their riders, to be trampled under the feet of those who pressed around--some, maddened with pain, tearing through all that opposed them, and carrying terror and confusion into the main body behind--some urged by fearful riders at the full gallop from a field which they fancied lost, because it was not instantly won, he could bear no more, but exclaimed, sharply and sternly, "They will lose the day!"

"But all that vast number coming down the hill have not yet struck a stroke," cried Martin Grille.

"Where can they strike?" said the monk, sternly. "Were the field cleared of their friends, they might yet do something with their foes. See, the banner of Alençon is down, and where is that of Brabant? I see it no more."

He gazed for a moment more, and then exclaimed, "On my life! they are flying--flying right into the centre of the main battle, to carry the infection of their fear with them!"

As he spoke, two or three horsemen, in mad haste, galloped up the hill directly toward them, and Martin Grille sprang to the side of the horses, unfastened one of them, and put his foot in the stirrup.

"Fool! they will not hurt thee," said the monk "'Tis their own lives they seek to save;" and, stretching out his arms across the path by which the men-at-arms were coming, he exclaimed, fiercely, "Cowards--cowards! back to the battle for very shame!"

But they galloped on past him, one with an arrow through his shoulder, and one with the crest of his casque completely shorn off. The third struck a blow with a mace at the monk as he passed, but it narrowly missed him; and on he too rode, with a bitter curse upon his lips.

By this time it was no longer doubtful which way the strife would go between the advance-guard of the French and that of the English army. The former was all in disarray, and parties scattering away from it every instant, while the latter was advancing steadily, supported by a large body of pikes and bill-men, who now appeared in steady order from behind some of the tall trees of the wood. Just then, through the bushes which lay scattered over the bottom of the slope, a group was seen coming up the hill, so slowly that their progress could hardly be called flight. At first neither Martin Grille nor the monk could clearly perceive what they were doing, for the branches, covered with thin, dry October leaves, partly intercepted the view. Soon, however, they emerged upon more open ground, and three or four men on foot appeared, closely surrounding a caparisoned horse, which one of them led by the bridle, while another, walking by the stirrup, seemed to have his arm around the waist of the rider. An instant after, a mounted man in a gray gown appeared from among the bushes, paused by the side of the little party, and was seen pointing upward toward the hill.

"Brother Albert and a wounded knight," said the monk, taking a step or two forward.

"Good Lord! I hope it is not my young master," cried Martin Grille, clasping his hands together. "Oh, if he would but stay at home and keep quiet! I am sure his mother would bless the day."

The monk hardly listened to him, for he was gazing with an eager and anxious look upon the group below; then, suddenly turning to the varlet, he asked, in a sharp, quick tone, "Has thy young lord any children?"

"None of his own," answered Martin Grille; "but one whom he has adopted--a fairy little creature, as beautiful as a sunbeam, whom they call Agnes. He could not love her better were she his own."

"God will bless him yet," said the monk; and then added, sharply, "Why stand you here? It is your lord; go down and help." And he himself hurried down the slope to meet the advancing party.

With his casque cleft open by an ax, an arrow through his right arm, a spear-hole in his cuirass, and the blood dropping over his coat of arms, Jean Charost, supported by one of his retainers, on whose shoulder his head rested, was borne slowly up the hill. His face could not be seen, for his visor was closed, but there was an expression of deep sadness on the faces of the two or three men who surrounded him, which showed that they thought the worst had befallen.

"Is he dead?" asked the old monk, looking at the man who led the horse.

"I can't tell, father," replied the soldier, gruffly. "He has not spoken since we got him out of the fray. Here is one who has done his duty, however. Oh, if they had all fought as he did!"

"I think he is not dead," said the other monk, riding up. "You see his hand is still clasped upon the rein, and once, I thought, he tried to raise his head."

"Bear him on--bear him on behind the trees," cried the older man, "and get the horses out of sight. He is not dead--his hand moves. How goes it, my son? How goes it? Be of good cheer."

A low groan was the only reply; but that was sign sufficient that life was not extinct, and Jean Charost was carried gently forward to a spot behind the trees, well concealed from the field of battle. The old monk, before he followed, paused to take one more look at the bloody plain of Azincourt. By this time, the main body of the French army was in as great disorder as the advanced-guard, while the English forces were making way steadily with the royal banner floating in the air.

"All is lost," murmured the monk. "God help them! they have cast away a great victory."

When he reached the little spot to which Jean Charost had been carried, the men were lifting him gently from his horse, and laying him down on the dry autumnal grass. His casque was soon removed; but his eyes were closed, and his breathing was slow and uneven. There was a deep cut upon his head; but that which seemed robbing him of life was the lance wound in his chest, and, with hurried hands, the two monks unclasped the cuirass and back-piece, and applied themselves to stanch the blood.

"It has gone very near his heart," said the elder monk.

"No, no," replied the other; "it is too far to the side. You understand fighting better than I, Brother Albert, but I know more surgery than you. Here, hold your hand firmly here, one of you men, and give me up that scarf. Some one run down to the brook and get water. Take his bassinet--take his bassinet. We must call him out of this swoon before it is too late."

Martin Grille seized up his master's casque, and impulsively ran away toward the brook, which took its rise about two thirds of the way down the hill. When he came in sight of the battle-field, however, he stopped suddenly short, with all his old terrors rushing upon him; but the next instant love for his young lord overcame all other sensations, and he plunged desperately down the slope, and filled the bassinet at the fountain.

"Help me, Martin! help me!" said a voice near; and looking up, he saw the young page, who had followed his lord down the hill.

"Here, boy, come along," cried Martin Grille. "What, are you hurt, you young fool?"

"Yes, sorely," replied the boy. "While trying to cover the baron, the first time he was thrown from his horse, they hacked me with their swords. But I shall never see him again; he is dead now."

"Give me your hand--give me your hand," cried Martin Grille. "He is not dead; so take good heart. But I must hurry back with this water; so put forth what strength you have left."

Dragging the page along with one hand, and holding the bassinet in the other, Martin contrived to climb the hill again, and reach the spot where De Brecy lay. The younger monk immediately took a handful of the water, and dashed it in the wounded man's face. A shudder passed over him, and then he opened his eyes and looked faintly round.

"Now some drops of this sovereign balsam," said the younger monk, taking a vial from his pocket. "Open your lips, my son, and let me drop it in."

He had to repeat his words before the wounded man comprehended them; but when the drops had been administered, a great change took place very rapidly. The light came back into Jean Charost's eyes, and he said, though faintly, "Where am I? Who has won?"

"How goes it, my son--how goes it?" asked the elder monk, bending over him, with his cowl thrown back.

"But feebly, father," answered Jean Charost. "Hah! is that you?"

"Even so," answered the monk. "But cheer up; you shall not die. We will take you to our priory of St. George of Hesdin, and soon give you health again."

"Alas!" said Jean Charost, raising his hand feebly, and letting it drop again, "I have no strength to move. But how goes the battle? If France have lost, let me lie here and die."

"We can not tell," answered the younger monk. "The battle still rages fiercely. Here, hold this crucifix in your hand, and let me examine the wound. 'Tis not bleeding so fast," he continued. "Take some more of these drops; they will give you strength again."

"Ah, Perot; poor boy!" said Jean Charost, suffering his eyes to glance feebly round till they rested upon the page, who was leaning against a tree. "Attend to him, good father. He must be wounded sorely. He saved my life when first I was dashed down by that blow upon my head."

"Take this first yourself," rejoined the monk, "or the master will go where the page will not like to follow."

Jean Charost made no resistance; and the monk then turned to the young boy, examined and bound up his wounds, and administered to him likewise some of the elixir in which he seemed to put so much faith. Nor did it seem undeserving of his good opinion; for again the effect upon Jean Charost was very great, and he said, in a stronger voice, "Methinks I shall live."

"Can we not contrive to make some litter?" said the elder monk, looking to the men who had aided their young lord up the hill.

"We will try," said one of them; and taking an ax which hung upon his shoulder, he began to cut down some of the sapling trees. Ere the materials were collected, however, to make a litter, there came a sound of horses feet going at a slow trot, and an instant after a small party of horse appeared.

"Ha! who have we here?" cried the man at their head. "A French knight, wounded! God save you, sir. I trust you will do well; but you must surrender, rescue or no rescue, and give your faith thereon."

As he spoke, he dismounted and approached the little group, holding out his hand to Jean Charost.

"There is no help for it," answered the wounded man, giving him his hand. "Rescue or no rescue, I do surrender."

"Your name is the next thing," replied the English officer.

"Jean Charost, Baron de Brecy," replied the young man. "I pray you tell me how goes the battle?"

"It is over, sir," answered the Englishman. "God has been pleased to bless our arms. Your men will surrender, of course."

With them, too, there was no help for it, as there were some twenty or thirty spears around

the them; and when they had given their pledge, the officer, an elderly man, turned again to Jean Charost, saying, in a kindly tone, "You are badly hurt, sir, and I am sure have done your *devoir*; right knightly for your king and country. I can not stay to tend you; but these good fathers will have gentle care of you, I am sure. When you are well, inquire for the Lord Willoughby. You will not find him hard to deal with. The parole of a gentleman with such wounds as these is worth prison bars of three inch thickness;" and thus saying, he remounted his horse and rode away.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A few brief glimpses, if you please, dear reader--quiet, and calm, and cool, like the early sunshine of a clear autumn day--a few brief glimpses, to throw some light upon a lapse of several years.

It may be asked why are not the events of those years recorded? Why are we not carried through the details of a history in which the writer, at least, must have some interest? In every life, as in every country which one passes through, there come spots of dull monotony, where the waters stagnate on the heavy flats, and to linger among them is dangerous to active existence. I say, in every life there are these flats at some period or another; for I can recall none in memory or in history, where they have not been found--none where all has been mountain and valley.

Take the most active life that ever was, that of Napoleon Bonaparte; carry him from the military school to the command of armies; go with him along his comet-like career, from glory to glory up to the zenith of his power, and then on his course down to the horizon with fierce rapidity. You come to the rock in the Atlantic, and the dull lapse of impotence and captivity at last!

In a cell, in the small priory of St. George of Hesdin, and on the pallet bed of one of the monks, lay a young gentleman pale and wan, but still with the light of reviving life in his eyes. By his side was seated a tall, thin old man, or if not very old in years, old in the experience of sorrows.

'Tis a strange thing, this life, and all connected with it--time, and joy, and grief, and fear, and hope, and appetite, and satiety! Very, very strange! The wise Eastern people have said that at the root of the Tree of Life lie two worms continually preying on it: the one black, the other white. But alas, alas! there is many another maggot, piercing the bark, eating into the core, drying up the sap, bringing on decay and instruction. I have named a few of them.

One of the most blessed conceptions of the soul is, that in its immortality none of these things can touch it.

He seemed an old man, though probably he had not yet seen near sixty years of age; but there were upon his face many harsh lines--not such as are drawn by hard carking cares and petty anxieties--not such as are imprinted on the face by the claws of grasping, mercenary selfishness; but the deep strong brands of burning passions, fierce griefs, fierce joys, and strong unruly thoughts. Yet the eye was subdued. There was not the light in it that had once been there--the wild, eager light, too intense to be fully sane. There was sadness enough, but little fire.

It would seem that the two--they were the only tenants of the cell--had been talking for some time, and that one of those pauses had taken place in which each man continues for himself the train of thought suggested by what has gone before. The old man looked down upon the ground, with his shaggy eyebrows overhanging his eyes. The young man looked up, as if catching inspiration from above. It was Hope and Memory. At length the old man spoke.

"When one looks back," he said, "upon the path of life, we lose in the mistiness of the distance a thousand objects which have influenced its course. We see it turn hither and thither, and wonder that we took not a course more direct to our end. We perceive that we have gone far out of the way; but the obstacles are not seen that were, or seemed insurmountable--the stream, too deep to be forded--the rock, too high to be scaled--the thicket, too dense to be penetrated; and the mists and darkness too--the mists and darkness of the mind, forever blinding us to the right way. Oh, my son, my son, beware of the eyesight of passion; for you know not how false and distorting it is. The things as plain as day become all dim and obscure, false lights glare around us, and nothing is real but our own sensations."

Jean Charost smiled. "I have escaped as yet, father," he said. "It is true, indeed, that when I look back on some passages of my life--on the actions of other men, and on my own--I sometimes wonder how I could view the things around me as I did at the time, and all seems to me as if I had been acting in a dream."

"Passion, passion," said the monk--"the dream of passion!"

"Happily, I have had no cause to regret that I did not see more clearly," replied Jean Charost; "but let me turn to other matters, good father. There are many things that I would wish to ask you--many that are necessary for me to know."

"Ask me nothing," replied the monk, quickly; then laying his hand upon Jean Charost's arm, he said, in a low, stern voice, "There is a space in memory on which I dare not tread. By struggle and by labor I have reached firm ground, and can stand upon the rock of my salvation; but behind me there is a gulf of madness--You would not drag me back into it, young man?"

"God forbid," replied Jean Charost. "But yet--"

The monk waved his hand; and an instant after, the door of the cell opened, and Martin Grille appeared, booted and spurred, with his dress covered with dust, and every sign about him of long riding over parched and sandy roads.

"Well Martin," exclaimed the young man, as soon as he saw him, "what says the Lord Willoughby?"

"But little, and not pleasant," replied Martin Grille. "However, he has written. Here is his letter."

Jean Charost took the paper which the man held out to him, and tore it open eagerly; but his face turned pale as he read, and he exclaimed, "Fifteen thousand crowns for a baron's ransom! This is ruin."

"I think he can not help himself," said Martin Grille; "for he seemed very much vexed when he wrote. Indeed, he told me that the ransoms had been fixed by higher power."

"Ay, ay! A mere excuse," exclaimed Jean Charost. "This greedy Englishman is resolved to make the most of the capture of a wounded man."

"Passion, my son, passion!" said the monk. "What the good lord says is true, I do believe. 'Tis the ambition and policy of his master, not his own greed. I have heard something of this, and feared the result. King Henry is resolved that all those who might serve France best against him should either pay the expenses of his next campaign by their ransoms, or linger out their time in English prisons, while he goes forth to conquer France."

"Shame be upon him," cried Jean Charost.

"Wouldst thou not do the same wert thou the King of England?" asked the monk.

Jean Charost mused for several minutes. "Then there is naught for me but a prison," he said, at length. "I will not impoverish my poor mother, nor my sweet little Agnes. It has cost enough to furnish me forth for this fatal battle. Oh, that Frenchmen had coolness as well as courage, discipline as well as activity! Oh, that they had won the day: I would not have treated my prisoners so. Well, God's will be done--I will cross the seas, and give myself up to captivity. Let me have things for writing, Martin Grille."

"Nay, my son, you are not fit," said the monk.

"It must be done," answered Jean Charost. "What matters it to any one if I die? He can not coin my clay into golden pieces. I will not pay this ransom so long as my mother lives. Let me have ink and paper."

Jean Charost wrote; but he was soon obliged to abandon the task, for he was still too feeble. The next day he wrote again, however, and two letters were accomplished. The one was sent off to his mother, the other to the Lord Willoughby. To the latter he received an answer courteous and kind, desiring him not to hurry his departure for England, but to wait till he was well able to bear the journey. There was one sentence somewhat confused in expression, intended to convey a regret that the ransom fixed upon prisoners of his rank was so high; but Jean Charost was irritated, and threw the letter from him.

The other letter conjured his mother to his side with all speed, and she brought his little Agnes with her; for she had a notion that the presence of the child would be balmy to him.

Let us pass over her remonstrances, and how she urged him to sell all and pay his ransom. For her sake, he was firm. He would not impoverish his mother; and though there were bitter tears, he departed from his native land. Now let us change the scene. Between three and four years had passed since the field of Azincourt had received some of the best blood of France, and thinned the ranks of French chivalry. Every city, every village, almost every family was full of trouble, and the place that was at one day in the hands of England was another day in the hands of France, and a third in the hands of Burgundy. All regular warfare might be said to have come to an end. Each powerful noble made war on his own hand, and linked himself by very slender ties to this faction or that. His enterprises were his own, though they were directed, in some degree, to the benefit of his party; but if he owned in any one a right to command him, it was only with the

reservation that he should obey or not as he pleased. Armed bands traversed the country in every direction. Hardly a field between the Loire and the Somme was not at some time a scene of strife. None knew, when they sowed the ground, who would reap the harvest; and the goods of the merchant were as often exposed to pillage as the crop of the husbandman.

Yet it is extraordinary how soon the mind of man, and especially the gay, volatile mind of the Frenchman, accommodates itself to circumstances. Here was a state almost intolerable, it would seem, to any but savages; but yet, in France, the skillful cook plied his busy trade, and the reeking kitchen sent up fragrant fumes. The *auberge*, the *cabaret*, the *gite*, the *repue*, all the places of public, entertainment, in short, were constantly filled with gay guests. The tailor's needle was never more employed, and as much ornament as ever was bestowed upon fair forms which might be destined a few days after to meet with a bloody death. The village bells called people to prayer and praise as usual, and rang out merrily for the wedding, even when hostile spears were within sight of the steeple.

Such was the state of the country, when, one day in the latter part of the summer of one thousand four hundred and nineteen, a young man, dressed in the garb of a monk, entered a small town near the city of Bourges. His feet were sandaled; he carried the pilgrim staff in his hand, and he was evidently wayworn and fatigued. The greater part of the peasantry were in the fields; and the street of the little place, running up the side of a small hill, lay almost solitary in the bright sunshine. The master of the *gite*, or small inn, however, was sitting at his own door, with an ancient companion, feeble and white-bearded, and they made some comments to one another upon the young stranger as he approached, which were not very favorable to monks in general.

"Oh, he is going to the Gray Friar's monastery, doubtless," said the host to his companion, "and doubtless they fare well there. He will have a jovial night of it after his journey, especially as this is Thursday."

"Ay, that's the time they always appoint for the women to come to confess," said the other; "and I dare say they talk over all the sins they hear pleasantly enough. See, he seems tending this way."

"Not he," replied the landlord; "we have but little custom from the brethren, though they can pay well when they will. Upon my life, I believe he is coming hither; but perhaps 'tis but to ask his way."

The stranger, however, did walk straight up to mine host of the inn, and instead of asking his way, inquired whether he could lodge there for the night.

"Assuredly, good father," replied the landlord, in a very altered tone; "this is a public *gite*, though the prices are rather higher than they used to be, because the country has been so run down."

"That matters not," answered the stranger; "when can I sup?"

"In an hour, father, supper will be on the table." answered the host. "Would you like to go and wash your feet; they are mighty dusty?"

"Not yet," replied the stranger; "if I knew where to place my wallet in safety, I would go on a little further to see the sun setting from the hill."

"Come with me--come with me," said the host; "I will show you your chamber, where you will have as good a bed as a baron could wish for, and a room, not much bigger than a cell, it is true; but you will not mind that, for it is fresh and airy, and, moreover, it has a lock and key, which is more than many rooms have."

The stranger followed in silence, was admitted to his room, and laid down the wallet. Then, taking the key--almost as big as that of a church door of modern times--he issued forth from the inn again, and, saying he would be back soon, he walked on to the other end of the street, where it opened out through a low mud wall upon the brow of the hill upon which the town was built.

When clear of all houses, with his foot upon the green turf, and the rocky descent below him, the young stranger crossed his arms upon his chest, and stood gazing upon the scene around with more of the air of a warrior than of a monk. He held his head high, and seemed to expand his chest to receive fully the evening breeze, looking like a fine horse when first turned forth from a close stable, snuffing the free air before he takes his wild, headlong career around the meadow. But the expression soon changed. Casting his eyes to the eastward, he just caught sight, from behind the shoulder of the hill, of the towers and battlements of Bourges; and a little further on, but more to the north, on the other side of the river, he perceived a wooded hill, with a large, square tower and some other buildings, crowning the summit. A look of deep melancholy came upon his countenance. After gazing for several minutes, he turned his eyes toward the ground, and fell into a deep fit of thought, as if debating some important question with himself. "It will be a painful pleasure," said he, at length; "but I will go, let it cost what it may."

Once more he gazed over the prospect all round, and then turning on his steps, he retraced his way back to the inn, where he found the landlord still seated at the door.

"Can you tell me," he said, "if Messire Jacques Cœur is now in Bourges?"

"No, that he is not, sir," answered the landlord, with great respect, dropping the title of father, which he had previously bestowed upon his guest, in favor of the gray gown; "he is away somewhere about Monterreau with his highness the dauphin."

"That is unlucky," said the other, just remarking, and no more, the landlord's change of manner toward him, and the substitution of the words sir and father.

"Well, I will sup, and go on upon my way."

"Had you not better sleep here, sir?" asked the landlord, again avoiding the word father; "perhaps they are not prepared for you, and you must have traveled far, I suppose."

The other held to his resolution, however, with out taking any outward notice of the great alteration in the man's demeanor; but when he retired to his chamber to wash his feet before supper, he found confirmation of a suspicion that the vaunted lock of his door had more keys than one. Nothing was abstracted, indeed, from his wallet; but the contents had been evidently examined carefully since he left the house. Small as was the amount of baggage it contained, there were several articles which bore the name of "Jean Charost de Brecy."

Night had fallen by the time that supper was over, and the stars shone out bright and clear when the young wanderer once more resumed his journey, and took his way direct toward the castle he had seen upon the hill. Onward he went at an unflagging pace, descended from the higher ground into the valley, crossed the little river by its stone bridge, and approached the foot of the eminence where the tower stood. Large dogs bayed loudly as he came near the entrance of the castle, and one or two men were seated under the arch of the barbican; but Jean Charost's impatience had been growing with every step, and, without pausing to put any questions or to ask permission, he passed the draw-bridge, crossed the little court, and mounted the steps leading into the great hall. One of the men had followed him from the barbican, but did not attempt to stop him. Two of the dogs ran by his side, looking up in his face, and a third gamboled wildly before him, whining with a sort of anxious joy. The great hall was quite dark; but he found his way across it easily enough, mounted a little flight of five steps, and opened the door just above. There were lights in that room, and Madame De Brecy was there seated embroidering: while little Agnes, now greatly expanded both in form and beauty, sat beside his mother, sorting the various colored silks. His feet were shod with sandals; but his mother knew the tread. She started up and gazed at him. The instant after, her arms were round his neck, and Agnes was clinging to his hand and covering it with kisses.

"Welcome--welcome home, my son!" cried Madame De Brecy; "has this hard lord then relented? We heard that you were ill--very ill; and ere three days more had passed, Agnes and I would have set off to join you in England. We waited but for safe-conducts to depart."

"I have been ill, dear mother," replied the young man; "and that obtained me leave to return for a time. But do not deceive yourself; I have not come back to stay. Indeed, so brief must be my absence from my prison, so hopeless is the errand on which I came, that I had doubts whether I ought to pause even here to give you the pang of parting with me again. I have only obtained leave upon parole, to absent myself from London for three months, in order to seek a ransom. My only hope is in Jacques Cœur; he, perhaps, may help us on easier terms than any one else will consent to. I find, however, that he is not in Bourges, and I must go on to-morrow to Monterreau to seek him; for well-nigh three weeks of my time is already expired; 'tis a long journey from England hither on foot."

"Ah, my poor son!" cried Madame De Brecy; "our fate has been a sad one, indeed. But yet, why should we complain? We share but the unhappy fate of France, and, Heaven knows, she has deserved chastisement, were it for nothing else but the bloody and unchristian feuds which have brought this evil upon her."

"Let us hope yet, mother--let us hope yet," said Jean Charost. "The very feeling of being once more at home--in this dear home, where so many sunny days have passed--rekindles the nearly extinguished fire, and makes me hope again, in despite of probability."

"But why did you come on foot, dear Jean?" cried Agnes, clinging to him. "It was not for want of money, was it? Oh, I would gladly have sold all those pretty things you gave me long ago, to have bought a horse for you, though our dear mother says we must save every thing we can in order to pay your ransom."

"No, dear child, no," replied Jean Charost. "There were other reasons for my coming on foot. I could not come with my lance in my hand, and my pennon and my band behind me; and for a solitary traveler, well dressed, and mounted on a good horse, it is dangerous to cross the country between Harfleur and Bourges. But it is vain to think of saving my ransom. My only hope is to get it diminished, and then to obtain the means of paying it--both through Jacques Cœur."

"Diminished!" said Madame De Brecy, eagerly. "Is there a chance of that?"

Her son explained to her that a conference had already taken place between the dauphin and the Duke of Burgundy, with a view to arrange the terms of peace. "Jacques Cœur," he said, "has

great influence with our own royal prince, and I believe that I myself stand not ill with his highness of Burgundy, although, Heaven knows, I have never sought his favor. If the dauphin will condescend--as perhaps he ought--to make the liberation, upon moderate ransom, of several gentlemen taken at Azincourt a stipulation in the treaty, I think I have a fair claim to be among them. There is another interview, I find, to take place in a few days, and I must not miss the opportunity. I bear his highness letters from his cousin the young Duke of Orleans, and several other gentlemen of high repute. Let us hope then, my mother, at least till hope proves vain. Here will I rest to-night, and speed onward again to-morrow. Perhaps I may lose my labor, and have to travel back--to England and to captivity."

"Then we will go with you, Jean," said Madame De Brecy. "You shall stay no more alone in a prison."

"Yes, yes, let us go with you," cried Agnes, eagerly, drowning Jean Charost's reply. "We can all be as happy there as here. It is not the walls, or the earth, that make a cheerful home. It is the spirits that are in it."

"Thou art a young philosopher." said Jean Charost, with a smile; "but we will see."

The next morning Jean Charost was upon his way toward Monterreau, still dressed in his monkish garb--for the proverb proved true in his case--but now mounted on an old mule, the very beast that had carried the Duke of Orleans on the night of his assassination. It had been given to him by the duchess when last he saw her, and when she felt the hand of death pressing heavily upon her.

The journey was too much for one day--twenty-three leagues, as they counted them in those days, when leagues were leagues, and they had kings in France--but Jean Charost resolved to push on as fast as possible; and by night of the second day he had reached the small town of Moret, whence a short morning's ride would bring him to Monterreau.

It was dark when he arrived; but the small village was full of armed men, and round the doors of many of the houses were assembled gay groups, some seated on the ground, some on benches, some on empty barrels, laughing, drinking, and singing, with all the careless merriment of soldiery in an hour of peace. Lights burned in the windows; lanterns, and sometimes torches, were out at the doors, and the yellow harvest moon was rolling along the sky, and shedding from her golden chariot-wheels a glorious flood of light.

Doubtless there was a good deal of ribaldry in the words--doubtless there was a good deal of licentiousness in the hearts of those around; but yet there was a joyous exuberance of life--a careless, happy, thoughtless confidence--an infectious merriment, that was difficult to resist. The ringing laughter, the light song, the gay jest, the cheerful faces, all seemed to ask Jean Charost, as he passed along, "Why should you take thought for the morrow, when you can never tell that a morrow will be yours? Why should you have care for the future, when the future is disposed of by hands you can not see? Rejoice! rejoice in the present day! Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow you die."

Many a jest assailed the friar and his mule as they passed along; but Jean Charost was in no mood to suffer a jest to annoy him. His hopes had increased as he came near the spot where they were to be fulfilled or extinguished, and the scene around him was certainly not calculated to bid them depart too soon.

At the door of a small inn, he stopped, and asked if he could find entertainment; but the landlord rolled out a fat laugh, and told him, No, not if he could make himself as small as the constable's dwarf. "We are all as full here," he said, "as we can hold, and running over, with the dauphin's men-at-arms. I doubt whether you will find a quarter of a bed in the whole place. At the great *gite*; there--that place which looks so dull and melancholy--you will have a better chance than any where else; for Maître Langrin has raised his prices above the tax, because he expects the lords and commanders to stay there; but I don't think they will prefer his bad wine to my good, and pay more for it." Thither, however, Jean Charost turned his mule; but here the answer was much the same as before, combined with the saucy intimation that they did not want any monks at that house; and the young gentleman was turning away, thinking, with some anxiety, how he could feed and stable his beast, when he saw a man, dressed apparently as a superior officer, examining somewhat closely the mule, which he had left tied to the tall post before the inn. He was not fully armed, although he had a haubergeon on; and his head was only covered with a plumed cap. Though tall and well formed, he stooped a little; and as he drew back a step or two when the young gentleman approached to mount, he seemed to move with some difficulty, and limped as he walked.

Jean Charost put his foot into the stirrup, mounted, and was about to ride away, when the stranger called to him, somewhat roughly, saying, "Where got you that mule, monk?"

"It was a gift," replied Jean Charost, in a quiet tone, turning his face full toward the speaker.

"A gift--not from a palmer to a convent," cried the other, "but from a lady to a soldier!" and in a moment after his arms were thrown round Jean Charost, while he exclaimed, with a laugh, "Why, don't you know me, De Brecy? I am not so much metamorphosed as you, in all your

monkery. In Heaven's name, what are you doing in this garb, and in this place? Where do you come from? What are you doing? Some said you were killed at Azincourt. One man swore to me he saw you die. Another told me you were a prisoner in England; and I have always supposed the latter was the case, for I have found in my own case how difficult it is to get killed. They have nearly chopped me to mincemeat, but here I am--what is left of me, that is to say."

The young gentleman gave his old companion all the information he desired; telling him, moreover, not without some hopes of assistance, the difficulties under which he just then labored.

"Oh, come with me, come with me," said Juvenel de Royans. "I am captain of a company of horse archers, and every one bows down in reverence to me here. You shall have half of my room, if they will give you none other;" and, leading him back into the inn, he called loudly for the host.

"Here, Master Langrin," he exclaimed, when the uncivil functionary whom Jean Charost had before seen made his appearance again, "this gentleman is a friend of mine. He must have accommodation--there, I know what you would say. You must make it, if you have not got it."

"I took the gentleman for a monk, sir," said the host, with all humility.

"A monk!" cried De Royans. "The gown does not make the monk. Where were your eyes? I will answer for it, he has got a steel coat on under that gown. But he must have some rooms, at all events."

"There are none empty but those reserved for Madame De Giac," replied the landlord; "and all the men are obliged to sleep four or five in a bed."

"Well, put him in Madame De Giac's rooms," cried De Royans, with a laugh. "I dare say neither party will object to the arrangement. At all events, you must find him some place; I insist upon it. I will quarter all my archers upon you, if you don't; eat out all you have got in the house, and drink up all your wine. Take ten minutes to consider of it, and then come and tell me, in the den where you have put me. Bid some of my people look to Monsieur De Brecy's mule, and look to it well; for, before it carried him, it carried as noble a prince as France has seen, or ever will see. Come, old friend, I will show you the way."

When Jean Charost was seated in the room of Juvenel de Royans, a lamp lighted, and his companion stretched out at ease, partly on his bed and partly on a settle, the latter assumed a graver tone, and De Brecy perceived with pain that he was both depressed in mind and sadly shattered in body. Twelve years of almost incessant campaigning had broken down his strength, and many wounds received had left him a suffering and enfeebled man.

"God help me!" he said. "I try to bear up well, De Brecy, and can not make up my mind to quit the old trade. I must die in harness, I suppose; but I believe what I ought to do would be to betake me to my castle by the Garonne, adopt my sister's son--her husband fell at Azincourt--and feed upon bouillons and Medoc wine for the rest of my life. I am never without some ache. But now tell me what are your plans; for, as I am constantly on the spot, I can give you a map of the whole country."

Jean Charost explained to him frankly his precise situation, and De Royans thought over it for some time in silence.

"You must make powerful friends," he said, at length. "Don't you know Madame De Giac? Every one knows that, on that fatal night, you were sent to her by the duke our lord, and, if so, she must be under some obligations to you for your discretion."

"I have remarked, De Royans," replied the other, "that ladies generally hate those who have the power to be discreet."

"That could be soon seen," said De Royans. "We can test it readily."

"I see no use," replied De Brecy. "She is the avowed mistress of the Duke of Burgundy, and of him I am going to ask no favor."

"She may be his avowed mistress, and no less a dear friend of his highness the dauphin," answered De Royans. "She was the duke's avowed mistress, and no less a dear friend of his highness of Orleans."

Jean Charost gave a shudder. "Heaven forgive me," he said, "if I lack charity. But there is a dark suspicion in my mind, De Royans, which would make me sooner seek a boon of the devil than of that woman."

"Ha!" said De Royans, raising himself partly from the bed. "If I thought that--but no matter, no matter. We will talk of her no more."

"What does she here?" asked Jean Charost.

"I will tell you all about it," replied the other. "A conference took place some time ago in regard to the general pacification of the kingdom. The Duke of Burgundy promised great things,

which he has never performed, nor ever will; and his highness the dauphin has summoned him to another conference here at Monterreau, hard by. The duke has hesitated for more than a month. Sometimes he would come, sometimes he would not. Often urged that the dauphin himself should come to Troyes, where he lay with his forces, and with the poor king and queen. The dauphin said nay, but promised all security if he would come hither. John-without-Fear has shown himself John-with-great-Fear, however, well considering that there are twenty thousand men with his prince in and around Monterreau. Nothing would serve him but he must have the castle given up to him for security; and, accordingly, I and my men, who kept it for his highness the dauphin, were turned out, to make way for--who do you think?"

"Nay, I can not tell," replied Jean Charost. "Perhaps James de la Ligne, master of the crossbow men, who I hear is with the duke."

"Nothing of the kind," answered De Royans. "For good Madame De Giac, her household and servants--not an armed man among them. She arrives here to-night; goes on early to-morrow; and the duke himself, they say, will arrive in the afternoon. He came as far as Bray sur Seine five or six days ago; but there he stopped and hesitated once more; and one can not tell whether he will come after all or not. If he does he will come well accompanied; for it is clear that his heart fails him."

"Is there any reason for his fear, except that general doubt of all men which the wicked have from the pictures in their own heart?" asked Jean Charost.

Juvenel de Royans raised himself completely, and sat upon the edge of the bed, bending slightly forward, and speaking in a lower tone. "I can not tell," he said, slowly and thoughtfully; "but there is a general feeling abroad--no one can tell why--that if to-morrow's interview does take place something extraordinary will happen. It is all vague and confused--no one knows what he expects, but every one expects something. We have no orders for extraordinary preparation. The side of the castle next to the fields is to be left quite free and open for the duke and his people to come and go at their pleasure, and every thing seems to indicate that his highness meditates nothing but peaceful conference. Yet I know that, as soon as I hear the duke is in the Castle of Monterreau, I will have every man in the saddle, and every horse out of the stable, in order to act as may be needed."

"But you must have some reasons for such apprehensions," said Jean Charost.

"None--none, upon my word," replied Juvenel de Royans. "The only way I can account for the general feeling is, that every man of our faction knows that John of Burgundy is an enemy to France; that his ambition is the great obstacle to the union of all Frenchmen against our English adversaries; and that it would be good for the whole country if he were dead or in prison. Perhaps what every one wishes, every one thinks may happen. But now, De Brecy, once more to your own affairs. Your plan is a good one. His highness, in consenting to any peace, ought to stipulate for the liberation of his friends upon a moderate ransom--and yours is certainly unreasonable. But how to get at him is the question, in order to insure that your name may be among those stipulated. You will not use Madame De Giac."

"Nay, but I have two means of access," answered Jean Charost. "I have a letter for his highness from the young Duke of Orleans, my fellow-prisoner; and I hear that my good friend Jacques Cœur has very great influence with the royal prince."

Juvenel de Royans mused before he answered. "The letter may not do what you want," he said, at length; "for you must see the prince before this interview takes place; and when you present the letter, a long-distant day may be appointed for your audience. Jacques Cœur can doubtless procure your admission at once, if he be in Monterreau. He was there, certainly, three days ago, and supplied his highness liberally, they say, to his great joy; for he was well-nigh penniless. But the rumor ran that he was to depart for Italy yesterday."

