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VOLUNTEERS.
FROM THE PAINTING BY ARTHUR J. BLACK.
EXHIBITED IN THE ROYAL ACADEMY, 1904.

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THE QUIVER

ANNUAL VOLUME, 1905

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THE SWORD OF GIDEON

CHAPTER I.

To north and south and east and west horsemen were spurring fast on the evening of May 15th, 1702 (N.S.), while, as they rode through hamlets and villages, they heard behind them the bells of the churches beginning to ring many a joyous peal. Also, on looking back over their shoulders, they saw that already bonfires were being lit, and observed the smoke from them curling up into the soft evening air of the springtime.

For these splashed and muddy couriers had called out as they passed through the main streets of the villages that the long expected war with France was declared at last by England, by Austria--or Germany, as Austria was then called--and the States-General of the United Netherlands.

Wherefore, it was no wonder that the bonfires were instantly set blazing and the bells ringing, since now, all said to the others, the great, splendid tyrant who for sixty years had given orders from his throne for battles, for spoliation and aggrandisement, for the humbling of all other countries beneath the heel of France, would meet his match. He--he! this superb arbiter of others' fate, who had in his younger days been called *Le Dieudonné* and in his older *Le Roi Soleil*--he who had driven forth from their homes countless Protestants and had cruelly entreated those who had remained by their hearths, while desiring only to worship God in their own way and without molestation, must surely be beaten down at last.

"And--'tis good news!--Corporal John goes, they say," exclaimed several of these horsemen as they drew bridle now and again at some village inn, "as Captain-General of all Her Majesty's forces and chief in command of the allied armies. He has been there before and hates Louis; Louis who, although he gave him command of his English regiment, would not give him command of a French one when he would have served France. Let us see how he will serve *him* now."

"I pity his generals and his armies when my lord the Earl of Marlborough crushes them between his ranks of steel," said one who stood by; "the more so that Lewis"--as they called him in this country--"has insulted us by espousing the claims of James's son, by acknowledging him as King of England. He acknowledges him who is barred for ever from our throne by the Act of Succession, and also because his father forswore the oath he took in the Abbey."

"He acknowledges the babe who, as I did hear Bishop Burnet say in Salisbury Cathedral," a Wiltshire rustic remarked, "was no child at all of the Queen, but brought into the palace in a warming pan, so that an heir should not be wanting."

"He persecutes all of our faith," a grave and reverend clergyman remarked now; "a faith that has never harmed him; that, in truth, has provided him with many faithful subjects who have served him loyally. And now he seeks to grasp another mighty country in his own hands, another great stronghold of Papistry--Spain. And wrongfully seeks, since, long ago, he renounced all claims to the Spanish throne for himself and his."

A thousand such talks as this were taking place on that night of May 15th as gradually the horsemen rode farther and farther away from the capital; the horsemen who, in many cases, were themselves soldiers, or had been so. For they carried orders to commanders of regiments, to Lord-Lieutenants, to mayors of country towns, and, in some cases, to admirals and sea captains, bidding all put themselves and those under them in readiness for immediate war service. Orders to the admirals and captains to have their ships ready for sailing at a moment's notice; to the commanders of regiments to stop all furlough and summon back every man who was absent; to the Lord-Lieutenants to warn the country gentlemen and the yeomanry. Orders, also, to the mayors to see to the militia--the oldest of all our English forces, the army of our freemen and our State--being called together to protect the country during the absence of a large part of the regular troops. Beside all of which, these couriers carried orders for food and forage to be provided at the great agricultural centres; for horses to be purchased in large quantities; for, indeed, every precaution to be taken and no necessary omitted which should contribute towards the chance of our destroying at last the power of the man who had for so long held the destiny of countless thousands in his hand.

Meanwhile, as all the bells of London were still ringing as they had been ringing from before midday, a young man was riding through the roads that lay by the side of the Thames, on the Middlesex side of it. A young man, well-built and as good-looking as a man should be; his eyes grey, his features good, his hair long and dark, as was plainly to be seen since he wore no wig. One well-apparelled, too, in a dark, blue cloth coat passemented with silver lace, and having long riding-boots reaching above his knees, long mousquetaire riding-gloves to his elbows, and, in his three-cornered hat, the white cockade.

He passed now the old church at Chelsea on the river's brink, and smiled softly to himself at the *tintamarre* made by the bells, while, as he drew rein the better to guide his horse betwixt the old waterside houses and all the confusion of wherries and cordage that lumbered the road, or, rather, the rutty passage, he said to himself:

"The torch is lighted. At last! 'Tis a grand day for England. And, though I say it not selfishly, for me. Oh!" he went on, as now his left hand fell gently to the hilt of his sword and played lovingly with its curled quillon; "if I may draw you once again for England and the Queen, and for all you represent for us," glancing at the old church, wherein lay the bodies of such men as Sir Thomas More, who, in his self-written epitaph, described himself in the bitterness wrung from his heart as "*hereticisque*" John Larke, an old rector of Chelsea, executed at Tyburn for his Protestantism; and many other staunch reformers. "Ah, yes," he continued, "if I may draw you against Spain and her hateful Inquisition, against France and the tyrant who persecutes all who love the faith you testify to; if I may but once more get back to where I stood before, then at last shall I be happy. Ah, well! I pray God it may be so. Let me see what cousin Mordaunt can do."

He was free now of the encumbered road betwixt the river and the old houses: the way before him lay through open fields in some of which there grew a vast profusion of many kinds of vegetables and orchard fruits, while, in others, the lavender scented all the afternoon air; whereupon, putting his horse to the canter, he rode on until he came to an open common and, next, to a kind of village green--a green on two sides of which were antique houses of substance, and in which was a pond where ducks disported themselves.

On the east side of the green, facing the pond, there stood embowered in trees an old mansion, known as the Villa Carey. In after days, when this old house had given place to a new one, the latter became known as Peterborough House, doubtless to perpetuate the memory of the dauntless and intrepid man who now inhabited it.

Arrived at the old, weather-beaten oak gate, against which the storms that the southwesterly gales brought up had beaten for more than two centuries, the young man summoned forth an aged woman and, on her arrival, asked if Lord Peterborough were within.

"Ay, ay," the old rosy-cheeked lodge-keeper murmured; "and so in truth he is. And to you always, Master Bracton. Always, always. Yet what brings you here? Is't anything to do with the pother the bells are making at Fulham and Putney and all around? And what is it all about?"

"You do not know? You have not heard?" Bevill Bracton answered, as he asked questions that were almost answers. "You have not heard, even though my lord is at home. For sure he knows, at least."

"If he knows he has said nothing--leastways to me. After midday he sat beneath the great tulip tree, with maps and charts on the carpet spread at his feet above the grass, and twice he has sent off messengers to Whitehall and once to Kensington, but still none come anigh us in this quiet spot. But, Master Bevill," the old woman went on, laying a knotted finger on the young man's arm--she had known him from boyhood--"those two or three who have passed by say that great things are a brewing--that we are going to war again as we went in the late King's reign, and with France as ever; and that--and that--the bells are all a-ringing because 'tis so."

"And so it is, good dame Sumner. We are going to see if we cannot at least check the King of France, who seeks now to make Spain a second half of France. But come; we must not trifle with

time. Let me hook my bridle rein here, and you may give my horse a drink of water when he is cool, and tell me where my lord is now. Great deeds are afoot!"

"He is in the long room now. There shall you find him. Ay, lord! what will he be doing now that war is in the air again? He who is never still and in a dozen different cities and countries in a month."