"Then the case is hopeless," said Jean Charost, with a sigh.

A silence of some minutes succeeded; but then De Royans looked up with a smile. "Not hopeless," he said, "not hopeless. I have just thought of a way more sure than any other. First, I will give you a letter to my friend and cousin Tanneguy du Châtel, who is high in the dauphin's confidence. There, however, you might be put off; but there is another means in your own hand. Do you remember Mademoiselle De St. Geran--the beautiful Agnes--people used to think that you were in love with her, and she with you, though she was but a girl, and you little more than a boy in those days."

"I remember her well," replied Jean Charost, "and have a high regard for her."

"So has the dauphin," answered Juvenel de Royans, with a meaning smile.

"You do not mean to say," cried Jean Charost; but his companion interrupted him.

"I mean to say nothing," replied De Royans "In fact, men know nothing but what I have said. It is clear his highness has a great regard for her, reverences her advice, follows it, even in affairs of war and policy; and, were it not that his wife reverences and loves her just as much, there would be no doubt of the matter; for her exquisite beauty--"

"I never thought her very beautiful," said Jean Charost. "Her form was fine, and her face pretty; but that is all."

"Oh, but there has been a change," answered De Royans. "She is the same, and yet another. It is impossible to describe how beautiful she has grown. Every line in her face has become fine and delicate. The colors have grown clear and pure; the roses blossom in her cheek; the morning star is sparkling in her eyes; warm as the summer, yet dewy as the daybreak. But that is not all. There is an inconceivable grace in her movements, unlike any thing I ever saw. Her quickest gesture is so easy that it seems slow, and her lightest change of attitude brings out some new perfection in her symmetry; and through the whole there seems a soul, a spirit shining like a light upon every thing around. Why, the old Bishop of Longres himself said, the other day, that, from the parting of her hair to the sole of her foot, she was all beauty. The good man, indeed, said he did not know whether it was the beauty of holiness; but he hoped so."

"Why, you seem in love with her yourself, De Royans," answered Jean Charost.

"Go and see--go and see," replied his companion. "She will greet you right willingly; for she is mild and humble, and ever glad to welcome an old acquaintance."

"But where can I find her?" asked Jean Charost.

"Oh, you will find her at the Strangers' Lodging at the abbey," answered De Royans. "The dauphin has his head-quarters there, with the dauphiness and two or three of her ladies. Were I you, I would go to her the first; for her influence is certain, however it comes. But you must change your monk's garb, man; for, though they lodge at the abbey, the court is not very fond of the friars. Ah, here comes our landlord. Now, Monsieur Langrin, what has made you so long?"

"The arrival of Madame De Giac, sir," answered the host. "I can but give the gentleman a mere closet to sleep in, which I destined for another; but of course, as your friend, he must have it; and as for supper, it is on the table, with good wine to boot."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Towns have their varying expressions as well as human faces; and the aspect of Monterreau, on the tenth of September, one thousand four hundred and nineteen, presented a curious appearance, but one which those who have lived long on the face of the earth must sometimes have seen in moments of great excitement and expectation. The city looked gay, for it was filled with people; and the splendor-loving soldiery, in their arms, seen in every direction, gave a brilliancy to the streets which in ordinary times they did not possess. The day was bright and beautiful, too; one of those clear, warm, September days, which often succeed a frosty morning; and the trees, which were then mingled with the vineyards on the heights of Surville, caught the rays of the sun upon foliage gently tinged with the tints of autumn. The bells of the churches rang out, for it was the Sabbath; and many a fair dame, in sparkling attire and with rosary on wrist, flaunted her Sunday finery along the streets, or might be seen gliding in through the dark portal to join in the service of the day. Still, there was a sort of silent solemnity over the place, an uneasy calm, if I may use an expression which seems to imply a contradiction--an oppressive expectation. Whenever the bell ceased, there seemed no other sound. Men walked in groups, and spoke not; even the women bated their breath and conversed in lower tones.

Early in the morning, a gay train had passed into the castle, after circling the town till a gate, opening beyond the walls into the fields, had been reached. There were ladies and waiting-women, and several gentlemen of gallant mien, and a small troop of archers. But the castle gates swallowed them up, and nothing more was seen of them for several hours. From time to time, two or three horsemen rode out of the town, and sometimes a small party re-entered it; but these were the only occurrences which gave any appearance of movement to the scene till after the hour of noon.

About nine o'clock in the morning, indeed, a young man, in the dress of a monk, rode in on a mule, put up his beast at a stable, where he was obliged to use the name of the Marquis De Royans to obtain any attention, and then proceeded on foot to a large house situated near the bridge over the Yonne. There were a number of people at the door, and he made some inquiries, holding a letter in his hand. The answer seemed unsatisfactory; for he turned away, and walked through the town, inquiring for the abbey, which lay upon the other side.

There were no signs of approaching the precincts of a court, as Jean Charost proceeded on the way he had been directed. The two streets through which he passed were nearly deserted, and,

being turned from the sun, looked cool and desolate enough. He began almost to fancy he had made a mistake, when, on the opposite side of a little square or close, he saw a large and very beautiful building, with a church at one end of it, and a row of stone posts before it. All that was left of it, as far as I remember, in one thousand eight hundred and twenty-one, was one beautiful doorway, with a rounded arch overhead, sinking deep with molding within molding, of many a quaint and curious device, till it made a sort of niche, under which the traveler might find shelter from the sun or rain. It was, when I saw it, used as the entrance to a granary; but two guards, with halberts on their shoulders, walking slowly up and down, and three or four servants loitering about, or sitting on the steps, showed that it had not been turned to such base uses, in the year of our Lord fourteen hundred and nineteen.

Directly toward this door De Brecy took his way, giving a glance round as he passed the corners of the houses opposite, and obtaining a view, down a short street, of the gently-flowing Seine, with its ancient bridge and the walls of the old castle. There seemed to be some curious erections on the bridge: a little pavilion, with a flag fluttering on the top, and several large wooden barricades; but De Brecy paused not to inquire what they meant, and walking straight on to one of the servants, inquired if the Seigneur du Châtel were there, adding that he had been directed thither from his quarters.

The young gentleman spoke with a tone of authority, which, probably, as well as the glistening of a military haubergeon above the neck of the monk's frock, procured him a civil answer.

"He is here, sir," answered the servant; "but is in deep conference with his highness the dauphin and several other lords. He can in no way be interrupted."

"Give him that letter when he comes from the council, and fail not," said Jean Charost. "Moreover, I must beg of you to see immediately the principal officer of his highness's household, and inform him that the Baron De Brecy, a prisoner of Azincourt, has arrived from England, bearing a letter for the dauphin from his highness the Duke of Orleans, and craves leave to lay it at his feet as soon as his convenience serves."

"I fear, sir, that will not be speedily," said the servant. "Where may you be found when his highness has occasion?"

"If Mademoiselle De St. Geran be at the court," replied Jean Charost, a little discouraged by the impediments he had met with, "I will crave an interview with her. You may tell her," he added, seeing the man take a step back as if to enter the building, "that Monsieur De Brecy waits--an acquaintance of her childhood, whom he trusts she may remember."

"You had better follow me, sir," said the servant. "She is here, and was alone some half hour ago."

Jean Charost followed the man into the abbey, one whole wing of which seemed to be appropriated to the dauphin and his train. No monks were visible; but still, the dim, religious light of the long passages and arched cloisters, the quiet courts, and galleries rich in gray stone fret-work, had a solemnity, if not a gloom, which Jean Charost thought must contrast strangely with some of those wild courtly revelries which checkered the fierce strifes and fiery passions of the age.

Passing by a number of small doors leading to the cells along the cloister, where probably the inferior followers of the court were quartered, the young gentleman was led to the foot of a flight of highly-ornamented stairs, carried boldly up through a wide, lightsome hall, round which it turned, and carved and supported with such skill and delicacy, that it seemed actually to hang in air. At the top ran round a gallery, screened by fine tracery of stone-work from the stair-case hall, and on the other hand, all round, except where the window was placed to afford light, were doors, and the opening of corridors, over the arch of one of which appeared a mitre, showing that there had formerly been the apartments of the abbot. The servant passed on to the next corridor, and then led the visitor along to the very end, where, after knocking at a door, he entered, said a few words, and then opened the door wider for Jean Charost to pass in. It was a small, but richly-decorated room he entered, with a door, apparently leading to another beyond; and at a table, covered with many-colored silks, which she seemed sorting into their different shades, sat a lady, magnificently dressed. She raised her eyes, beautiful and full of light, but with no glance of recognition in them, and for a moment De Brecy fancied there must be some mistake. There was a certain vague, shadowy likeness to the Agnes Sorel he had formerly known, but yet there was a strange difference. It was the diamond polished, compared with the diamond dull from the mine.

The next instant, however, the likeness suddenly became more strong. Remembrance seemed to flash up in the countenance of the lovely creature before him. She threw down the silk, rose hastily from the table, and exclaimed, with a beaming smile, "Ah, Monsieur De Brecy! He did not give your name rightly."

She was in the very act of advancing to meet him; but suddenly she paused, and from some cause, unexplained, a warm blush rushed over her cheek and forehead, and then, the moment after, she turned deadly pale.

She recovered herself speedily, welcomed him most kindly, made him sit down by her, and

listened to all he had to say. She answered him, too, with every mark of interest; but, from time to time, she fell into a deep, silent fit of thought, during which her spirit seemed to take wings and fly far away.

"Forgive me, Monsieur De Brecy," she said, at length, "if I seem sometimes inattentive and absent. Your sudden and unexpected coming carries me back continually to other days, without leaving me any power of resistance--I know not whether to call them happier days, though they were happier in one sense. They were days full of hopes and purposes, alas! not to be accomplished. But we learn hard lessons, Monsieur De Brecy, in this severe school of life. We learn to bear much that we thought we could never bear; and by constantly seeing changes and chances, and all that befalls others, learn to yield ourselves unresisting to our fate, with the sad philosophy of enjoying the day, from a knowledge that we have no power over the morrow. Oh, what a lapse of strange things there seems to be since you and I last met! The frightful murder of the poor Duke of Orleans, and your own undeserved sufferings, mark out that distant time for memory as with a monument. Between that point and this, doubtless, much has occurred to both of us that can never be forgotten. But, God help us! it is well to curb memory with a strong hand, that she run not always back to the things past, for the course of all mankind is onward. Now let us talk of what can be done for your deliverance. You must, of course, see his highness the dauphin before his meeting with the Duke of Burgundy, and I think I can warrant that he will make a strong effort for your deliverance. He is a noble and a generous prince, and will do much to serve his friends--though, Heaven knows, he has had discouragement enough to weary the heart, and sink the energies of any one. Nothing but selfishness around him, taking all the many shapes of that foul, clinging fiend which preys forever upon human nature--ambition, covetousness, petty malice, calumny, sordid envy, ingratitude--wherever he turns, there is one of its hateful Hydra heads gaping wide-mouthed upon him. Yes, you must certainly see him before the meeting, for no one knows when there may be another--The meeting! What will be the parting?"

She fell into a fit of thought again, but it lasted not long; and, looking up, she added, "I know not how it is, Monsieur De Brecy, but a certain sort of dread has come upon me in regard to this meeting, and every one who approaches me seems to feel the same. I can not help remembering that this man who comes hither to-day murdered his own first cousin, when pretending the utmost affection for him, and vowing peace and amity at the altar; and I should fear for the dauphin's safety, if I did not know that he has twenty thousand men in this place and neighborhood, and that every possible precaution has been taken. What is it, I wonder, makes me feel so sad? Do you think there is any danger?"

"I trust not," replied Jean Charost. "They tell me the two princes are to meet within barriers, assisted by some of their most experienced counselors; and though the castle has been given up to the duke, yet the dauphin's force is so much superior to any Burgundian body which could be brought up, that it would be madness to attempt any surprise."

"Could he not secretly introduce a large force into the castle," asked Agnes, "and, rushing suddenly upon the bridge, make the dauphin his prisoner?"

"He would be taken in the flank and rear," replied De Brecy, "and speedily punished for his temerity. No, dear lady, as far as I can judge, the interview must be a very safe one. But, if you wish, I will go and make further inquiries."

"No, no," she replied; "you must stay here. The council may break up at any moment, and I will then introduce you to his highness--provided they do not sit till after the dinner hour, when it would be well for you to go away and return. The duke, they say, will not be here till two or three o'clock; but he has sent word from Bray that he will assuredly come. Nay, is not Madame De Giac in the castle? That is a certain sign of his coming. Now let us talk of other things, and turn our eyes once more back to other days. I love sometimes a calm, dreamy conference with memory--as one sits over a fire at eventide, and sees misty pageants of the mind rise up before the half-closed eyes, all in a bright, soft haze. Do you recollect that boy who played so beautifully upon the violin? He is now the chief musician to her highness the dauphiness. Would he were here: he would soon soften down all hard fears and doubts with sweet music."

Jean Charost took his tone from her, and the conversation proceeded, quietly and tranquilly enough, for more than an hour, Agnes Sorel sometimes reverting to her companion's actual situation, but more frequently suffering her thoughts to linger about the past, as those are inclined to do who feel uncertain of the present or the future. Twice she turned the little hour-glass that stood upon the table, but at length she said, "It is in vain to wait longer, Monsieur De Brecy. His highness's dinner-hour is now fast approaching. Return to me at two o'clock; and in the mean time, if possible, see Tanneguy du Châtel. He may befriend you much, for he is greatly in the prince's favor, and, moreover, he is honest and true, though somewhat fierce, and rough of speech, and unforgiving. But he is zealous and, faithful for his prince, and, strange to say, no envier of other men who seem rising into power with less truth and less merit than himself. I will not say farewell, for we shall meet again shortly. Remember, two o'clock."

Jean Charost retired at once; but, as he found his way down the stairs, he heard a door below thrown suddenly open, and several persons speaking, and even laughing, as they came out. In the hall, at the foot of the stairs, he found some twelve or fifteen persons slowly moving across, some stopping for a moment to add a word or two more to something which had gone before; others

hurrying on toward the door by which he had entered the building. Among the former was a tall, powerful man, exceedingly broad in the shoulders, with a long peacock's feather in his cap, who paused for an instant just at the foot of the stairs to speak with a thin old man in a black gown.

Jean Charost had just passed them, when the servant with whom he had spoken before approached the taller man as if to speak to him; and before Jean had taken ten steps more, he heard his name pronounced aloud.

"Monsieur De Brecy--Monsieur De Brecy!" said the voice; and, turning round, he found the personage with the peacock's feather following him. His manner was quick and decided, and not altogether pleasant, yet there was a frankness about it which one often finds in men of a bold and ready spirit, where there is no great tenderness or delicacy of feeling--stern things and rough, but serviceable and sincere.

"This letter from De Royans," he said, "comes at a moment of some hurry; but yet your business wants speedy attention. Come to my house and dine. We will talk as we eat. We have not time for ceremony."

As he spoke, he took hold of Jean Charost's arm, as if he had been an old friend, and drew him on, with long strides, to the house at which the young gentleman had called in the morning. As they went, he inquired what he had done in the matter of his ransom, and when he heard that he had seen Mademoiselle De St. Geran, and interested her in his behalf, he exclaimed, "'Tis the best thing that could be done. I could not serve you as well as she can. Are you an old friend of hers?"

"I knew her when she was a mere girl," answered Jean Charost.

Du Châtel appeared hardly to hear his answer, for he seemed, like Agnes Sorel, subject to fits of deep thought that day; and he did not wake from the reverie into which he had fallen till they reached the door of his dwelling. Then, as they were mounting the steps, he broke forth again with the words, "She can do what she will--lucky that she always wills well for France; Let me see--" Then, speaking to a servant, he added, "Dinner instantly. Tell Marivault to have my armor all laid out ready. Come, De Brecy, all I can do for you I will. But that is only to make you known to the dauphin, and it must be hastily too. The fair Agnes must plead your cause with him, though I think it will not need much pleading."

While he had been speaking, he had advanced into a little room on the left hand side of the entrance, where a small table was laid, as if for the dinner of one person, and throwing himself on a stool, he pointed to another, saying, "If this interview ends well, I think there can be no doubt of your success."

"I trust it will end well," said Jean Charost "Is there any reason to think otherwise?"

"Hum!" said Tanneguy du Châtel. "That will depend altogether upon the Duke of Burgundy. He is puffed up and insolent, and there be hot spirits about the dauphin. It were well for him not to use such bold words as he has lately indulged in. We all mean him well, and fairly; but if he ruffles his wings as he has lately done, he may chance to go back with his feathers singed; and then, my good friend, your suit would be of no avail. Ah, here comes the pottage. Eat, eat; for we must be quick. It must be a strange thing," he continued, after he had taken his soup; "it must be a strange thing to go about the world with the consciousness that every man in all the land believes your death would be the salvation of France! I should not like the sensation. Here, wine--boy, give me wine! God send that this all ends well. If the Duke of Burgundy will but be reasonable, sacrifice some small part of his ambition to his country's good, remember that he is a subject and a Frenchman, and fulfill his promises, we may see some happy days again, and drive these islanders from the land. If not, we are all at sea again."

"I trust he will," answered Jean Charost; "but yet he is of a stern, unbending spirit, as I have cause to know."

"Ha! Has he been your enemy, too?" asked Du Châtel.

"Not exactly," answered Jean Charost. "Indeed, long ago he made me high offers if I would enter his service; but it was an insult rather than a compliment; for he had just then caused the assassination of the Duke of Orleans, my noble lord."

Du Châtel ground his teeth. "Ah, the villain," he said. "That is a score to be wiped off yet. But you must have done something to serve him previously. John of Burgundy is not a man to court any one without some strong motive of self-interest."

"I have often puzzled myself as to what could be his motive," answered Jean Charost, with a smile, "but have never been even able to guess at any inducement, unless it were some words of an astrologer at Pithiviers, who told him I should be present at his death, and try to prevent it."

"Heaven send the prophesy may be soon accomplished!" exclaimed Tanneguy du Châtel, with a laugh. "I longed to send my sword through him the other day at Troyes; but I thought it would be hardly courteous in his own house, when we were eating together. But if I could meet with him, lance to lance, in the field, I think one or the other of us would not ride far after."

"Shall I give you more wine, my lord?" asked a page, advancing with a flagon.

"No," replied his master; "I am hot enough already. Change that dish. What is there else for dinner?"

A man came in as he spoke, and said, in a low voice, "The duke is on the road, my lord."

"Well, let him come," replied Du Châtel. "We are ready for him."

"Perhaps he may not come on still," replied the man; "for Anthony of Thoulongeon and John of Ermay have been examining the barricades upon the bridge with somewhat dark faces, and have ridden out to meet the duke, their master."

"Then let him stay away," answered Du Châtel, abruptly. "We mean him no ill. He has been courted enough. It's his own conscience makes him afraid to come. Here is some hare, De Brecy. Take some wine, take some wine. You do not require so spare a diet as I do. Odds life! they let you blood enough at Azincourt to keep you calm and tranquil."

When the brief, frugal dinner was over, Tanneguy du Châtel started up, saying, "I must go get on my harness. You hurry back to the beautiful lady you wot of, and wait with her till you hear from me, unless the dauphin comes in and your business is settled. If not, I will present you to him before the interview, in the good hope that matters will go smoothly, and some fair conditions be settled for the good of France. I know not what is in me to-day. I feel as if quickened by another spirit. Well, I must get on this armor."

Thus saying, he left the room, and Jean Charost found his way back to the abbey, where he was kept some time before he obtained audience of Agnes Sorel. When he was at length admitted, he found her seated with another lady somewhat younger than herself, and very beautiful also, with their arms thrown round each other's waists. Neither moved when the young gentleman entered; but Agnes, bowing her head, said, "This is Monsieur De Brecy, madam, of whom I spoke to your highness. Monsieur De Brecy, I present you to the dauphiness."

Jean Charost, it need hardly be said, was greatly surprised, and, in some degree, embarrassed; for the suspicions of others had created suspicions in himself, which he now mistakenly thought were mistaken. He paid all due reverence to the dauphiness, however, and remained for nearly an hour conversing with her and the beautiful Agnes, who were both waiting anxiously, it seemed, for the appearance of the dauphin. The part of the house in which they were was very quiet; but the sounds from the country came more readily to the ear than those proceeding from the town. Some noise, like the hoof-tramp of many horses, was heard, and the dauphiness looked at Agnes anxiously.

"What is that? Can you see, Monsieur De Brecy?" asked the latter; and Jean Charost sprang to the window.

"A large party of horse," he answered. "I should judge from four to five hundred men."

"It is the duke," exclaimed the dauphiness. "Dearest Agnes, are you sure there is no danger? Remember the Duke of Orleans."

"True, madam," replied Agnes; "but he was well-nigh alone. His highness has twenty thousand men around him."

The dauphiness cast down her eyes in thought, and the moment after one of the officers of the household entered, saying, "Monsieur De Brecy, the Seigneur du Châtel desires to see you below."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

When Jean Charost reached the bottom of the great stair-case, he found every thing below in a state of great hurry and confusion. A number of persons were passing out, and stately forms, and burnished arms, and waving plumes were seen flowing along through the corridor like a stream. At the foot of the stairs stood Tanneguy du Châtel in complete arms, with his right foot raised upon the first step, his knee supporting the pommel of a small battle-ax, and his hand resting on the blade of the weapon. His beaver was up, and the expression of his countenance eager and impatient. "Quick, quick, De Brecy," he said. "The prince has gone on. We must catch him before the interview begins, if you would speed in your suit."

"I am ready," said the young man; and on they hastened, somewhat impeded by the number of attendants and noblemen of the dauphin's court, who were already following him toward the bridge over the Seine. They issued out of the abbey, at length, and then made greater progress in the open streets. But, nevertheless, they did not overtake the prince and the group that immediately surrounded him, till he had reached the foot of the high arched bridge on which the barriers were erected. In the open space on either side of the road, between the houses and the water, were assembled a strong body of horse and two large companies of archers. A herald and a marshal kept the way clear for the prince and his train, and no one appeared upon the bridge itself but some men, stationed at each of the four barriers, to open and close the gates as the several parties passed in. On the opposite side of the river towered up the old castle, with its outworks coming quite down to the bridge; but nobody appeared there except a few soldiers on the walls.

"Here is Monsieur De Brecy, royal sir," said Tanneguy du Châtel, approaching the dauphin--a tall and graceful, but slightly-formed young man--"the gentleman who has been a prisoner! since Azincourt, of whom I spoke to your highness, as did also, I hear, your royal lady, and Mademoiselle De St. Geran."

The dauphin turned partly round, and gave one glance at Jean Charost, saying, "Bring him in with you, Du Châtel. We will speak with him within the barriers; for, by all I see, my fair cousin of Burgundy intends to keep me waiting."

Thus saying, the dauphin passed on with two or three other persons, the barrier being raised to give him admission. The man in charge of the gate seemed to hesitate at the sight of Jean Charost in his monk's gown; but Du Châtel exclaimed, sharply, "The Baron De Brecy. Let him pass. I am his warrant."

The second barrier was passed in the same way as the first by the dauphin and his immediate followers; but a number of the train remained between the two barricades, according to orders apparently previously given. The keeper of the second barrier made greater difficulty than the other to let Jean Charost pass and it was not till the dauphin himself turned his head, and said, "Let him enter," that the rail was raised.

Across the centre of the bridge a single light rail was drawn, and in the space between that and the second barrier was placed a little pavilion, decorated with crimson silk, and furnished with a chair for the use of the prince. He advanced at once toward it and seated himself, and those who accompanied him, in number about two or three and twenty, gathered round, and an eager conversation seemed to take place among them. Tanneguy du Châtel mingled with the rest, approaching close to the side of the dauphin; but Jean Charost remained on the verge of the group, unnoticed, and apparently forgotten.

Some one was heard to say something regarding the insolence of keeping his highness waiting; and then the voice of Du Châtel answered, in a frank tone, "Not insolence, perhaps--suspicion and fear, very likely."

"We wish him no ill," said the dauphin. "Let him keep his promises, and we will embrace him with all friendship. Perhaps he does not know that we are here. Go and summon him, Du Châtel."

Without reply, Tanneguy hastened away, vaulted, armed as he was, over the rail which crossed the bridge at the centre, and passed through the two other barriers on the side of the castle, disappearing under the archway of the gate.

The eyes of most persons present were turned in that direction; but the dauphin looked round, with a somewhat listless air, as if for some object with which to fill up the time, and, seeing Jean Charost, he beckoned him up.

"I am glad to see you, Monsieur De Brecy," he said. "They tell me you have a letter for me from my cousin of Orleans. Were you not, if I remember right, the secretary of his father, my uncle, who was so basely murdered?"

"I was, your highness," replied Jean Charost. "Permit me to present you the young duke's letter."

The dauphin took it, but did not break the seal, merely saying, "I grieve deeply for my good cousin's long imprisonment, and if we can bring this stout-hearted Duke of Burgundy to any thing like reasonable terms of accommodation, I doubt not that we shall be able to conclude an honorable peace with England, in which case his liberation shall be stipulated, and yours, too, Monsieur De Brecy; for I am told you not only served well, and suffered much at Azincourt, but that your noble devotion to my murdered uncle had well-nigh cost your own life. Rest assured you shall be remembered."

Jean Charost judged rightly whence the prince's information came; and he was expressing his thanks, when some of those who were standing round exclaimed, "The duke is coming, your highness!"

"Somewhat late," said the young prince, with a frown; "but better that than not come at all. Well go, some of you, and do him honor."

Thus saying, he rose and advanced slowly to the rail across the bridge, on which he leaned, crossing his arms upon his chest.

In the meanwhile, a small party, consisting of ten or twelve people, were seen approaching from the gate of the castle. At the first barrier they halted, and a short consultation seemed to take place. Before it was finished they were joined by some six or seven noblemen who had left the group about the dauphin by his command. They then moved forward again; but some way in advance of them came Tanneguy du Châtel, with a quick step and a flushed countenance.

"This man is very bold, my prince," he said, in a low tone. "God send his looks and words may be more humble here, for I know not how any of us will bear it."

"Go back--go back, and bring him on," said the dauphin. "He shall hear some truths he may not lately have heard. Be you calm, Du Châtel, and leave me to deal with him. I will not spare."

Eagerness to see all the strange scene that was passing had led Jean Charost almost close to the rail by the time that Tanneguy du Châtel turned, and advanced once more to meet the Duke of Burgundy. That prince was now easily to be distinguished a little in advance of his company, and Jean Charost remarked that he had greatly changed since he last saw him. Though still a strong and active man, he looked much older, and deep lines of anxious thought were traced upon his cheek and brow. At first his eyes were fixed upon the dauphin, who continued to lean against the rail without the slightest movement; but as he came on, the duke looked to the right and left, running his eyes over the prince's attendants, and when about ten steps from the rail, they rested firmly and inquiringly on the face of Jean Charost. For a moment the sight seemed to puzzle him; but then a look of recognition came over his countenance; and the next instant he turned deadly pale.

A sort of hesitation was seen in his step and air; but he recovered himself at once, advanced straight to the dauphin, and bent one knee to the ground before him, throwing his heavy sword behind with his left hand.

The dauphin moved not, spoke not, for a moment, but gazed upon the duke with a heavy, frowning brow. "Well, cousin of Burgundy," he said, at length, without asking him to rise, "you have come at length. I thought you were going to violate your promise now, as in the other cases."

"I have violated no promises, Charles of France," replied the duke, in a tone equally sharp.

"Heaven is witness that you have," answered the dauphin. "Did you not promise to cease from war? Did you not promise to withdraw your garrisons from five cities where they still are?"

The duke's face flushed, his eyes sparkled, and his brow contracted. What he replied, Jean Charost did not hear; but seeing a gentleman close to the dauphin lay his hand upon his dagger, he caught him by the arm, whispering, "Forbear! forbear!"

At the same moment, one of the dauphin's officers, who had gone to meet the duke, took that prince by the arm, saying, "Rise, sir--rise. You are too honorable to remain kneeling."

Whether the duke heard, or mistook him, I know not; but he turned sharply toward him, with a fierce look, and, either moved by his haughty spirit, or in order to rise more easily, he put his right hand on the hilt of his sword; and Robert de Loire exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, "Dare you put your hand on your sword in the presence of our lord the dauphin!"

"It is time that this should cease!" cried Tanneguy du Châtel, his whole countenance inflamed, and his eyes flashing fire; and at the same moment he struck the duke a blow with the ax he carried in his hand.

Burgundy started up, and partly drew his sword; but another blow beat him on his knee again, and another cast him headlong to the ground. A strong man, named Oliver de Laget and another sprang upon him, and thrust a sword into his body. At the same moment, a scuffle occurred at a little distance between one of the followers of the duke and some of the dauphin's party, and Jean Charost saw a man fall; but all was confused and indistinct. Horror, surprise, and a wild, grasping effort of the mind to seize all the consequences to France, to England, to himself, which might follow that dreadful act, stupefied and confounded him. Every thing passed, as in a dream, with rapid indistinctness, to be brought out vivid and strong by an after effort of memory. That the duke was killed at the very feet of the dauphin, was all that his mind had room for at the moment.

The next instant a voice exclaimed, "Look to the dauphin--look to the dauphin!" and Jean Charost saw him staggering back from the rail as pale as death, and with his eyes half closed.

It is not unlikely that many there present had contemplated as possible some such event as that which had taken place, without any definite purpose of effecting it, or taking any part therein. Popular expectation has often something prophetic in it, and the warning voice, which had rendered so many grave and thoughtful during the whole course of that morning, must have been heard also by the actors of the scene which had just passed. But one thing is certain, and the whole history of the time leaves no doubt of the fact, that the dauphin himself had neither any

active share in his cousin's death, nor any participation in a conspiracy to effect it. They bore him back, fainting, to the little pavilion which had been raised for his accommodation, and thence, after a time, led him, in profound silence, to the abbey, while his followers secured a number of the Duke of Burgundy's immediate attendants, and the soldiery, crowding on the bridge, threatened the castle itself with assault.

Jean Charost retired from the scene with a sad heart. His hopes were disappointed; his fate seemed sealed; but though he felt all this bitterly, yet he felt still more despondency at the thought of his unhappy country's fate. Personal rivalry, selfish ambition, greed of power and of wealth, undisciplined valor, insubordinate obstinacy, were all urging her on to the verge of a precipice from which a miracle seemed necessary to save her. The feelings which filled his breast at that moment were very like those expressed by the contemporary historian when he wrote, "Only to hear recounted this affair is so pitiful and lamentable that greater there can not be; and especially the hearts of all noble men, and other true men, natives of the kingdom of France, must be of great sadness and shame in beholding those of such noble blood as of the *fleur de lis*, so near of kindred, themselves destroy one another, and the same kingdom placed, in consequence of the facts above mentioned, and others past and done before, in the way and the danger of falling under a new lord and altogether going to perdition."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

To dwell minutely upon a period unfilled by action, and merely marked by the revolution of day and night, even in the life of a person in whom we have some interest, would be almost as dull as to describe in detail the turning of a grindstone. It is not with the eventless events of a history that we have to do--not with the flat spaces on the road of life. We sit not down to relate a sleep or to paint a fishpond.

Little occurred to Jean Charost during the rest of his stay in France that is worth the telling which will not be referred to hereafter. Let us change the scene then, and, spreading the wings of Fancy, fly on through the air of Time to a spot some years in advance.

There was an old house, or rather palace, and well it deserved the name, situated near the great city of London, close upon the banks of the River Thames. Men now living can remember parts of it still standing, choked up with houses, like some great shell of the green deep incrusted with limpets and other tiny habitations of the vermin of the sea. At the time of this history it had gardens running all around it, extending wide and pleasantly on the water side, though but narrow between the palace itself and the stone-battlemented wall which separated them from the great Strand road leading from the Temple gate of the city to the village of Charing.

Fretted and richly carved in some parts, plain and stern in others, the old palace of the Savoy combined in itself the architecture of several ages. Many were the purposes it had served too--sometimes the place of revelry and mirth--sometimes the witness of the prisoner's tears. It had been the residence of John, king of France, during his captivity in England some half century before; and since that time it had principally served--grown almost by prescription to be so used--as an honorable prison for foreign enemies when the chances of war brought them in bonds to England.

In the midst of the embattled wall that I have mentioned, and projecting a little beyond its line, stood a great gate-house, which has long since been pulled down, or has fallen, perhaps, without the aid of man; and that gate-house had two large towers of three stories each, affording very comfortable apartments, as that day went, to their occasional tenants. They were roomy and pleasant of aspect enough. One of these towers was appropriated to the wardens of the Savoy and their families, while the other received at various times a great number of different denizens, sometimes princes, sometimes prisoners, sometimes refugees, people who remained but a few days, people who passed there half a lifetime. The stone walls within were thickly traced with names, some scrawled with chalk, or written in ink; and among these the most conspicuous were records of the existence there for several years of persons attached to the unfortunate King John.

It was a cheerful building in those days; nothing obscured the view or hid the sunshine; and the smiling gardens, the glittering river, or the busy high-road could be seen from most of the windows of the palace.

In a room on the first floor of the eastern tower of the gate-house, Jean Charost is once more before us. Monterreau's blood-stained bridge, the dauphin and the murderers, and the dying Duke of Burgundy, have passed away; and there are but two women with him. Yes, I may call them women both, though their ages are very far apart. One is in the silver-haired decline of life,

the other is just blossoming; they are the withered flower and the bud.

They were seated round a little table, and had evidently been talking earnestly. Madame De Brecy's eyes had traces of tears on them, and those of the young girl, turned up to Jean Charost's face, were full of eagerness and entreaty.

"In vain, dear mother--in vain," said Jean Charost. "My resolution is as firm as ever. Jacques Cœur is generous; but I can not lay myself under such an obligation, and even at the most moderate rate, to raise such a sum in the present state of France, would deprive you of two thirds of your whole income. This captivity is weary to me. To remain here year after year, while France has been dismembered, her crown bought and sold, her fair fields ravaged, her cities become slaughter-houses, has been terrible--has doubled the load of time, has depressed my light spirits, and almost worn out hope and expectation. But yet I will not trust the fate of two, so dear as you two are, to the power of circumstances. You say, apply to Lord Willoughby. I have applied; but it is in vain. He gives me, as you know, all kindly liberty: no act of kindness or courtesy is wanting. But on one point he is inflexible, and we all feel and know that he is ruled by a power which he must obey. It is the same with others who have prisoners of some consideration. They can not place them at reasonable ransom, though the rules of chivalry and courtesy require it."

"He seems a kind man, Jean," said the young girl, still looking in his face. "He spoke gently and good-humoredly to me."

"Ay, gentleness and good humor, my sweet Agnes," said Jean Charost, "will not make a man disobey the commands of his monarch. Another month, and I shall have lain a prisoner seven long years. Why, Agnes, my hair is growing gray, while yours is getting darker every hour. I can recollect your locks like sunshine on a hill, and now a raven's wing is hardly blacker."

"Ah, I saw a gray hair the other day in that curl upon your temple," said the girl, with a laugh. "You will soon be a white-headed old man, Jean, if you obstinately remain here, when our dear mother would willingly sell all to free you. Though I think, after all, you are getting a little younger since we came. We have now been three years with you in this horrible country, and I think you look a year younger."

Jean Charost smiled, saying, "Certainly I do, Sunshine, else do you shine in vain."

"Well, I am going out to seek more sunshine," said the girl. "I will wander away up the bank of the river, and say an ave at the Blackfriars' Church. And then, perhaps, I will go into the Church of the Templar's, and look at the tombs of the old knights, with their feet crossed, and their swords half drawn; and then I will come back again; for then it will be dinner-time. Good-by till then."

She tripped away with a light step, down the stair-case, out upon the road; and when Jean Charost looked after her out of the window he saw her going slowly and thoughtfully along. But Agnes did not continue that pace for any great distance. As soon as she was out of the gate tower of the Savoy, she hurried on with great rapidity, turned up a narrow lane between two fields on the west of the road, and, passing the house of the Bishop of Lincoln, not even stopping to scent her favorite briar rose which was thick upon the hedges, paused at a modern brick house--modern in those days--with towers and turrets in plenty, and the arms of the house of Willoughby hung out from a spear above the gate.

An old white-headed man sat upon the great stone bench beneath the archway; and a soldier moved backward and forward upon a projecting gallery in front of the building. A page, playing with a cat, was seen further in under the arch, in the blue shade, and one or two loiterers appeared in the court beyond, on the side where the summer sun could not visit them.

Agnes stopped by the porter's side, and asked if she could see the Lord Willoughby.

"Doubtless, doubtless," said the man, "if he be not taking his forenoon sleep, and that can hardly be, for old Thomas of Erpingham has been with him, and the right worshipful deaf knight's sweet voice would well-nigh rouse the dead--'specially when he talks of Azincourt. Go, boy, to our lord, and tell him a young maiden wants to see him. Ah, I can recollect the time when that news would have got a speedy answer. But alack, fair lady, we grow slow as we get old. Sit you down by me now, till the page returns, and then the saucy fellows in the court dare not gibe."

Agnes seated herself, as he invited her; but she had not waited long ere the boy returned, and ushered her through one long passage to a room on the ground floor, where she found the old lord writing a letter--with some difficulty it must be confessed; for he was no great scribe--but very diligently. He hardly looked round, but continued his occupation, saying, "What is it, child? The boy tells me you would speak with me."

"When you have leisure, my good lord," replied Agnes, standing a little behind him. But the old man started at her voice, and turned round to gaze at her.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "My little French lady, is that you? It is very strange, your face always puts me in mind of some one else, and your tongue does so too. However, there is no time in life to think of such things. Sit you down--sit you down a moment. I shall soon have finished this epistle--would it were in the fire. I have but a line to add."

He was near a quarter of an hour, however, in finishing that line; and Agnes sat mute and thoughtful, gazing at his face, and, as one will do when one has important interests depending on another, drawing auguries from every line about it. It was a good, honest old English face, with an expression of frank good nature, a little testiness, and much courtesy; and the young girl drew favorable inferences before she ended her reverie.

At length the letter was finished, folded, sealed, and dispatched; and then turning to Agnes, the old soldier took her hands in his, saying, "I am glad to see you, my dear. What is it you want? Our friend at the Savoy--your father--brother--husband--I know not what, is not ill, I hope."

"Very ill," replied Agnes, in a quiet, gentle tone.

"Ha!" cried the old gentleman. "How so? What is the matter?"

"He is ill at ease, my lord--sick at heart--is in a fever to return to his own land."

"You little deceiver," cried Lord Willoughby, laughing. "You made me anxious about the good young baron, and now it is but the old story, after all. But why should he pine so to get back to France? This is a fine country--this a fine city; and God is my witness I do all I can to make him happy. He is little more than a prisoner in name."

"But still a prisoner, my lord," replied Agnes, with a touching earnestness. "The very name is the chain. Think you not that to a gentleman, a man of a free spirit, the very feeling of being a prisoner is heavier than fetters of iron to a serf. You may cage a singing-bird, my lord, but an eagle beats itself to death against the bars. Would you be content to rest a captive in France, however well treated you might be? Would you be content to know that you could not revisit your own dear land, see the scenes where your youth had passed, embrace your friends and relations, breathe your own native air? Would you be content to sit down at night in a lonely room, not in your own castle, and, looking at your wrists, though you saw not the fetters there, say to yourself, 'I am a captive, nevertheless. A captive to my fellowman--I can not go where I would, do what I would. I am bound down to times and places--a prisoner--a prisoner still, though I may carry my prison about with me!' Would any man be content with this? and if so, how much less can a knight and a gentleman sit down in peace and quiet, content to be a prisoner in a foreign land, when his country needs his services, when every gentleman of France is wanted for the aid of France, when his king is to be served, his country's battles to be fought, even against you, my lord, and his own honor and renown to be maintained?"

"Ay; you touch me there--you touch me there, young lady," said the old nobleman. "On my life, for my part, I would never keep a brave enemy in prison, but have him pay only what he could for ransom, and then let him go to fight me again another day."

"Monsieur De Brecy's father," continued Agnes, simply, "died in a lost field against the English. The son is here in an English prison. Think you not that he envies his father?"

"Perhaps he does, perhaps he does," cried Lord Willoughby, starting up, and walking backward and forward in the room. "But what can I do?" he continued, stopping before Agnes and gazing at her with a look of sincere distress. "The king made me promise that I would not liberate any of my prisoners, so long as he and I both lived, without his special consent, except at the heavy ransoms he himself had fixed. My dear child, you talk like a woman, and yet you touch me like a child. But you can, I am sure, understand that it is not in my power; or, upon my faith and chivalry, I would grant what you desire."

The tears rose in Agnes's beautiful eyes. "I know you would be kind," she said. "But his mother insisted upon selling all they have to pay his ransom. He would not have it; for it would reduce her to poverty, and I came away to see if I could not move you."

"On my life," cried Lord Willoughby, "I have a mind to send you to the king."

"Where is he?" cried Agnes. "I am ready to go to him at once."

The old lord shook his head: "He is in France," he said; and was going to add something more, when a tall servant suddenly opened the door, and began some announcement by saying, "My lord, here is--"

But he was not suffered to finish the sentence; for a powerful, middle-aged man, unarmed, but booted and spurred, pushed past him into the room, and Lord Willoughby exclaimed, "Ha, Dorset! what brings you from France? Has aught gone amiss?"

There was some cause for the latter question; for there was more than haste in the expression of the Earl of Dorset's countenance: there was grief, and there was anxiety.

With a hasty step he advanced to Lord Willoughby, laid his hand upon his arm, and said something in a low voice which Agnes did not hear. The old lord started back with a look of sorrow and consternation. "Dead!" he exclaimed. "Dead! So young--so full of life--so needful to his people. Dorset, Dorset; in God's name, say that my ears have deceived me. Killed in battle, ha! Some random bolt from that petty town of Cone, whither he was marching when last I heard. It must be so. He, like the great Richard, was doomed to find such a fate--to fall before an

insignificant hamlet by a peasant's hand. He exposed himself too much, Dorset--he exposed himself too much."

Dorset shook his head: "No," he replied, "he died of sickness in his bed; but like a soldier and a hero still--calmly, courageously, without a faltering thought or sickly fear. Heaven rest his soul: we shall never have a greater or a better king. But harkee, Willoughby, I must go on at once and summon the council. Come you up with all speed; for there will be much matter for anxious deliberation, and need of wise heads, and much experience."

"I will, I will," replied Lord Willoughby. "Ho, boy! without there. Get my horses ready with all speed. Farewell, Dorset; I will join you in half an hour. Now--Odds' life, my sweet young lady, I had forgot your presence. What was it we were saying? Oh, I remember now. The course of earthly events is very strange. That which brings tears to some eyes wipes them away from others. Come hither; I will write a note to your young guardian, and none but yourself shall be its bearer. My duty to my king is done, and I am free to act as I will. Stay for it; it shall be very short."

He then drew a scrap of paper toward him, and wrote slowly, "The ransom of the Baron De Brecy is diminished one half.

"In witness whereof I have set my hand.

"WILLOUGHBY."

"There, take it, dear child," he said, "and let him thank God, and thank you;" and drawing her toward him, he imprinted a kind and fatherly kiss upon her forehead, and then led her courteously to the door.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Sometimes very small and insignificant occurrences, even when anticipated and prepared for, produce mighty and unforeseen consequences; sometimes great and startling events the least expected, and the least provided against, pass away quietly without producing any immediate result.

Henry the Fifth of England had returned to France in high health, had triumphed over all enemies, and had used the very storms and tempests of passion and faction as instruments of his will. All yielded before him; victory seemed his right; health and long life his privilege; and success the obedient servant of his will. No one contemplated a change--no one even dreamed of a reverse; defeat was never thought of; death was never mentioned. There was no expectation, no preparation. But in the midst of triumph, and activity, and energetic power, he was touched by the transforming wand of sickness. Few hours were allowed him to set his house in order; and in the prime of life and the midst of glory, the successful general, the gallant knight, the wise statesman, the ambitious king closed his eyes upon the world, and nothing but a mighty name remained.

What changes might have been expected to follow an event so little contemplated! Yet very few, if any, occurred. His last hours, while writhing on a bed of pain, sufficed to regulate all the affairs of two great kingdoms, and his wisdom and foresight, as well as his energy and resolution, were never more strongly displayed than on the bed of death. All remained quiet; the sceptre of England passed from the hand of the hero to the hand of the child; and in France no popular movement of any importance showed that the people were awakened to the value of the chances before them. All remained quiescent; the vigorous and unsparing hand of Bedford seemed no less strong than had been that of his departed brother; and, reduced to a few remote provinces, the party of the dauphin was powerless and inert.

It was while this state continued, that three persons entered the old hall of the château of Brecy just as the sun was going down. The elder lady leaned with a feeble and fatigued air upon the arm of Jean Charost; Agnes had both her hands clasped upon his other arm, and all three paused at the door, and looked round with an expression, if not somewhat sad, somewhat anxious. All were very glad to be there again; all were very glad to be even in France once more. But three years make a great difference in men, in countries, and in places; and when we return to an ancient dwelling-place, we are more conscious, perhaps, of the workings of time than at any other period. We feel within ourselves that we are changed, and we expect to find a change in external objects also--we look to see a stone fallen from the walls, the moss or mildew upon the paneling, the monitory dust creeping over the floor, the symptoms of alteration and decay

apparent in the place of cherished memories.

There was nothing of the kind, however, to be seen in the old hall of the château of De Brecy. The evening rays of sunshine gliding through the windows shone cheerfully against the wall; the room was swept and garnished. All was neat and in good array; and it seemed as if, from that little circumstance alone, Hope relighted her lamp for their somewhat despondent hearts.

"There may be bright days before us yet, my son," said Madame de Brecy, in a calm, grave tone.

"Oh, yes, there will be bright days," said Agnes, warmly and enthusiastically. "We are back in France--fair bright France; we are back, safe and well, and there must be happy days for us yet."

"I wonder," said Jean Charost, thoughtfully, "who has kept up the place so carefully. We left but poor old Augustine, incapable of much exertion. The friendly offices of Jacques Cœur must have had a hand in this."

"Not much, sir," said a voice behind him; "if that very excellent gentleman will permit me to say so."

Jean Charost turned round, and perceived Jacques Cœur himself entering the hall with a stout little man in a gardener's habit. I say a gardener's habit, because in those blessed days, called the good old times, which had their excellences as well as their defects, you could tell a man's trade, calling, profession, or degree--at least usually--by his dress. It was a good habit, it was a beneficial habit, was an honest habit. You could never mistake a priest for a life-guardsman, nor a shop-boy for a prime minister--nor the reverse. In our own times, alas--in our days of liberty (approaching license), equality (founded upon the grossest delusion), and fraternity (which, as far as we have seen it carried, is the fraternity of Cain), we are allowed to disguise ourselves as we will, to sail under any false colors that may suit us, to cheat, and swindle, and lie, and deceive in whatever garb may seem best fitted for our purpose. The vanity and hypocrisy of the multitude have triumphed not only altogether over sumptuary laws, but, in a great part, over custom itself and I know nothing that a man may not assume, except the queen's crown, and God protect that for her, and for her race forever!

The gardener's habit, however, with the blue cloth stockings bound on with leathern straps, was so apparent in the present instance, that Jean Charost, who was unconscious of having a gardener, could not for an instant conceive who the personage was, till the face of Martin Grille, waxen like that of the moon at the end of the second quarter, grew distinct to recollection.

"He says true, my good friend, Monsieur de Brecy," said Jacques Cœur, "and right glad I am, his care should have so provided that your first sight of your own house, on your return from captivity should be a pleasant one. The only share I have had in this, as your agent, has been to let him do what he would."

"'Tis explained in a word, sir," said Martin Grille. "You told me you could not afford to keep me while you were a prisoner; and I thought I could afford to keep myself, out of the waste ground about the castle, and keep the castle in good order too. I had always a fancy for gardening when I was a boy, and had once a whole crop of beans in an old sauce-pan, on the top of the garret where my mother lived in Paris. The first five sous I ever had in my life was for an ounce of onion seed which I raised in a cracked pitcher. I was intended by nature for digging the earth, and not for digging holes in other people's bodies; and the town of Bourges owes me some of the best cabbages that ever were grown, when I am quite sure I should have reaped any thing but a crop of glory if I had cultivated the fields of war. However, here I am, ready to take up the trade of valet again, if you will let me; and, to show that I have not forgotten the mystery, I rubbed up all your old arms last night, brushed coats, mantles, jerkins, houseaux, and every thing else I could find, and swept up every room in the house to save poor old Augustine's unbendable back."

In more ways than one, the house was well prepared for the return of its lord, and, thanks to the care of good Martin Grille, a very comfortable supper had not been forgotten. It was a strange sensation, however, for Jean Charost, when the sun had gone down and the sconces were lighted, to sit once more in his own hall, a free man, with friendly faces all about him--a pleasant sensation, and yet somewhat overpowering. The tears stood in Madame De Brecy's eyes more than once during that evening; but Agnes, whose spirits were light, and who had fewer memories, was full of gay joyfulness.

Jean Charost himself was very calm; but he often thought, had he been alone, he could have wept too.

Thus some thought and some feeling was given to personal things; but the fate, the state, the history of his country during his absence occupied no small portion of his attention. In those days news traveled slowly. Great facts were probably more accurately stated and known than even now; for there was no complicated machinery for the dissemination of falsehood, no public press wielded by party spirit for the purpose of adulterating the true with the false. A certain generosity, too, had survived the pure chivalrous ages, and men, even during life, could attribute high and noble qualities to an enemy; but details were generally lost. Jean Charost was anxious to hear those details, and when they gathered round the great chimney and the blazing hearth--for

it was now October, and the nights were frosty--Jacques Cœur undertook to give his young friend some account of all that had taken place in France since the battle of Azincourt, somewhat to the following effect.

"You remember well, my friend," he said, "that, after the fall of Harfleur, John of Burgundy only escaped the name of traitor by a lukewarm offer to join his troops to those of France in defense of the realm. But he was distrusted, and probably not without cause. You were already a prisoner in England when the Orleanist party obtained entire preponderance at the court, and the young duke being in captivity like yourself, the leading of that faction was assumed by his father-in-law, the Count of Armagnac. Rapid, great, and perilous was his rise, and fearless, bold, and bloody he showed himself. The sword of constable placed the whole military power of France at his disposal, and the death of the dauphin Louis left him no rival in authority or favor. Happy had it been for him had he contented himself with military authority; but he must grasp the finances too; and in the disastrous state of the revenues of the crown, the imposts, only justified by a hard necessity, raised him up daily enemies. His rude and merciless severity, too, irritated even more than it alarmed, and it was not long before all those who had been long indifferent went to swell the ranks of his adversaries. True, his party was strong; true, hatred of the Burgundian faction was intense in a multitude of Frenchmen. But the great lords, and many of the princes attached to the house of Orleans, were absent and powerless in English prisons. By every means that policy and duplicity could suggest, John of Burgundy strove to augment the number of his friends. All those who fled from the persecution of Armagnac were received by him with joy and treated with distinction. He increased his forces; he hovered about Paris; he treated the orders of the court to retire, if not with contempt, with disobedience. At length, however, he seemed to give up the hope of making himself master of the capital, and retreated suddenly into Artois.

"Not judging his enemy rightly, the Count of Armagnac resolved to seize the opportunity of an open path, in order to strike a blow for the recovery of Harfleur; and, leaving a strong garrison in Paris, he set out upon his expedition. No sooner was he gone, than John of Burgundy hastened to profit by his absence, and rapid negotiations took place between him and his partisans within the walls of Paris. You know the turbulent and factious nature of the lower order of citizens in the capital. Many of them were animated with mistaken zeal for the house of Burgundy; more were eager for plunder, or thirsty for blood; and one of the darkest and most detestable plots that ever blackened the page of history was formed for the destruction of the whole Armagnac party, and that, too, with the full cognizance of the Duke of Burgundy. It was determined that, at a certain hour, the conspirators should appear in arms in the streets of Paris, seize upon the queen, the king, and the young dauphin, John, murder the-whole of the Armagnac faction, and, after having seized the Duke of Berri and the King of Sicily, load them with chains, and make a spectacle of them in the streets of Paris mounted on an ox, and then put them to death likewise.

"The plot was frustrated by the fears or remorse of a woman, within a few minutes of the hour appointed for its execution. Precautions were taken; the royal family placed in safety; and Tanneguy du Châtel, at the head of his troops, issued forth from the Bastile, and made himself master of the houses and the persons of the conspirators. There was no mercy, my friend, for any one who was found in arms. Some suffered by the cord or hatchet, some were drowned in the Seine; and Armagnac returning, added to the chastisement already inflicted on individuals, the punishment of the whole city of Paris. Suspicion was received as proof, indifference became a crime, the prisons were filled to overflowing, and the very name of Burgundian was proscribed. The troops of the Duke of Burgundy, which had approached the city of Paris, were attacked in the open field, and civil war, in its most desolating aspect, raged all around the metropolis.

"Every sort of evil seemed poured out upon France, as if all the fountains of Heaven's wrath were opened to rain woes upon the land. Another dauphin was snatched away from us, and rumors of poison were very general; but the death of one prince was very small in comparison with the treason of another. There is no doubt, De Brecy, that John of Burgundy, frustrated in his attempt upon Paris, entered into a league with the enemies of his country, and secretly recognized Henry of England as king of France. Dissensions arose between the queen and the Count of Armagnac, in which our present dauphin, Charles, was so far compromised as to incur the everlasting hatred of his mother. Burgundy, the queen, and England, united for the destruction of the dauphin and the Count of Armagnac, and vengeance and ambition combined for the final ruin of the country. The politic King of England took advantage of all, and marched on from conquest to conquest throughout Normandy, while, by slow degrees, the Duke of Burgundy approached nearer and nearer to the capital. The perils by which he was surrounded appeared to deprive Armagnac of judgment: he seemed possessed of the fury of a wild beast, and little doubt exists that he meditated a general massacre of the citizens of Paris. But his crimes were cut short by the crimes of others. The troops of Burgundy were in possession of Pontoise. A well-disposed and peaceable young man, insulted and injured by a follower of Armagnac, found means to introduce his enemies into the city of Paris. At the first cry of Burgundy, thousands rose to deliver themselves from the tyranny under which they groaned, and, headed by a man named Caboche, retaliated, in a most fearful manner, on the party of Armagnac, the evils which it had inflicted. The prisons were filled; the streets ran with blood; and the Count of Armagnac, himself forced to fly, was concealed for a few hours by a mason, only to be delivered up in the end. The queen and the Duke of Burgundy encouraged the massacre; the prisons were broken into, the prisoners murdered in cold blood; the Châtelet was set on fire, and the unhappy captives within its walls were driven back into the flames at the point of the pike; and the leaders of the

Armagnac faction were dragged through the streets for days before they were torn to pieces by the people. Tanneguy du Châtel alone showed courage and discretion, and obtained safety, if not success. He rescued the dauphin in the midst of the tumult, placed him in safety at Melun, returned to the capital, fought gallantly for some hours against the insurgents and the troops of Burgundy, and then retired to counsel and support his prince. The queen and the Duke of Burgundy entered the city in triumph; flowers were strewed before her on the blood-stained streets; and a prince of the blood-royal of France was seen grasping familiarly the hands of low-born murderers. But the powers, which he had raised into active virulence, were soon found ungovernable by the Duke of Burgundy, and he determined first to weaken, and then to destroy them. The troops of assassins fancied themselves soldiers, because they were butchers, and demanded to be led against the enemy. The duke was right willing to gratify them, and sent forth two bands of many thousands each. The first was beaten and nearly cut to pieces by the Armagnac troops. The remnant murdered their leaders in their rage of disappointment, but did not profit by the experience they had gained. The second party were defeated with terrible loss, and fled in haste to Paris; but the gates were shut against them; and dispersing, they joined the numerous bands of plunderers that infested the country, and were pursued and slaughtered by the troops of Burgundy. Thus weakened, the insurgents, who had brought back the Duke of Burgundy to Paris, were easily subjugated by the duke himself: their leaders perished on the scaffold; and thousands of the inferior villains were swept away by various indirect means. A still more merciless scourge, however, than either Armagnac or Burgundy was about to smite the devoted city--a scourge that spared no party, respected no rank or station. The plague appeared in the capital, and, in the space of a few months, the grave received more than a hundred thousand persons of every age, class, and sex. In some of these events perished Caboche, the uncle of your servant Martin Grille, who, with the courage of a lion and the fierceness of a tiger, combined some talents, which, better employed, might have won him an honorable name in history."

"And what has become of his son?" asked Jean Charost. "He was attached, I think, to the court of the queen."

"He left her," answered Jacques Cœur, "and came hither to Bourges with Marie of Anjou, the wife of the dauphin, when that prince removed from Melun to Bourges. You know somewhat of what happened after--how his highness was driven hence to Poictiers, how negotiations took place to reunite the royal family; how divided counsels, ambitions, and jealousies prevented any thing like union against the real enemy of France; how, step by step, the English king made himself master of all the country, almost to the gates of Paris. You were present, I am told, at the death of the Duke of Burgundy--shall I, or shall I not call it murder? Well had he deserved punishment--well had he justified almost any means to deliver France from the blasting influence of his ambition. But at the very moment chosen for vengeance, he showed some repentance for his past crimes, some inclination to atone, and perhaps the very effects of his remorse placed his life in the hands of his adversaries. Would to God that act had not been committed."

"And what has followed?" asked Jean Charost. "I have heard but little since, except that at Arras a treaty was concluded by which the crown of France was virtually transferred to the King of England on his marriage with the Princess Catharine."

"The scene is confused and indistinct," said Jacques Cœur, "like the advance of a cloud overshadowing the land, and leaving all vague and misty behind it. Far from serving the cause of the dauphin, far from serving the cause of France, the death of the Duke of Burgundy has produced unmitigated evil to all. His son has considered vengeance rather than justice, the memory of his father, rather than the happiness of his country. Leagued with the queen, and with the King of England, he has sought nothing but the destruction of the dauphin, and has seen the people of France swear allegiance to a foreign conqueror whom his connivance enabled to triumph. From conquest to conquest the King of England has gone on, till almost all the northern part of France was his, and the River Loire is the boundary between two distinct kingdoms. Here and there, indeed, a large town and a strong fortress is possessed by one party in the districts where the other dominates, and a border warfare is carried on along the banks of the river. But for a long time previous to King Henry's death, fortune seemed to follow wherever he trod, and the whole western as well as northern parts of France were being gradually reduced beneath his sway. During a short absence in England, indeed, a false promise of success shone upon the arms of the dauphin. A re-enforcement of six thousand men from Scotland enabled him to keep the field with success, and the victory of Baugé, the death of the Duke of Clarence, and the relief of Angers, gave hope to every loyal heart in France. Money, indeed, was wanting, and I was straining every nerve to obtain for my prince the means of carrying on the war, when the return of Henry, and his rapid successes in Saintonge and the Limousin cut me off from a large part of the resources I had calculated upon, and once more plunged us all into despair. The last effort in arms was the siege of Cone, on the Loire, garrisoned by the Burgundian troops. The dauphin presented himself before its walls in person, and the Duke of Burgundy marched to its relief, calling on his English allies for aid. Henry was not slow to grant it, and set out from Senlis to show his readiness and his friendship. Death struck him, it is true, by the way; but even in death he seemed to conquer, and Cone was relieved as he breathed his last at Vincennes. Happily have you escaped, De Brecy; for had the Lord Willoughby received intimation of the king's dying commands before he freed you, you would have lingered many a long year in prison. Well knowing that the captives of Azincourt would afford formidable support to the party of the dauphin as soon as liberated, it has always been Henry's policy to detain them in London, and

almost his last words were an order not to set them free till his infant son had attained his majority. You are the only one, I believe, above the rank of a simple esquire who has been permitted to return to France."

"I owe it all to this dear girl," answered Jean Charost, laying his hand upon the little hand of Agnes. "She went to plead for me at a happy moment. But where is the dauphin now? He needs the arm of every gentleman in France, and I will not be long absent from his army."

"Army!" said Jacques Cœur, with a melancholy shake of the head. "Alas! De Brecy, he has no army. Dispirited, defeated, almost penniless, seeing the fairest portions of his father's dominions in the hands of an enemy--that father's name and authority used against him--his own mother his most rancorous foe, the Duke of Burgundy at the head of one army in the field, and the Duke of Bedford, hardly inferior to the great Henry, leading another, he has retired, almost hopeless, to the lonely Castle of Polignac; and strives, I am told, but strives in vain, to forget the adversities of the past, and the menaces of the future, in empty pleasures. An attempt must be made to rouse him; but I can do nothing till I have obtained those means, without which all action would be hopeless. To Paris I dare not venture myself; but I have agents there, friends who will aid me, and wealth locked up in many enterprises. Diligently have I labored during the last month to gather all resources together; but still I linger on in Bourges without receiving any answer to my numerous letters."

"Can not I go to Paris?" asked Jean Charost. "You know, my friend of old, that I want no diligence, and had once some skill in such business as yours."

Jacques Cœur paused thoughtfully, and then answered, "It might, perhaps, be as well. You have been so long absent, your person would be unknown. When could you set out?"

Jean Charost replied that he would go the very next day; and the conversation was still proceeding upon these plans, when the sound of a horse's feet was heard in the castle court, and in a minute or two after, a tall, elderly weather-beaten man was brought in by Martin Grille. Jean Charost looked at him, thinking that he recognized the face of Armand Chauvin, the chevaucheur of the late Duke of Orleans; but the man walked straight up to Jacques Cœur, put a letter in his hand, and then turned his eyes to the ground, without giving one glance to those around.

"This is good news, indeed," said Jacques, who had read the letter by the light of a sconce. "A hundred thousand crowns, and two hundred thousand more in a month! What with the money from Marseilles we may do something yet. This is good news indeed!"

"I have more news yet," said Chauvin, gravely. "Hark, in your ear, Messire Jacques. I have hardly eaten or drank, and have not slept a wink from the gates of Paris to Bourges, and Bourges hither, all to bring you these tidings speedily. Hark in your ear!" and he whispered something to Jacques Cœur. The other listened attentively, gave a very slight start, and appeared somewhat, but not greatly moved.

"God rest his soul!" he said, at length. "He has had a troublous life--God rest his soul!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Who has not heard of the beautiful Allier? Who has not heard of the magnificent Auvergne? But the horseman stopped not to gaze at the mountains round him. He lingered not upon the banks of the stream; he hardly gave more than a glance at the rich Limagne. At Clermont, indeed, he halted for two whole hours, but it was an enforced halt, for his horse broke down with hard riding, and all the time was spent in purchasing another. A crust of bread and a cup of wine afforded the only refreshment he himself took, and on he went through the vineyards and the orchards, loaded with the last fruits of autumn. At Issoire he gave his horse hay and water, and then rode on at great speed to Lempole, but passed by its mighty basaltic rock, crowned with its castle, though he looked up with feelings of interest and regret as he connected it with the memory of Louis of Orleans. At Brioude he was forced to pause for a while; but his horse fed readily, and on he went again, out of the narrow streets of that straggling, disagreeable town, over the mountains, through the valleys, with vast volcanic forms all around him, and hamlets and villages built of the dark gray lava, hardly distinguishable from the rocks on which they stood. More than seventy miles he rode on straight from Clermont, and drew not a rein between Brioude and Puy, which burst upon his sight suddenly on the eastern declivity of the mountains, with its rich, unrivaled amphitheatre, and its three rivers flowing away at the foot. The sun was within a hand's breadth of the horizon. All the valleys seen from that elevation were flooded with light; the old cathedral itself looked like a resplendent amethyst, and devout pilgrims to the

miraculous shrine still crowded the streets, some turning on their way homeward, some mounting the innumerable steps to say one prayer more at the feet of the Virgin.

Jean Charost rode straight up to the little old inn--small and miserable as compared with many of the vast buildings appropriated in those days to the reception of the traveler in France, and still smaller in proportion to the number of devout persons who daily flocked into the city. But then the landlord argued that the pilgrims came for grace, and not for good living, and that therefore the body must put up with what it could get, if the soul was taken care of. Jean passed under the archway into the court-yard, gave his horse to an hostler of precisely the same stamp as the man who afforded a type to Shakspeare, and then, turning back toward the street, met the host in the doorway, prepared to tell him that he must wait long for supper, and put up with a garret.

"I want nothing at present, my good friend," replied Jean Charost, "but a cup of wine, which is ready at all times, and some one to show me my way on foot to Espaly. Indeed, I should not have turned in here at all, but that my horse could go no further."

"Ah, sir," cried the host, with his civility and curiosity both awakened together; "so you are going to see Monseigneur le Dauphin? News now, I warrant, and good, I hope--pray, what is it?"

"Excellent good," replied Jean Charost.

"First, that a thirsty man talks ill with a dry mouth; and, secondly, that a wise man never gives his message except to the person it is sent to. The dauphin will be delighted with these tidings; and so now give me a cup of wine, and some one to show me the way."

"Ha, you are a wag!" said the landlord; "but harkee, sir; you had better take my mule. It will be ready while I am drawing the wine, and you drinking it. Though they say, 'Espaly, near Puy,' it is not so near as they call it. My boy shall go with you on a quick-trotting ass to bring back the mule."

"And the news," said Jean Charost, "if he can get it. So be it, however; for, good sooth! I am tired. I have not slept a wink for six-and-thirty hours; but let them make all haste."

"As quick as an avalanche, sir," said the landlord; "and God speed you, if you bring good news to our noble prince. He loves wine and women, and is exceedingly devout to the blessed Virgin of Puy; so all men should wish him well, and all ladies too."

The landlord did really make haste, and in less than ten minutes Jean Charost was on his way to Espaly, along a sort of natural volcanic causeway which paves the bottom of the deep valley. The sun was behind the hills, but still a cool and pleasant light was spread over the sky, and the towers of the old castle, with their many weather-cocks, and a banner displayed on the top of the donjon, rising high above the little village at the foot of the rock, seemed to catch some of the last rays of the sun, and

> "Flash back again the western blaze,
> In lines of dazzling light."

The ascent was steep, however, and longer than the young gentleman had expected. It was dim twilight when he approached the gates, but there was little guard kept around this last place of refuge of the son of France. Nested in the mountains of Auvergne, with a long, expanse of country between him and his enemies, Charles had no fear of attack. The gates were wide open, not a solitary sentinel guarded the way, and Jean Charost rode into the court-yard, looking round in vain for some one to address. Not a soul was visible. He heard the sound of a lute, and a voice singing from one of the towers, and a merry peal of laughter from a long, low building on the right of the great court; but besides this there was nothing to show that the castle was inhabited, till, just as he was dismounting, a page, gayly tricked out in blue and silver, crossed from one tower toward another, with a bird-cage in his hand.

"Ho, boy!" cried Jean Charost; "can you tell me where I shall find the servant of Mademoiselle De St. Geran; or can you tell her yourself that the Seigneur de Brecy wishes to speak with her?"

"Come with me, come with me, Beau Sire," said the boy, with all the flippant gayety of a page. "I am going to her with this bird from his highness; and this castle is the abode of liberty and joy. All iron coats and stiff habitudes have been cast down in the chapel, and a vow against idle ceremony is made by every one under the great gate."

"Well, then, lead on," said Jean Charost "My business might well abridge ceremony, if any did exist. Wait here till I return," he continued, speaking to the innkeeper's son; and then followed the page upon his way.

The tower to which the boy led him was a building of considerable size, although it looked diminutive by the side of the great donjon, which towered above, and with which it was connected by a long gallery, in a sort of traverse commanding the entrance of the outer gate. The door stood open, as most of the other doors throughout the place, leading into an old vaulted passage, from the middle of which rose a narrow and steep stair-case of gray stone. A rope was twisted round the pillar on which the stair-case turned; and it was somewhat necessary at that

moment, for, to say sooth, both passage and stair-case were as dark as Acheron. Feeling his way, the boy ascended till he came to a door on the first floor of the tower, which he opened without ceremony. The interior of the room which this sudden movement displayed, though darkness was fast falling over the earth, was clear and light compared with the shadowy air of the stair-case, and Jean Charost could see, seated thoughtfully at the window, that lovely and never-to-be-forgotten form which he had last beheld at Monterreau. Agnes Sorel either did not hear the opening of the door, or judged that the comer was one of the ordinary attendants of the place, for she remained motionless, plunged in deep meditation, with her eyes raised to a solitary star, the vanward leader of the host of heaven, which was becoming brighter and brighter every moment, as it rose high above the black masses of the Anis Mountains.

"Madam, here is a bird for you which his highness has sent," said the page, abruptly. "Some say it is a nightingale; and, though his coat is not fine, he sings deliciously."

Agnes Sorel turned as the boy spoke, but she looked not at him, or the cage, or the bird, for her eyes instantly rested upon the figure of Jean Charost, as he advanced toward her, apologizing for his intrusion. Though what light there was fell full upon him through the open window, it was too dark for her to distinguish his features; but his voice she knew as soon as he spoke, though she had heard it but rarely. Yet there are some sounds which linger in the ear of memory--echoes of the past, as it were--which instantly carry us back to other days, and recall circumstances, thoughts, and feelings long gone by, with a brightness which needs no eye to see them but the eye of the mind. The voice of Jean Charost was a very peculiar voice--soft, and full, and mellow, but rounded and distinct, like the tones of an organ, possessing--if such a thing be permitted me to say--a melody in itself.

"Monsieur de Brecy!" she exclaimed, "I am rejoiced to see you here--no longer a prisoner, I hope--no longer seeking ransom, but a free man. But what brings you to this remote corner of the earth? Some generous motive, doubtless. Patriotism, perhaps, and love of your prince. Alas! De Brecy, patriotism finds cold welcome where pleasure reigns alone; and as to love--would to God your prince loved himself as others love him!"

"What shall I say to his highness, madam?" asked the boy, whom she had hardly noticed; "what shall I say about the bird?"

"Tell him," replied Agnes, rising quickly from her seat--"tell him that if I am a good instructor, I will teach that bird to sing a song which shall rouse all France in arms--Ay, little as it is, and feeble as may be its voice, I am not more powerful, my voice is not more strong; and yet--I hope--I hope--Get thee gone, boy. Tell his highness what I have said--tell him what you will--say I am half mad, if it please you; for so I am, to sit here idly looking at that mountain and that star, and to think that the banners of England are waving triumphant over the bloody fields of France. Well, De Brecy--well," she continued, as the boy retired and closed the door. "What news from the court of the conquerors? What news from the proud city of London? We have lost our Henry; but we have got a John in exchange. What matters Christian names in these unchristian times? A Plantagenet is a Plantagenet; and they are an iron race to deal with, which requires more steel, I fear, than we have left in France."

"My news, dear lady," replied Jean Charost, "is not from London, but from Paris."