With a laugh at the old woman's reflections on her master's habits--which reflections were true enough--Bevill Bracton went on towards the house itself and, entering it by the great front door, crossed a stone-flagged hall, and so reached a polished walnut-wood door that faced the one at the entrance. Arrived at it, he tapped with his knuckle on the panel, and a moment later heard a voice from inside call out:

"Who's there?"

"'Tis I--Bevill."

"Ha!" the voice called out again, though not before it had bidden the young man come in, "and so I would have sworn it was. Why, Bevill," the occupant of the room exclaimed, as now the young man stood before him, and when the two had exchanged handshakes, "I expected you hours before. When first the news came to me this morning----"

"Your lordship knows?"

"Know? Why, i' faith, of course I know. Is there anything Charles Mordaunt does not know when mischief is in the wind?--Mordanto, as Swift calls me; Sir Tristram, as others describe me; I, whose 'birth was under Venus, Mercury, and Mars,' and who, like those planets, am ever wandering and unfixed. Be sure I know it. As, also, I knew you would come. Yet, kinsman, one thing I do not know--that one thing being, what it is you expect to gain by coming, unless it is the hope of finding the chance to see those Catholics, amongst whom you lived as a youth, beaten down by sturdy Protestants like yourself."

"For that, and to be in the fray. To help in the good cause--the cause we love and venerate. Through you. By you--a kinsman, as you say."

"You to be in the fray--and by me? Yet how is that to be? You are----"

"Ah, yes! I know well. A broken soldier--one at odds with fortune. Yet----"

"Yet?"

"Not disgraced. Not that--never that, God be thanked."

"I say so, too. But still broken, though never disgraced. What you did you did well. That fellow, that Dutchman, that Colonel Sparmann, whom you ran through from breast to back--he may thank his lucky stars your spadroon was an inch to the left of his heart--deserved his fate."

"He insulted England," Bracton exclaimed. "He said that without King William to teach us the art of war we knew not how to combat our enemies. For that I challenged him, and ran him through. Pity 'twas I did not----"

"Nay; disable thine enemy--there is no need to kill him. All the same," Lord Peterborough continued drily, "King William broke you for challenging and almost killing a superior officer."

"King William is dead. Death pays all debts."

"I would it did! There are a-many who will not forgive me when I am dead."

"Queen Anne reigns, the Earl of Marlborough is at the head of the army. My lord, I want employment; I want to be in this campaign. Oh, cousin Mordaunt," Bevill Bracton said, with a break in his voice, "you cannot know how I desire to be a soldier once again, and fighting for my religion, my country, and the Queen. To be moving, to be a living man--not an idler. I have never parted with this," and he touched the hilt of the sword by his side, "help me; give me the right; find me the way to draw it once more as a soldier."

"How to find the way! There's the rub. Marlborough and I are none too much of cater-cousins now. We do not saddle our horses together. And he is--will be--supreme. If you would get a fresh guidon you had best apply to him."

"Even though I may have no guidon nor have any commission, still there will surely be volunteers, and I may go as one."

"There will be volunteers," Lord Peterborough said, still drily, "and I, too, shall go as one."

"You!"

"Yes, I. Only it will be later. When," and he smiled his caustic smile, "the others are in trouble. If Marlborough, if Athlone, or Ormond, who goes too, finds things going criss-cross and contrary,

then 'twill be the stormy petrel, Mordanto, who will be looked to."

"But when--when?" Bevill Bracton asked eagerly.

"When they have had time to flounder in the mire; when Ginkell--I mean my Lord Athlone--has, good honest Dutchman as he is, fuddled himself with his continual schnapps drinking; or when Jack Churchill, sweet as his temper is and well under control, can bear no more contradictions and cavillings from his brother commanders. Then--then Charles Mordaunt will be looked to again; then--for I can cast my own horoscope as well as any hag can do it for me--I shall be invited to put my hand in my pocket, to stake my life on some almost impossible venture, to give them the advice that, when I attempt to offer it, they never care to take."

"But--but," Bevill said, "the time! The time!"

"'Twill come. Only you are young, impatient, hot-headed. I am almost old, yet I am the same sometimes--but you will not wait. What's to do, therefore?"

"I cannot think nor dream--oh, that I could!"

"Then listen to me. 'Tis not the way of the world to do so until it is too late; in your case you may be willing. Do you know Marlborough?"

"As the subaltern knows the general, not being known by him. But no more."

"'Tis pity. Yet--yet if you could bring yourself before his notice; if--if--you could do something that should come under his eyes--some deed of daring----"

"I must be there to do it--not here. At St. James's or Whitehall I can do nought. The watch can do as much as I."

"That's very true; you must be there. There! there! Let me see for it. Where are the charts?" and Lord Peterborough went towards a great table near the window, which was all littered with maps and plans that made the whole heterogeneous mass look more like a battlefield itself after a battle than aught else.

"Bah!" his lordship went on, picking up first a plan and then a chart, and throwing them down again. "Catalonia, Madrid, Barcelona, Cadiz. No good! no good! Marlborough will not be there. The war may roll, must roll, towards Spain, yet 'tis not in Spain that he will be. But Holland--Brabant--Flanders. Ha!" he cried at the two latter names. "Brabant--Flanders. And--why did I not think of it?--she is there, and there's the chance, and--and, fool that I am! for the moment I had forgotten it."

"*She!* The chance! Brabant! Flanders!" Bevill Bracton repeated, the words stumbling over each other in his excitement. "She! Who? And what have I to do with women--with any woman? I, who wish to do all a man may do in the eyes of men?"

"Sit down," Lord Peterborough said now, in a marvellously calm, a suddenly calm, voice. "Sit down. I had forgotten my manners when I failed to ask you to do so earlier."

"Ah, cousin Mordaunt, no matter for the manners at such a moment as this. Alas! you set my blood on fire when you speak of where the war will be, of where it must be, and then--then--you pour a douche of chill cold water over me by talking of women--of a woman."

"Do I so, indeed? Well, hearken unto me," and his lordship leant forward impressively and looked into the young man's eyes. "Hearken, I say. This woman of whom I speak may be the guiding star that shall light you along the path that leads to Marlborough, and all that he can do for you. This woman, who may, in very truth, be your own guiding star or----"

"Or?"

"She may lead to your undoing. Listen again."

"'Learn to know what Sylvia Thorne is like'" (*p.* 6).

"'Learn to know what Sylvia Thorne is like.'" (*p.* 6).

CHAPTER II.

Had there been any onlooker or any listener at that interview now taking place in the old house at Parson's Green, either the eyes of the one or the ears of the other could not have failed to be impressed by what they saw or heard.

Above all, no observer could have failed to be impressed by the character of the elder man, Charles Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough and Monmouth, who, although so outwardly calm, was in truth all fire within.

For this man, who was now forty-seven years of age, had led--and was still to lead for another thirty years--a life more wild and stirring than are the dreams of ordinary men. As a boy he had seen service at sea against the Tripoli corsairs, he had next fought at Tangiers, and, on the death of Charles II., had been the most violent antagonist of the Papist King James. An exile next in Holland, he had proposed to the Prince of Orange the very scheme which, when eventually adopted, placed that ungracious personage on the English throne, yet, at the time, he had received nothing but snubs for his pains. He had, after this, escaped shipwreck by a miracle, and, later, lay a political prisoner in the Tower, from which he emerged to become not long afterwards Governor of Jamaica. In days still to come he was to capture Barcelona by a scheme which his allies considered to be, when it was first proposed to them, the dream of a maniac; he was to rescue beautiful duchesses and interesting nuns and other *religieuses* from the violence of the people, to be then sent back to England as a man haunted by chimeras, next to be given the command of a regiment, to be made a Knight of the Garter, and to be appointed an Ambassador. Nor was this all. He flew from capital to capital as other men made trips from Middlesex to Surrey; one of his principal amusements was planting the seeds and pruning the trees in his garden with his own hands; he would buy his own provisions and cook them himself in his beautiful villa, and he was for many years married to a young and lovely wife, who had been a public singer, and whom he never acknowledged until his death was close at hand.