"Well, what of Paris, then?" asked Agnes Sorel, in an indifferent tone, taking another seat partly turned from the window. "Let me ask you to ring that bell upon the table. It is growing dark--we must have lights. One star is not enough, bright as it may be--even the star of love--one star is not enough to give us light in this darksome world."

Jean Charost rang the bell; but ere any attendant could appear, he said, hurriedly, "Dear lady, listen to me for one moment: I bring important news."

"Good or bad?" asked Agnes Sorel, quickly.

"One half is unmingled good," answered Jean Charost; "the other is of a mixed nature, full of hope, yet alloyed with sorrow."

"Even that is better than any we have lately had," replied Agnes. "Nevertheless, I am a woman, De Brecy, and fond of joy. Give me the unmingled first: we will temper it hereafter."

"Well, then, dear lady, I am sent to tell his highness, from our good friend Jacques Cœur, that a hundred thousand crowns of the sun are by this time waiting his pleasure at Moulins, and that two hundred thousand more will be there in one month."

"Joy, joy," cried Agnes, clasping her hands; "oh, this is joyful indeed! But then," she added, "Heaven send that it be used aright. I fear--oh, I fear--Nay, nay, I will fear no more! It is undeserved misfortune crushes the noble heart, bows the brave spirit, and takes its energy away from greatness. Have you told him, De Brecy? What did he say? How did he look? Not with light joy, I hope; but with grave, expectant satisfaction, as a prince should look who finds his people's deliverance nigher than he thought."

"I have not seen him," replied De Brecy, "first, because I knew not well how to gain admission, and, secondly, because I wished that you should have the opportunity of telling him of a change

of fortunes, hoping--knowing that you would direct his first impulses aright."

"I--I?" exclaimed Agnes. "Oh, De Brecy, De Brecy, I am unworthy of such a task! How should I direct any one aright? Yet it matters not what I be--Weak, frail, faulty as I am--the courage and resolution, the energy and purpose, which once possessed me solely, shall, all that is left, be given to him and to France. One error shall not blot out all that is good in my nature. Ha! here come the lights--"

She paused for a moment or two, while the servant entered, placed lights upon the table, and retired; and then, in a much calmer tone, resumed the discourse.

"I have been much moved to-day," she said, "but even this brief pause of thought has been sufficient to show me the right way--Lights, you have done me service," she added, with a graceful smile. "Come, De Brecy, I will lead you to her who alone is worthy, and fitted to give these good tidings--to my friend--to my dear good friend--the princess, his wife."

"But you have forgotten," replied Jean Charost. "I have other tidings to tell."

"Ha!" she said, "and those mingled--I did forget, indeed. Say what it is, De Brecy. We must not raise up hopes to dash them down again."

"That will not be the effect," said De Brecy. "The news I have is sad, yet full of hope. That which has been wanting on the side of his highness and of France, in this terrible struggle against foreign enemies and internal traitors, has been the king's name. In his powerless incapacity, the mighty influence of the monarch's authority has been arrayed against the friends, and for the foes of France. Dear lady, it will be so no more!"

"No more!" exclaimed Agnes, eagerly, and with her whole face lighting up. "Has he been snatched from their hands, then? Tell me, De Brecy, how? when? where? But you look grave, nay, sad. Is the king dead?"

"Charles the Sixth is dead," answered De Brecy. "But Charles the Seventh lives to deliver France."

"Stay--stay," said Agnes Sorel, seating herself again, and putting her hand thoughtfully to her brow. "Poor king--poor man! May the grave give him peace! Oh, what a life was his, De Brecy! Full of high qualities and kindly feelings, born to the throne of the finest realm in all the world, adored by his people, how bright were once his prospects! and who would ever have thought that the life thus begun would be passed in misery, madness, sickness, and neglect--that his power should be used for his own destruction--his name lead his enemies to battle against his son--his wife contemn, despise, and ill treat him, and his daughter wed his bitterest foe--that he should only wake from his insane trances to see his kinsmen murder and be murdered before his face, all his sons but one passing to the tomb before him--perchance by poison--and that he himself should follow before he reached old age, without that tendance in his lingering sickness that a common mechanic receives from tenderness, the beggar from charity? Oh, what a destiny!"

"We might well weep for his life," said De Brecy; "but we can not mourn his death. To him it was a blessing; to France it may be deliverance. This news, however, you have now to carry to the king."

"True, true," cried Agnes; but then she paused a moment, and repeated his last words with a thoughtful and anxious look. "To the king!" she said; "to the king! No, I will take it to the queen, De Brecy. Come you with me, in case of question, and to receive those honors and rewards which are meet for him who brings such tidings. Ay, let us speak it plainly--such good tidings. For on these few words, 'Charles the Sixth is dead,' depends, I do believe, the salvation of our France."

As she spoke, she rose and moved toward the door, and De Brecy followed her down the stair-case, and through the long passage which connected the tower with the donjon. The yellow autumn moon peeped up above the hills, and poured its light upon them through the tall windows as they went. There was a solemn feeling in their hearts which prevented them from uttering a word. The way was somewhat lengthy, but at last Agnes stopped before a door and knocked. The sweet voice of Marie of Anjou bade them come in, and Agnes opened the door.

"Ah, my Agnes," cried the princess, "have you come to cheer me? I know not how it is, but I have felt very sad to-night. I have been moralizing, dear girl, and thinking how much happier I should have been had we possessed nothing but this castle and the demesne around, mere lords of a little patrimony, instead of seeing kingdoms called our own, but to be snatched away from us. France seems going the way of Sicily, my Agnes. But who is this you have with you? His face seems known to me."

"You have seen him once before, madam," said Agnes. "He is the bringer of great tidings; but no lips but mine must give them to my queen;" and, advancing gracefully, she knelt at the feet of Marie of Anjou, and kissed her hand, saying, "Madam, you are Queen of France. His majesty, Charles the Sixth, has departed."

The queen stood as one stupefied; for so often had the unfortunate king been reported ill, and then recovered, so little was known of his real state beyond the walls of the Hôtel St. Pol, and so

slow was the progress of information in that part of France, that not a suspicion of the impending event had been entertained in the château of Espaly. After gazing in the face of Agnes for a moment, she cast down her eyes to the ground, remained for a brief space in deep thought, and then exclaimed, "But, after all, what is he? A king almost without provisions, a general without an army, a ruler without power or means. Rise, rise, dear Agnes;" and, casting her arms round her neck, Marie of Anjou shed tears. They were certainly not tears of sorrow for the departed, for she knew little of the late king; we do not even know from history that she had ever seen him; but all sudden emotions must have voice, generally in laughter, or in tears. It has been very generally remarked that joy has its tears as well as sorrow; but few have ever scanned deeply the fountain-source from which those drops arise. Is it not that, like those of a sealed fountain unconsciously opened, they burst forth at once, to sparkle, perhaps, in the sunshine of the hour, but yet bear with them a certain chilliness from the depths out of which they arise?

Marie of Anjou recovered herself speedily, and Agnes Sorel, rising from her knee, held out her hand to Jean Charost, and presented him to the queen, saying, "He brings you happier tidings, madam--tidings which, I trust, may give power to the sceptre just fallen into his majesty's hand; ay, and edge his sword to smite his enemies when they least expect it. By the skill and by the zeal of one I may venture to call your friend as well as mine--noble Jacques Cœur--the means which have been so long wanting to make at least one generous effort on behalf of France, are now secured. Speak, De Brecy--speak, and tell her majesty the joyful news you bear."

The young gentleman told his tale simply and well; and when he had concluded, the queen, with all traces of sorrow passed away, exclaimed, "Let us hasten quick, dear Agnes, and carry the news to my husband! There be some men fitted for prosperity, and he is one. Misfortune depresses him; but this news will restore him all his energies. Oh, this castle of Espaly! It has seemed to me a dungeon of the spirit, where chains were cast around the soul, and the fair daylight of hope came but as a ray through the loophole of a cell. Come with me--come with me, my friends! I need no attendants but you two."

Jean Charost raised a light from the table and opened the door, then followed along the dark passages till they reached a small hall upon the ground-floor, which the queen entered without waiting for announcement or permission. Her light step roused no one within from his occupation, and the whole scene was before her eyes ere any one engaged in it was aware of her presence. She might, perhaps, have seen another, less tranquil to look upon. At a table under a sconce, in one corner of the room, sat a young man reading the contents of a book richly illuminated. His cap and plume were thrown down by his side, his sword was cast upon a bench near, and his head was bent over the volume, with his eyes eagerly fixed upon the page, deciphering, probably with difficulty, the words which it presented. In another corner of the room, far removed from the light, and with his shoulders supported by the angle of the building, sat Tanneguy du Châtel, sound asleep, but with his heavy sword resting on his knees, and his left hand lying upon the scabbard. Nearer to the windows--some seven paces probably in advance--stood a boy dressed as a page, looking at what was going on at a table before him, but not venturing to approach too near. At that table, with a large candelabra in the centre, sat a young gentleman of powerful frame, though still a mere lad, with a slight mustache on the upper lip, and his strong black hair curling round his forehead and temples. On the opposite side of the table, nearest to the page, was Charles the Seventh himself. He was the only one in the room who wore his cap and plume, and to the eyes of Jean Charost--whether from prepossession or not, I can not tell--there seemed an air of dignity and grace about his youthful figure which well befitted the monarch. The thoughts of France, however, were evidently far away, and his whole attention seemed directed to the narrow board before him, on which he was playing at chess with his cousin, the after-celebrated Dunois.

Still the step of the queen and her companions did not rouse him: his whole soul seemed in the move he was about to make, and it was not till they were close by that he even looked round.

Even then he did not speak, but turned his eyes upon the game again, and in the end moved his knight so as to protect the king.

"That is a good move," said his wife, taking a step forward; "but some such move must be made speedily, my lord, upon a wider board." Then, bending her knee, she added, "God save his majesty, King Charles the Seventh!"

Charles started up, nearly overturning the board, and deranging all the pieces. "What is it, Marie?" he asked, looking almost aghast; but Agnes Sorel and Jean Charost knelt at the same time, saying, "God save your majesty! He has done his will with your late father."

Up started Dunois, and waved his hand in the air, exclaiming, "God save the king!" and the other three in the chamber pressed around, repeating the same cry.

Charles stood in the midst, gazing gravely on the different faces about him, then slowly drew his sword from the scabbard, and laid it on the table, saying, in a calm, thoughtful, resolute tone, "Once more!"

CHAPTER XL.

How the news spread through the castle, I know not; but Charles VII. had hardly recovered from the first surprise of the intelligence when, without waiting for permission or ceremony, all whose station justified their admission to the presence of the prince crowded into the little hall of Espaly. A bright and beautiful sight it presented at that moment; for it was a court of youth and beauty, and not more than two or three persons present had seen thirty years of age. Hope and enthusiasm was in every countenance, and the heavy beams of the vault rang with the cries of "Long live the king."

The bearer of the intelligence which had caused the acclamation seemed likely to be altogether forgotten by the monarch in the gratulations which poured upon him; but some bold, frank words of the young and heroic lord of La Hire gave to generous Agnes Sorel an opportunity of calling the attention of Charles to Jean Charost.

"Ay, God save the king!" cried La Hire, warmly; "and send him some more crowns in his purse to secure the one upon his head."

Agnes whispered something to the young queen, and Marie of Anjou turned gracefully toward De Brecy, saying, "This gentleman, my lord, has something to tell your majesty on that score."

"He is the messenger of all good tidings, sir," urged Agnes Sorel; "but perhaps your majesty forgets him. He was the trusted friend of your uncle of Orleans; he was wounded and made prisoner at Azincourt, and his first steps upon French ground after his liberation brings you tidings of dignity, and the promise of success. Speak, Monsieur De Brecy. Tell his majesty the good news you have in store."

Charles VII. fixed his eyes upon Jean Charost, and a shade came over his face--not of displeasure, indeed, but of deep melancholy. It is probable the memories awakened by the sight, as soon as he recognized him, were very sorrowful. The bloody bridge of Monterreau, the dying Duke of Burgundy, and all the fearful acts of a day never to be forgotten, came back to memory; but the impression was but momentary; and when he heard the tidings which the young gentleman bore of present relief, and of the prospect of large future supplies, and was made aware that he had also brought the news of his being King of France, he smiled graciously upon him, saying, "How can we reward you, Monsieur De Brecy? Few kings have less means than we have."

At that moment, Tanneguy du Châtel--to whose disinterested character history, dwelling on his faults, has not done full justice--came forward, and laid his hand upon Jean Charost's shoulder, saying, "Give him St. Florent, sir; which we were talking of the other day. Its lord not having appeared for fully fifteen years, the fief has clearly fallen into the demesne of the crown."

"But I promised, Du Châtel," said Charles, turning toward him.

"Never mind that, sire," said Du Châtel, bluffly. "I do not want it. De Brecy here has served the crown well, and suffered for his services. So did his father before him, I have been told. He brings you good tidings--good tidings for France also, I do hope. Give him the fief, sir. If I had it, every one would be jealous. No one will be jealous of him."

"Well, then, so be it," replied Charles. "The town and castle of St. Florent, near Bourges, Monsieur De Brecy, shall be yours; but, by my faith, you must keep them well; for the place is of importance, commanding the supplies at Bourges. The letters of concession shall be ready for you to-morrow, and you can do homage before you go, if you will but stay at our court for a few days."

"I must stay here, sire or at Puy, for the arrival of Messire Jacques Cœur," replied Jean Charost. "He has many another scheme for your majesty's service. In St. Florent I will do my duty, and I humbly thank you much for the gift."

"Stay here, stay here," said Charles; and then he added, with a faint and melancholy smile, "Our court is not so large as to fill even the Castle of Espaly to overflowing. Some one see that he is well cared for. And now, lords and ladies, other things are to be thought of. My first thought, so help me Heaven, has been of France, and of what benefit the event which has just happened may prove to her. But I can not forget that I have lost a father, a kind and noble prince, whom God has visited with long and sore afflictions, but who never lost the love of his people or his son. I do believe, from all that I have heard, that death was to him a blessing and relief; but still I must mourn that so sad and joyless a life has ended without one gleam of hope or happiness, even at the close. I had hoped that it might be otherwise, that my sword might have freed him from the durance in which he has been so long kept; that my care and love might have soothed his latest hours. It has been ordered otherwise, and God's will be done. But all to-morrow we will give up to

solemn mourning, and the next day take counsel as to instant action."

Thus saying, he took the hand of the queen in his own, and was retiring from the room, the group around him only moving to give him passage, except one gentleman, who sprang to open the door. Two persons were left in the midst of the little crowd, not exactly isolated, but in circumstances of some awkwardness. Agnes Sorel, notwithstanding all her influence at the court, notwithstanding all her power over the mind of the young king, felt that the bonds between herself and those who now surrounded her were very slight, and that there were jealousies and dislikes toward her in the bosoms of many present. But she was relieved from a slight embarrassment by the unvarying kindness of Marie of Anjou. Ere Charles and herself had taken six steps through the hall, the queen turned her head, saying, with a placid smile, "Come with us, Agnes. I shall want you."

"Marvelous, truly!" said a lady standing near Jean Charost, speaking in a low tone, as if to herself. "Were I a queen, methinks I would have the vengeance Heaven sends me, even if I did not seek some for myself."

At the same moment, Tanneguy du Châtel laid his hand upon Jean Charost's arm: "You must come with me, De Brecy," he said. "You shall be my guest in the château. I have room enough there where I lodge. Wait but a moment till I speak a word or two with these good lords. We must not let the tide of good fortune ebb again unimproved. The royal name alone is a great thing for us; but it may be made to have a triple effect--upon our enemies, upon our friends, and upon the king himself. By my life, this is no time to throw one card out of one's hand."

He then spoke for several minutes in a low tone with Dunois, La Hire, Louvet, and others, and, returning to the side of Jean Charost, led him down to the outer court, on his way to that part of the building which he himself inhabited. There, patiently waiting by the side of the mule, they found the son of the landlord at Puy. The boy was dismissed speedily, well satisfied, with directions to send up the young gentleman's horse to the castle the next morning; and the rest of the evening was spent by Jean Charost and Tanneguy du Châtel almost alone. It was not an evening of calm, however; for the excitable spirit of the *prévôt*; was much moved with all that had passed, and with his prompt and eager impetuosity he commented, not alone upon the news that had been received, but upon all their probable consequences. Often he would start up and pace the room in a deep revery, and often he would question his young companion upon details into which the king himself had forgotten to inquire.

"The happy moment must not be lost," he said. "The happy moment must not be lost. The young king's mind must be kept up to the tone which it has received by this intelligence. Would to Heaven I could insure half an hour's conversation with the fair Agnes, just to show her all the consequences of the first great step. But I do not like to ask it; and, after all, she needs no prompting. She is a glorious creature, De Brecy. Heart and soul, with her, are given to France."

"Yet there be some," said Jean Charost; "some, even in this court, who seem not very well disposed toward her. Did you hear what was said by a lady near me just now?"

"Oh, Joan of Vendôme," cried Tanneguy, with a laugh; "she is a prescribed railer at our fair friend. She came to Poictiers two years ago, fancying herself a perfect paragon of beauty, and making up her mind to become the dauphin's mistress; but he would have naught to say to her faded charms--not even out of courtesy to her husband; so the poor thing is full of spleen, and would kill the beautiful Agnes, if she dared. She is too cowardly for that, however: at least I trust so."

Jean Charost meditated deeply over his companion's words, and whither his thoughts had led him might be perceived by what he next said.

"Strange," he murmured, "very strange, the conduct of the queen!"

"Ay, strange enough," answered Du Châtel. "We have here, within this little château of Espaly, De Brecy, two women such as the world has rarely ever seen, both young, both beautiful, both gentle. The one has all the courage, the intellect, the vigor of a man; and yet, as we see, a woman's weakness. The other is tender, timid, kind, and loving, and yet without one touch of that selfishness which prompts to what we call jealousy. By the Lord, De Brecy, it has often puzzled me, this conduct of Marie of Anjou. I do believe I could, as readily as any man, sacrifice myself to the happiness of one I love;[3] but I could not make a friend of my wife's lover. There are things too much for nature--for human nature, at least. But this girl--her majesty, I mean--seems to me quite an angel; and the other does, I will say, all that a fallen and repentant angel could to retain the friendship which she fears she may have forfeited. All that deference, and reverence, and humble, firm attachment can effect to wash away her offense, she uses toward the queen; and I do believe, from my very heart, that no counsel ever given by Agnes Sorel to Marie of Anjou has any other object upon earth but Marie's happiness. Still, it is all very strange, and the less we say about it the better."

Jean Charost thought so likewise; but that conversation brought upon him fits of thought which lasted, with more or less interruption, during the whole evening.

Society, in almost every country, has its infancy, its youth, its maturity, and its old age. At

least, such has been the case hitherto. These several acts of life are of longer or shorter duration, according to circumstances, but the several epochs are usually sufficiently marked The age in which Jean Charost spoke was not one of that fine, moralizing tendency which belongs to the maturity of life; but it was one of passion and of action, of youth, activity, and indiscretion. Nevertheless, feeling often supplied a guide where reason failed, and from some cause Jean Charost felt pained that he could not find one character among those who surrounded him sufficiently pure and high to command and obtain his whole esteem. He asked himself that painful question which so often recurs to us ere we have obtained from experience, as well as reason, a knowledge of man's mixed nature, "Is there such a thing as virtue, and truth, and honor upon earth?"

The next day was passed as a day of mourning; but on the following morning early, all the nobles in the castle of Espaly met together in the great hall, and some eager consultations went on among them. There were smiles, and gay looks, and many a lively jest, and lances were brought in, and bucklers examined, as if for a tournament.

Jean Charost asked his companion, Du Châtel, the meaning of all that they beheld; and the other replied, with a grave smile, "Merely a boy's frolic; but one which may have important consequences."

A moment after, the young king himself, habited in scarlet, entered the hall, followed by a number of the ladies and gentlemen of the court, and received gracefully and graciously the greetings of his subjects. But an instant after, La Hire and two or three others surrounded and pressed upon him so closely, that Jean Charost thought they were showing scanty reverence toward the king, when suddenly a voice exclaimed, "Pardon us, sire;" and in an instant spears were crossed, a shield cast down upon them, and the young monarch lifted to a throne which might have befitted one of the predecessors of Charlemagne. Dunois seized a banner embroidered with the arms of France, and moving on through the doors of the hall into the chapel, the banner was waved three times in the air, and the voices of all present made the roof ring with the shout of, "Long live King Charles the Seventh!"

Almost at the same time, another personage was added to the group around the altar, and Jacques Cœur himself repeated heartily the cry, adding, "I have brought with me, sire--at least, so I trust--the means to make you King of France, indeed. It is here in this château, and all safe."

"Thanks, thanks, my good friend," said the young king. "We must take counsel together how it may be used to the best advantage; and our deep gratitude shall follow the service, whatever be the result of the use we make of it. And now, lords and ladies, to Poictiers immediately--ay, to-morrow morning, to be solemnly crowned in the Cathedral there. That city, at least, we can call our own, and there we will deliberate how to recover others."

CHAPTER XLI.

What a wild whirlpool is history, and how strange it is to gaze upon it, and to see the multitudes of atoms that every instant are rushing forward upon the whirling and struggling waters of Time, borne fiercely along by causes that they know not, but obey--now catching the light, now plunged into darkness, agitated, tossed to and fro, turned round in giddy dance, and at length swallowed up in the deep centre of the vortex where all things disappear! It is a strange, a terrible, but a salutary contemplation. No sermon that was ever preached, no funeral oration ever spoken, shows so plainly, brings home to the heart so closely, the emptiness of all human things, the idleness of ambition, the folly of avarice, the weakness of vanity, and the meanness of pride, as the sad and solemn aspect of history--the record of deeds that have produced nothing, and passions that have been all in vain. But there is a Book from which all these things will at one time be read; and then, how awful will be the final results disclosed!

To men who make history, however, while floating round in that vortex, and tending onward, amid all their struggles, to the one inevitable doom, how light and easy is the transition, how imperceptible the diminution of the circle, as onward, onward they are carried--how rapid, especially in times of great activity, is the passage of event into event. Time seems to stop in the heat of action, and energy, like the prophet, exclaims, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon!"

It seemed to Jean Charost--after several years had passed--but as a day and a night since he had left Agnes and his mother in the château of Brecy, near Bourges. Each day had had its occupation, each hour its thought: the one had glided into the other, and one deed trod so hastily upon the steps of another that there was no opportunity to count the time. And yet so many great

events had happened that one would have thought the hours upon the dial were marked sufficiently. He had taken part in battles, he had been employed in negotiations, he had navigated one of the many armed vessels, now belonging to Jacques Cœur, upon the Mediterranean, in search of fresh resources for his king; and one of those lulls had taken place at the court of France--those periods of idle inactivity which occasionally intervened between fierce struggles against the foreign enemy, or factious cabals among the courtiers themselves. He took his way from Poictiers toward Bourges, to fulfill the promise he had often made to himself of returning, at least for a time, to those he loved with unabated fondness; and as he went, he thought with joy of his dear mother just as he left her--not knowing that her hair was now as white as snow; and his dear little Agnes--forgetting that she was no longer a mere bright girl of fourteen years of age.

But Jean Charost now no longer appeared as a poor youth struggling to redeem his father's encumbered estates, nor as a soldier followed to battle by a mere handful of followers. His train was strong and numerous. The lands of St. Florent, so near his own castle and the town of Bourges as to be under easy control of an intendant, had furnished not only ample revenues but hardy soldiers, and with a troop of some sixty mounted men, all joyful, like himself, to return for a period to their homes, he rode gladly onward, a powerful man in full maturity, with a scarred brow and sun-burned face, but, with the rich brown curls of his hair hardly streaked with gray, except where the casque had somewhat pressed upon it, and brought the wintery mark before its time. But it was in the expression of his countenance that youth was most strongly apparent still. There were no hard lines, no heavy wrinkles. There was gravity, for he had never been of what is called a very merry disposition, but it was--if I may be allowed an expression which, at first sight, seems to imply a contradiction--it was a cheerful gravity, more cheerful than it had been in years long past. Success had brightened him; experience of the world and the world's things had rubbed off the rust that seclusion, and study, and hard application had engendered; and a kind, a generous, and an upright heart gave sunshine to his look.

The country through which he passed was all peaceful: the troops of England had not yet passed the Loire; the Duke of Bedford was in England, and his lieutenants showed themselves somewhat negligent during his absence. After the fiercest struggle, the spirit of the Frenchman soon recovers breath; and in riding from Poictiers to Bourges, one might have fancied that the land had never known strife and contention--that all was peace, prosperity, and joy. There was the village dance upon the green; there was the gay inn, with its well-fed host, and his quips, and jests, and merry tales; the marriage-bells rang out; the procession of the clergy moved along the streets, and there was song in the vineyard and the field.

It was an evening in the bright, warm summer, when the last day's march but one came toward an end; and on a small height rising from the banks of the Cher, with a beautiful village at its foot, and woods sweeping round it on three sides, appeared the old castle of St. Florent, where Jean Charost was to halt for the night, and journey on to De Brecy the following day. It was a pleasant feeling to his heart that he was coming once more upon his own land; and there above, upon the great round tower--for it was a very ancient building even then--floated a flag which bore, he doubted not, the arms of De Brecy. Just as he was passing one of the curious old bridges over the Cher, with its narrow, pointed arches, and massy, ivy-covered piers, a flash broke from the walls of the tower, and a moment after the report of a cannon was heard.

"They see us coming, and are giving us welcome, De Bigny," said Jean Charost, turning to one of his companions who rode near. "Oh, 'tis pleasant to enjoy one's own in peace. Would to Heaven these wars were over! I am well weary of them."

They rode on toward the slope, and entered a sort of elbow of the wood, where the dark oak-trees, somewhat browned by the summer sun, stretched their long branches overhead, and made a pleasant shade. It was a sweet, refreshing scene, where the eye could pierce far through the bolls of the old trees, catching here and there a mass of gray rock, a piece of rich green sward, a sparkling rivulet dashing down to meet the Cher, a low hermitate, with a stone cross raised in front, and two old men, with their long, snowy beards, retreating beneath the shady archway at the sight of a troop of armed men.

"This is pleasant," said De Brecy, still speaking to his companion; "but to-morrow will afford things still pleasanter. The face of Nature is very beautiful, but not so beautiful as the faces of those we love."

A hundred steps further, and the gates of the old castle appeared in view, crenelated and machicolated, with its two large flanking-towers, and the walls running off and losing themselves behind the trees. But there was the flutter of women's garments under the arch, as well as the gleam of arms. The heart of De Brecy beat high, and, dashing on before the rest, he was soon upon the draw-bridge.

It is rarely that Fortune comes to meet our hopes. Hard school-mistress! She lessons man's impatience by delay. But there they were--his mother and little Agnes, as he still called her. The change in both was that which time usually makes in the old and in the young; and with old Madame De Brecy we will pass it over, for it had no consequences. But upon the changes in Agnes it may be necessary to pause somewhat longer. From the elderly to the old woman, the transition is easy, and presents nothing remarkable. From the child to the young woman the step is more rapid--more distinct and strange. There is something in us which makes us comprehend

decay better than development.

Agnes, who, up to the period when Jean Charost last beheld her, had been low of stature, though beautifully formed, seemed to have grown up like a lily in a night, and was now taller than Madame De Brecy. But it was not only in height that she had gained: her whole form had altered, and assumed a symmetry as delicate, but very different from that which it had displayed before. Previously, she had looked what Jean Charost had been fond to call her--a little fairy; but now, though she might have a fairy's likeness, still there was no doubting that she was a woman. Beautiful, wonderfully beautiful, she was to the eyes of Jean Charost; but yet there was something sorrowful in the change. The dear being of his memory was gone forever, and he had not yet had time to become reconciled to the change. He felt he could not caress, he could not fondle her as he had done before--that he could be to her no longer what he had been; and he dreamed not of ever becoming aught else.

Strange to say, Agnes seemed to feel the change far less than he did. Indeed, she saw no change in him. His cheek might be a little browner; the scar upon his brow was new; but yet he was the same Jean Charost whom she had loved from infancy, and she perceived no trace of Time's hand upon his face or person. She had not yet learned to turn her eyes upon herself, and the alteration in him was so slight, she did not mark it. She sprang to meet him, even before his mother, held up her cheek for his first kiss, and gazed at him with a look of affection and tenderness, while he pressed Madame De Brecy to his heart, which might have misled any beholder who knew not the course of their former lives.

But Jean Charost was very happy. Between the two whom he loved best on all the earth, he entered the old château; was led by them from room to room which he had never seen; heard how, as soon as they had received news of his proposed return, they had come on from De Brecy to meet him; how the hands of Agnes herself had decked the hall; and how the tidy care of good Martin Grille had seen that every thing was in due order for the reception of his lord. Joyfully the evening passed away, with a thousand little occurrences, all pleasant at the time, but upon which I must not dwell now. The supper was served in the great hall, and after it was over, and generous wine had given a welcome to De Brecy's chief followers, he himself retired, with his mother and his fair young charge, to talk over the present and the past.

During that evening the conversation was rambling and desultory--a broken, ill-ordered chat, full of memories, and hardly to be detailed in a history like this. Jean Charost heard all the little incidents which had occurred in the neighborhood of Bourges; how Agnes had become an accomplished horse-woman; how she had learned from a musician expelled from Paris to play upon the lute; how Madame De Brecy had ordered all things, both on their ancient estates and those of St. Florent, with care and prudence; and how there were a thousand beautiful rides and walks around, which Agnes could show him, on the banks of the Cher.

Then again he told them all he himself had gone through, dwelling but lightly upon his own exploits, and acknowledging, with sincere humility, that he had been rewarded for his services more largely than they deserved. Many an anecdote of the court, too, he told, which did not give either of his hearers much inclination to mingle with it; how the adhesion of the Count of Richmond had been bought by the sword of Constable and other honors; how the somewhat unstable alliance of the Duke of Brittany had been gained by the concession of one half of the revenues of Guyenne; how Richmond had played the tyrant over his king, and forced him to receive ministers at his pleasure; how he had caused Beaulieu to be assassinated; and how, after a mock trial, he had tied Giac in a sack, and thrown him into the Loire. Happily, he added, La Trimouille, whom he had compelled the king to receive as his minister, had avenged his monarch by ingratitude toward his patron; how Richmond was kept in activity at a distance from the court, and all was quiet for a time during his absence. Thus passed more than one hour. The sun had gone down, and yet no lights were called for; for the large summer moon shone lustrous in at the window, harmonizing well with the feelings of those now met after a long parting. Madame De Brecy sat near the open casement; Agnes and Jean Charost stood near, with her hand resting quietly in his--I know not how it got there--and the fair valley of the Cher stretched out far below, till all lines were lost in the misty moonlight of the distance. Just then a solemn song rose up from the foot of the hill, between them and St. Florent, and Agnes, leaning her head familiarly on Jean Charost's shoulder, whispered, "Hark! The two hermits and the children of the village, whom they teach, are chanting before they part."

Jean Charost listened attentively till the song was ended, and then remarked, in a quiet tone, "I saw two old men going into the hermitage. I hope their reputation is fair; for it is difficult to dispossess men who make a profession of sanctity; and yet their proximity is not always much to be coveted."

"Oh yes, they are well spoken of," replied Madame De Brecy; "but one of them, at least, is very strange, and frightened us."

"It was but for a moment," cried Agnes, eagerly. "He is a kind, good man, too. I will tell you how it all happened, dear Jean; and we will go down and see him to-morrow, for he and I are great friends now. The day after our arrival here, I had wandered out, as I do at De Brecy, thinking myself quite as safe here as there, when suddenly in the wood, just by the little waterfall, I came upon a tall old man, dressed in a gray gown, and walking with a staff. What it was he saw in me, I do not know; but the instant he beheld me he stopped suddenly, and seemed

to reel as if he were going to fall. I started forward to help him; but he seized hold of my arms, and fixed his eyes so sternly in my face, he frightened me. His words terrified me still more; for he burst forth with the strangest, wildest language I ever heard, asking if I had come from the grave, and if his long years of penitence had been in vain; saying that he had forgiven me, and surely I might forgive him; that God had forgiven him, he knew; then why should I be more obdurate; and then he wept bitterly. I tried to soothe and calm him; but he still held me by the arm, and I could not get away. Gradually, however, he grew tranquil, and begged my pardon. He said he had been suffering under a delusion, asked my name, and made me sit down by him on the moss. There we remained, and talked for more than half an hour; for, whenever I wished to go, he begged me piteously to stay. All the time I remained, his conversation seemed to me to ramble a great deal, at least I could not understand one half of it. He told me, however, that he had once been a rich man, a courtier, and a soldier, and that many years ago he had been terribly wronged, and in a moment of passionate madness he had committed a great crime. He had wandered about, he said, for some years as a condemned spirit, not only half insane, but knowing that he was so. After that, he met with a good man who led him to better hopes, and thenceforth he had passed his whole time in penitence and prayer. When he let me go, he besought me eagerly to come and see him in his hermitage, and, taking Margiette, the maid with me, I have been down twice. I found him and his companion teaching the little children of the village, and he seemed always glad to see me, though at first he would give a sidelong glance, as if he almost feared me. But he seemed to know much of you, dear Jean, at least by name. He said you had always been faithful and true, and would be so to the end, and spoke of you as I loved to hear. So you must come down with me, and see him and his comrade."

"I will see him," replied Jean Charost. He made no further remark upon her little narrative; but what she told him gave him matter for much thought, even after the whole household had retired to rest.

CHAPTER XLII.

When Jean Charost awoke, it was one of those pleasant, drowsy summer mornings when the whole of nature seems still inclined to sleep, when there is a softness in the air, a misty haze in the atmosphere, streaky white clouds are half veiling the sky, and even the birds of the bush, and the beasts of the field, seem inclined to prolong the sweet morning slumber in the midst of the bounteous softness of all around. A breath of air, it is true, stirred the trees; but it was very gentle and very soft, and though the lark rose up from his fallow to sing his early matins at heaven's gate, yet the sounds were so softened by the distance, that one seemed to feel the melody rather than to hear it. It was very early, and from the window no moving object was to be seen except the mute herds winding on toward their pasturage, a rook wending its straight flight overhead, and an early laborer taking his way toward the fields. The general world was all asleep; but, nevertheless, the young Lord De Brecy was soon equipped in walking guise and wandering on toward the hermitage. He found its tenants up, and ready for the mornings' labors; but one of them welcomed him as an old acquaintance, and, leading him into their cell, remained with him in conversation for more than an hour.

De Brecy came forth more grave than he had gone in, though that was grave enough, and immediately on his return to the castle messengers were dispatched to several public functionaries in Bourges. It was done quietly, however, and even those who bore the short letters of their lord had no idea that his impulse was a sudden one, supposing merely that he acted on orders received before he had set out from Poictiers.

Ere he joined his mother and Agnes too, De Brecy passed some time in examining a packet of old papers, a few trinkets, and a ring, and then walked up and down thoughtfully in his room for several minutes. Then casting away care, he mingled with his household again, and an hour went by in cheerful conversation. Perhaps Jean Charost was gayer than usual, less thoughtful, yet his mother observed that once or twice his eyes fixed upon the face of Agnes for a very few moments with a look of intense earnestness and consideration. Nor was Agnes herself unconscious of it; and once, for a single instant, as she caught his look directed toward her, a fluttering blush spread over her cheek, and some slight agitation betrayed itself in her manner.