As still Lord Peterborough foraged among the mass of papers on the table, turning over one after the other, and sometimes half a dozen together, Bevill Bracton recognised that he was seeking for some particular scroll or document amidst the confused heap.

"What is it, my lord?" the young man asked. "Can I assist you?"

"Nay. If I cannot find what I want for myself, 'tis very certain none can do it for me. Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, pouncing down like an eagle on a large, square piece of paper which was undoubtedly a letter. "Ah! here 'tis. A letter from the woman who is to give you your chance."

"I protest I do not comprehend----"

"You will do so in time. Bevill," his lordship went on, "do you remember some ten years ago, before you got your colours in the Cuirassiers and, consequently, before you lost them, a little child who played about out there?" and the Earl's eyes were directed towards the great tulip tree on the lawn.

"Why, yes, in very truth I do. I played with her oft, though being several years older than she. A child with large, grey eyes fringed with dark lashes; a girl who promised to be more than ordinary tall some day; one well-favoured too. I do recall her very well. She was the child of a friend of yours, and her name was--was--Sophia, was it now?--or Susan? Or----"

"Neither; her name was Sylvia, and is so still--Sylvia Thorne."

"Sylvia Thorne--ay, that is it. She promised to become passing fair."

"She is passing fair--or was, when I saw her last, two years ago. She is not vastly altered if I may judge by this," and Lord Peterborough went to a cabinet standing by one of the windows and, after opening a drawer, came back holding in his hand a miniature.

"Regard her," he said to Bracton, as he handed him the miniature; "learn to know what Sylvia Thorne is like. Learn to know the form and features of the woman who may lead to restoring you to all you would have, or--you are brave, so I may say it--send you to your doom."

"Why," Bracton exclaimed while looking at the miniature and, in actual fact, scarce hearing Lord Peterborough's words, so occupied was he, "she is beautiful. Tall, stately, queen-like, lovely. Can that little child have grown to this in ten years?"

In absolute fact the encomiums the young man passed upon the form and features that met his eye were well deserved.

The miniature, a large one, displayed a full, or almost full length portrait of a young woman of striking beauty. It depicted a young woman whose head was not yet disfigured by any wig, so that the dark chestnut hair, in which there was now and again a glint of that ruddy gold such as the old Venetians loved to paint, waved free and unconfined above her forehead. And the eyes were as Bevill Bracton recalled them, grey, and shrouded with long dark lashes. Only, now, they were the eyes of a woman, or one who was close on the threshold of womanhood, and not those of a little child; while a straight, small nose and a small mouth on which there lurked a smile that had in it something of gravity, if not of sadness, completed the picture. As for her form, she was indeed "more than common tall," and, since there was no suspicion of hoop beneath the rich black velvet dress she wore, Bracton supposed that it was donned for some ball or festival.

"She is beautiful!" he exclaimed again. "Beautiful!"

"Ay, and good and true," Lord Peterborough said. "Look deep into those eyes and see if any lie is hidden therein; look on those lips and ponder if they are highroads through which falsehood is like to pass."

"It is impossible. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, as poets say, then truth, and naught but truth, shelters behind them. And this is Sylvia Thorne But still--still--I do not comprehend. How shall she bring me before my Lord Marlborough? How advance my hopes and desires? Stands she so high that she has power with him?"

"She is a prisoner of France."

"What? She, this beautiful girl, she a prisoner of France, of chivalrous France, for chivalrous France is, though our eternal foe?"

"Yes, in company with some thousands of others, mostly Walloons--muddy Hollanders all--and mighty few English, if any. She is shut up in Liége, and the whole bishopric of Liége is in the hands of France under the command of De Boufflers."

"What does she there--she, this handsome English girl, in a town of Flanders now possessed by the French--she whom, I take it, since now I begin to comprehend--and very well I do!--I am to rescue?"

"One question is best answered at a time. Martin Thorne, her father, was my oldest friend. When James mounted the throne of England he, like your father and myself, was one of those honest adherents of the Stuarts who could not abide the practices James put in motion. He himself had been in exile with Charles and James while Cromwell lived, and he, again like your father, went into exile when James became a Papist."

"My father never returned from abroad," Bevill remarked.

"I know--I know. But Thorne returned only to go abroad again. Your father was, however, well to do. Thorne was not so. When a young exile during Cromwell's rule he had been in Liége, in a great merchant's house, since it was necessary he should find the means whereby to live. When he returned to Liége twenty-six years afterwards he had some means, and he became on this

second occasion a merchant himself."

"I begin to understand."

"He thrived exceedingly. 'Tis true England was almost always at war with France, but war is good for commerce. Thorne profited by this state of affairs, and so grew rich. Sylvia is rich now, but the French hold Liége. She would escape from that city."

"Will they not let her go? She is a woman. What harm can she do either by going or staying?"

"They will let none go now who are strangers. Ere long this war, which the claims of Louis to the Spanish succession on behalf of his grandson have aroused, will have two principal seats--Flanders and Spain. There are such things as hostages; there are such things as rich people buying their liberty dearly. And Sylvia is rich, and they know it. Much of her wealth is placed in England, 'tis true, but much also is there, in Liége. Short of one chance, the chance that, in the course of this campaign Liége should fall into the hands of one of our allies, she may have to remain there until peace is made--and that will not be yet. Not for months--perhaps years."

"But if she should escape--what of her wealth then?"

"She will be free, and still she will be rich; while if, as I say, Liége falls into the allies' hands she will not even lose her property there. But, at the moment, she desires only one thing; and that desire, being a rich woman, she is anxious to gratify. She is anxious to return to England."

"And I--I am to be the man to help her to do so--to aid her to escape from Liége. I'll do it if 'tis to be done."

"Well spoken; especially those last words. 'If 'tis to be done.' Yet pause--reflect."

"I have reflected."

Though, however, Bevill had said, "I have reflected," it would scarcely seem as if Lord Peterborough placed much confidence in his statement, since, either ignoring what his young kinsman had said or regarding his words as of little worth, he now proceeded to tell the latter what difficulties, what dangers, would lie in his path.

"I would not send you to that which may, in truth, lead to your doom without giving you fair warning of what lies before you," his lordship commenced, while, as he spoke, his eyes were fixed on Bevill Bracton--fixed thus, perhaps, because he who, in this world, had never been known to flinch at or fear aught, was now anxious to see if the solemn speech he had just uttered could cause the other to blench. Observing, however, that, far from such being the case, Bracton simply received that speech with an indifferent smile, Peterborough went on.

"From the very instant you set foot on foreign ground, every step your feet take will be environed with difficulty and danger. For, since you could by no possibility go as an Englishman, it follows that you must be a Frenchman."

"Am I not already half a Frenchman?" the young man asked. "From the day my father took me to France until I got my colours, I spoke, I read--almost thought--in French. I learnt my lessons in French; I had French comrades, as every follower of the Stuarts had, since we were welcome enough in France; I was French in everything except my religion and my heart. They were always English."

"Therefore," Lord Peterborough continued, for all the world as though Bracton had not interrupted him or uttered one word, "if you, passing as a Frenchman, fell into the hands of the French and were discovered to be an Englishman, your shrift would be short."

"I shall never be discovered."

"While," his lordship continued imperturbably, "if the English, or the Dutch, or the Austrians, or the Hanoverians, or the troops of Hesse-Cassel--for all are in this Grand Alliance, as well as the Prussians and the Danes, who do not count for much, though even they will be powerful enough to string a supposed spy up to the branch of a tree--if any of these get hold of you, thinking you a spy of one or t'other side, well! your life will not be worth many hours' purchase."

"I shall soon prove to the English that I am not a Frenchman, and to the others that I am not a spy. I presume your lordship can provide me with a passport?"

"I can do so, but it will be that of a Frenchman. Bolingbroke, who is now, as you know, Secretary-of-War--oh! la-la! he Secretary-of-War!--has some already prepared. His French hangers-on have provided him with those. All Frenchmen are not loyalists. You will not be the first or only English spy abroad."

"Yet I shall not be a spy."

"Not on the passport, but if you are limed you will be treated as one. I disguise nothing from you."

"And terrify me not at all. As soon as I have that passport I am gone. I shall not return until I bring Mistress Sylvia Thorne with me."

"Fore 'gad, you are a bold fellow! I am proud to have you of my kith and kin. Yet you will want something else. What money have you?"

"I had forgotten that. Money, of course, I have, yet--yet----"

"Not enough. Is that it? Hey? Well, you shall have enough--enough to help you bravely; to bring you, if Providence watches over you, safely to Liége and before the glances of Sylvia's grey eyes. And, then, Heaven grant you may both get back safely."

"I have no fear. What a man may do I will do. Yet, my lord, one thing alone stands not clearly before my eyes. God, He knows, I go willingly enough to obey your behests, your desires; to, if it may be, help a young maiden to quit a town which may soon be ravaged by war; a town to be, perhaps, held by our enemies for months or even years. From my heart I do so. Yet--ah!--how shall I by this do that on which I have set my heart? How get back again to the calling I have loved and forfeited--though forfeited unjustly? How will this commend me to my Lord Marlborough?"

"What! How? Why, heart alive! if Marlborough but hears you have done such a thing as this, your new commission will be as good as signed by Queen Anne. He hath ever an eye for a quick brain, a ready hand. 'Tis thus that great men rise or, being risen, help to maintain their eminence. The workman who chooses good tools does ever the best of work."

"Therefore I need not fear?"

"Fear! Fear nothing; above all, fear not that you shall go unrewarded. Moreover, remember Jack Churchill has ever been a valiant cavalier of *le beau sexe, un preux chevalier*; remember his devotion to his wife, handsome shrew though she be. Great commander though he is, he is not above advancing those soldiers who can help beauty in distress.

"Now," Lord Peterborough concluded, "go and hold yourself in readiness, remembering always that she whom you go to succour is the child of a man I loved--of my dearest, my dead, friend. Remember, too, that she is young and good and pure and honest. Now go, remembering this; and when I send for you--'twill not be long--return. Then, when you have my last instructions, as also the money and the passport, with, too, a letter for Sylvia Thorne, I will bid you God speed. Go--farewell!"

CHAPTER III.

"'Not forgotten, monsieur dares to hope.'"—*p.* 10.

"'Not forgotten, monsieur dares to hope.'"--*p.* 10.

The bilander *Le Grand Roi*, flying French colours, was making her way slowly up the Scheldt to Antwerp, as she had been doing for five hours, namely, from the time she had entered the river. Two days before this time she had left Harwich, while, since the proclamation had been made in London and the principal cities of England that all French and Spanish subjects were to quit the country, and that they would be permitted to depart without molestation and also would not be interfered with while proceeding on the high seas to their destination, she had arrived safely. She was close to Antwerp now; the spire of the cathedral had long since become visible as *Le Grand Roi* passed between the flat, marshy plains that bordered the river; she would be moored, the sailors said, within another hour--moored in Antwerp, which, since the death of Charles II. of Spain, eighteen months before this time, had been seized by the French. For the whole of this region, the whole of Flanders, was now no longer the vast barrier of Western Europe against the power and ambition of the Great King, but was absolutely his own outworks and barrier against his foes.

On board the old-fashioned craft--which had brought away from England Frenchmen and Frenchwomen of all classes, from secretaries of the Embassy and ladies attached to the suite of the ambassadress, down to the croupiers of the faro banks and the women employed by the French milliners in London, as well as a choice collection of French spies who had been earning their living in the capital--all was now excitement. For, ere anyone on board would be permitted to land, their passports would have to be examined, their features, height, and other details of their appearance compared with those passports, and any baggage they might possess would be scrupulously inspected. If all were ashore and housed by the afternoon, or were enabled to set out on their further journey, the sailors told the travellers they might indeed consider themselves lucky.

"Nevertheless," said a young man who sat on the small raised deck on which the wheelhouse stood, while he addressed a young French lady who sat by his side, "it troubles me but very little. So that I reach Louvain in two days, or three, for the matter of that, or even four, I shall be well content."

"Monsieur is not pressed?" this young lady said, after looking at her mother who sat asleep on the other side of her, and then glancing at the young man. And, in truth, the object of her second glance was worthy of observation, since he was good-looking enough to merit scrutiny. His dark features were well set off by his wig, his manly form was none the worse for the gallooned, dark blue travelling coat and deep vest he wore. A handsome young man this, many had said in the last two days on board; a credit to France, the land, as they, told each other often--perhaps because they feared the fact might be overlooked even by themselves--of handsome men and lovely women. Even his *mouches* on the cheeks, his extremely fine lace and his sparkling rings were forgiven by his fellow-passengers, since, after all, were not patches and lace of the best, and jewels, the appanage of a true French gentleman? And a gentleman M. de Belleville was--a gentleman worthy of the greatest country in the universe, they modestly added.

"Not the least in all the world," this graceful, airified young man answered the young lady now in an easy manner; "not the least, I do assure you, mademoiselle. In truth, I am so happy to have left England behind that now I am out of it I care not where else I am."

"Monsieur has seemed happy since he has been on board. He has played with the children, given his arm to the elderly ladies, assisted the older men as they staggered about with the roll of the ship, played cards with the younger. Monsieur will be missed by all when we part at Antwerp."

"But not forgotten, monsieur dares to hope," the graceful M. de Belleville said.

"Agreeable persons are never forgotten," his companion of the moment replied, she being evidently accustomed to the *riposte*. "But, monsieur, this war, this Grand Alliance, as our enemies term it--tell me, it surely cannot last long? This Malbrouck of whom they speak, this fierce English general--he cannot--undoubtedly he cannot--prevail against King Louis' marshals!"

"Impossible, mademoiselle!" the young man exclaimed, while his eyes laughed as he answered. "Impossible! What? Against De Boufflers, Tallard, Villeroy, and the others? Yet there is one thing in his favour, too. He served France once."

"He! This Malbrouck. He! Yet now he fights against her!"

"In truth he did, and so learnt the art of war. He was colonel of the English regiment in the Palatinate under Turenne. That should have taught him something. Also----"

But there came an interruption at this moment. The side of the bilander grated against the great timbers of the dock, the hawsers were thrown out; *Le Grand Roi* had arrived at the end of her journey. A moment later the *douaniers* were swarming into the vessel, hoarse cries were heard, the passengers were ordered to prepare their necessaries for inspection, and to have their papers ready.

Among some of the first, though not absolutely one of the first, M. de Belleville was subjected to inspection. His passport was perused by the *douanier*, who mumbled out as he did so, "Height, five feet ten. *Hein!*" raising his eyes to the young man's face. "I should have said an inch more."