Shortly after she left the hall; and Madame De Brecy said, in a quiet tone, but not without a definite purpose, "I doubt not we shall have an early visit, my son, from a young neighbor of ours who lives between this place and De Brecy: Monsieur De Brives, whose château, and the village of that name you can see from the top of the tower. He has frequently been to see us both here and at De Brecy--I believe I might say to see our dear Agnes. You see, my dear son, how beautiful she has become; and, to say the truth, I am very glad you have arrived before this young gentleman has come to any explanation of his wishes; for I could not venture to tell him even the

little that I know of Agnes's history, and yet he might desire some information regarding her family."

She watched her son's countenance quietly while she spoke, but she could discover no trace of emotion thereon. Jean Charost was silent, indeed, and did not reply for two or three minutes; but he remained quite calm, and merely thoughtful. At length he asked, "Do you know, my dearest mother, any thing of this young gentleman's character?"

"It is very fair, I believe, as the world goes," replied Madame De Brecy. "He seems amiable and kind, and distinguished himself in the attack of Cone some years ago, I am told. He is wealthy, too, and altogether his own master."

"How does Agnes receive him?" asked Jean Charost, thoughtfully.

"Friendly and courteously," replied his mother; "but I have remarked nothing more. Indeed, I have given no great encouragement to his visits, thinking that perhaps the dear girl might meet with a sad disappointment if her affections became entangled, and her obscure history were to prove an insurmountable obstacle in the eyes of the man she had chosen."

"Did it do so, he would be unworthy of her," answered Jean Charost, rising, and walking slowly to and fro in the room. Then stopping opposite to his mother, he added, "I have been thinking all this morning, my dear mother, of telling Agnes every thing I can tell of her history. It is a somewhat difficult and somewhat painful task, but yet it must be done."

"I think the sooner the better," replied Madame De Brecy. "I have long thought so; but trusting entirely to your judgment, I did not like to interfere."

"Does she know that she is in no degree allied to us?" asked Jean Charost.

"Yes, yes," answered his mother; "that her own questions elicited one day. I could see she would have fain known more; but I merely told her she was an orphan committed to your care and guardianship. That seemed to satisfy her, and she asked no more. But I think it is right that she should know all."

"She shall," answered Jean Charost. "I will tell her; but it must be at some moment when we are alone together."

"If you will give me any sign, I will quit the room," answered Madame De Brecy.

"No," replied her son, thoughtfully; "no: that will not be needful. I could not tell it in a formal way. It must be told gently, easily, my dear mother, in order not to alarm and agitate her. Some day when we are riding or walking forth in the woods around, or on the castle walls, I will say something which will naturally lead her to inquire. Then, piece by piece, I will dole it out, as if it were a matter of not much moment. There sounds the horn at the gates. Perhaps it is this Monsieur De Brives."

"What will you do if he speaks at once?" asked Madame De Brecy quickly, adding, "I doubt not that he will do so."

"I will refer him to Agnes herself," answered Jean Charost. "She must decide. First, however, I will let him know as much of her history as I may, and, as some counterpoise, will assure him that all which I have gained by my labors or my sword shall be hers."

"But you will some day marry, yourself, deal Jean--I hope, I trust so," said his mother, earnestly.

"Never!" answered her son; and the next moment Monsieur De Brives was in the room.

He was a tall, handsome young man, of some five or six-and-twenty, polished and courteous in his manners, with a tone of that warm sincerity in his whole address which is usually very winning upon woman's heart. Why, it is hardly possible to say, Jean Charost received him with somewhat stately coldness; and the first few words of ceremony had hardly passed, when Agnes herself re-entered the room and welcomed their visitor with friendly ease. De Brecy's eyes were turned upon her eagerly. At the end of a few minutes, Monsieur De Brives turned to Jean Charost, saying, "I am glad you have returned at last, Monsieur De Brecy; for I have a few words to say to you in private, if your leisure serves to give me audience."

"Assuredly," replied De Brecy, rising; and whispering a word to his mother as he passed, he led the way to a cabinet near, giving one glance to the face of Agnes. It was perfectly calm.

His conversation with Monsieur De Brives lasted half an hour, and some time before it was over, Madame De Brecy quietly left the hall, while Agnes remained embroidering a coat of arms. At length the two gentlemen issued from the cabinet, and Monsieur De Brives took his way at once to the room where Agnes was seated. Jean Charost, for his part, went down to the lower hall, which had been left vacant while his followers sported in the castle court. There, with a grave, stern air, and his arms crossed upon his chest, Jean Charost paced up and down the pavement, pausing once to look out into the court upon the gay games going on; but he turned

away without even a smile, bending his eyes thoughtfully upon the old stones as if he would have counted their number or spied out their flaws. The time seemed very long to him, and yet he would not interrupt the lover in his suit. At length, however, he heard a rapid step coming, and the next instant Monsieur De Brives entered the hall, as if to pass through it to the court. His face was deadly pale, and traces of strong emotion were in every line.

"Well," cried De Brecy, advancing to meet him; "she has accepted you--of course, she has accepted you."

De Brives only grasped his hand, and shook his head.

"Did you tell her you knew all?" asked De Brecy. "Did you tell her of your generous--"

"In vain--all in vain," said the young man; and, wringing De Brecy's hand hard in his, he broke away from him, and left the castle.

Jean Charost stood for an instant in the midst of the hall buried in deep thought, and then mounted the stairs to the room where he had left Agnes. He found her weeping bitterly; and going gently up to her, he seated himself beside her and took her hand. "Dear Agnes," he said, "you are weeping. You regret what you have done. It is not yet too late. Let me send after him. He has hardly yet left the castle."

"No, no--no!" cried Agnes, eagerly. "I do not regret what I have said, though I regret having given him pain--I regret to give pain to any thing. But I told him the truth."

"What did you tell him?" asked Jean Charost, perhaps indiscreetly.

Agnes's face glowed warmly, but she answered at once, "I told him I could not love him as a woman should love her husband."

"Bitter truth enough from such lips as those," said Jean Charost in a low tone.

"Indeed, indeed," cried Agnes, who seemed to feel some reproach in his words, "I did not intend to grieve him more than I could help in telling him the truth. But how could I love him?" she asked, with a bewildered look; and then shaking her head sadly, she added, "no--no!"

"Not a word more, dear Agnes," answered Jean Charost. "You did right to tell him the truth; and I am quite sure you did it as gently as might be. Now let us forget this painful incident as soon as we can, and all be as we were before."

"Oh gladly," cried Agnes, with a bright smile. "I hope for nothing, I desire nothing but that."

He soothed her with kindly tenderness, and soon whiled her away from all painful thoughts, gradually and with more skill than might have been expected, leading the conversation by imperceptible degrees to other subjects and to distant scenes. The return of Madame De Brecy to the room renewed for a time the beautiful girl's agitation; and Jean Charost left her with his mother, with a promise to take a long ramble with her that evening, and make her show him every fair spot in the woods around the castle.

Woman's heart, it is generally supposed, is more easily opened to a fellow-woman than to a man; and sometimes it is so, but sometimes not. If we have watched closely, most of us must have seen the secret within more carefully guarded from a woman's eyes than from any other--perhaps from a knowledge of their acuteness. Such, indeed, might not--probably was not.--the case with Agnes. Nevertheless, it was in vain that Madame De Brecy questioned her. She told all that had occurred frankly and simply, every word that had been uttered, as far as she could recollect them. But there was something that Agnes did not tell--the cause of all that had occurred. True, she could not tell it; for it was intangible to herself--misty, indefinite--a something which she could feel, but not explain. Gladly she heard the trumpet sound to dinner; for she had set Madame De Brecy musing; and Agnes did not like that she should muse too long over her conduct of that day.

Noon proved very sultry, and Jean Charost had plenty of occupation for several hours after the meal. Horsemen came and went: he saw several persons from Bourges, and several of the tenants of St. Florent. He sent off a large body of the men who had accompanied him from Poictiers to the neighboring city, and the castle resumed an air of silence and loneliness.

Toward evening, however, he called upon Agnes to prepare for her walk; and as he paced up and down the hall waiting for her, Madame De Brecy judged from his look and manner that he meditated speaking to his fair charge, that very evening, on the delicate subject of her own history.

"Be gentle with the dear girl, my son," she said, "and if you see that a subject agitates her, change it. There is something on Agnes's mind that we do not comprehend fully; and one may touch a tender point without knowing it."

"Do you suspect any other attachment?" asked Jean Charost, turning so suddenly, and speaking so gravely, that his mother was surprised.

"None whatever," she answered. "Indeed, I can not believe such a thing possible. To my knowledge she has seen no one at all likely to gain her affections but this Monsieur De Brives. The stiff old soldiers left to guard this castle and De Brecy, good Martin Grille, and Henriot, the groom, upon my word, are the only men we have seen."

The return of Agnes stopped further conversation; and she and De Brecy took their way out by one of the posterns on the hill. Agnes was now as gay as a lark; the shower had passed away and left all clear; not a trace of agitation lingered behind. De Brecy was thoughtful, but strove to be cheerful likewise, paused and gazed wherever she told him the scene was beautiful, talked with no ignorant or tasteless lips of the loveliness of nature, and of the marvels of art which he had seen since he was last in Berri; but there was something more in his conversation. There was a depth of feeling, a warmth of fancy, a richness of association which made Agnes thoughtful also. He seemed to lead her mind which way he would; to have the complete mastery over it; and exercising his power gently and tenderly, it was a pleasant and a new sensation to feel that he possessed it.

There was one very beautiful scene that came up just when the sun was a couple of hands' breadth from the horizon. It was a small secluded nook in the wood, of some ten or fifteen yards across, surrounded and overshadowed by the tall old trees, but only covered, itself, with short green grass. It was as flat and even, too, as the pavement of the hall; but just beyond, to the southwest, was a short and sharp descent, from the foot of which some lesser trees shot up their branches, letting in between them, as through a window, a prospect of the valley of the Cher, and the glowing sky beyond.

"This is a place for Dryads, Agnes," said Jean Charost, making her sit down by him on a large fragment of stone which had rolled to the foot of an old oak. "Nymphs of the woods, dear girl, might well hold commune here with spirits of the air."

"I was thinking but the day before yesterday," said Agnes, "what a beautiful spot this would be for a cottage in the wood, with that lovely sky before us, and the world below."

"It is always better," said Jean Charost, with a smile, "to keep the world below us--or, rather, to keep ourselves above the world; but I fear me, Agnes, it is not the inhabitants of cottages who have the most skill in doing so. I have little faith either in cottages or hermitages."

"Do not destroy my dreams, dear Jean," said Agnes, almost sadly.

"Oh, no," he answered, "I would not destroy, but only read them."

Agnes paused, with her eyes bent down for a moment or two, and then looked earnestly in his face: "They are very simple," she said, "and easily read. The brightest dream of my whole life, the one I cherish the most fondly, is but to remain forever with dear Madame De Brecy and you, without any change--except," she added, eagerly, "to have you always remain with us--to coax you to throw away swords and lances, and never make our hearts beat with the thought that you are in battle and in danger."

Jean Charost's own heart beat now; and he was silent for a moment or two. "That can not be, Agnes," he said, "and you would not wish it, my dear girl. Every one must sacrifice something for his country--very much in perilous times--men their repose, their ease, often their happiness, their life itself, should it be necessary; women, the society of those they love--brothers, fathers, husbands. Now, dear Agnes, I am neither of these to you, and therefore your sacrifice is not so much as that of many others."

"I know you are not my father," answered Agnes. "That our dear mother told me long ago; but do you know, dear Jean, I often wish you were my brother."

Jean Charost smiled, and seemed for a moment to hesitate what he should reply. He pursued his purpose steadily, however, and at length answered, "That is a relationship which, wish as we may, we can not bring about. But, indeed, we are none to each other, Agnes. You are only my adopted child."

"No, not your child," she said; "you are too young for that. Why not your adopted sister?"

"I never heard of such an adoption," replied De Brecy; "but you are like a child to me, Agnes. I have carried you more than one mile in my arms, when you were an infant."

"And an orphan," she added, in a sad tone. "How much--how very much do I owe you, kindest and best of friends."

"Not so much, perhaps, as you imagine, Agnes," replied Jean Charost. "To save my own life in a moment of great danger, I made a solemn promise to protect, cherish, and educate you, as if you were my own. I had incautiously suffered myself to fall into the hands of a party of ruthless marauders, who, imagining that I had come to espy their actions, and perhaps to betray them, threatened to put me to death. There was no possibility of escape or resistance; but a gentleman who was with them, and who, though not of them, possessed apparently, from old associations, great influence over them, induced them to spare me on the condition I have mentioned. You were then an infant lying under the greenwood-tree, and I, it is true, hardly more than a boy; but

I took a solemn promise, dear Agnes, and I have striven to perform it well. Yet I deserve no credit even for that dear Agnes; for what I did at first from a sense of duty, I afterward did from affection. Well did you win and did you repay my love; and, as I told Monsieur De Brives this morning, although at my death the small estate of De Brecy must pass away to another and very distant branch of my own family, all that I have won by my own exertions will be yours."

"Do you think I could enjoy it, and you dead?" asked Agnes, in a sad and almost reproachful tone. "Oh, no--no! All I should then want would be enough to find me place in a nunnery, there to pray that it might not be long till we met again. You have been all and every thing to me through life, dear Jean. What matters it what happens when you are gone?"

Jean Charost laid his hand gently upon hers and she might have felt that strong hand tremble; but her thoughts seemed busy with other things. She knew not the emotions she excited--doubtless she knew not even those which lay at the source of her own words and thoughts.

"It is sad," she continued, after a brief pause, "never to have seen a father's face or known a mother's blessing. To have no brother, no sister; and though the place of all has been supplied, and well supplied, by a friend, I sometimes long to know who were my parents, what was my family. I know you would tell me, if it were right for me to know, and therefore I have never asked--nor do I ask now, though the thought sometimes troubles me."

"I am ready to tell you all I know this moment," answered Jean Charost; "but that is not much, and it is a sad tale. Are you prepared to hear it, Agnes?"

"No--not if it is sad," she answered. "I have been looking forward to the time of your return, dear friend, as if every day of your stay were to be a day of joy, and not a shadow to come over me during the whole time. Yet you have been but one day here, and that has been more checkered with sadness than many I have known for years. I have shed tears, which I have not done before since you went away. I would have no more sad things to-day. Some other time--some other time you shall tell me all about myself."

"All that I know," answered Jean Charost; "and I will give you, too, some papers which, perhaps, may tell you more. There are some jewels, too, which belong to you--"

"See," said Agnes, interrupting him, as if her mind had been absent, "the sun is half way down behind the edge of the earth. Had we not better go back to the castle? How gloriously he lights up the edges of the clouds, changing the dark gray into crimson and gold. I have often thought that love does the like; and when you and our dear mother are with me, I feel that it is so; for things that would be otherwise dark and sad seem then to become bright and sparkle. Even that which made me weep this morning has lost its heaviness, and as it was to be, I am glad that it is over."

"Will you never repent, my Agnes?" asked Jean Charost, with a voice not altogether free from emotion. "Of this Monsieur De Brives I know nothing but by report, yet he seemed to me one well calculated to win favor--and perhaps to deserve it."

"What is he to me?" asked Agnes, almost impatiently. "A mere stranger. Shall I ever repent? oh, never--never!"

"But you must marry some one nearly as much a stranger to you as he is," replied Jean Charost.

She only shook her head sadly, again answering, "Never!"

Jean Charost was silent for a moment; and then rising, they returned to the castle with nothing said of all that might have been said.

CHAPTER XLIII.

There was a great change in Agnes, and Madame De Brecy remarked it immediately. Hers was an earnest, though a cheerful spirit, and when she was thoughtful, those who knew her well might be sure she was debating something with herself, examining some course of action, trying some thought or feeling before the tribunal of her own heart. All that night, and all the following morning, she was very thoughtful. Her gayety seemed gone, and though she could both listen and converse, yet at the least pause she fell back into a revery again.

Jean Charost, too, was a good deal changed, at least toward Agnes, and the mother's eye

marked it with very varied feelings. His manner was more tender, his language more glowing; there was a spirit in his words which had never been there before. He, too, was often very thoughtful; but Jean Charost had other motives for thought besides those connected with Agnes. Early on the morning of the day following the incidents lately detailed, he sent a man up to the watch-tower with others to keep his eye on the valley of the Cher, and Madame De Brecy remarked that the soldiers who had remained at St. Florent were no longer scattered about, either amusing themselves in the village, or sporting in the court-yard, but were gathered together, all in busy occupation, some cleaning and rubbing down their horses, some polishing armor, or sharpening swords and lances, some skillfully making arrows or quarrels for the crossbow. She refrained from asking any questions till after the mid-day meal; but it was hardly over when the horn of the watcher upon the tower was winded loudly, and De Brecy, springing up from the table, ran up the stairs himself, as if on some notice of danger. There were several of the chief persons of his little band still around the board; but none of them moved or showed any sign of anxiety, and, in truth, they had been so long inured to hourly peril that danger had lost its excitement for them.

The young lord was absent only a few minutes; but, on his return, he did not resume his seat, merely saying to the soldiers around, "To the saddle with all speed. Lead out all the horses. Some one bring me my armor. Do not look pale, my mother; I know not that there is any cause for alarm; but I heard yesterday that troops were tending toward Bourges in a somewhat menacing attitude, and I think it may be as well for us to leave St. Florent for a time, and return to De Brecy."

"Are they English?" asked Madame De Brecy, evidently much frightened.

"Not so," replied her son; "nor are they even the rebels on the English part; but I grieve to say these are Royalists, perhaps more dangerous to the king's cause than even his open enemies. I will tell you the circumstances presently; for there may yet be some mistake. The spears we have seen are very distant, and few in number. Our good friend above was quite right to give the alarm; but neither he nor I could at all tell what troops they were, nor in what force. I will go back and see more in a moment. In the mean time, however, dear mother, it would be well to have all prepared for immediate departure. I can not receive these gentlemen as friends in St. Florent, and they may be very apt to treat those who do not do so as enemies. Dear Agnes, get ready in haste. Tell Martin Grille to have my mother's litter ready; I will return directly."

Thus saying, he again went up to the watch-tower, and remained gazing along the valley of the Cher for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. There was much woodland in those days along that fair valley, and Jean Charost could not satisfy himself. Spear heads he certainly descried; but in the leafy covering of the scene they were lost almost as soon as perceived, and he could not tell their numbers. At length he turned to the warder, who stood silent, gazing out beside him, and pointed out one particular spot in the landscape. "You see that large tree," he said; "an evergreen oak, it seems to be. The road divides there into two; one turns eastward to the right, the other comes toward the north. Watch those men well as they pass that spot. They must all show themselves there. If there be more than fifty, and they come upon this road, blow your horn twice and come down. If they take the other road, remain quiet where you are till I come."

The preparations of Madame De Brecy, under the effect of fear, had been very rapid; and she and Agnes were standing in the hall, ready for departure. A page was there also, resting on a bench half covered with armor, and, as soon as his lord appeared, he sprang to arm him, asking, as Madame De Brecy had asked, "Are they the English?"

"No, boy--no!" replied De Brecy and then, turning to his mother, he said, "There is no need of great haste. We shall hear more presently. The fact is, the Count of Richmond," he continued, in a quiet, narrative tone, "has ridden the court somewhat too hard. He forced La Trimouille upon the king, as I told you the other night; and now he would rule La Trimouille, and, through him, his sovereign. He found himself mistaken, however; for Trimouille is a very different person to deal with from Giac or Beaulieu. Finding himself opposed, he determined to employ force; joined with himself the Counts of La Marche and Clermont, and advanced upon Chatellerault. When I left Poictiers, the king had chosen a decided part, and ordered the gates of Chatellerault to be closed against the counts. It was supposed, indeed, that the matter would be soon accommodated; for Richmond is needful to the king, and is himself but a mere cipher, except when serving his royal master. But since my arrival here, I have heard that, instead of submitting dutifully, he has levied larger forces, and is marching upon Bourges. If the troops I have seen be his, we shall soon hear more, and then--though doubtless there would be no great danger in staying--it may be better to retire before them. How do you go, dear Agnes? In the litter with my mother?"

"Oh, no; I will ride," replied the beautiful girl. "I have become as good a cavalier as any man in your band."

"Well, then, you shall be my second page," said Jean Charost, with a smile. "Come and buckle this strap on my shoulder--the boy can hardly reach it."

Agnes sprang forward and buckled the strap, and Jean Charost gayly kissed her cheek, saying, "Thanks for the service, dear Agnes."

His tone and manner were altogether so easy and unconcerned, that even Madame De Brecy

could hardly suppose that there was any cause for fear; but, a moment after, the trumpet was heard to sound twice from the tower above, and then the step of the soldier descending the stairs heavily.

"Now, dear mother," said Jean Charost, taking the old lady's hand, "you must let me lead you to your litter; for these friends of ours are coming this way. Run, boy, and tell Martin Grille and the rest to mount, and be gone on the road to De Brecy. Come, Agnes, come."

All were soon in the court-yard. It may seem an ungallant comparison; but all light things are more easily moved than weightier ones, and women, like dust, are soon disturbed by bustle. The very haste with which her son spoke destroyed all Madame De Brecy's confidence, agitated and alarmed her. Even Agnes felt a sort of thrill of apprehension come over her heart. But in those perilous times people were drilled into promptitude. Madame De Brecy and two of the maids wee soon in the litter, and Agnes mounted on her horse by Jean Charost's side. She had seen him in times of suffering and of captivity; she had seen him go forth to battle and to danger; she had seen him in the chivalrous sports which in those times were practiced in almost every castle in the land; but she had never ridden by his side in the hour of peril and command. On many a former occasion, deep interest, compassion, admiration perhaps, had been excited in her bosom; but now other sensations arose as she heard the clear, plain orders issue from his lips, and saw the promptness and submission with which all around obeyed. Surely woman was formed to yield, and, beyond all doubt, there is something very admirable to her eyes in the display of power. But she was to witness more before the day closed.

As they issued forth upon the road down to the village of St. Florent, nothing was to be seen which could create the least alarm; and, turning toward Solier, all seemed fair and open. But still Jean Charost was watchful and anxious, throwing out several men in front, and detaching others to the rear, while, as they approached the little valley which lies between the Cher and the Avon, and gives name to the small hamlet of La Vallée, he sent one of the soldiers on whom he could trust to the top of the church tower, to reconnoitre the country around. The man came back at speed; and rejoined the party ere they had proceeded far, bringing the intelligence that he had seen a considerable body of horse following slowly at about half a league's distance.

"Then we have plenty of time," said Jean Charost, in an easy tone; but still he rather hurried the horses, and, mounting the hill, the towers of Bourges were soon in sight.

At that time the road to Mont Luçon entered the road to Bourges much nearer to the city than it does at present, and it was along the former that the way of Jean Charost lay in going to De Brecy, if he wished to avoid passing through the city itself. But as he approached the point of separation, the sound of a trumpet on the right met his ear, and, galloping up a little eminence, he saw a large body of crossbow men, with some thirty or forty men-at-arms coming up from the side of Luçon. They were near enough for the banners to be visible, and he needed nothing more to decide him. Wheeling his horse, he hurried down the hill again, and, speaking to his lieutenant, said, "There are the men of La Marche in our way. There is nothing for it but to go through Bourges."

"Here is Hubert come back from the front, sir," replied the lieutenant at once, "to tell us that they have got a party on the bridge over the Avon. They shouted to him to keep back; so they will never let us pass into Bourges."

"The best reason for going forward," answered Jean Charost, in a gay tone. "We are nicely entangled; but we have made our way through, against worse odds than this. How many are there, Hubert?"

"Much about our own numbers, fair sir," replied the man. "The others are a great deal further off; but we are right between them."

"Oh; Jean, will you be obliged to surrender?" asked Agnes, with a pale face.

"Surrender!" exclaimed Jean Charost, pointing to his pennon, which was carried by one of the men. "Shall De Brecy's pennon fall, my Agnes, before, a handful of rebels, and you by my side? Give me my lance. Now mark me, Dubois. The bridge is narrow; not more than two can pass abreast. You lead the right file, Courbeboix the left. Valentin, with the eight last men, escort the litter and this lady. The object is to give them a free passage. We must beat the rebels back off the bridge, and then disperse them over the flat ground beyond. Go back to the side of the litter, my Agnes. 'Twere better you dismounted and joined my mother. Go back, dear girl; we must lose no time. Now, loyal gentlemen, use the spur. They have bid us back; I say, forward!"

Agnes was alarmed, but less for herself than for him; and, notwithstanding the wish he had expressed, she kept her seat upon her horse's back, with her eyes straining upon the front, where she saw the plume of blue and white in De Brecy's crest dancing in the air, as his horse dashed on.

On the little party went; words were passed forward from front to rear; quicker and quicker they moved forward, till a short turn of the road showed them the bridge over the Avon, partly occupied by a party of horse, several of whom, however, had dismounted, and seemed to be gazing nonchalantly up toward the walls of Bourges.

Jean Charost gave them no time to question or prepare; for he knew right well who they were, and why they were there. Agnes saw him turn for an instant in the saddle, shout loudly a word which she did not clearly hear, and the next moment his horse dashed forward to the bridge, at what seemed to her almost frantic speed. She saw him couch his lance and bend over his saddle-bow; but the next instant, the greater part of his troop following, hid him from her sight. There was a momentary check to their headlong speed upon the bridge, and she could clearly see some one fall over into the water. All the rest was wild confusion--a mass of struggling men and horses rearing and plunging, and lances crossed, and waving swords and axes. Oh, how her young heart beat! But as she still gazed, not able to comprehend what she beheld, one of the soldiers suddenly took her horse by the rein, saying, "Come on, dear lady--come on. Our lord has cleared the way. The bridge will be free in another minute. 'Tis seldom De Brecy gives back before any odds."

Agnes could have kissed him; but on they went, and she soon saw that he was right. Driven on into the open space beyond the bridge, the men of the Count La Marche still maintained the combat; but they were evidently worsted, for some were beaten back to the right, some to the left, and some got entangled in the marshy ground, and seemed scarcely able to extricate their horses. To Agnes's great joy, however, she saw the blue and white plume still waving on the right, and a clear space before them up to the walls of the city. Forward pressed the man who had hold of her rein; the litter came after it, as fast as the horses could bear it, followed by three or four servants in straggling disarray, but flanked on either side by several stout men-at-arms. This was not all, however, which Agnes saw when she looked back to assure herself of the safety of Madame De Brecy. On the other side of the bridge, and across the marsh which lies to the east, she beheld a large, dark body of spears moving on rapidly, and at the same time, as they came closer to the walls of the town, cries and shouts were heard, apparently from within. "By the Lord! I believe they have won the city," exclaimed the soldier who was guiding her; and almost at the same moment, a man from the battlement over the gate shouted something to the conductor, who replied, "The Seigneur De Brecy, just from Poictiers. Long live King Charles!"

"Ride quick to the castle gate!" cried the man from above. "The Count of Richmond is in the city. They are fighting in the streets; but we are not enough to hold the town. To the castle--to the castle!" and he himself ran along the battlements to the westward.

Agnes's guide turned in the same direction, but was met by De Brecy coming at full speed, a little in advance of his men, who now, gathered all together again in good order, were approaching the gate which Agnes and her companion had just left.

Jean Charost heard the tidings with evident pain and anxiety; but there was no time for deliberation, and, with one cheering word to Agnes, he wheeled his horse and galloped on to another gate hard by, close to which rose up the large round tower and smaller square keep of the old citadel of Bourges. Strong works, according to the system of fortification of that day, connected the castle with the gate below, and the space between the wall and the marsh was very narrow, so that the place was considered almost impregnable on that side. A number of persons were seen upon the towers as Agnes rode on; and when she reached the castle draw-bridge, she found De Brecy arguing with a little group of armed men upon the crenelated gallery of the gate-tower, who seemed little disposed to give him admission.

"Tell Monsieur De Royans," he exclaimed, "that it is his old friend De Brecy; and in Heaven's name make haste! They are rallying in our rear, and the other squadrons coming on. You can not suppose that I would attack and rout my own friends. You have yourselves seen us at blows on the meadow. Wheel the men round there, Dubois, behind the litter," he continued, shouting to his lieutenant. "Bring their spears down, and drive those fellows into the marsh, if they come near enough."

As he spoke, however, the chains of the draw-bridge began to creak and groan, a large mass of wood-work slowly descended, and the portcullis was raised.

"Forward, Agnes, forward!" cried De Brecy, riding toward the rear; and while he and a few of his followers kept the enemy in check, the rest of the party passed over the bridge, till they were all closely packed in the space between the portcullis and the gate. The latter was then opened, and riding on, Agnes found herself in a small open sort of court, surrounded by high walls, between the inner and the outer gates. There were stone stair-cases leading up to the ramparts in different directions, and down one of these flights a gentleman in steel armor was coming slowly when the troop entered.

"Where is De Brecy?" he exclaimed, looking down upon the group below. "I do not see him. Varlet, you have not shut him out?"

"No, no; I am here!" cried the voice of De Brecy, riding in from under the arch, while the portcullis clanged, and the draw-bridge creaked behind him.

"Pardi! De Brecy," cried the man from above, "you have brought us a heap of women. Men are what we want, for we have only provisions for a week, and we shall be closely pressed, I can tell you."

"Here are forty-seven horses," answered De Brecy, "which will feed the whole castle for a

month, in case of need. But is there no means of passing through the town?"

"Impossible!" cried the other. "They are just now fighting in the castle street, to bring in safely the grain out of the corn-market."

Agnes then, for the first time, became fully aware of her situation, and that she was destined to be for some time the tenant of a small citadel, closely besieged, and but very ill provided to resist.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The power of the mind to accommodate itself to all things is curiously displayed in the zest and carelessness with which soldiers, in the busy time of war, enjoy all short intervals of repose. The whole morning had been passed in skirmishing in the streets of Bourges, in strengthening every defense of the castle, and in collecting whatever provisions could be found in the neighboring houses, so long as the smallness of the force in the town permitted parties to issue forth from the citadel. But in the course of the day, the troops of the Count of La Marche and of the Count of Clermont entered Bourges, and joined the Count of Richmond. A strong party was posted across the river opposite to the gate of the castle, another occupied the bridge, and the blockade of the citadel was complete. Weary, however, with the long march and a morning's skirmishing, the troops of the revolted lords did not press the siege during the rest of the day. The defenders of the citadel, too, had but little opportunity of annoying the enemy or serving themselves; and, from three o'clock till nightfall, nothing occurred but an occasional shot of a cannon or a culverine, directed at any group of the enemy who might appear in the castle street, or at the parties on the opposite side of the river. True, the citadel was surrounded on every side by a strong force; true, the siege was likely to commence on the following day with vigor and determination; but still a sort of tacit truce was established for the time; and could any one have seen the little party of superior officers seated together in the castle of Bourges that night at supper, they would have seemed but a gay assembly of thoughtless men met together on some occasion of merry-making. They laughed, they talked, and some of them drank deep; but none of them seemed to give one thought to their perilous situation, trusting confidently to the precautions they had taken for defense, and to the care and faith of those who had been left upon guard.

Jean Charost, though perhaps the gravest of the party, seemed for the time as indifferent to the fate of the citadel as the rest; and, seated next to Juvenel de Royans, conversed upon any subject on earth but the state of Bourges, dwelling upon former times and past-by occurrences, the days they had spent together in the household of the Duke of Orleans, their after meetings, and the fatal events of Monterreau.

"What a strange thing life is, De Brecy!" said his companion. "Here you and I meet, first as enemies, and are ready to cut each others throats; then as young friends and brothers-in-arms, ready to sacrifice our lives for one another; and then here we are, beleaguered in this fusty old château of Bourges, with Richmond, who never spares an enemy, and La Marche, who seldom spares a friend, ready to dig us out of our hole, as they would a badger on the side of a hill. I forgot to mention our short meeting at Monterreau, for, by my faith! I was too ill at that time even to do the honors of my quarters."

"You seem wonderfully improved in health, De Royans," said Jean Charost. "You look younger by four or five years than you did then."

"But a poor, battered old soldier, after all," replied De Royans, tossing up with his fingers one of the curls that hung at the back of his neck. "You see I am as gray as a wild goose. However, I am much better. A year's idleness on the banks of the Garonne, a little music, and a great deal of physic, cured my wounds, loosened my stiff joints, and enabled me to keep my horses back almost as well as ever. I have got on in the world, too, De Brecy, have made some very nice little captures, paid off many old debts, and got two companies of arquebusiers under my command instead of one. I wish to Heaven I had them all here. Had they been in the town, Richmond would never have got in by the northwest gate."

"I marvel much that he did, I will confess," replied Jean Charost. "Two days ago I sent Monsieur de Blondel there intimation that Bourges was in danger. I thought fit, indeed, to tell him the source from which I received the intelligence; but still it might have kept him on his guard."

"Oh, I heard all about that," replied De Royans, laughing; "and we were all more or less in

fault. When Blondel got your letter, he held it in his hand, after reading it, and cried out, in his jeering way, 'What's a hermit? and what does a hermit know of war?' Then said Gaucourt, 'As much as the pig does of the bagpipe; and why should he not?' and then they all laughed, and the matter passed by. But who is this hermit who has got such good intelligence? On my life! De Brecy, it would be well to have him in pay."

"That you could hardly have," replied De Brecy. "He was once a famous soldier, my friend, but has met with many disasters in life. I went to see him upon other matters; but the intelligence he gave me, transmitted from mouth to mouth, I believe, all the way from Chatellerault to St. Florent, seemed so important that I left him without even touching upon my object. He is looked upon as a saint by all the country round, and the peasantry tell him every thing they hear."

"But what, in Fortune's name, took you to a saint?" asked Juvenel de Royans, laughing "Was it to ask for absolution for wandering about the land with that lovely little creature you brought hither?"

Jean Charost looked grave, but answered calmly, "That was no sin, I trust, De Royans, for I may call her my adopted daughter. She had, indeed, something to do with my going to see him, for he has great knowledge of her fate and history; and I wished to learn more than he has ever yet told me. It is time that she herself should know all. She will, it is true, have all I die possessed of; but still I could wish the mystery of her birth cleared up."

"Why, surely this is not the infant you brought out of the wood near Beauté sur Marne--the child we had so many jests upon?" exclaimed De Royans.

"The very same," replied Jean Charost. "She has been as a child to me ever since."

"We thought she was your child then," replied De Royans. "Heaven help us! I have learned to think differently since of many things, and would gladly have wished you joy of your babe, if you had acknowledged her, right or wrong; but, as it was, we all vowed she was yours, and only called you the sanctified young sinner. Two or three times I went down to good Dame Moulinet's to see if I could not get the truth out of her; but; though she seemed to know much, she would say little."

"Do you know if Dame Moulinet be still living, and where she is?" asked Jean Charost.

"She was living a year ago, and not ten miles from Bourges," replied De Royans. "In the village of Solier, hard by the Cher. I had one of her sons in my troop. She and her husband are well to do now, for they have got her father's inheritance. They were tenants of that old Monsieur de Solier whose daughter our dear lord and master, the Duke of Orleans, carried off by force from her husband."

Jean Charost started, and exclaimed, "Merciful Heaven!"

"Ay, it was bad enough," said De Royans. "Our noble lord had his little faults and his great ones; and some of them. I have a notion, imbittered his last hours. This, above all others, I believe, affected him, for it had a terrible termination, as I dare say you remember."

"No--no," answered Jean Charost; "I never heard of it before. How did it end?"

"Why, the lady died," said De Royans, gravely. "No one of the household very well knew how, unless it was Lomelini. Some say that she was poisoned--some, that she was stabbed in her sleep."

"Not by the duke!" exclaimed Jean Charost, with a look of horror.

"God forbid!" cried Juvenel de Royans, eagerly. "He only loved her too well. No; there were strange tales going; but certain it is she died, and her death nearly deprived the duke of reason, they thought. Now, I recollect, you first came about that very time. The lady had been ill some months; but, as there was the cry of a babe in the house--one might hear it from the garden--we thought that natural enough. Her death, however, surprised us all. Hypocritical Lomelini would have us believe that it was remorse that killed her; but there were a great many strange things took place just then. One of the judges of the Châtelet was brought to the palace--there were secret investigations, and I know not what. Your coming about that time made us think you had something to do with the affair. Some said you were her younger brother. But what makes you look so sad, De Brecy?"

"The subject is a sad one," answered Jean Charost; "and, moreover, new lights are breaking upon me, De Royans. Do you think, if Lomelini is still living, he could give me information upon those events?"

"He could, if he would," answered his companion. "He is living, and as sleek as ever, and Abbot of Briare; but I can tell you, I think, all that remains to be told. Poor old Monsieur De Solier died of grief. I shall never forget his coming to the Palais d'Orleans, to persuade the duke to give his daughter up, nor the despair of his countenance when the duke would not see him. The husband made away with himself, I believe, which was a pity, for they say this Count De St. Florent was as good a soldier as any of his day, and had fought in many a battle under Charles

the Fifth. However, he never was heard of more, from the time the duke carried off his wife, during his absence. That is all that is to tell. One--two--three, died miserably for a prince's pleasures; and he himself had his heart wrung with remorse, which is better, perhaps, than could be said of most princes. It is a sad history, though a brief one."

"And the child?" said De Brecy.

Juvenel de Royans looked suddenly up with an inquiring glance. "I do not know," he said. "But do you think--do you really believe--"

"I know nothing," replied Jean Charost. "The duke told me nothing of all this. I had fancied he might have something of importance to communicate; and, indeed, something was said about giving me some papers; but he was murdered, and--"

"Did you never get the packet Lomelini had for you?" asked De Royans.

Before Jean Charost could answer, a soldier came into the hall, saying, "Is there a Monsieur de Brecy here?"

"He is here, young man; what do you want?" asked De Brecy.

"A letter addressed to you, sir," answered the soldier, advancing toward him.

All eyes turned at once upon the bearer of the letter and him to whom it was addressed; and De Blondel, who was in command, exclaimed, "A letter, by the Lord! Unless we have taken to writing letters to one another, the gates of the old château must be more open than we thought."

"I found it on an arrow-head, sir, just within the east barbican," replied the soldier.

"Well, well. What contains it?" asked the other, impatiently. "News, or no news, good or bad, Seigneur De Brecy?"

"News, and good news," replied Jean Charost, who had by this time received the letter and unfolded it; "hear what he says;" and he proceeded to read from the somewhat crooked and irregular lines before him the following words:

"FAITHFUL AND TRUE,--This is to have you know that King Charles is already on the march for your deliverance. Hold out to the last, and two days will see the royal banner before Bourges. Let not your companions slight this notice as they slighted the last; for the shameful loss of Bourges can only be repaired by the brave defense of the castle."

"He touched us there pretty sharply," said Blondel; "and, 'pon my life, what he says is true; so I, for one, swear by this flagon of wine--and if I don't keep my vow may I never drink another--that I will bury myself under the ruins of the castle before I surrender it. What say you, gentlemen? Will you all touch the tankard, and take the vow?"

They all swore accordingly; for the chivalrous custom of making such rash vows had not departed, though Chandos, one of the most remarkable of vow-makers, had laid his head in the grave nearly half a century before. It must be confessed, however, that Jean Charost took the oath unwillingly, for there were lives in that castle dearer to him than his own.

CHAPTER XLV.

This is not a book of battles and sieges--those fire-works of history which explode with a brief space of brilliant light, and leave nothing but dust, and tinder, and darkness. The man who gave an account of the three great battles of the world, and explained that he meant those which had permanently affected the destinies of the human race, probably named three too many. There is nothing so insignificant as a battle. The invention of the steam-engine was worth a thousand of the greatest victories that ever were achieved.

This is no hook of battles and sieges, and, therefore, I will pass over lightly the events of the two succeeding days. Suffice it, the counts of Richmond, Clermont, and Marche pressed the Castle of Bourges with all the means and appliances they could command. They attacked it from the country side; they attacked it from the city; they assailed the gates and barriers sword in hand; they endeavored to escalade the walls; but they were met at every point with stern and determined resistance, and though by no means well prepared for defense, the château held out; the besiegers lost many men, and gained nothing.

In the midst of these scenes, Jean Charost was not inactive. Now on the walls, now at the barricades, and now quietly sitting in the high upper chamber of the round tower, with Agnes, and his mother, and their maids plying the busy silk with trembling fingers, he tried to give encouragement to the soldiery, and to restore confidence and calmness to the women. There was something in his aspect, something in the perfect serenity of his look and manner, in the absence of every sign of agitation and anxiety on his face, which was not without its effect, and the news which he brought of the speedy coming of the King of France to the relief of his faithful vassals besieged in Bourges afforded bright hope and expectation. The services of himself and those whom he brought were great to the defenders of a citadel too large for the numbers it contained; and his quiet, unassuming bravery, his activity and ready presence of mind, won for him that respect which pretension, even well founded, could not have gained.

"I always knew he would make a good soldier," said Juvenel de Royans, somewhat proud of his friendship and their long companionship; and Blondel himself, one of the first knights of France, admitted that he had never seen a clearer head or stronger hand exercised in the hour of danger.

At first sight, it may seem strange to say that the news of the king's march, which brought hope and relief to the whole garrison--and, in one sense, to himself also--filled him, when considered in another point of view, with grief and alarm. But when Jean Charost considered what must necessarily be the consequence--at a moment when more than one half of France was in possession of a foreign invader, and the first vassal of the crown in arms against his sovereign--of an actual struggle between the monarch in person, and three of those who had been his chief supporters, his heart sunk as he thought, what might be the fate of France. During many a moment throughout the first and second day, when a pause took place in the attack, he meditated somewhat sadly of these things; but he was not a man only to meditate, without action; and toward evening he took De Blondel aside to confer with him as to what was to be done. A few words presented the subject to the mind of the other in the same light in which it appeared to himself, and he then said, "I wish you very much to consider this, Monsieur De Blondel, as I think an opportunity is afforded you of rendering great service to France. Were I in your place, I would open negotiations at once with the constable, and represent to him the consequences that are likely to ensue. It would be no slight honor to you if you could induce him to cease the attack, and draw off his forces, even before the king appears, and little less if you could commence a negotiation which might be carried on after his majesty's arrival, and heal these unhappy dissensions."

"By the Lord," cried Blondel, "if I were the king, I would have the head of every one of them, who by his insolent ambition and rebellious spirits gives strength to the arm of our foreign adversary, and takes away the strength of France. Nevertheless, I suppose he is obliged to temporize. But there are many difficulties in the way, my good friend. You are a negotiator, I am told, as well as a soldier. I know nothing of such things, and should only make a blunder. I should never know how to use the knowledge we possess of the king's coming without betraying the secret to the enemy."

"Well, leave it to me," said De Brecy. "I will act in your name."

De Blondel mused for a minute. "On the condition," he said, at length, "that there is no talk of surrendering the castle; and also that you say nothing of the king's movements till he is actually in sight. But who will you get to go? On my life, the task is somewhat perilous; for Richmond is just the man either to hang any one who pretends to oppose his will, or drown him in a sack, as he did Giac."

"I will go," replied De Brecy. "I have no fear. The constable is violent, haughty, domineering; but at heart he has a sincere love for France, a bitter hatred of the English, and devotion to the royal cause. Giac he scorned, as well as hated; and besides, Giac stood in his way. Me he neither scorns nor hates, nor wishes to remove. By your leave, I will send out for a safe-conduct by a flag of truce, and you shall give me a general authority to treat, though, of course, not to conclude."

De Blondel was easily led in such matters. A good soldier and a gallant man, he commanded skillfully and fought well; but his political views were not very far-sighted, and he was one of those persons who fancy they save themselves half the trouble of decision by looking only at one side of a question. The authority was given as amply as Jean Charost desired, and nearly in words of his own dictation: a flag of truce was sent out to demand a pass for the Seigneur De Brecy, in order to a conference with the lord constable, and the bearer speedily returned with the paper required, reporting that he had remarked much satisfaction among the rebel leaders at the message which he had carried them, in which they doubtless saw an indication of some intention to capitulate.

A slight degree of agitation was apparent upon Blondel's face, as Jean Charost, divested of his harness, and armed only with sword and dagger, prepared to set out upon his enterprise. "I do not half like to let you go, sir knight," he said. "This Richmond is a very furious fellow. There is no knowing what he may do."

"I do not fear," repeated Jean Charost. "But, in case of any accident, De Blondel, I trust in your honor and your kindness to protect the ladies whom I leave here with you. They have some thirty or forty men with them who would each shed the last drop of his blood in their defense; but the honor of a knight, and that knight De Blondel, is a surer safeguard than a thousand swords."

The gates of the castle were soon passed; and the first barricade which the assailants had raised in the Rue du Château was reached without question. Some half dozen men were lying on a pile of straw behind, lighted by a solitary lantern; but two of them started up immediately, and, though neither of them could read a word of the pass, they both seemed to have been previously informed of what they had to do; for they insisted upon bandaging De Brecy's eyes, and leading him on blindfold, as if conducting him through the works of a regular fortress. He submitted with a smile; for he knew every step of the city of Bourges from his childhood, and could almost tell every house that they passed as he was led along. The tread of the broad stone sill of the gateway where they at length stopped was quite familiar to him; and it was without surprise that, on the bandage being removed, he found himself in the court-yard of his old friend Jacques Cœur.

Conducted up a narrow stair-case, in one of the congregation of square towers, of which the building principally consisted, he was introduced into a small, but very tall cabinet, lined with gilt leather hangings. In the midst stood a table, with three gentlemen surrounding it, and a lamp, swinging overhead and showing a mass of papers on the board, the stern, square-cut head of the constable bent over them, the mild and rather feeble expression of the Count La Marche, and the sharp, supercilious face of the Count of Clermont.

"Here is Monsieur De Brecy, I presume," said the latter, addressing Richmond.

The constable started up, and held out his hand frankly, saying, "Welcome, welcome, De Brecy. Sit down. There's a stool. Well," he continued, as soon as the guard was gone, and the door closed, "what cheer in the castle?"

"Very good cheer, my lord," replied De Brecy. "We have not yet finished the pullets, and horse-flesh is afar off."

The Count La Marche laughed; but Richmond exclaimed, somewhat impatiently, "Come, let us to the point. You are frank and free usually, De Brecy. Say what terms of capitulation you demand, and you shall speedily have my answer."

"You mistake my object altogether, my lord," replied De Brecy. "The castle is less likely to capitulate than when first you sat down before it. There are now men enough within to defend it for a month against five times your force, unless you shoot better than you have done these last two days; and we have provisions for some months, as well for our own mouths as for those of the culverins."

"Then, in the devil's name, what did you come here for?" exclaimed Richmond, angrily.

"Upon business, my lord," replied De Brecy, "which I should wish to communicate to you alone."

"No, no. No secrets from these gentlemen," said the constable; and then added, with a hard, dry laugh, "we are all chickens of one coop, and share the same grain and the same fate. Speak what you have to say before them."

"Be it so, if you desire it, my lord," replied De Brecy. "I came to offer an humble remonstrance to you, sir, and to point out a few facts regarding your own situation"--Richmond gave an impatient jerk in his chair, as if about to interrupt him; but De Brecy proceeded--"and that of the citadel, which I think have escaped your attention."

"Ay, ay; speak of the citadel," answered Richmond. "That is what I would fain hear of."

"I have told you, my lord," replied De Brecy, "that the citadel can and will hold out for more than a month, and nothing that you can do will take it. Long before that month is at an end, the king himself will be here to give it relief."

"Well, let him come," exclaimed Richmond, impatiently. "We may have the citadel before he arrives, for all you say."

"I think not, sir," answered De Brecy; "and if you knew as much of the affair as I do, you would say so too. But let us suppose for a moment that the castle does hold out, and that the king arrives before you can take it--"

"Perhaps we can deal with both," cried Richmond.

"And ruin France!" answered De Brecy. "I will never believe that the Count of Richmond--the loyal, faithful Count of Richmond--that the Count of La Marche, allied to the royal race; or the Count of Clermont, well known for his attachment to the throne, would be seen fighting against their sovereign at the very moment when, surrounded by foreign enemies, he is making a last desperate struggle for the salvation of his country and your own."

He turned slightly toward the Count La Marche as he spoke, and Richmond exclaimed, in a furious tone, "Speak to me, sir. I am commander here. By the Lord, if you attempt to corrupt my allies, I will have your head off your shoulders."

"You forced me to speak in their presence, my lord," replied Jean Charost, coolly; "and,

whatever I have to say must be said as boldly as if they were not here."

"Nay, nay; let him speak, good cousin," said the Count La Marche. "It is but right we should hear what he has to say."

"My noble lord constable," said Clermont, "can not blame Monsieur De Brecy for acting on his own orders. We were his dear allies a moment ago, and partners of all his secrets. Why should we not hear the young gentleman's eloquence?"

"Would I were eloquent!" replied De Brecy. "I would then show you, my lords, what a spectacle it would hold up to the world, to see one of the first officers of the crown of France, and two of the first noblemen of the land, from some small personal disgusts at the king's prime minister, violating their allegiance, frustrating all their sovereign's efforts to save his country, plunging the state, already made a prey to enemies by military factions, into greater danger and confusion than ever, and destroying the last hope for safety in France."

Richmond rolled his eyes from the speaker to the two counts, and from their faces to that of De Brecy again, while his fingers clasped ominously round the hilt of his dagger. "Let him do us justice," he cried; "let him do us justice, and we will sheathe the sword."

"Even if he have not done you justice," said De Brecy, boldly, "is this a moment to unsheathe the sword against your lord--that sword which he himself put into your hands? Is this a time, when every true son of France should sacrifice all personal considerations, and shed the last drop of his blood, were it necessary, for the deliverance of his country, to take advantage of the difficulties of his sovereign in order to wring concessions from him by force of arms? But has he not done you justice, my lord constable? Twice has his minister been sacrificed to your animosity. A third time you quarrel with the minister whom you yourself forced upon him, and plunge your unhappy country, already torn to pieces by strangers, into civil war, because the king will not, for the third time, submit to your will. Are his ministers but nine-pins, to be set up and knocked down for your pleasure? Are they but tools, to be used as you would have them? and are you an officer of the king, or his ruler?"

The constable started up, with his drawn dagger in his hand, and would probably have cast himself on De Brecy, had not the Count La Marche interposed.

"Hold, hold!" he cried, throwing himself in the way. "No violence, Richmond. On my life, he speaks well and truly. We are here for the public good--"

"At least we-pretend so," said the Count of Clermont. "Really, my lord constable, you had better let Monsieur De Brecy go on, and speak quietly. We presume that he can say nothing that you would not wish us to hear, being chickens of the same coop, as you yourself have said; and the sharp arguments you seemed about to use might convince him, but could not convince us."

Richmond threw himself into his seat again, and thrust the dagger back into its sheath.

"Let us consider calmly," said the Count La Marche, "what are to be the consequences if the king does come to the relief of this castle before we have taken it."

"Simply that we shall be besieged in the good city of Bourges," said the Count of Clermont, "and pass three or four months very pleasantly, with such diet and exercise as a besieged city usually affords."

"Merely to get rid of La Trimouille," said the Count La Marche.

The door suddenly opened as he spoke, and a gentleman, armed all but the head, entered in haste. "I beg your pardon, my lords," he said; "but I have thought fit to bring you instant intelligence that trumpets have been heard in the direction of Pressavoix, and some of the peasantry report that the king is there with a large force."

"So soon!" said Richmond.

"Got between us and Paris!" said the Count of Clermont.

"The very movement is a reproach, my lords," replied De Brecy. "It shows that the king, unhappily, has been led to infer, from the surprise of Bourges, that three of the noblest men in France are in league with the common adversary. Oh, wipe away such a stain from your names, I beseech you! Send somebody to the king to make representations, if nothing more; and let not the Englishmen see true Frenchmen shedding each other's blood, while they are riding triumphant over the land. My life for it, if you have any real grievances, they will be redressed when properly represented."

"It is false!" cried Richmond, vehemently, catching at some of De Brecy's words, and not heeding the rest. "We have no league with the enemy. We are faithful vassals of the crown of France; but we can be loyal to the king without being servile to his minister."

"I doubt you not in the least, my lord," replied De Brecy. "Had I believed you disloyal, I never would have come hither. I have sought but to show you what language your actions speak,

without ever questioning the truth and, fidelity that is in your heart. All I beseech you now to do, is to send some one at once to the king to negotiate terms of accommodation, and to show the loyalty you feel, before passion lead you into absolute treason."

"I think the proposal is a very good one," said the Count La Marche. "We can do no harm by negotiating."

"At all events, it will put our adversaries in the wrong," said Clermont. "What say you, Richmond?"

"Well, well," said the constable, "I say yea also, although I have known more great successes cut short, more mighty enterprises frustrated, more good hopes crushed by small negotiation than by battle or defeat. However, so be it. Let some one go, though, good faith, I know not who will be the man, being sure of one thing, that, were I Tremouille, and a sleek-faced negotiator were to come with pleasant words from Richmond, La Marche, or Clermont, I would write my answer on his forehead, and hang him on the first tree I found. When men have gone as far as we have, to my mind there is no going back. However, I yield to better judgment. Send some one, if you can find him."

Clermont and La Marche consulted together for a moment or two in a low tone, and, to say sooth, they seemed sorely puzzled. But at length La Marche looked up, saying, with some hesitation, "Perhaps Monsieur De Brecy would undertake the task?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the constable, slightly raising his hands and eyes.

"I will go willingly," replied De Brecy; "but it can only be, my lords, to open the negotiation for you. Carry it on I can not, as I am not of your faction. I shall require a letter under the hand of one or more of you assuring his majesty of the loyalty of your intentions, and begging him to appoint persons to confer with yourselves or your deputies in regard to certain grievances of which you complain. In this I think I shall succeed; but I will bear you back his majesty's answer, and after that can take no further share in the affair."

"What, then," exclaimed the constable, in a tone of affected surprise, "you do not propose to rise upon our tombs to higher honor and preferment?"

"Not in the least," replied De Brecy. "I am here, even at this present moment, merely as the envoy of Monsieur De Blondel, who sent me to you, as this authority will show."

"Pooh, pooh!" said Richmond, in a contemptuous tone. "De Blondel has no wits either for the conception or the execution of such projects. But one thing I must exact, Monsieur De Brecy: if we send you to the king, you must hold no consultations in the castle before you go."

De Brecy meditated for a moment, and then replied, "See Monsieur De Blondel I must, my lord; for I came from him to you, and must render him an account of what I have done. That account, however, may be very short. I can have him called to the barriers, and any one of you may hear what passes. I must, however, have horses and some of my train."

"Be it so," said the constable. "I will go with you. You, Clermont, are a scribe, so write the letter to the king. It will be ready when we come back. Doubtless you will make it dutiful enough, and you need not say, unless you wish it, that Richmond is the only obstacle."

With this sneer he rose, put his bonnet on his head, and accompanied De Brecy out of the room. As they went he said little, and at the barrier, both while Jean Charost waited for Blondel's coming and during their short conference, stood silent, with his arms crossed upon his breast. The governor of the castle, indeed, noticed the constable first, saying, "Give you good-night, my lord;" but Richmond only bent his head gravely in reply, and spoke but once during the whole interview, saying, when Jean Charost had given directions regarding his horses and men, "Send them down to Jacques Cœur's house, De Blondel, and that as quick as may be, for fear La Marche should have time to change his mind, and Clermont to fill his letter so full of tropes that no one can understand it."

CHAPTER XLVI.

The town and the castle were quiet; the hateful sound of the rattling cannon was heard no more; *pierrier*, *veuglaire*,[4] and culverin were still, and the drum and the trumpet sounded not. When Agnes looked out of the high window of the great round tower, after a sleep which had remained unbroken by the clang of war longer than usual, she could almost have supposed that

every thing was peaceful around. The morning sun shone brightly, the morning air was sweet and fresh, few soldiers appeared upon the walls of the castle, there was no strife seen going on in the streets, and it was only the sight of a barricade immediately below the town gate of the citadel, and a breast-work of earth some way further down, with half a dozen soldiers loitering about each, that kept up the memory of a struggle.

Although she knew not the cause, Agnes was well pleased; for the very quiet stillness was a relief, restoring to the mind calmness and hope. But Agnes's hopes had now taken one particular direction, and her first thought was, "As there is no active struggle going on, dear Jean will be with us soon this morning."

But Jean Charost came not. An hour passed--an hour beyond the usual time of his coming--and both his mother and Agnes began to feel alarm. At length they sent down to inquire; but the answer brought up was, he had gone out on the preceding night, and had not yet returned.

Had the wars and contentions which had raged through the rest of France prevailed in the neighborhood of Bourges--had Madame da Brecy and Agnes been accustomed to the scenes of strife and confusion which reigned in the rest of the country--had they been drilled, as it were, and disciplined to hourly uncertainty, they might have felt little or no alarm. But Berri had been nearly free from the evils that scourged the rest of France, and a wandering troop of Royalist cavalry, or the sudden inroad of a small band of English or Burgundians, causing them to raise the draw-bridge and drop the portcullis, was all they knew of the dangers of the times. Even during the short period they had spent in the citadel of Bourges, however, Jean Charost had always found means to spend a short part of each day with them; and although his not coming at the usual hour might not have caused much apprehension, the reply that he had gone forth from the castle, and not returned, agitated them both.

The alarm of Agnes, however, was much more than that of Madame De Brecy. The aged feel this kind of apprehension, from many causes, much less than the young. Cares and griefs harden the spirit to endure. Each sorrow has its stiffening influence. Besides, as we approach the extreme term of life, we are led to value it less highly--to estimate it properly. When we contemplate it from the flowery beginning of our days, oh, what a rich treasury of golden hours it seems! and we think every one like us has the same dower. But as we look back at it when our portion is nearly spent, we see how little really serviceable to happiness it has procured, and we judge of others as ourselves. A friend dies; and, though we may grieve, we think that we may soon meet again. A friend is in danger, and we feel the less alarm, from a knowledge that in losing life he loses little--that a few years more or less are hardly dust in the balance, and that if he be taken away, it is but that he goes from an inn somewhat near us to his home further off.

Agnes was very anxious. Her's was a quick imagination, active either in the service of joy or sorrow; and she fancied all that might have occurred, and much that was not likely. At one time she was inclined to believe that the commander of the castle was deceiving Madame De Brecy and herself, anxious to save them pain--that Jean Charost had been killed, and that De Blondel would not tell them. She little knew how lightly a hardened soldier could deal with such a matter. Then, reasoning against her fears, she thought that De Brecy must have gone forth upon a sally, and been made prisoner, and memory brought back all the sorrows that had followed Azincourt. But worst of all was the uncertainty, the toilsome laboring of thought after some definite conclusion--the ever-changing battle between hope and fear, in which fear was generally triumphant. She sat at the high window, gazing over the country round, and watching the different roads within sight. Now she saw a group coming along toward the gates; but after eager scanning, it proved nothing but some peasants bringing in provisions for the soldiery. Then an indistinct mass was seen at a distance; but long ere it reached Bourges, it turned away in a different direction. Each moment increased her anxiety and alarm. One hour--two, went by. Again she saw some one coming, and again was disappointed, and the long-repressed tears rose in her eyes, the sobs with which she could struggle no longer burst from her lips.

"Agnes, Agnes my child, come hither," cried Madame De Brecy; and rising from her seat, Agnes cast herself upon her knees beside Jean Charost's mother, and hid her streaming eyes upon her lap.

"What is it, my dear Agnes?" asked Madame De Brecy, much moved. "Tell me, my child; what agitates you thus? Tell me your feelings--all your feelings, my Agnes. Surely I have been to you ever as a mother: conceal nothing from me."

"Why does he not come?" asked Agnes, in a voice hardly audible. "Oh, dear mother, I fear he is ill--he is hurt--perhaps he is--"

"Nay, nay," replied Madame De Brecy, "you have no cause for such agitation, Agnes. A soldier can not command his own time, nor can he, amid many important tasks, always find the opportunity of letting those he loves best know his movements, even to relieve their anxiety. A soldier's wife, my child," she added, putting her arm gently round the kneeling girl, "must learn to bear such things with patience and hope--nay, more, must learn to conceal even the anxiety she must feel, in order to cast no damp upon her husband's spirits, to shackle none of his energies, and to add nothing to his sorrow of parting even with herself. Would you like to be a soldier's wife, my Agnes?"

"I know not what I should like," answered Agnes, without raising her head; but then she added quickly, as if her heart reproached her for some little insincerity, "Yes, yes, I should; but then I should like him to be a soldier no longer."

A faint smile came upon Madame De Brecy's lip, and she was devising another question to bring forth some further confession, when through the open window came the sound of a trumpet, and Agnes, starting up, darted back to her place of watching.

Oh, how eagerly she dashed away the tears that dimmed her eyes; and the next instant she exclaimed, with a radiant, rosy look of joy, which rendered all further confession needless, "It is he--it is he! There are a great number with him--some twenty or thirty; but I can see him quite plainly. It is he!"

Hardly five minutes elapsed, and Agnes had barely time to clear her face of the traces of emotion it displayed, when Jean Charost's step sounded on the stairs, and the next moment he was in the room.

Very strange, Agnes did not fly to meet him. Agnes uttered no word of gratulation. But she stood and trembled; for there are sometimes things as full of awe discovered, within the heart, as any which can strike our outward senses, and a vail had been withdrawn which exposed to her sight things which, when first seen, were fearful as well as dazzling.

"Joy, dear mother--joy, dearest Agnes," said De Brecy, holding out a hand to each. "Your prison hours are over. A truce is proclaimed, negotiations for reconciliation going on, and you have nothing to do but mount and ride away with me. Quick with your preparations, dearest mother--quick, my sweet Agnes!"

"Do not hurry her, my son," said Madame De Brecy, kindly. "She has been very much terrified by your long absence, and has hardly yet recovered. She shall go in the litter with me, and I will tell Suzette to get all ready for her."

"Terrified for me, dearest Agnes!" said Jean Charost, as his mother left the room; and he took her hand in his, and gazed into her face. "Did they not give you the message I sent last night?"

"No," answered Agnes, in a low tone. "They only told us this morning, when we sent to inquire, that you had gone forth, and had not returned. How could they be so cruel. One word from you would have saved us hours of pain."

"You are trembling now," said Jean Charost, still holding her hand. "What would you do, dear Agnes, if you were a soldier's wife?"

"Your mother asked me the same," answered Agnes, with a faint smile, "and I told her I did not know. I can but make you the same answer, Jean. I suppose all a woman can do is to love and tremble."

"And could you love a soldier?" asked De Brecy, in a very earnest tone.

"Oh that I could." murmured Agnes, trembling more than ever.

Jean Charost led her toward a seat, and as she trembled still, and he feared she would fall, he put his arm around her waist, merely to support her. It had been there a thousand times before, in years long past, when she had stood by his side or sat upon his knee; but the touch was different now to both of them. It made his heart thrill and beat; it made hers nearly stop altogether.

She was so pale, he thought she would faint; and instinct prompted that the safest way was that of the proverb--to speak true words in jest. So, in a gay tone, he said, as he seated himself beside her, still holding his arm round her waist, "Well, I'll tell you, dearest Agnes, how it shall be. When you have refused some half a dozen other soldiers, you shall marry Jean Charost; and I will give you leave to love as much as you like, and to tremble as little as possible."

Agnes suddenly raised her eyes to his face with a look of earnest inquiry, and then her cheek became covered with crimson, and she leaned her head upon his bosom.

She said nothing, however, and he asked, in a low and gentle tone, "Shall it be so, dearest Agnes?"

"No," she answered, wiping away some tears. "I do not wish to refuse any one else."

"Ah, then I must make haste," said Jean Charost, "for fear you should accept any one else. Will you be my wife, my own sweetest love?"

Again she answered not; but her small, soft fingers pressed gently on his hand.

"Nay, but I must have a word," said Jean Charost, drawing her closer to him; "but one word, dear girl. That little hand can not speak so clearly as those dear lips."

"Oh, do not tease me," said Agnes, raising her head for a moment, and taking a glance at his

face. "I hardly know whether you are bantering me or not."

"Bantering you!" said Jean Charost, in a graver tone. "No, no, my love. I am not one to banter with your happiness or my own; and mine, at least, is staked upon this issue. For all that the world contains of joyful or of fortunate, I would not peril yours, Agnes. For this, when Monsieur De Brives sought your hand, I hid my love for you in my own heart, lest ancient regard and youthful fondness for an old dear friend, should bias your judgment toward one unsuited to you. For this, I would fain have let you see a little more of life before I bound you by any tie to one much older than yourself. But I can refrain no longer, Agnes; and, having spoken, I must know my fate. Will you be mine, sweet love?"

"Yes, yes--yes!" said Agnes, throwing her arm round his neck. "I am yours. I ever have been yours. I ever will be yours. You can not make me otherwise, do as you will."

"I will never try," replied Jean Charost, kissing her. "Dear mother," he continued, as Madame De Brecy re-entered the room, "here is now your daughter, indeed. I know you can not love her more than you do; but you will love her now for my sake, as well as her own."

Madame De Brecy held wide her arms, and Agnes flew to her bosom. "My child, my dear child," said the old lady. "But calm yourself, Agnes; here is Martin Grille, come to say the litter is ready. Let us go."

"Ah, I thought how it would be," said Martin Grille to himself. "I never saw dear friendships between a man under forty and a girl under sixty end otherwise. My lord, the litter is ready, and all the men-at-arms you named. The rest, however, seem somewhat surly at being left behind; for I think they have had enough of being besieged. I am sure I have. I shall not get that big gun out of my head for the next month."

"Tell them there is a truce for three days," said Jean Charost; "and if, at the end of that time, war is not at an end, I will return and join them. We must not strip the castle of its defenders."

In a few minutes Jean Charost and his little cavalcade were beyond the walls of Bourges; but Madame De Brecy remarked that they did not take the way toward their own well-loved home, but, passing the River Langis, directed their course toward Pressavoix. "Where are you taking us, Jean?" she said to her son, who was riding beside the litter.

"To the castle of Felard, my dear mother," replied Jean Charost. "I promised the queen that I would bring you and Agnes thither for a day. I am in great favor at court now," he added, gayly, "for having had some share in bringing about this negotiation. The king, indeed, seems somewhat moody and irritable, but not with me; and he insists that I shall take part in the conferences to be held this night at Pressavoix. Nay, dearest mother; no objections on the score of dress and equipment; for, let me tell you, the court is in traveling guise as well as we are, and you will find more soiled and dusty apparel there than we bring into it."

Madame De Brecy was in some trepidation; for it was long, long since she had moved in courts, and the retired and quiet life which she had passed for years unfitted her for such scenes. She made no opposition, however; and, in somewhat less than half an hour, the little cavalcade began to fall in with the outposts of the king's army. There was no difficulty in passing them, however; for, from the moment the truce was proclaimed, the soldiers on both posts concluded that some agreement would be arrived at between the different factions, and began to mingle together with as much gayety and good-will as if they had never drawn the sword against each other. Groups were seen galloping about the fields in different directions, standing and talking together upon the road, riding rapidly about to and fro between Pressavoix and Bourges, and the scene presented all the gayety and brilliancy of war, without any of its terrors.

Shortly after passing the second line of posts upon the high-road, Jean Charost led the way down a narrow lane, which seemed to plunge into a deep, heavy wood. All was now quiet and solitary, and nothing but the waving branches of great old trees was seen around for nearly half a mile. The undulations of the ground were so slight that no eminence gave a view over the prospect, and all that varied their course as they advanced were the strongly-contrasted lines of light and shade that crossed the road from time to time. At length, however, the lane turned sharply, an open space was presented to view, and the ancient château of Felard, which has long since given place to the present modern structure, rose upon the sight in the midst. It had towers and turrets, walls, ditch, and draw-bridge, like most large country houses at that time; but it was by no means defensible against any regular force, and was only chosen for the residence of the court on account of the accommodation it afforded. Charles VII. had not yet learned to dread the approach of his subjects to his person, to see poison in his food, and an enemy in every stranger, and the gates were wide open, without guards, and nothing but a few pages in attendance, lingering about.

Descending in the outer court, Jean Charost assisted his mother and Agnes to alight, and then led them on to the principal entrance of the building, where they were shown into a vacant chamber, to wait the pleasure of the queen.

"Have the courtesy," said Jean Charost to the page, "to let Messire Jacques Cœur know that I am here, after you have informed the queen;" and, turning to his mother, whose face brightened

at the name of her old friend, he added, "I only saw him for an instant last night; but his presence was most serviceable in obtaining for me speedy audience."

At the end of about five minutes, the door opened, and a lady entered alone, the richness of whose apparel, and perhaps still more, the brilliance of her beauty, made Madame De Brecy suppose that she beheld the queen. Jean Charost, however, addressed her as Mademoiselle De St. Geran, and introduced his mother and Agnes to her, not altogether without some embarrassment in his manner.

Agnes Sorel did not seem to remark it, however, spoke frankly and kindly to Madame De Brecy, and then, turning to Agnes, gazed upon her with a look of deep interest. "So this is your Agnes," she said, turning to Jean Charost. "Oh, De Brecy, do not bring her into courts. They are not places for such a flower as this. Is not that a hard speech, my dear young lady? Doubtless, your young imagination has painted courts as very brilliant places; but I myself know, from sad experience, that they are fields where little grows but sorrows, disappointments, and regrets."

"I have no inclination, indeed, madam, ever to mingle with them," replied Agnes.

But Agnes Sorel was by this time in a deep fit of meditation, and seemed not to hear the fair girl's reply. After a minute's silence, however, she turned quickly to Jean Charost, and said, "Why did you name her Agnes?"

"Youthful regard for yourself, I believe, was the chief motive," he answered, frankly. "I had seen you, dear lady, in many a trying situation. You had generously, nobly befriended me, even at that time, and I wished this dear girl to be like you."

Agnes shook her head slowly and sorrowfully, with an air which seemed to speak as plainly as words, "You wish so no longer." Suddenly, however, she roused herself, and said, with a sweet smile, "I had almost forgotten my duty. Her majesty has commanded me to bring you to her apartments. If you will follow me, Madame De Brecy, I will show you the way, and afterward will show you your lodging."

CHAPTER XLVII.

Just behind the old stone cross on the green of the little village of St. Privé, about half a mile south of Pressavoix, a large pavilion was erected, not far from the bank of the river. Between the two poles which supported it was spread a great table covered with writing materials, with two or three candlesticks placed in no very seemly order. Two men, who appeared to be clerks, were seated at the table mending pens, and venting dry jokes at one another; and round about the pavilion, at the distance of about fifty yards on either side, patrolled a number of archers of the King's Guard, to keep prying eyes and curious ears afar. For about a quarter of an hour, the tent remained vacant of all but the clerks; but at the end of that time a group of several gentlemen entered it, and took their place on the northern side of the table, not sitting down, but standing together conversing earnestly, though in low tones. Shortly after, Jean Charost and Monsieur De Blondel appeared, and, joining the others, took part in their conversation. Then came Richmond, La Marche, and Clermont, with several other gentlemen of their faction; but these remained to the south of the table, although an occasional word or two passed between them and those on the other side.

"Does his majesty come in person?" said Richmond at length, in his deep-toned voice.

"On my life, I know not," replied Blondel; "but, of course, I should suppose not, my lord constable."