"I should have said two more," M. de Belleville replied with a laugh. "*Mais, que voulez vous?* The monsieur at our embassy would have it so, in spite of my pardonable remonstrances. Therefore five feet ten I have to be. And he was short himself. Let us forgive him."

"Monsieur is gay and debonair. *Bon!* That is the way to live long. Eyes, dark. *Bon!* Hair," putting up a forefinger and lifting M. de Belleville's peruke an inch or so, "dark. *Bon!* Age, twenty-nine."

"Another affront. I assure you, monsieur, I told the gentleman I am but twenty-eight and four months."

"*Ohé!* Monsieur has a light vein. When a man has passed twenty-eight he is twenty-nine in the eyes of the law. Monsieur's vanity need not be offended. Now, monsieur, the pockets. 'Tis but a ceremony, I assure monsieur."

The pockets were soon done with. The man saw a purse through which glistened many pistoles and louis d'or and gold crowns, several bills drawn by the great French banker Bernard, which could be changed almost anywhere, and--a portrait.

"*Hein!*" the man said, though not rudely. "A beautiful young lady. Handsome as monsieur himself, doubtless one whom----"

"Precisely. There is nothing more?"

"Except the baggage."

"I have none. By to-night, or to-morrow, or the next day, I hope to be in Marshal de Boufflers' lines."

"Monsieur must ride then. The Marshal's lines stretch from----"

"I know. I shall reach them as soon as horse can carry me."

After which the young man was permitted to walk ashore.

"So," 'Monsieur de Belleville' said to himself, as now, with his large cloak over his arm, he made his way to the vicinity of the cathedral, "I am here. So far so good. Yet this is but the first step. I must be wary. Vengeance confound the vagabond!" he went on as his thought changed. "I wish he had not looked on that sweet face and stately form of Sylvia Thorne. Almost it seems a sacrilege. Cousin Mordaunt gave me that as my passport to her. I wonder if he dreams of how many times I have gazed on it since I parted from him? Still, it had to be shown."

Consoled with this reflection, the young man continued on his way until the *carillons* sounding above his head told him that the cathedral was close at hand. Then, emerging suddenly from a narrow street full of lofty houses, he found himself on the cathedral *place*, and looked around for some hostelry where he might rest for the day and part of the night.

His first necessity was a horse. This it was important he should obtain at once, directly after he had procured a room and a meal. Yet, he thought, there should be no difficulty in that. The French, who never neglected the art of possessing themselves of the spoils of war, were reported to have laid all the country round under such contributions of food, cattle, forage, and other things, that he had read in the *Flying Post* ere he left London how, in spite of their large armies scattered over Flanders, they were now selling back at very small prices the things they had plundered.

"But first for an inn," said Bevill Bracton (the *soi-disant* M. de Belleville) to himself. Directing his steps, therefore, across the wide *place* and towards a deep archway, over which was announced the name of an inn, he entered the house and stated that he wanted a room for the night.

"A room?" the surly Dutch landlord repeated, looking up as he heard himself addressed in the French language--doubtless he had good reason to be surly! "A room? Two dollars a night, payable in advance."

"'Tis very well. You do not refuse French money?"

"No, 'specially as we see little enough of it. Hans," addressing a boy in the courtyard after he had received the equivalent of two dollars, "show the French gentleman to No. 89. All food and wine," he added, "is also payable in advance."

"That can also be accomplished. Likewise the price of a horse, if I can purchase one."

"*Ja, ja!* Very well!" the man said, brisking up at this. "If monsieur desires a horse, and will pay for it, I have many from which he may choose."

"So be it; when I descend I will inspect them. Now," to the boy, "show me to the room."

Arrived at No. 89, which, like all Dutch rooms, was scrupulously clean if bare of aught but the most necessary furniture, Bevill, after having made some sort of toilette, and one which would have to suffice until he had bought a haversack and some brushes and other necessaries, was ready for his meal.

He went downstairs now to where the surly Dutch landlord still sat in his little bureau, and asked him if the horses were ready for inspection. Receiving, however, the information that two or three had been sent for from some stables that were in another street, he decided to proceed to the long, low room where repasts were partaken of. Before he did so, however, the landlord told him that it was necessary to inscribe his name and calling in a register that was kept of all guests staying at the inn.

Knowing this to be an invariable custom, as it had always been for many long years--for centuries, indeed--on the Continent, Bevill made no demur, but, taking a pen, he dipped it in the inkhorn and wrote down, "André de Belleville, Français, Secrétaire d'Embassade récemment à Londres," since thus ran the passport which had been procured for him by Lord Peterborough.

After which, on the landlord having stated that this information was all that the Lieutenant of Police would require, Bevill proceeded to the room where a meal could be obtained--a meal which, as he had already been warned, he would have to pay for in advance. For now--and it was not to be marvelled at--there was no Dutchman in all Holland who would trust any Frenchman a sol for bite, or sup, or bed.

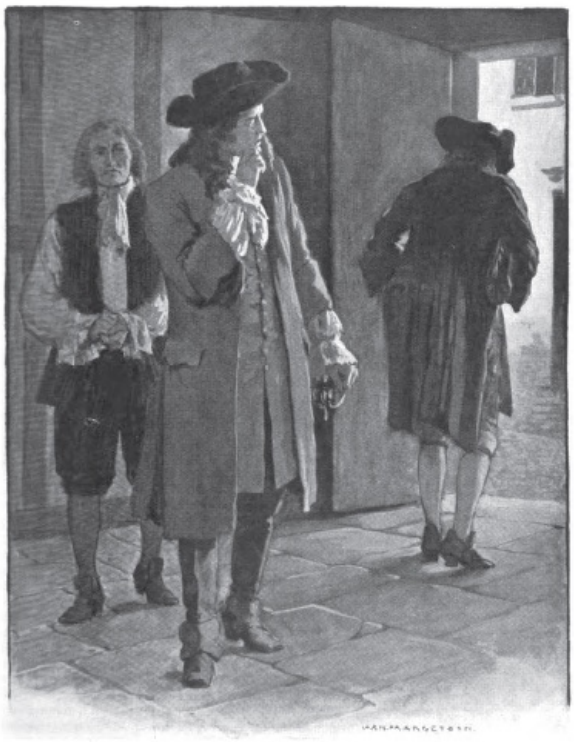
By the time this repast was finished, the horses from which Bevill was to select one were in the courtyard, and, being informed of this, he went out to see them. One glance from his accustomed eye, the eye of an ex-cuirassier who had followed William of Orange and fought under his command, was enough to show him that any one of them was sufficient for his purpose of reaching Liége by ordinary stages. Therefore the bargain was soon struck, six pistoles[1] being paid for the stoutest of the animals, a strong, good-looking black horse, and the one that seemed as if, at an emergency, it could attain a good speed--an emergency which, Bevill thought, might well occur at any moment on his route through roads and towns bristling with French soldiers.

As, however, the landlord and he returned to the bureau to complete the transaction, Bevill saw, somewhat to his surprise, a man leave the bureau--a man elderly and cadaverous--one who wore a bushy beard that was almost grey, and who looked as though he was far advanced in a decline. A man whose face appeared familiar to Bracton, yet one which, while being thus familiar, did not at first recall to him the moment or place where he had once seen or known him.

"Fore 'gad!" he said to himself. "Where have I seen that fellow?" And Bevill Bracton glanced down the passage as though desiring that the man would return. Not seeing him, however, he stepped back from the gloom of the passage into the sunshine of the courtyard and counted out into his hand the six pistoles he was to pay. Then, as he did so, he heard a step behind him--a step which he imagined to be that of the landlord as he came forth with the receipt, and, looking round, saw that the strange man was now in the bureau, and bending over the register. A moment later he heard him say to the landlord, while speaking in a husky, soddened voice:

"There was no secretary named André de Belleville at the French Embassy. The statement is false. I shall communicate with the Lieutenant of Police at once. I warn you not to let him depart."

Then, in an instant, the man was gone, he passing down the passage and out into the Dutch kitchen garden.



"Bevill had heard enough, had learnt enough."

But Bevill had heard enough, had learnt enough.

The voice of the man, added to what he had already seen of him, aided his wandering recollection--it told him who the man was.

"'Tis Sparmann," he said to himself. "Sparmann, who, two years ago, had my sword through him from front to back. It is enough. There is no rest here for me. To-night I must be far from Antwerp. My lord said well. It is death if I am discovered."

CHAPTER IV.

The great high road that runs almost in a straight line from Antwerp to Cologne passes through many an ancient town and village, each and all of which have owned the sway of numerous masters. For Spain once had its grip fast on them, as also did Austria, Spain's half-sister; dukes, reigning over the provinces, fierce, cruel, and tyrannical, have sweated the blood from out the pores of the back-bowed peasants; prince-bishops, such as those of Liége and Antwerp and Cologne, have also held all the land in their iron grasp; even the Inquisition once heaped its ferocious brutalities on the dwellers therein. Also, France has sacked the towns and cities of the land, while armies composed of men who drew their existence from English soil have besieged and taken, and then lost and taken again, those very towns and cities and villages.

Among the cities, at this period garrisoned and environed by one of the armies of Louis le Grand, none was more fair and stately than Louvain, though over her now there hangs, as there has hung for two hundred years, an air of desolation. For she who once numbered within her walls a hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants has, since the War of the Spanish Succession, been gradually becoming more and more desolate; her great University, consisting once of forty colleges, exists only in a very inferior degree; where streets full of stately Spanish houses stood are meadows, vineyards, gardens, and orchards now.

But Louvain was still stately, as, at sunset in the latter part of May in the year of our Lord 1702, a horseman drew up at the western *porte* of the city walls, and, hammering on the great storm-beaten gate, clamoured for admission to the city. A horseman mounted on a bright bay--one that had a shifty eye, yet, judging by its lean flanks and thin wiry legs, gave promise of speed and endurance. A rider to whose shoulders fell dark, slightly curling hair, and whose complexion was bronzed and swarthy as though from long exposure to the sun and wind and rain.

"Cease! Cease!" a voice in French growled out from the inner side of the great gate. "Cease, in the name of all the fiends! The gate has had enough blows dealt on it in the centuries that are gone since it first grew a tree. Thy sword hilt will neither do it good nor batter it down. Also, I come. I do but swallow the last mouthful of my supper."

"I do beseech thee, *bon ami*," the traveller called back with a mocking laugh, "not to hurry thyself. My lady can wait thy time. The air is fresh and sweet outside, the wild flowers grow about the gate, and I am by no means whatever pressed. Eat and drink thy fill."

"Um--um!" the voice from inside grunted. "Whoe'er you are, you have a lightsome humour, a jocund tongue. I, too, do love my jest. *Peste!* These sorry Hollanders know not what wit and mirth are--therefore I will open the gate. Ugh! ugh! ugh!"

"Hast choked thyself in thine eager courtesy? Wash it down, man--wash it down with a flask of Rhine wine."

But as the traveller thus jeered the great gate grunted and squeaked on its huge hinges; then slowly, with many more rasping sounds, one half of it opened wide.

"A flask of Rhine wine," muttered the warder, an elderly man clad in a soldierlike-looking dress, and one who looked as if not only the Rhine wines, but those of Burgundy and Bordeaux, were well known to him. "A flask of Rhine wine. Where should I, a poor soldier of the Régiment de Beaume, and a wounded one at that, get flasks of wine?"

"Where? Why, *camarade*, from a friend. From me. Here," and, putting his hand to his vest pocket, the cavalier tossed down a silver crown to the warder.

"Monsieur is an officer," the soldier said, stiffening himself to the salute, while his eye roamed over the points of the bright bay, and observed the handsome, workman-like sword that lay against its flanks, and also the good apparel of the rider. "He calls me *camarade*, and is lavish."

"Aye, an officer. Now, also disabled by a cruel blow. One who is still weak, yet who hopes ere long to draw this again," touching his quillon. "Of the cavalry. Now, see to my papers, and then let me on my way."

"To the lady who awaits monsieur," the man said with a respectful smile.

"Tush! I did but jest. There is no lady fair for me. I ride towards--towards--the Rhine, there to take part against the Hollanders who cluster thick, waiting to join Malbrouck." As the horseman spoke, he drew forth a paper from his pocket, and, bending over his horse's neck, handed it to the man.

"Le Capitaine Le Blond," the latter read out respectfully, "capitaine des Mousquetaires Gris. Travelling to Cologne. Bon, monsieur le capitaine," saluting as he spoke. "Pass, mon capitaine."

"Tell me first a good inn where I may rest for the night."

"There are but two, 'L'Ours' and 'Le Duc de Brabant.' The first, monsieur le capitaine, is the best. The wine is--*o*--*hé*--superb, adorable. Also it is full of officers. Some mousquetaires are of them. Monsieur should go there. There are none at the other."

"I will," the captain of mousquetaires said aloud as he rode on, though to himself he muttered, "Not I. 'Le Duc de Brabant' will suffice for me."

When Bevill Bracton recognised Sparmann in the inn at Antwerp he knew, as has been told, that he already stood in deadly peril. Already, though he had scarce been ashore two hours! Nevertheless, while he recognised this and understood that at once, without wasting a moment, he must form some plans for quitting Antwerp, and also, if possible, assuming a fresh disguise, he could by no means comprehend the presence of Sparmann in the city. Nor could he conceive what this man, a Dutchman, could have to do with the French Lieutenant of Police, an official who must surely be hated by the townspeople as much as, if not more than, the rest of their conquerors.

Re-entering the passage now, and approaching the bureau with the determination of discovering something in connection with his old enemy, if it were possible to do so, Bevill observed that the landlord's eyes were fixed upon him with a glance that was half menacing and half derisive, while, as he perceived this, he reflected, "Doubtless the man is rejoiced to see one of the hated French, as he supposes me to be, outwitted by his own countryman." After which he addressed the other, saying:

"Who is that man who throws doubt upon my identity and the passport I carry, issued by the French Embassy in London?"

"He! *ach* he! One who is a disgrace to the country that bore him-- to this city, for of Antwerp he is. He was once an officer in the Stadtholder's bodyguard, the Stadtholder who was made King of England; yet now he serves the French, your countrymen. Bah!" and the landlord spat on the

floor. "Now he is a spy on his own. A--a--a *mouchard*."

"But why? Why?"

"He has been disgraced. He was always in trouble. A soldier--a young one, too; an English officer, as it is said--ran him through for jeering at the English soldiers; then, since he was despised by his own brother-officers for being beaten, he took to drinking. At last, he was broken. Then he joined the French, your countrymen. Only, since he had been beaten by an Englishman, they would not have him for a soldier. So he became *un espion*. For my part, I would that the English officer had slain him. To think of it! A Hollander to serve the French!"

"I fear you do not love the French," Bevill said quietly, a sudden thought, an inspiration, flashing to his brain even as the landlord poured out his contempt on his own compatriot. "The English appear to have your sympathy."

"Does the lamb love the tiger that crushes it between its jaws? Does the hare love the spring in which it is caught? Yet--yet they say," the landlord went on, casting a venomous glance at Bevill, "your country will not triumph over us long. Malbrouck is coming, forty thousand more English soldiers are coming; so, too, are the soldiers of every Protestant country in Europe Then, look out for yourselves, my French friends."