"Then what do we wait for?" asked Richmond, again.

"Monsieur De la Trimouille is, I believe, commissioned by the king to treat--" said Jean Charost; "at least, I heard so, my lord, while I was at the castle of Felard."

"By the Lord, he must come soon, then," said Richmond, with a discontented air, "or no treating will there be at all; for I am not going to lackey a Trimouille, and wait upon his lordship's pleasure."

A few minutes more passed in gloomy silence, and then the sound of horses coming fast was heard upon the road, through the canvas walls of the tent.

The next instant, La Trimouille himself, a tall, powerful, handsome man, entered the pavilion,

leaning on the arm of Juvenel de Royans, his countryman and connection, and followed by Dunois and several others.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, for keeping you waiting," he said, with the blandest possible smile; "but I had to hear his majesty's pleasure, in order that there might be no doubt or difficulty upon our part. Let us be seated, and discuss this matter."

Each one took his seat at the table without much order, the party of the king on one side--for kings were at heads of parties in those, days--and the party of the three counts on the other. A pause ensued, which seemed to fret the spirit of Richmond; for at length he spoke, after giving a snort like a wild horse, exclaiming, "Some one speak--in Heaven's name! What are we here for? Not to sit silent, I suppose. Speak, Trimouille!"

"Right willingly, my lord constable," replied Trimouille. "You are aware you are in arms against the king your sovereign."

"False to begin with," cried Richmond. "I am in arms against favorites and court flatterers--in arms to restore to the king the right use of his own authority, for the good of the nation and the safety of the land."

"In arms against me, you would say," replied Trimouille, with a dark spot on his brow which belied the smile upon his lips. "But let us hear what you complain of. I know of nothing done by me which can justify such acts as yours. However, if you have cause, state it before these gentlemen here present, who are commissioned by his majesty, as well as myself, to inquire into this matter, and will report to him every word you say without gloss or comment, such as you accuse me of making. What are your griefs, my lords?"

"Heavy enough," said Richmond, sternly. "Your ingratitude, Trimouille, I could pass over; but--"

"My ingratitude!" exclaimed the king's minister. "I know not that you have given me cause to be grateful or ungrateful."

"Did I not place you where you are?" demanded Richmond. "Did I not remove better men than yourself to place you there? Did I not force Louvet from the council to make room for you, and punish the audacity of Beaulieu--"

"And drown Giac," said the Count of Clermont, with a sarcastic smile; and all around the table laughed, except Trimouille himself, who had married the dangerous widow of the deceased nobleman. He waved his hand, however, saying, "This is all trifling. I hold the place I occupy by the king's favor and approval, and by the act of no other man. But you are in arms, you say, for the public service. What has been done to give you a color for this pretense?"

"I will tell you speedily," replied Richmond, bitterly. "You have frustrated all my plans for the service of the state. During this last campaign in Brittany, you kept me idle before Pontorson, for want of men and money, or it would have fallen a week before it did. The same was the case before St. James, and now, for the last four months, not a livre have I been able to wring from your hands, either for my own pay or to keep my men on foot."

"You have been able to keep them on foot to war against your monarch," said Trimouille, bitterly; "but I will meet the charge with frankness and truth. I have not sent you money when you demanded it, for the same reason that I did not send any to my lord the Count of La Marche here, to whom I eagerly wished to send it--simply because I had it not to send."

"A mere pretense," exclaimed Richmond, striking the table with his fist, and rising as he spoke. "We have found in the papers of Jacques Cœur, which we seized in Bourges, proof positive that a large sum was sent to Chinon at the very time you refused my demand."

"Which was all forestalled before it came," said La Trimouille. But his voice was drowned by the angry tones of the constable, who exclaimed, "If we are again to be put off with such pitiful excuses as that, negotiations can produce no good;" and he turned to leave the tent.

The counts of La Marche and Clermont rose also; but Jean Charost exclaimed, "Stay, I beseech you, my lords. Consider what you are doing--casting away the safety of France, giving her up a prey to the enemy, not only sacrificing your loyalty to your king, but your duty to your country. If there be one particle of patriotism, or of generosity, or of honor in you, stay and listen to what Monsieur La Trimouille has to propose."

The word "propose" was happily chosen, holding out vague ideas of advantages to be obtained which affected both Clermont and La Marche.

"What shall we do, Richmond?" said the latter, in a hesitating tone.

"Stay, if you will," said the constable, gruffly. "You can act for me, if you choose to remain. I shall go; for I only lose my temper."

Thus saying, he quitted the tent. La Marche and Clermont hesitated for a moment, and then

returned to their seats; the latter observing, with a quiet sneer, that the constable lately gave them more fire than light.

"Well, gentlemen," said Trimouille, in his most placable tones, "now this hot spirit is gone, we are likely, meseems, to come to some result. Pray let me hear your demands."

The Count La Marche turned a somewhat puzzled look toward the Count of Clermont, and the latter laughed gayly.

"Speak, I beseech you," said La Trimouille. "What are your demands?"

"Why, the first of them we decided upon," replied the Count of Clermont, "was one so unpleasant to utter, that it sticks in the throat of La Marche here--simply your removal from the council of the king, Monsieur La Trimouille."

"I will not stand in the way," replied the minister, with the utmost frankness of manner. "No personal interest of mine shall prevent an accommodation. But upon this point the king alone can, of course, decide. It shall be referred to him, exactly as you state it. Let us pass on to other things. What more do you demand?"

"Nay, we would rather hear what you have to propose," said the Count of Clermont, who began to doubt how the negotiations would turn.

"I will willingly take the lead," said Trimouille; "for his majesty's intentions are kind and generous. First, however, it is necessary to state how matters stand, in order to show that it is by no compulsion the king acts, but merely from his gracious disposition. Here are three noblemen, two of them closely allied to the blood royal, take arms against their sovereign at a time when disunion is likely to be fatal to the state. The two I have mentioned, his majesty believes to have been misled by the third, an imperious, violent man, overestimating both his services and his abilities--"

"Nay, nay," cried the Count La Marche.

"Hear me out," said La Trimouille; "a man who pretends to dictate to the king who shall be his ministers, and publicly boasts of placing and displacing them at his pleasure. These three noblemen actually seize upon a royal city, and besiege the royal garrison in the citadel. The king, judging it necessary to check such proceedings at once, marches against them as rebels--and in great force. To speak plainly, my lords, you have five thousand men in and about Bourges; he has ten thousand men between you and Paris, five thousand more arrived an hour ago at La Vallée, and a large force under La Hire is marching up from Chateauroux."

He paused, and the countenances of the constable's party fell immensely. However, the Count of Clermont replied, with his usual sarcastic smile, "A perilous situation as you represent it, my good lord; but methinks I have heard an old fable which shows that men and lions may paint pictures differently."

"You will find my picture the true one, Clermont," said La Trimouille, coolly. "I have I taken care not to exaggerate it in the least, and both the generosity with which the king treats you, and the firmness with which his majesty will adhere to his determinations, will prove to you that he is convinced of these facts likewise. He is desirous, however, that Frenchmen should never be seen shedding Frenchmen's blood, and therefore he proposes, in mitigation of all griefs, real or supposed, and also as a mark of his love and regard for his good cousin, the Count of La Marche, to bestow upon him the fief of Besançon. To you, Monsieur De Clermont, he offers to give the small town of Montbrison, or some other at your choice, of equal value. To the other noblemen and gentlemen I see around you, and whose names were furnished to me this morning, each a benefice, the list of which I have here; and all this upon the sole condition that they return to their loyalty, and serve the crown against the common enemy, with zeal, fidelity, and obedience."

"And the Count of Richmond," said La Marche. I

"What for the constable?" asked the Count of Clermont.

A heavy frown came upon La Trimouille's brow. He had remarked keenly the effect produced upon the constable's companions by the offers made, and saw that the faction was in reality broken up; and he replied, in a slow, stern tone, "Permission for him to retire unmolested to Parthenay, and live in peace and privacy."

A dead silence pervaded all the tent, which was first broken by Jean Charost, who saw both peril and injustice in the partiality just shown, and attributed it rightly to La Trimouille's personal enmity toward his former friend.

"Nay, my good lord," he exclaimed. "Surely his majesty will be moved to some less strict dealing with the lord constable."

"What, you sir!" cried La Trimouille, in a sharp and angry tone.

"Yes, my good lord," replied De Brecy. "I had his majesty's own commands to be present here,

and, as he said, to moderate between contending claims, and I shall feel it my duty to urge him strongly to reconsider the question in regard to the Count of Richmond, whom I do not mean to defend for the part he has taken with these two noble counts; but who has formerly served the crown well, and is only a sharer in the same faults as themselves."

"You had better be silent, Monsieur De Brecy," said La Trimouille, with a lowering brow.

"My lord, I was not sent here to be silent," said De Brecy, "and, in speaking, I only obey the king's commands."

"Then go to the king, and hear what he says now," said La Trimouille, putting on a more placable air. "I have seen him since yourself, and received his last directions. Go to him, I say; I am quite willing."

De Brecy fell into the trap. "I will," he said, rising. "If you will proceed with all other points, I will be back before you can conclude."

La Trimouille saw him depart with a smile; but no sooner heard his horse's feet, than, sure of his advantage, he hurried on all the proceedings of the conference, threw in an inducement here, promised a greater advantage there, employed all the means he had kept in reserve of working upon the selfishness of the constable's late confederates, and in less than twenty minutes had triumphed completely over faith, and friendship, and generosity to Richmond. He made the descent easy, however, by leaving all questions concerning the constable to be settled afterward, and succeeded in obtaining a written promise from La Marche and Clermont to return to their duty, and submit to the king's will, without any condition whatever in favor of Richmond.

His leave-taking was hasty as soon as this was accomplished; and, mounting his horse with all speed, he galloped back to Felard as fast as he could go. There, approaching the building by the back, he hurried up to the king's apartments, and inquired, eagerly, if Monsieur De Brecy had obtained admission.

"No, my lord," replied the attendant. "His majesty was fatigued, and lay down to rest for an hour. We, therefore, refused Monsieur De Brecy admission."

"You must not refuse me," said La Trimouille.

The man hesitated; but the minister passed him boldly, and knocked at a door on the opposite side of the ante-room. A moment after, he disappeared within, and then the murmur of conversation was heard, apparently eager, but not loud. At the end of some five minutes, La Trimouille looked out, saying to the attendants, "If Monsieur De Brecy returns to seek an audience, tell him his majesty will see him at the general reception this evening, for which he is invited;" and then drawing back, he closed the door.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Many are the perils of greatness, but among them all, there are few more disastrous than that of being subject continually to influences the most corrupt, which poison the stream of human action almost at the fountain-head. False representations, sneers, innuendoes, mis-statements, are ever fluttering about the heads of princes, guard themselves how they will against them; and I have seen the base, the treacherous, the coward, and the fool raised to office, honor, and emolument; the good, the wise, the just, and the true rejected, neglected, and despised by men, not feeble-minded, not corrupt themselves, but strong in intellect, clear of sight, and with the highest and the noblest purposes. Princes and powerful men can but, as others do, judge and decide from what they see and hear, and the very atmosphere around them is misty with falsehood, their very closet is an echo which repeats little else but lies.

There was a great hall in the château of Felard, and in it, about nine o'clock, were assembled many of the prime nobility of France. Gay habits were there, and handsome forms; and, being so numerous, the party of course comprised some who were good and wise. It consisted principally of men, indeed; but there were ladies likewise present--the queen herself, Agnes Sorel, several high dames of Berri, and ladies attending upon the court. The young king, graceful and handsome, stood at the upper end of the hall, by the side of his wife; and various guests from time to time advanced, spoke a few words to him, and passed on. All seemed gay and smiling. The news had spread around that the principal conditions of a treaty of accommodation with the late rebels had been signed, and joy and satisfaction at a result so greatly to be desired, yet which had been so little expected, spread a cheerfulness like sunshine over all. Little did he who had first suggested the steps which had led to such a conclusion, and had principally contributed to

their adoption, dream at that moment of the evil that awaited himself.

Jean Charost, after several persons of higher station than himself had passed the king's presence, advanced with a grave air from the end of the circle near which he stood. His countenance was calm and well assured, though thoughtful, and his eyes were raised direct to the monarch. He could see a dark cloud suddenly come upon Charles's face, and La Trimouille, who was at some little distance from the king, immediately drew nearer to him. The king bowed his head somewhat ungraciously in answer to the young nobleman's salutation, and then, seeing him pause without passing on, said, harshly, "What is it, Monsieur de Brecy? Speak, if you have any thing to say."

De Brecy instantly divined that the king had been prepossessed; but that ancient spirit in him, which had led him, when a mere boy with the Duke of Orleans, to speak his mind plainly, had not been beaten out of him, even by all the hard blows of the world, and he replied, with one glance at his mother and Agnes, who stood at a little distance from the queen, but whom he could have well wished absent, "I have something to say, sire, which I would not venture to say at present, had you not yourself appointed me this as my hour of audience."

The king slowly nodded his head, as if directing him to proceed; and Jean Charost continued, "To-night, by your commands, I took part in a conference at Pressavoix, and gladly found that your majesty was disposed to be most gracious to a number of your vassals and subjects who had ventured to take arms upon very shallow pretexts against your authority. Although no motive was necessary to explain your clemency, the motive which Monsieur La Trimouille did express, was to reunite all Frenchmen in the service of the country. One solitary exception was made in this act of grace and goodness, and that exception was against a nobleman who, whatever may have been his faults lately, has, in times past, served the crown with zeal, skill, and courage."

The frown was darkening more and more heavily on Charles's brow every moment; but he did not speak, and Jean Charost went on boldly, "I have ventured to believe, sire, that you might be led to mitigate the severity of your just anger against the constable, and to consider former services as well as present faults, to remember how useful he has been, and may be still to France, and might be even induced to extend to him the same grace and favor which you hold out to his comrades in offense."

"Did you hear my will expressed by Monsieur La Trimouille?" demanded the king, sternly, and in a loud tone.

"I heard what he was pleased to say was your will, sire," replied De Brecy; "but I presumed to differ with Monsieur La Trimouille, and to believe that by proper representations to your majesty, which I imagined had not been made, you might be brought to reconsider your decision, and be gracious in all, as well as in part."

"And you expressed that difference at the council-table?" said Charles.

"I did, sire," replied De Brecy, "judging it necessary to the safety of France to do so."

"For which, sir," said the king aloud, and using the imperious plural representing the many powers united in a king; "for which, sir, we banish you from our court and presence, and make you share the punishment of the fault you have defended. You did your best to frustrate our purposes intrusted to the execution of our minister. You nearly rendered abortive his efforts to bring about a pacification, necessary to the welfare of the country; and it is probable that, had you remained on the spot, that pacification would not have been accomplished. We would have you know, and all know, that we will be obeyed. We have punished his rebellion in the Count of Richmond more leniently, perhaps, than his offense required, taking into full consideration his former services, but weighing well the fact that he was the head and leader, the chief and instigator of the conspiracy, in which the rest were but his deluded followers. Unwarned by his example, you thought fit to oppose our will at our very council-table, and we therefore inflict on you the same punishment as on him. The only grace we can grant you is to leave you the choice of your retreat, within ten miles of which, wherever it may be, we require you to limit your movements. Say whither you will go."

The first part of the king's speech had surprised and confounded De Brecy; but he gradually recovered himself as the monarch went on. He had long seen that Trimouille had sought to establish an almost despotic authority over the court of France, and he easily divined that Charles was not speaking his own sentiments, but those of his minister. This was some consolation, and he had completely recovered himself before the king ended. It was more by chance, however, than any thing else that, thus suddenly called upon, he fixed on a place of retreat. "By your majesty's permission," he replied, "I will retire to Briare. I have, however, some weighty business to conclude, having been too much engaged in your majesty's service to visit De Brecy for several years. May I have permission to remain yet a few days in this part of the country?"

"We give you three days," said the king, coldly inclining his head.

"It will need every exertion to accomplish what I have to do in the time," answered Jean Charost, with much mortification in his tone. "I will, therefore, beg leave to retire to De Brecy

this very night. Come, my dear mother--come, Agnes," he continued, taking a step back.

"Hold!" cried the king. "Madame De Brecy, of course we do not oppose your departure with your son; but as for this young lady, we have had reason to believe very lately, that the right to her guardianship exists in us, rather than in Monsieur De Brecy. She must remain at our court, and under the protection of the queen, till such time, at least, as the matter is inquired into."

A red, angry glow spread over De Brecy's face; and Agnes herself was starting forward, as if to cling to him in that moment of anguish and indignation; but Agnes Sorel laid her hand upon her arm and held her back, whispering eagerly, "Do not oppose the king now. If you refrain, all may yet be well. Resist you can not, and opposition will be destruction."

"He has brought her up from her infancy, my lord the king," said Madame De Brecy, in an imploring tone. "I know of no one who could have so good a right to her guardianship as himself."

"Dare he venture to say that he has any right to her guardianship at all?" asked the king; "that that guardianship is his by blood, or that he has received it from one competent to give it?"

"Perhaps not, sire," replied De Brecy, boldly. "But I know of no one who has a better right than myself."

His eyes were flashing, his face heated, his whole frame trembling with emotion; and, with his free and possibly rash habit of expressing his thoughts, it is impossible to tell what he might have said; but Dunois and Juvenel de Royans took him by the arms, and forcibly drew him away from the king's presence toward a door at the end of the line of ladies and gentlemen, on the king's right hand.

As this painful and exciting scene had proceeded, the open space before the monarch had been gradually crowded, the ring around had become narrower and narrower, and De Brecy was soon lost to the monarch's eyes in the number of persons about him. Dunois paused for a moment there, urging something to which Jean Charost gave no heed; but nearly at the same instant a small hand was laid upon his arm, and the voice of Agnes Sorel said, in a low, earnest tone, "Leave her to me, De Brecy; leave her to me. I know all you fear; but, by my Christian faith, I will protect her, and guard her from all evil. Here, here--give your mother your arm; and, for Heaven's sake, for your own sake, for her sake, do not irritate the king."

De Brecy heard no more; but, with the heaviest heart that had ever rested in his bosom, suffered Dunois to lead him from the hall.

Juvenel de Royans followed, and, when they leached the vestibule beyond, he wrung De Brecy's hand hard, saying, "This is my fault--all my foolish chattering. But, by the Lord, I will set it right before I have done, or I will cut my cousin Trimouille's heart out of his body;" and with those words he turned sharply and re-entered the hall.

CHAPTER XLIX.

For Jean Charost, a period of lethargy--I may almost call it--succeeded the scene last described. A dull, idle, heavy dream--a torpor of the spirit as well as of the body. It is not the man of many emotions who has the deepest: it is he who has the power, either from temperament or force of character, to resist them. His spirit has not been worn by them; his heart has not been soiled by them; and when at length they seize upon him, and conquer him, they have something to grasp.

It was thus with him. In early life he had never known love. The circumstances in which he had been placed, the constant occupation, the frequent moving from place to place, and the absence of any of those little incidents which plant and nourish passion, had left his life without the record of any thing more than a mere passing inclination. But when love seized upon him, it took possession of him entirely, filled him for a few days with hope and joy, and now plunged him into that spiritless lethargy. The events which were passing around him in France came upon him as a vision. Like the ancient prophet, he saw things in a trance, but having his eyes open; and they must be pictured to the reader in the same way that they appeared to him.

A large, fine city, on a beautiful river, is besieged by a numerous army. Its fortifications are old and insufficient, the troops within it scanty, the preparations small. The cannon thunder upon it, mines explode beneath its walls, the enemy march to its assault; but they are driven back, and Orleans remains untaken. There is a bridge, the key, as it were, to the city. It is attacked, defended, attacked again. An old castle seems its only protection. The castle is attacked, and

taken by the enemy; and a man of magnificent presence, calm, and grave, and gentle, mounts the highest tower therein, to direct his soldiery against the city. Suddenly, the stone ball of a large cannon strikes the window at which he stands; and Salisbury is carried away to die a few hours after of his wounds.

The city still holds out; the attacks have diminished in fierceness; but round about the devoted place the English lines are drawn on every side, pressing it closer and closer, till famine begins to reign within the walls. There is a battle in the open fields, some miles from the besieged place. Wagons and tumbrils are in the midst, and gallant men, with the lily banner over them, fight bravely; but fight in vain. They fly--at length they fly. The bravest hearts in France turn from the fatal field, and all is rout, and slaughter, and defeat. Surely, surely Orleans must fall, and all the open country beyond the Loire submit to the invader.

Let us turn away our eyes from this scene to another. The king's council has assembled at Chinon; the news of the defeat has reached them. Hope, courage, constancy are lost. They advise their monarch to abandon Orleans to its fate; to abandon Berri and Touraine, and make his last struggle in the mountains of Auvergne. The counsels of despair had been spoken, nor is it wonderful that a young man fond of pleasure, ruled by favorites, weary of strife, contention, and cabal, should listen to them with a longing for repose, and tranquillity, and enjoyment. Oh, how often is it, in this working-day world of ours, that the most active, the most energetic, the most enduring, thirsts, with a burning thirst, such as the wanderer of the desert hardly knows, for the cool refreshment of a little peace. He stands in his own cabinet, not quite alone; for there is a beautiful figure kneeling at his feet. She raises her eyes to his face with looks of love and tenderness, yet full of energy and fire. "Never, never, my Charles!" she says. "Never, my king and master! Oh, never let it be said that France's king embraced the counsels of fear, rather than of courage; fled without need--turned from his enemy before he was defeated! It is God's will that gives the victory; but it is for you to struggle for it. What if the courage of the people of Orleans faint? what if a battle is lost? what if the English pass the Loire!"

"All this is true, or will be true within a month, my Agnes," replied the king, in a tone of deep despondency. "I can not prevent it. Suppose it happened; what can I do then?"

"Mount your horse. Set your lance in rest. Give your standard to the wind. Call France around you. March against the enemy--fight--fight--and, if need be, die! I will go with you--die with you, if it must be so. There is nothing for me but you and France on earth. God pardon us that it is so; but I have given, and you have taken from me all else."

Charles shook his head mournfully; and Agnes rose slowly from her knees, and drew a step back. "Then pardon me, my lord," she said, "if I retire from your royal court to that of his highness the Duke of Bedford. It was predicted to me long ago, by a learned astrologer, that I should belong to the greatest prince of my time. I fondly fancied I had found him; but I must have been mistaken." And she retired still further, as if to quit the room.

"Stay, Agnes, stay!" cried Charles. "Stay, if you love me!"

Agnes sprang back again, and cast her arms around his neck. "Love you!" she cried; "God knows I love you but too well; and though our love has humbled, debased, and dishonored me, if it is to last, it must raise, and elevate, and animate you. For my sake, Charles, if not for your own, cast the base thoughts which others have suggested far away. Take the nobler part which your own heart would prompt; dare all, encounter all, and save France, yourself, and Agnes; for be sure I will never outlive the freedom of my country. There is many a noble heart yet beating in our France. There is many a strong arm yet ready to strike for her; and it needs but the appearance of the king in the field, and proofs of strong determination upon his part, to quell the factions which distract the land, and gather every noble spirit round his king. Whatever your love may have done to injure me, oh let my love for you lead you to safety, honor, and renown."

"Well, be it so," cried Charles, infected by her enthusiasm. "I swear by all I hold most sacred, I will not go back before the enemy. Let him cross the Loire--let Orleans fall--let every traitor leave me--let every faint heart counsel flight. I will meet him in the field, peril all on one last blow, free France, or die!"

Let us back to the besieged city again. Gaunt famine is walking in the streets; eager-faced men, and hollow-eyed women are seen prowling about, and vainly seeking food. Closer, closer draw the lines about the place, the bridge is broken down, as a last resource; but the enemy's cannon thunder still, and the hands are feeble that point those upon the walls. Suddenly there is a cry that help is coming, that food is on the way; food, and an army to force an entrance. There is a feeble flash of joy and hope; but it soon goes out. Men ask, Who is it leads the host? who brings the promised succor? A woman--a young girl of seventeen years of age--some say a saint--and some a fool; and many weep with bitter disappointment.

Nevertheless, on the day named, the ramparts are crowded, people go up to the towers and to the belfries. What do they see? A fleet of boats coming up the river, an army marching up the bank, lances and banners, pennons and bright arms are there enough. But still the hearts of the inhabitants, though beating with interest and expectation, hardly give place to hope. They have seen French armies as bright and gay fly before those hardy islanders who are now marching out of their lines to attack the escorting force. They have seen succor as near them intercepted on

the way. But right onward toward them moves the host of France. Quicker, quicker--at the march, at the trot, at the gallop. Band mingles with band, spear crosses spear; the flag of France advances still; the boats sweep on and reach the city; and shouts of joy ring through the air--shouts, but not shouts so loud, nor warm, nor triumphant as those which greet that young girl as she rides through the streets of the city she has succored.

But she was not content to succor; she came to deliver; and forth she goes again to plant her banner between the walls and the besieging lines, and there she sleeps, lulled by the roar of the artillery.

Again the Maid of Arc is in the field. Again the standard of France is in her hand, and on she bears it from success to success. The enemy's forts are taken, the lines swept, the castle of the bridge recaptured, Orleans delivered, and her name united with it in everlasting memory.

Joy, hope, confidence returned to France, and men's hearts were opened to each other which had long been closed.

Gergeau, Beaugency, and many another small town was taken, and across a country delivered from his enemies, the King of France marched on to take his crown at Rheims.

CHAPTER L.

Flitting like shadows in a mist, came many a great event in the history of France about that time, hardly known or appreciated by any except those who were the immediate actors in them; but amid them all, with a heavy heart, and a dejected spirit, Jean Charost remained in exile at Briare. Why he had chosen that small town for the place of his retreat, he himself hardly knew; for although no human action is probably without its motive, some motives are so quick and lightning-like, that all traces of them are instantly lost even in the cloud from which they issue. It might be that he had been thinking deeply of the words of Juvenel de Royans, from the second night of the siege of Bourges till the moment when his sentence of banishment from the court was spoken, and that he had fully made up his mind to go thither sooner or later to converse with the Abbot Lomelini. No other inducement, indeed, could be imagined; for Briare was then, as now, a very dull small place, with its single street, and hardly defensible walls, and nothing to recommend it but the smiling banks of the Loire, and the fine old abbey at the highest point of the whole town. Dull enough it was, in truth, to Jean Charost, without one object of interest, one source of occupation. Filial love, too, had deprived him of the consolation of his mother's company. The journey from De Brecy to Briare he thought was too long, the difficulties and dangers in the way too numerous for her to encounter them without risk to her health or to her life, and he had persuaded her to remain, and keep the management of his estates in her own hands. Thus, with a few servants, he remained at the principal inn of the place, poorly lodged, and poorly fed, but heeding little the convenience or inconvenience of the body in the dull, heavy anguish of the heart. His spirit fretted sore within him; but yet he did not venture to resist the sentence of the king, unjust as it might be. It was a strange state that France was in at that period. Nobles would actually take arms against the royal authority at one moment, and submit to the most arbitrary decrees the next; and not only did De Brecy remain at Briare in obedience to the king's command, but Richmond, with all his impetuous spirit, lingered on at Parthenay for months.

For some days after his arrival at his place of exile, occupied with other thoughts, Jean Charost forgot Lomelini entirely; and when he did remember him, and recalled the words which De Royans had spoken, he asked himself, "Why should I seek for information which may probably confirm the king's claim to the disposal of her I love?"

Man's mind, however, abhors uncertainty. That thirst for knowledge which was kindled in Paradise is upon us still. We would rather know evil than know not. On the fourth day, toward eventide, he set out and walked up to the abbey, and paused in the gray light, looking at the gray gates. One of the brethren, gazing forth, asked him if he would come in and see the church, and then De Brecy inquired for the abbot, and if he were still brother Lomelini.

The monk replied in the affirmative, but said the abbot seldom received any one after sunset, unless he came on business of importance, or was an old friend.

"I am an old friend," replied Jean Charost. "Tell him Monsieur De Brecy is here. I will wait till you return."

He was speedily admitted, and Lomelini seemed really glad to see him. He had become an old

man, indeed, with hair as white as silver, had grown somewhat bowed and corpulent, and was slightly querulous withal. He complained of many things--of man's ingratitude--the dullness of the place of his abode--the forgetfulness of friends--the perils of the land, and all those things easily borne by the robust spirit of youth, which age magnifies into intolerable burdens. Still, he seemed gratified with Jean Charost's visit, and besought him to stay and take a homely supper with him--poor monastic fare. But during the course of the evening, and the meal with which it concluded, the young nobleman found that his old acquaintance had lost none of that quiet subtlety which had distinguished him in other days, and that his taste for good things was in no degree diminished. It had increased, indeed. Like an old dog, eating had become his only pleasure. He had become both a glutton and an epicure.

Before he took his departure, the young nobleman asked openly and boldly for the papers which De Royans had mentioned. Lomelini looked surprised and bewildered, and assured him that Monsieur de Royans had made a mistake. "I recollect nothing about them whatever," he said, with an air of so much sincerity, that Jean Charost, though he had acquired a keener insight into character than in former times, did not even doubt him.

He went back from lime to time to see the old man, who always seemed glad of his society, and, indeed, Jean Charost could not doubt that company of any kind was a relief to one who was certainly not formed by nature to pass his days in a monastery. He remarked, however, that Lomelini from time to time would look at him from under his shaggy white eyebrows with a look of cunning inquiry, as if he expected something, or sought to discover something; but the moment their eyes met, the abbot's were averted again, and he never uttered a word which could give any clue to what was passing in his mind at such moments.

Thus had time passed away, not altogether without relief; a few hasty lines, sometimes from his mother, sometimes from Agnes Sorel, sometimes from his own Agnes, gave him information of the welfare of the latter, and cheered his spirits for a day. But often would the momentary sunshine be clouded by dark anxieties and fears.

He had not heard any thing for some weeks; and after a long ride through the neighboring country, he was about to retire to rest, when steps came rapidly through the long gallery of the inn, and stopped at his chamber door. It was a young monk come to tell him that the abbot, after supper, had been seized with sudden and perilous sickness, and earnestly desired to see him instantly. Jean Charost hurried up with the messenger to the abbey, and being brought into the old man's chamber, instantly perceived that the hand of death had touched him: the eyes spoke it, the temples spoke it, it was written in every line.

Lomelini welcomed him faintly; and as Jean Charost bent kindly over him, he said, almost in a whisper, "Bid all the others leave the room--I have something to say to you."

As soon as they were alone together, the old man said, "Put your hand beneath my pillow. You will find something there."

Jean Charost obeyed, and drew forth a packet, yellow and soiled. His own name was written on it in a hand which he recognized at once.

"Something more--something more," said Lomelini; and searching again, he found another packet, also addressed to himself; but the seals of this had been broken, though those on the other cover had been left undisturbed. Without ceremony he unfolded the paper, and found within a case of sandal wood inlaid with gold, and bearing the letters M. S. F. twisted into a curious monograph. It opened with two small clasps, and within were two rows of large and brilliant diamonds.

De Brecy's examination had been quick and eager, and while he made it, the dying man's eyes had been fixed upon his countenance. As he closed the case, Lomelini raised his voice, saying, "Listen, Seigneur De Brecy."

Jean Charost put up the packets, and sat down by the old man's side. He could not find it in his heart at that moment to speak harshly, although he now easily divined why the packets had been kept from him, so long.

"What is it, father?" he said, bending his head.

"What, not an angry word?" asked Lomelini.

"Not one," replied Jean Charost. "I have too many sorrows of my own, father, to add to yours just now."

"Well, then, I will tell you all," said Lomelini. "You think I kept these packets on account of the diamonds. That had something to do with it; but there was more. After you entered the Orleans palace you were trusted more than me. I had been the keeper of all secrets; you became so. The duke's daughter was put under your charge, notwithstanding your youth; and I resolved you should never be able to prove her his daughter."

"I knew not that she was so," replied Jean Charost. "The duke himself knew it not."

"Nay, nay, do not lie," said Lomelini, somewhat bitterly. "I watched you--I watched you both well--I followed you to the convent of the Celestins, where the murderer had taken sanctuary; and I know the child was made over to you then, though you pretended to find it in the forest."

"On my Christian faith, and honor as a knight," replied De Brecy, "I heard nothing either of murderer or child at the convent of the Celestins. The dear babe *was*; given to me in the forest by a tall, strange, wild-looking man, who seemed to me half crazed."

"St. Florent himself," murmured Lomelini.

"I call Heaven to witness," continued Jean Charost, "I never even suspected any connection between the duke and that child till long after--I am not sure of it even yet."

"Be sure, then," said Lomelini, faintly. "The duke took her mother from that mother's husband--carried her off by force one night as she returned from a great fête, with those very diamonds on her neck."

"By force!" murmured De Brecy; and then from a feeling difficult to define, he added, "thank God for that!"

"For what?" said Lomelini. "Doubtless she went willingly enough. Women will scream and declare they are made miserable for life, and all that. At all events, she stayed when she was there, and that was her daughter; for I knew the child again as soon as I saw it at the cottage, by a mark upon her temple; and the old father died of grief, and the mad husband stole in one night and stabbed his wife, and carried away the child; and that is all."

He seemed to ramble, and a slight convulsion passed over his face. "I know the whole," he added, "for I had a share in the whole," and a deep groan followed.

"Let me call in a priest," said De Brecy. "You have need of the consolations of the Church."

"Ay, ay; call in a priest," answered Lomelini, partly raising himself on his arm. "I would not have my corpse kicked about the streets like the carcass of a dog; but do not suppose I believe in any priestly tales, young man. When life goes out, all is ended. I have enjoyed this life. I want no other; I expect no other--I--I fear no other--surely there is no other. Well, call in a priest--haste, or you will be too late--is this faintness--is this death?"

Jean Charost sprang to the door, near which he found several of the monks. The penitentiary was called for in haste. But he was, as Lomelini had said, too late. They found the abbot passed away, the chin had dropped, the wide open eyes seemed to gaze at nothing, and yet to have nothing within them. Something had departed which man vainly tries to define by words, or to convey by figures. A spirit had gone to learn the emptiness of the dreams of earth.

With a slow step, and deep gloom upon his mind, Jean Charost turned back to his dwelling. As he went, his thoughts were much occupied with the dark, sad, material doctrines--philosophy I can not call them--creed I can not call them--which at that time were but too common among Italian ecclesiastics. When he was once more in his own chamber, however, he took forth the packets he had received from Lomelini, and opened the cover of the one which had the seals unbroken. It contained a letter from the Duke of Orleans, brief and sad, speaking of the child which De Brecy had adopted, of her mother, and of the jewels contained in the other packet. The duke acknowledged her as his child, saying, "I recognized her at once by the ring which you showed me, as the daughter of her whom I wronged and have lost. It was taken at the same time that my poor Marie's life was taken; for, as you doubtless know, she was murdered under my very roof--yes, I say murdered. Had the dagger found my heart instead of hers, another word, perhaps, would have been better fitted; for mine was a wrong which merited death. I wronged her; I wronged her murderer."

He then went on to urge Jean Charost to perform well the task which he had undertaken, and which he had certainly well performed without exhortation; and the duke ended by saying, "I have seen you so far tried, Monsieur De Brecy, that I can trust you entirely. I know that you will be faithful to the task; and, as far as I have power to give authority over my child, I hereby give it to you."

Those were joyful words to Jean Charost, and for a moment he gave way to wild and daring hopes. He thought he would claim that right, even against the king himself; but short consideration, and what he knew of the law of France, soon dimmed all expectation of success.