"So you love the English?"

"We love those who pull us out of the mire. And they have been our allies for years."

For a moment after hearing these words Bevill stood regarding this man while pondering deeply; then, making up his mind at once, he said:

"If I told you that at this present time that young English officer who ran Sparmann through--this renegade countryman of yours, this *espion*, this spy of the French, *your conquerors*--stands in imminent deadly danger in Antwerp--here, here, in your own city--would you help and succour him? Would you strive to save him--from Sparmann, the spy?"

"What!" the landlord exclaimed, his fishlike eyes extending as he stared at Bracton. "What!" while in a lower tone he repeated to himself the words Sparmann had uttered a quarter of an hour ago: "There was no secretary named André de Belleville at the French Embassy. 'The statement is false.'"

"Aye," replied Bevill Bracton, hearing his muttered words, and understanding them too, since he had learnt some Dutch when in Holland under King William. "Aye, the statement is false, but his is true. There was no secretary of that name. The passport was procured to help that young officer to reach Liége and assist a countrywoman. Also, if the day should haply come, to assist, to join Protestant Holland against Catholic France and Spain."

"And," the man said, still staring at him, "you are he? You are an Englishman--a Protestant?"

"I am, God be praised. I trust in you. It is in your power to help me to escape, or you can give me up to the Lieutenant. It is in your power to enable me to quit Antwerp ere the alarm is given at the gates. If it be already given, my chance is gone! You hate France; you look to England for rescue and preservation. Speak. What will you do?"

"The spy saw," the landlord said, still muttering to himself, "that you had bought the black horse. Therefore you cannot ride that, though it is the best. But in my stable is a bay----"

"Ah!"

"A bay! *Ja wohl*, a bay! Tricky, ill-tempered, but swift as the wind. Once outside the city----"

"Heaven above bless you!"

"----You are safe. You speak French like a Frenchman. You have passed before as one, it seems; you can do so again. The bay belonged to a mousquetaire who died here of a fever when first the accursed French seized on the city. I would not give it up since his bill was large."

"One thing only! My passport will betray, ruin me."

"*Nein*. I have the mousquetaire's papers; his French pass. He was a captain named Le Blond. With those, and with that thing off your head," nodding at the peruke Bevill wore, "you will surely pass the gate. But you must be quick. Quick! Time is money, as you English say. With you it may be more. It may be life or death."

Even as the landlord spoke Bevill had torn off his wig and shaken out his own dark hair, after which the former said:

"I will go get the papers. Then will I saddle the bay myself. She is in the stable in the back of the garden. You can pass out that way and through a back street. If you have luck, you are saved. If not----"

"I *shall* be saved. I know it--feel it. But you--you--he warned you of what might befall----"

"Bah! You will have escaped unknown to me. For proof, I can show that you even left the black horse behind in your haste. How shall they know that I gave you another in its place?" And the landlord left his bureau and ran up the stairs, saying he would be back with the papers of Captain Le Blond ere many moments had passed.

Thus it was that the supposed captain of mousquetaires escaped the first peril he encountered on the road towards Liége, towards assisting Sylvia Thorne to quit that city. He had escaped, yet he had done so by means that were abhorrent to him--by a false passport, the papers of a man now in his grave. He who--Heaven pardon him!--could he have had matters as he desired, would have ridden boldly and openly to every barrier, have faced every soldier of the enemy, and, announcing himself as what he was, have got through or finished his mission almost ere it was begun.

Yet that escape was indeed perilous, and, though Bevill Bracton knew it not, he had, even with the aid of the landlord, only missed discovery by a hair's breadth.

For, but a quarter of an hour before he rode towards the city barrier, the guard had been changed; a troop of the Régiment d'Orléans had relieved a troop of the Mousquetaires Gris. Had Bevill, therefore, arrived before this took place, he would at once have been discovered and his fate sealed, since all would have known that le Capitaine Le Blond had been dead for months. But with the men of the Régiment d'Orléans it was different, since they had but marched in a week or so before, and probably--though it need by no means have been so--knew not the name or appearance of the officers of the mousquetaires.

"'Would you strive to save him--from Sparmann, the spy?'"

Bevill soon learnt, however, that Sparmann had wasted no time. Had he not acquired those papers, his undertaking must have ended here. The sergeant at the barrier, who came forward to inspect the paper he presented, carried in his hand another, which he read as Bevill rode up; and the latter divined, by the swift glance the trooper cast at his horse, and divined it with a feeling of actual certainty, that on that paper was a description of the black horse and his own appearance. But the horse was not the same, the peruke was wanting, and his riding cloak hid all that was beneath. Consequently, with a muttered "*Bon voyage*, M. le capitaine," and a salute, the sergeant stood back as Bevill rode through on the bay mare, who justified the character her recent owner had given her by lashing out with her hind legs and prancing from one side of the road to the other in her endeavour to unseat her rider. Soon finding, however, that she had her master on her back, she settled down into a swinging stride and bore him swiftly along the great, white east road.

And now he was in Louvain, after having passed by numberless implements of warfare collected by the roadside and watched over by French soldiery, as well as having passed also two French regiments marching swiftly towards Antwerp, there to reinforce the garrison, since, as war was declared, none knew how soon the forces of the redoubtable Marlborough, or Malbrouck, as they called him, might appear.

He was in Louvain, riding up an old, quiet street full of Spanish houses with pointed roofs that almost touched those of the opposite side, and allowed only a glimpse of the roseate hue of the early summer sunset to be seen between them. And soon, following the directions given him by the soldier at the gate, he reached the hostelry "Le Duc de Brabant," a house that looked almost as old as Time itself. One that, to each of its numerous windows, had huge projecting balconies of dark discoloured stone, of which the house itself was composed; an old, dark mansion, on whose

walls were painted innumerable frescoes, most of which represented sacred subjects but some of which also depicted arrogantly the great deeds and triumphs of the Dukes of Brabant. A house having, too, a huge pointed gateway, the summit of which extended higher than the top of the windows of the first floor, and down one side of which there trailed a coiled rope carved in the stone, while, on the other side, was carved in the same way an axe, a block, and a miniature gibbet.

"Ominous signs for those who enter here," Bevill thought to himself, while the mare's hoofs clattered on the cobblestones as he rode under the archway. "Ominous once in far-off days for those who entered here, if this was some hall of justice, or the residence of their, doubtless, tyrannical rulers. Yet will I not believe that they are ominous for me. I have no superstitions, and, I thank Heaven devoutly, I have no fear. Yet," he muttered to himself as he prepared to dismount, "I would I had not to resort to so many subterfuges. Rather would I be passing for what I should be--a soldier belonging to those who have sworn to break down the power of this great ambitious king, this champion of the bigotry that we despise." Then, in an easier vein he added, as though to console himself, "No matter! What I do I do to help, perhaps to save, a helpless woman; to reinstate myself in the calling I love, the calling from which I was unjustly cast forth. And," he concluded, as he cast the reins to the servitors who had run into the courtyard at the clatter made by the mare's hoofs, "it is war time, and so--*à la guerre, comme à la guerre!*"

CHAPTER V.

As Bevill dismounted in the great courtyard, and, addressing a man who was evidently the innkeeper, told him that he desired accommodation for the night, he recognised that, whatever might be the inferiority of this house to its rival, "L'Ours," it had at least some traveller, or travellers, of importance staying in it.