The other papers which the packet contained were merely letters in a woman's hand, signed Marie de St. Florent; but they were pleasant to Jean Charost's eyes, for they showed how the unhappy girl had struggled against her evil fate. In more than one of them, she besought the duke to let her go--to place her in a convent, where, unknown to all the world, she might pass the rest of life in penitence and prayer. They spoke a spirit bowed down, but a heart uncorrupted.

Several hours passed; not so much in the examination of these papers, as in the indulgence of thoughts which they suggested; and it was midway between midnight and morning when Jean Charost at length lay down upon his bed.

CHAPTER LI.

De Brecy woke with a start just in the gray of the dawn. His thoughts were confused. He had had troublous dreams. He had fancied himself in the midst of war and strife again, and the well-known sounds, "*Alerte! alerte! Aux armes! aux armes!*" seemed to ring in his ears.

In an instant he had thrown on the furred gown which lay beside him, and had seized his sword; but the only sound he now heard was a sharp tap at the door, and a voice saying, "Monsieur De Brecy! Monsieur De Brecy! Pray let me in. I wish to speak to you in haste."

Jean Charost opened the door, and, to his surprise, beheld the face of his good servant, Martin Grille, who had been especially left at the court with Agnes, to attend upon and watch over her. A vague feeling of alarm instantly took possession of De Brecy's heart, and he exclaimed, ere the man could tell his errand, "How is your lady? Is she ill?"

"No, sir; not ill," replied Martin Grille; "though ill at ease, I have a notion. But I have hastened here with such speed that I believe I have left my horse no lungs, nor myself either, any more than a cracked pair of bellows, to warn you, my lord, of a danger that menaces you. So I beseech you, before you hear it, to order all your people to get upon horseback, and make ready to set out yourself, for there is no great time to lose."

"Nay, I must hear the danger first," replied Jean Charost "What is the matter, my good friend?"

"Well, tell the people to get ready, at all events," said Martin, earnestly; "then you can do as you like. Stories are sometimes long in telling, questions long in asking, and longer in being answered. It is better always, my lord, to be ready to act upon the news when it comes, than to have to wait to make ready after you have got it."

There was some truth in what he said; and Jean Charost sent by him the orders he desired, nor was he long in giving them.

"Now tell me all, while I am dressing," said his master, as soon as he had returned. "I know no cause for fearing any thing; but it is an uncertain world, good Martin, and there are unseen dangers around our every step."

"This one is plain enough," answered Martin Grille. "Nôtre Dame is not plainer. It is simply, sir, that the king has sent a certain sergeant of his, with a long troop of archers at his back, to arrest and bring you to his presence. He is now at Bourges, in the house of good Messire Jacques Cœur, which he fills tolerably well; and the distance not being very great from Bourges to Briare, you may expect our friend the sergeant every hour. It was late at night, however, when the order was given, and master sergeant vowed that he would have a nap first, king or no king. But, vowing I would have no nap, I came away at once; and so you have three good hours, and perhaps a few minutes more."

De Brecy mused, and then asked, "Do you know any motive for this order?"

"None at all," replied Martin Grille; "nor can I even guess. But I'll tell you all that happened, as I have it from one who saw all. There is one Jeanne de Vendôme about the court; they call her also Marquise De Mortaigne--"

"I have seen her," said Jean Charost. "What of her? Go on."

"Why, she has a nephew, sir, one Peter of Vendôme," replied Martin Grille, "whom she is very fond of; but he is an enemy of yours."

"I never even saw him," replied De Brecy.

"Well, sir, the king's mind is poisoned against you," said Martin Grille, "that is clear enough; and I know not what else to attribute it to. But, upon my word, you had better mount your horse and ride away. I can tell you the rest of the story as we go. I never was a very good horseman, and, if the sergeant rides better than I, he may be here before we are in the saddle."

"Well, be it so," said Jean Charost, thoughtfully. "Gather all those things together, while I go and reckon with my host. I would rather not be taken a prisoner into Bourges, and I think I will prevent it."

He spoke with a slight smile, and yet some bitterness of tone; but Martin Grille applied himself at once to pack up all that was in his master's room, and in about half an hour Jean Charost and his followers were in the saddle.

"Were it not better to take the road to Bussiere, my lord?" said Martin Grille, who rode somewhat near his master's person. "It seems to me as if you were going toward Oussin."

"No; methinks we shall be safer on this side," said Jean Charost. "Now, as we ride along, let me hear all that has been passing at the court. Perhaps I may be able to pick out some cause for this sudden displeasure of the king."

"Well, sir, I am sorry to be obliged to say what I must say," answered Martin Grille; "but the king has treated you very ill. This Peter of Vendôme, whom I was talking about--the devil plague him!--is at the bottom of it all; though his aunt, who is a worse devil than himself, manages the matter for him. She has taken it into her head that she must ally herself to the royal family. Now, it runs every where at the court that Mademoiselle Agnes is the daughter of the poor Duke of Orleans, who was killed near the Porte Barbette; that she was intrusted by him to your care; and that, for ambition, you want to marry her, and then tell all the world who she is."

Jean Charost had been gazing in his face for the last moment or two in silence; but now he inclined his head slowly, saying, "Go on. I now see how it is."

"Well, sir, about a month ago this Jeanne de Vendôme proposed to the king that her nephew should marry our young lady, and the king, it would seem, was willing enough; but a certain beautiful lady you know of opposed it, and, as she can do nearly what she likes, for some time the day went with her. Then Jeanne of Vendôme went and curried favor with Monsieur La Trimouille, who can do nearly what he likes on the other side, and then the day went against us for some time. The king was very violent, and swore that if he had any power or authority over Mademoiselle Agnes, she should marry Peter of Vendôme, though she told him all the while she would not, and begged him, humbly and devoutly, rather to let her go into a nunnery. Kings will have their way, however, sir, and things were looking very bad, when suddenly, three days ago, our young lady disappeared--"

"Where did she go to? Where is she?" asked Jean Charost, sharply.

"That I can not tell, sir," answered Martin Grille; "but she is safe enough, I am sure; for when I told Mademoiselle De St. Geran about it, she said, with one of her enchanting smiles, 'Has she, indeed, my good man? Well, I dare say God will protect her.' But the king did not take it so quietly. He was quite furious; and neither Peter of Vendôme nor his aunt would let his passion cool."

"Doubtless attributed it all to me," said Jean Charost, whose face had greatly lighted up within the last few minutes. But Martin Grille replied, to his surprise, "I do not think they did, sir. The painted old woman hinted, though she did not venture to say so, that the beautiful young lady you wot of had helped her namesake's escape; and the nephew said that if the king would but sign the papers, he would soon find the fugitive, for he had a shrewd notion of where she was."

"He did not sign them!" exclaimed Jean Charost, with a look of dread.

"He had well-nigh done it, my lord," replied Martin Grille. "Last night, when the king was sitting with the queen in the large black room on the second floor, which you remember well--very melancholy he was, for somewhat of a coolness had sprung up between him and her whom he loves best, and he can not live without her--they brought him in the papers to sign, that is to say, Peter of Vendôme and his aunt, looking all radiant and triumphant. Some one watched them, however; for, just at that minute, in came the chancellor and two or three others, and among them one of the pages, with a paper in his hand addressed to the king. The king took it, just looked at the top, and then handing it up to the chancellor, was about to sign what Peter of Vendôme demanded, and let him go; but Monsieur Des Ursins--that is the chancellor--cried, 'Hold, your majesty. This is important; in good and proper form; and must have your royal attention.' Then he read it out; but I can not tell you all that it contained. However, it was a prohibition, in good set form, for any one to dispose of the hand, person, or property of our young lady, Mademoiselle Agnes, either in marriage, wardship, or otherwise, and setting forth that the writer was her true and duly-constituted guardian, according to the laws of France. It was signed 'St. Florent;' and, though the king was mighty angry, the chancellor persuaded him not to sign the papers till the right of the appellant, as he called it, was decided by some competent tribunal."

"And how came you to know all this so accurately?" asked Jean Charost, after meditating for several minutes over what he had heard.

"Part one way, part another, my noble lord," replied Martin Grille. "Principally, however, I learned the facts from a young cousin of mine, who is now chief violin player to the queen. When she found her husband so dull that night, she sent for Petit Jean to solace him, because she could not very well have sent for the person who would have solaced him best. He heard all, and marked all, and told me all; for you are a great favorite of his. However, I had something to do with it afterward myself; for the king, knowing that I was in the house, sent for me, and made me

tell him whether, when you were last in Berri, you signed your name St. Florent. I was frightened out of my wits, and said I believed you did. The next minute the king said, looking sharply at the sergeant, who was standing near, 'Bring him at once from Briare. Lose no time.' Then he turned to me, with a face quite savage, and said, 'You may go.' I thought he was going to add, 'to the devil;' but he did not, and I slunk out of the room. The sergeant went out at the same time; but he laughed, and said, 'Sleep wasted no time, and he was not going to set off for Briare at midnight, not he.' So I did, instead of him; for as I feared I had done some mischief, I thought I might as well do some good."

Jean Charost smiled with a less embarrassed look than he had worn during the ride; but he made no reply, and during the next half hour he seemed to hear nothing that Martin Grille said, although it must not be affirmed that Martin Grille said nothing. It were hardly fair to look into his thoughts, to inquire whether the injustice he had met with, the wrong which was meditated against him, and the ingratitude for services performed and suffering endured in the royal cause had shaken his love toward the king. Suffice it, they had not shaken his loyalty toward his country, and that although he might contemplate flying with his Agnes beyond the reach of an arm that oppressed him, he never dreamed of drawing his sword against his native land, or of doing aught to undermine the throne of a prince to whom he had sworn allegiance.

At length, however, Martin Grille pulled him by the sleeve, saying, "I can not help thinking, my good lord, that you are taking a wrong course. You are going on right toward Bourges, and at any point of the road you may meet with the sergeant and his men. Indeed, I saw just now a party of horsemen on the hill there. They have come down into the valley; but that is the high road to Bourges they were upon."

"My good friend, I am going to Bourges," replied Jean Charost; "but as I do not intend to go as a prisoner, if I can help it, we will turn aside a little here, and go round Les Barres, that hamlet you see there. We can then follow the by-roads for eight or ten miles further, and cross the river at Cosne. I know this country well; for, during the last twelvemonth, I have had nothing to do but to think, and to explore it."

CHAPTER LII.

It gives one a curious sensation to stand on the spot where great deeds have been enacted: to tread the halls where true tragedies have been performed: to fancy one sees the bloody stains upon the floor: to fill the air with the grim faces of the actors: to imagine one's self surrounded with the fierce passions of other days, like midnight ghosts emitted from the grave. I have stood in the small chamber where the most brutal murder that ever stained the name of a great nation was devised and ordered by the counselors of John of Bedford. I have stood where an act of justice took the form of assassination against Henry of Guise. I have beheld the prison of the guilty and the unhappy Mary, and the lingering death-chamber of the innocent and luckless Arabella Stuart. But, although these sights were full of deep interest, and even awe, the effect was not so strange as that produced by passing through ancient places of more domestic interest, where courts and kings, the brave, the fair, the good, the wise, or their opposite, had lived and loved, enjoyed and suffered, reveled and wept, in times long, long gone by. Often, when I have read some glowing description of mask or pageant, or scene of courtly splendor, and have visited the place where it occurred, I have asked myself, with wonder, "Could it have been here, in this mean and poor-looking place?" and have been led from an actual comparison of the scene with that described in the past, to conclude that in those earlier days men were satisfied with much less, and that the splendor of those times would be no splendor to ourselves.

The great hall of Jacques Cœur, the wealthiest merchant in France, now holding high office at the court, and, in fact, the royal treasurer--a hall celebrated throughout all Berri--was indeed a large and well-shaped apartment, but still very simple in all its decorations. It was, perhaps, more than forty feet in length, and four or five and twenty feet in width: was vaulted above with a semicircular arch, ceiled with long planks, finely jointed together, of some dark, unpolished wood. The same material lined the whole hall; but on the walls the wood was polished and paneled, and four pilasters, in the Italian fashion, ornamented each corner of the wall, and seemed, but only seemed, to support the roof.

Many candles were required to give light to that large dark room; but it was very insufficiently illuminated. What little light there was fell principally upon the figure of the young king, as, seated at a small table in the midst, he leaned his head upon his hand in a somewhat melancholy attitude, and bent his eyes down toward the floor.

"Will she come?" he said to himself; "will she come? And if she will not, how must I act? This

good merchant says she will? but I doubt it--I doubt it much. Hers is a determined spirit; and once she has chosen her part, she abides by it obstinately. Well, it is no use asking myself if she will come, or thinking what I must do if she refuse. Kings were made to command men, I suppose, and women to command them;" and a faint smile came upon his lips at the conceit.

While it still hung there, a door opened hard by--not the great door of the hall, but a smaller one on the right--and a sweet voice said, "Your majesty sent for me."

"Agnes!" said the king, rising and taking her hand, "Agnes! why have you left me so long?"

"Because I have been ill and miserable," she answered; and the tears rose in her beautiful eyes.

"And I have been ill and miserable too," said Charles, leading her to a seat close by his own. "Do you not know," he continued, in an earnest and sad voice, "that, from time to time, a moody, evil spirit seems to take possession of me, making me sicken at all the toil and pomp of state, at all the splendor, and even all the gayety of a court? His visits are becoming more frequent and more long. There is no one can drive him from me but you, Agnes."

"Can I drive him from you always?" she asked. "Has he not resisted me lately, very lately, till I lost hope, lost courage, and was repelled, to take counsel with my own heart, and listen to all its bitter self-reproach. Charles, Charles! oh, my king and lord! there is nothing can console--nothing can comfort--under the weight of my own thoughts, but to believe and know that you are worthy of better love than mine--the love of your whole people. Take not that comfort from me. Let me, let me believe that passion, nor moodiness, nor any evil spirit will lead you to do an act of injustice to any of your subjects."

"Well, well," said Charles, kissing her hand, "it shall be as you will, my Agnes. You shall decide De Brecy's fate yourself, of however rebellious a spirit he may be--however insolent his tone. I will forgive him for your sake. It shall be as you will."

"Nay, not so," answered Agnes, gently, "I ask you not to forgive insolence or rebellion. All I beseech you is, to inquire unprejudiced, and judge without favor. De Brecy is somewhat bold, and free of speech. He always was so, even from his boyhood; but he is faithful and true in all things. I saw him peril his life rather than give up a letter to the Duke of Burgundy. I saw him submit to the torture rather than betray to the Council the secrets of your uncle, the Duke of Orleans. It is his nature to speak fearlessly, but it is his nature to speak truly; and all I ask of you is to judge of him as he is, untinged by the yellow counsels of Trimouille, or the black falsehoods of that woman of Vendôme. I hear that some paper he has sent you has excited your anger, and that you have ordered his arrest. Before you judge, investigate, my dear lord. Remember that he has many enemies--that he has offended Trimouille, who never forgives; and that the love of my bright little namesake for him is an obstacle in the way of Jeanne of Vendôme, than whom a more poisonous viper does not crawl upon the earth."

"I will investigate," answered Charles. "I will judge unprejudiced; and my better angel shall be by my side to see whether I keep my word with her."

"Not alone, not alone," said Agnes, "or they will say, in their malice, that favor for me, not sense of justice, has swayed the king. Have your chancellor here. He is a noble man, and true of heart. Nay, let all who will be present, to see you act, as I know you will act, justly and nobly--sternly, if you will; for I would not even have love pleading for love affect you in this matter. Oh, think only, my noble Charles, of how you may have been deceived against this young gentleman, how Trimouille's enmity may have read an evil gloss upon his actions, how Jeanne of Vendôme and her false nephew may have distorted the truth. Take the whole course of his life to witness in his favor; and then, if you assoil him of any fault--then Agnes, perhaps, may plead for favor to him."

"She shall not plead in vain," said Charles embracing her. "Some time to-morrow probably, the sergeant will be back, and I will hear and judge his cause at once, for we are lingering in Bourges too long. There is, moreover," he continued, holding her hand in his, and gazing into her eyes with a smile, "there is another cause for speedy decision. The king's authority, till this is all concluded, suffers some contempt. A daring act has been committed against our state and dignity, and hints have reached us that the traitor is above our power. 'Tis policy, in such a case, not to investigate too closely, but to remove all cause of contest as soon as possible."

Agnes sank upon her knees, with a glowing cheek, and bent down her fair forehead on his hand, murmuring, "Forgive me--oh, forgive me!"

Charles threw his arm round her fondly, saying, "Thank thee, my Agnes--thank thee for letting me have something to forgive."

She was still at his feet, when some one knocked at the door, and, raising her gently, Charles said aloud, "Come in."

"May it please your majesty," said a page, entering, "Monsieur De Brecy waits below to know your pleasure concerning him."

A slight flush passed over the king's cheek. "This is quick, indeed," said Charles. "Why does not the sergeant whom I sent present himself?"

"There is no sergeant there, your majesty. Monsieur De Brecy, with a few attendants, came but a moment ago, and is in the vestibule below with Messire Jacques Cœur."

"Let him wait," said Charles; "and, in the mean time, summon Monsieur Des Ursins hither. Wait; I will give you a list of names."

"Now, Agnes," continued the king, when he had dispatched the boy, "I will act as you would have me. We must have other ladies here. Go call some, love--some who will best support you."

About an hour after, in that same hall, Charles was seated at the table in the midst, with his bonnet on his head, and some papers before him. The queen was placed near, and some fifteen or sixteen ladies and gentlemen, members of the court, stood in a semicircle round. The door opened, and, ushered in by one of the attendants, Jean Charost, followed close by Jacques Cœur, advanced up the hall with a bold, free step. When within two paces of the table, he paused, and bowed his head to the king, but without speaking.

"Monsieur De Brecy," said Charles, "I sent one of the sergeants of our court to bring you hither."

"So I have heard, sire," replied De Brecy; "but, learning beforehand that your majesty required my presence, I set out at once to place myself at your disposal."

"You have done well," said the king; "and we would fain believe that there is no contempt of our authority, nor disloyalty toward our person, at the bottom of your heart."

"I have proved my loyalty and my reverence, sire," replied De Brecy, "by shedding my blood for you in the field against your enemies, at all times, and on all occasions, and by lingering in inactivity for long months at Briare in obedience to your commands."

"Well," said the king, "it is well. But there be special circumstances, when men's own interests or passions will lead them to forget the general line of duty, and cancel good services by great faults. Charges of this kind are made against you."

"My lord, they are false," replied De Brecy; "and I will prove them so, either in your royal court, by evidence good and true, or in the lists against my accuser, my body against his, and God to judge between us."

He glanced, as he spoke, toward a slight young man standing beside La Trimouille; and the king, mistaking his look, replied, with a light laugh, "Our ministers are not challenged to the field for their actions, Monsieur De Brecy. La Trimouille is a flight above you."

"I thought not of Monsieur La Trimouille, sire," replied De Brecy. "I know not that I have offended him; and, moreover, I hold him to be the best minister your majesty ever had, because the one who has made your authority the most respected. I spoke generally of any accuser."

"Well, then," said the king, "in the first place, tell me, with that truth and freedom of speech for which you have a somewhat rough reputation, have you, or have you not just cause to think that a young lady who has been brought up under your charge from infancy, and lately at our court, is the daughter of our late uncle, the Duke of Orleans?"

"I have, sire," answered De Brecy.

"Then how did you presume to claim the guardianship of her against our power?" said the king, sternly. "As our first cousin, legitimate or illegitimate, she is our ward."

"My answer is simple, sire," replied De Brecy. "I have never done what your majesty says; and if I had, when last I stood before you, I should have done it in ignorance; for it is but three days since I received from one Lomelini, abbot of Briare, then upon his death-bed, any certain information regarding her birth. These packets should have been delivered to me long before, but they were retained through malice. I now lay them before you, to judge of them as may seem meet."

"Look at them, Des Ursins," said the king; and the chancellor took them up.

"I can prove, my lord the king," said Juvenel de Royans, stepping forward, "that when last in Berri, Monsieur De Brecy was quite uncertain whose child the young lady was; for we had a long conversation on the subject when he gallantly threw himself into the citadel of this place, to aid us in defending it for your majesty."

"Silence! silence!" said the king; and taking up a paper, he held it out toward De Brecy, saying, "Did you sign that paper, sir?"

"No, sire," replied De Brecy; "I never saw it before."

"Then whose is it?" cried the king.

"Mine," replied the voice of an old man, in somewhat antiquated garments, standing a step or two behind Agnes Sorel. "I signed that paper, of right;" and advancing with a feeble step, he placed himself opposite the king.

"And who may you be, reverend sir?" demanded Charles, gazing at him with much surprise.

"The man whose name is there written," replied the stranger. "William, count of St. Florent; the only lawful guardian of the girl you wrangle for. You took my property and gave it to another. I heeded not, because I have no such needs now. But when you sought to take away the guardianship of this poor girl from him to whom I intrusted her, and to bestow her hand upon a knave, I came forward to declare and to maintain my rights. They have been dormant long; but they are not extinct. Each year have I seen her since she was an infant; each year have I performed some act of lordship in the fief of St. Florent; and I claim my right in the King's Court--my right to my estates--my right in my--" He paused for an instant, and seemed to hesitate; but then added, quickly, and in a tremulous voice, "in my child."

The king looked confounded, and turned toward the chancellor, who was at that moment speaking eagerly to Agnes Sorel, with the fell eyes of Jeanne of Vendôme fixed meaningly upon them both.

"Monsieur Des Ursins," said the king, "you hear what he says."

"I do, sire," answered the chancellor, coming forward. "You have made your appeal, sir," he continued, addressing the old man, "and perhaps, if you can prove your statements, his majesty may graciously admit your rights without the trouble of carrying your claim before the courts. You have to show, first, that you are really the Count of St. Florent; secondly, that the young lady in question is legally to be looked upon as the daughter of that nobleman. Her birth, at present, is not at all established. None of these letters but one prove any thing, and that proves only a vague belief on the part of a prince long since dead."

The old man drew himself sternly up to his full height, which was very great, and said, "You ask me for bitter proofs, chancellor. Methinks you might know me yourself, for I first gave you a sword."

"I can be no witness in my own court," said the chancellor; "and the cause, if it be tried, must come before me."

"Stand forward, then, Jacques Cœur," cried the other. "Do you know your old friend?"

"Right well," answered Jacques Cœur, advancing from behind De Brecy. "This, please your majesty, is William, count of St. Florent. I have seen him at intervals of not more than two or three years ever since he disappeared from the court and army of France, and have received for him, and paid to him, the very small sum he has drawn from the revenues of St. Florent. If my testimony is not enough, I can bring forward twenty persons to prove his identity."

There was a dead silence for several moments; but then the chancellor said, addressing the king, "This may be, perhaps, admitted, sire. I have no doubt of the count's identity. But there is nothing to show any connection whatever between him and this young lady, whom the Duke of Orleans, in this letter, seems to have claimed as his daughter."

At these words, a fierce, eager fire seemed lighted up in the old man's eyes, and taking a step forward, he exclaimed, "Ay, such claim as a robber has to the gold of him whom he has murdered!" Then, suddenly stopping, he clasped his hands together, let his eyes fall thoughtfully, and murmured, "Forgive me, Heaven! Sire, I have forgot myself," he said, in a milder tone. "My right to the child is easy to prove. I was her mother's husband. She was born in marriage. I myself gave her into the arms of this young man," and he laid his hand upon De Brecy's shoulder. "With him she has ever been till the time you took her from him. Let him speak for himself. Did he not receive her from me?"

"Most assuredly I did," replied De Brecy; "and never even dreamed for a moment, at the time, that any one had a claim to her but yourself."

"Nor had they--nor have they," replied St Florent, sternly.

"But it is strange, good sir," said Charles, "that you should trust your child to the guardianship of another; that other a mere youth, and, from what I have heard, well-nigh a stranger to you."

"There are wrongs, King of France, which will drive men mad," said St. Florent, fixing his eyes full upon the king's face. "Mine were such wrongs, and I was so driven mad. But yet in this act, which you call strange, I was more sane than in aught else. This young man's father I knew and loved, before he ruined himself for his king, and died for his country. Of the youth himself I had heard high and noble report from this good merchant here. I had seen him once, too, in the convent of the Celestins, and what I saw was good. I knew that I could trust her to none better, and I trusted her to him."

"But can you prove that she is your wife's daughter?" asked La Trimouille; "for these papers in the hands of the chancellor seem to show, and Monsieur De Brecy himself admits there is cause

to believe, that she is the child of the late Duke of Orleans, and consequently a ward of the king."

He spoke in a mild, sweet tone; but his words seemed almost to drive St. Florent to madness. His whole face worked, his eyes flashed, and the veins in his temple swelled. "Man, would you tear my heart out?" he exclaimed, in a fearful tone. "Would you drag forth the dead from the grave to desecrate their memory?" and snatching up the other packet which De Brecy had laid upon the table, he tore off the cover, exclaiming, "Ha! these are trinkets. Poor, lost, unhappy girl!" and, laying his finger upon the cover, he looked sternly at La Trimouille, saying, "Whose are these arms? Mine! Whose are these initials? Hers--Marie de St. Florent!"

As he spoke, he opened the case and gazed upon the diamonds. "Oh, Marie, Marie," he said, "when I clasped these round thy neck, little did I think--But no more of that. My lord the king, what does your majesty say to my just claim? I gave my daughter's guardianship to this young man: I now give him her hand. I ratify your gift of the lands and lordships of St. Florent. What says your majesty?"

"In sooth, I know not what to say or think," answered Charles.

"I think I see my way, sire," said the chancellor; "although the case is somewhat complicated. If Monsieur De St. Florent can prove that this young lady is the daughter of his wife, he is undoubtedly, by the law of France, her lawful guardian, and all opposition to his claim grounded on other facts is vain. So much for that view of the case. But even supposing he can not prove the fact, here is a letter from his highness the Duke of Orleans, whose handwriting I well know, which, though somewhat informal, contains matter which clearly conveys the whole of his authority over the young lady, if he had any, to Monsieur De Brecy. In either case, then, your majesty can not err, nor violate any of your own edicts, or those of your predecessors, by restoring the guardianship to him from whom it has been taken under a misapprehension. Any other course, I think, would be dangerous, and form a very evil precedent."

Trimouille bit his lip, and Jeanne de Vendôme slowly nodded her head, with a bitter smile, toward Agnes Sorel.

"So be it, then," said the king, with a gracious look toward Jean Charost. "Take her back, De Brecy, if you can find her, which we doubt not; and if you bestow her hand on any one else but yourself, he shall have our favor for your sake. If you wed her yourself, we will dance at the wedding, seeing that you have submitted with patience and obedience to a sentence which we sternly pronounced, and sternly executed against you, in order to teach all our court and subjects that not even those whom we most highly esteem, and who have served us best, will be permitted to oppose our expressed will, or show disobedience to our commands. Your sentence of exile from our court is recalled, and we shall expect, not only your attendance, but your service also; for, wedded or unwedded, we can spare no good sword from the cause of France."

He spoke gayly and gracefully, and then looking round with a smile, he said, "Is there no wise and pitiful person who, in charity, can give us some information of where our fair fugitive is?"

"In my castle of St. Florent," said the old count, who had now sunk down again into the appearance of age and decrepitude; "and there De Brecy will find her to-morrow. Let him take her, and let him take her inheritance also; for I go back to my own living tomb, to work out the penance of deeds done in madness and despair."

"Methinks, sire," said Jean Charost, who had marked some facts which created suspicion, "it were well that I should go to-night. St. Florent is very insufficiently guarded, and these are strange times."

"Nay, nay, this is lovers' haste," said Charles. "But, as you say, there may be danger of rash enterprises on the part of rivals, now that her abode is known. We will therefore, to spare all scandal, entreat some fair lady to undertake the task of bringing her back to the court this very night, which is not yet far advanced. Who will undertake it? She shall have good escort, commanded by this gallant knight himself."

"I am ready, sire," said Jeanne de Vendôme.

"Then, I beseech your majesty, let me go also," exclaimed Agnes Sorel, eagerly.

Charles looked from the one to the other, and replied, somewhat jestingly, "Both go. A litter shall be prepared at once; and as a moderator between you--ladies not always well agreeing when too closely confined--I will ask our good friend Messire Jacques Cœur to accompany you. Quick, ladies! prepare. De Brecy, see for your horses; and on your return you shall sup with us, and we will forget all but what is pleasant in the dream that is past."

CHAPTER LIII.

A little after ten o'clock at night, a party of some five-and-twenty persons, escorting one of the large horse-litters of the day, stopped in the court-yard of the old Castle of St. Florent. One or two servants came forth to meet them, and instantly recognized De Brecy's right to admission. Lights were procured; and the young nobleman himself, handing Agnes Sorel from the litter, led her into the great hall, while Jacques Cœur followed with Jeanne de Vendôme.

"My indignation at that woman's duplicity," whispered Agnes Sorel, as they advanced, "has made me very thirsty. Let them bring me some water, my friend."

Jean Charost gave the order she desired to the servant who went before them with the lights, and the whole party of four paused for an instant in the hall, Agnes Sorel bending her eyes upon the ground, as if lost in thought. Suddenly, however, she raised her head, saying, "Come, De Brecy, I will not keep you from your love. I will lead you to her. I know where she is to be found."

"Ha!" said Jeanne de Vendôme, with a very marked emphasis, as Jean Charost and his fair companion left the room.

"Will you not go with them, madam?" asked Jacques Cœur, who had no great love for the lady left behind.

"I think not," replied Jeanne de Vendôme, in a quiet, easy tone. "Lovers' meetings should have as few witnesses as possible;" and she and Jacques Cœur remained in the hall, the good merchant going to the window, and gazing out upon the night.

A minute or two after, the servant returned with a flagon of water from the castle well, and a silver drinking-cup. These he set upon the table, and retired. Jeanne de Vendôme gazed at them for a moment, and then said, aloud, "I am thirsty too."

Quietly approaching the table, she placed herself in such a position as to stand between the flagon and Jacques Cœur, poured herself out some water, drank, set down the cup again, and after remaining a short time in that position, turned to the window, and took her place beside the merchant.

In the mean time, Jean Charost, with a light in his hand, accompanied Agnes Sorel up the stairs, and through a long passage at the top.

"You seem to know the castle even better than I do," he said, as she guided him on.

"I have been this road in secret once before," she answered, gayly. "Mine is a happier errand now, De Brecy. But we must thread out the labyrinth. I have hid your little gem where best it might lie concealed."

A few moments more, however, brought them to a door which Agnes Sorel opened, and there, with an elderly waiting-maid of Madame De Brecy's, stood his own Agnes, gazing with anxious terror toward the door. She was somewhat pale, somewhat thinner than she had been, and the noise of horses' feet in the court below had made her heart beat fearfully. The moment she saw De Brecy, however, she sprang forward and cast herself into his arms. He pressed her closely to his heart; but all he could say was, "My Agnes--my own Agnes--all is well, and you are mine."

Agnes Sorel put a fair hand upon the arm of each. "May you love ever as you love now," she said, "and may God bless you in your love. Oh, De Brecy, just a year ago you gave me the most painful moment I have ever felt. When I told you I would guard and protect her, there came such a look--oh, such a look into your face--a look of doubt and fear, more reproachful, more monitory, more condemnatory than any thing but my own heart has ever spoken. I give her back to you now, pure, and bright, and true as you left her with me, with the bloom and brightness of her mind as fresh and unsoiled as ever. Love her, and be beloved, and may God bless you ever."

De Brecy took her hand and kissed it. "For how much have I to thank you," he answered; "for all--for every thing; for I am certain that but for your influence this happy meeting would have never been."

"It might not," answered Agnes, with a cheek glowing with many emotions. "But I call Heaven to witness, De Brecy, the influence I unrightly possess has never been, and never shall be exercised but to do justice, to prompt aright, and to lead to honor. Now let us go. Agnes, you must back with us to the court as the bride of him you love. Make no long preparation nor delay. You will find us waiting for you in the hall. Come, De Brecy, come. More lovers' words another time."

When they reached the hall, Agnes advanced at once to the table, filled the cup, and drank; then, turning gayly to Jacques Cœur, she said, "We have not been long, my friend. I went on purpose to cut caresses short. Our fair companion will be here anon. How brightly the stars are shining. Methinks it would be very pleasant if one could wing one's way there up aloft, and look into the brilliant eyes of heaven."

A minute or two after, she turned somewhat pale, and seated herself in a large arm-chair which stood near. She said nothing; but an expression of pain passed across her countenance. Shortly after, De Brecy's Agnes entered, prepared to go; and Agnes Sorel rose, supporting herself by the arm of the chair, and saying, "Let us be quick; I feel far from well."

She was soon placed in the litter, and they went on quickly toward Bourges; but once or twice, during the short journey, Jacques Cœur put forth his head, urging the drivers of the litter to make more haste. When they entered the court-yard of his house, and the litter stopped before the great door, the good merchant sprang out at once, saying, "Help me to carry her in, Jean. She is very ill."

They lifted her out in their arms, and bore her into the house, pale and writhing. Confusion and dismay spread through the court. Physicians were called, and gave some relief. She became somewhat better--well enough to travel to a distant castle; but, ere six weeks were over, the kind, the beautiful, the frail was in her grave, and none knew how she died.

From that moment a fear of poison seized upon the mind of Charles the Seventh, and affected the happiness of all his after days.

The king did not keep his promise of being present at the marriage of De Brecy and Agnes de St. Florent, and their own joy was baptized in sorrow.

FOOTNOTES.

Footnote 1: Jacques Cœur, it would seem, alluded to a fact not generally stated by English historians, which I may as well mention here as a curious illustration of the habits of those times. After the death of the unhappy Richard the Second, when it was currently reported throughout Europe that the successful usurper had put him to death in prison, the Duke of Orleans sent a cartel to Henry of Lancaster, by the hands of Champagne, king-at-arms, and Orleans his herald, demanding a combat of one hundred noblemen of France against one hundred of the Lancastrian party of England, the one party to be headed by the duke, the other by the new King of England. He gave the choice of any place between Angoulême and Bordeaux, and endeavored earnestly to bring about the meeting. Henry, in his reply, evading the demand, takes exception to the titles which the Duke had given him, stands upon his dignity as a king, and expresses great surprise that the duke should call him to the field without having previously solemnly abjured an alliance contracted between them in the year 1396. To this the Duke of Orleans tartly replied, in a letter full of pungent and bitter satire. Among other galling passages is the following: "And as to what you say, that no lord or knight, let his condition be what it will, ought to demand a combat without renouncing his alliance (with his adversary), I am not aware that you renounced to your lord the King Richard your oath of fealty to him before you proceeded against his person in the manner which you have done." And again: "As to what you write, that whatever a prince and king does ought to be done for the honor of God, and for the common benefit of all Christendom and his own kingdom, and not for vain-glory, nor for any temporal cupidity, I reply that you say well; but if you had so acted in your own country in times past, many things which you have done would not have been perpetrated in the land in which you live." By such expressions he galled Henry the Fourth into an indefinite sort of acceptance of his challenge, though the English king would not condescend to name time or place. The letters are still extant, and are very curious.

Footnote 2: His exact words.

Footnote 3: He afterward nobly proved his devotion to Charles the Seventh, by an act which distinguished him more than all the military services he rendered to that prince. His dismissal from the court was demanded, as the price of even a partial reconciliation between the king and the young Duke of Burgundy. Charles resisted firmly; but Du Châtel voluntarily resigned all his prospects and retired, to free his master from embarrassment.

Footnote 4: A large piece of artillery, which threw immense balls of stone, evidently by the force of gunpowder. It was by the discharge of one of these that the famous Earl of Salisbury was killed under the walls of Orleans the following year.

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