In one corner of the yard, round which ran a railed platform level with the ground floor and having four openings with steps leading up to that floor, there stood, horseless now, a large travelling coach, of the kind which, later, came to be called a *berline*. This construction was a massive one, since inside it were to be seen not only the front and back seats--the latter so deep and vast that one person might have made a bed of it by lying crosswise--but also a small table, which was firmly fixed into the floor in the middle of the vehicle. The body of the coach was slung on to huge leathern braces, which also served as springs, and was a considerable height from the ground--so high, indeed, that the steps outside the doors were four in number, though, when the vehicle was in progress, they were folded into one. On the panels were a count's coronet, a coat-of-arms beneath it, and above it the word and letter "De V." On the roof, and fitted into the grooves constructed for them, were some travelling boxes of black leather, with others piled on top of them. For the rest, there were on each side of the coach, in front, and at the back, long receptacles for musketoons as well as another for a horn, the weapons and instrument being visible.

"A fine carriage," Bevill said to the landlord, who seemed equally as surly and ungracious, if not more so, than the man at Antwerp had been while he supposed that the traveller was a Frenchman. "Some great personage, I should suppose."

"A compatriot of yours," the man said. "*Mein Gott!* Who travels thus in our land but your countrymen--and women? Yet," he added still more morosely, "it may not be ever thus."

Ignoring this remark, which naturally did not arouse Bevill's ire, since he imagined that the state of things the man suggested might most probably come to pass, he exclaimed:

"And women, you say? *Pardie!* Are ladies travelling about during such times as these, when war is in the air?"

"Aye, war is in the air," the landlord said, ignoring the first part of the other's remark. "In the air, and more than in the air. Soon it will be in the land and on the sea." After which, a waiting woman having arrived to conduct Bevill to his room, and a stableman having led the horse to a stall, the man turned away. Yet, as he went, he muttered, "Then we shall see. England and Holland are stronger than France on the sea, and on the land they are as good as France."

It was no part of Bevill's to assume indignation, even if he could have done so successfully, at these contemptuous remarks about his supposed country and countrymen; therefore he followed the woman to the room to which she led him. On this occasion, doubtless because he possessed a horse, and that horse was at the present moment in the landlord's custody, no demand was made for payment in advance.

"And now," he said to himself, "a supper, the purchase of a few necessaries in this town, and to bed. To-morrow I must be off and away again. The sooner I am in Liége the better."

In the old streets of that old city, Bevill found a shop in which he was able to provide himself with the few requisites that travellers carried with them in such distracted times. Amongst the accoutrements of the late Captain Le Blond's charger was his wallet-haversack for fastening behind the cantle, or in front of the pommel; but it required filling, and this was soon done. A change of linen was easily procured, which, with a comb, generally completed a horseman's outfit, and then Bevill set out on his return to "Le Duc de Brabant." But as he passed along the street he came across an armourer's shop, and, glancing into it, was thereby reminded that he was without pistols.

"And," he thought to himself, "good as my blade is, a firearm is no bad accessory to a sword. It may chance, and well it may, that ere I reach Liége, as in God's grace I hope to do, I may have need of such a thing. So be it. Cousin Mordaunt has well replenished my purse; I will enter and see if the armourer has any such toys."

Suiting the action to the thought, Bevill entered the shop, and, seeing an elderly man engaged on polishing up a breastplate, asked him if he had any pistols to dispose of.

"*Ja!*" the man replied. "And some good ones, too. Only they are dear. Also the mynheer may not like them. Most of them were taken from the French after Namur, and sold to me by an English soldier."

"Bah! What matters how I come by them so that 'tis honestly, and that they will serve their purpose? Produce them."

Upon this the armourer dragged forth a drawer in which were several weapons of the kind, some lying loose and some folded in the leather or buckskin wrappings in which the man had enveloped them. At first, those which met Bevill's eyes did not commend themselves much to him; some were too old, some too clumsy, and some too rusty.

"Mynheer is difficult to please," the armourer remarked with a grunt; "perhaps these will suit him better. Only they are dear," while, as he spoke, he unfolded two of the buckskin wrappers and exhibited a pair of pistols of a totally different nature from the others. These weapons were indeed handsome ones, well mounted on ivory and with long, unbrowned barrels worked with filigree. The triggers sprang easily back and fell equally as easily to the light touch of a finger, the flints flashing sparks bravely as they did so. On one was engraved "*Dernier espoir*," on the other "*Mon meilleur ami*."

"How much for these?" Bevill asked, looking at the armourer.

"Two pistoles, with powder flask and bullet-box. Also the flask well filled and two score balls."

"So be it. They are mine." And Bevill dropped one into each of the great pockets of his riding-coat. "Now for the flask and bullets."

"With these," he said to himself, as he walked back to the inn, "my sword, and the swift heels of the mare, I can give a good account of myself if danger threatens."

The supper for the guests was prepared when he reached "Le Duc de Brabant," and Bevill, taking his place at the table, glanced round to see who his fellow-travellers might be, yet soon observed that, for the present at least, there were none.

"So," he thought to himself, "the fellow at the gate spoke truly. 'Tis very apparent that 'The Duke' is not in such high favour as his rival, 'The Bear.' However, the eating proves the pudding and the drinking proves the wine. Let us see to it."

Whereupon he bade the drawer bring him a flask of good Coindrieux--the list of wines hanging on a wall so that all the guests might see and read. Then, ere the wine came, Bevill commenced to attack the course set before him, though before he had eaten two mouthfuls an interruption occurred.

Preceded by a servitor, whom Bevill supposed--and supposed truly, as he eventually knew--to be a private servant and not one attached to the inn, a lady came down the room towards the table at which the Englishman sat: a lady still young, of about thirty years of age, tall, and delicate-looking. Also she was extremely well favoured, her blue-grey eyes being shielded by long dark lashes, and her features refined and well cut. As for her hair, Bevill, who on her approach had risen from his seat and bowed gravely, and then remained standing till she was seated, could form no opinion, since it was disguised by her wig. But he observed that she was clad all in black, even to her lace; while, thrown over her wig, was the small coif, or hood, which widows wore. Therefore he understood the solemnity of her attire--a solemnity still more enhanced and typified by the look of sadness which her face wore.

"He had hastened to the door to hold it open for her."—*p.* 122.

"He had hastened to the door to hold it open for her."--*p.* 122.

This lady, who had returned Bevill's courtesy by a slight inclination of her head, was now served by the elderly manservant, who took the dishes from the ordinary inn server, and, placing each before her who was undoubtedly his mistress, then retired behind her chair until the next dish was ready. But, as would indeed have been contrary to all etiquette, neither Bevill nor the lady addressed a word to the other.

When, however, the drawer returned with the flask of Coindrieux, and Bevill spoke some word to the man on the subject of not filling his glass too full, he observed for one moment that the lady lifted her eyes and looked at him somewhat curiously, and as though some tone or intonation of his had attracted her attention. A moment later her eyes were dropped to her plate again, though more than once during the serving of the next dish he observed that she was again regarding him.

"Has my accent betrayed me?" Bevill mused. "When I spoke to the man, did she recognise that I am no Frenchman? Has my tongue grown rusty?"

Yet, even as he so pondered, he told himself that there was no reason that such should be the case. The lady might herself be no Frenchwoman, but, instead, one belonging to this war-worn land.

"She may not be capable of judging who or what I am," he reflected.

Yet in another moment he had learnt that her powers of judging whether he was a Frenchman or not were undoubtedly sufficient.

In a voice, an accent, which no other than a Frenchman or Frenchwoman ever possessed, an intonation which none but those who had learnt to lisp that language at their mother's knee could have acquired, the lady spoke now to her elderly servant, saying:

"Ambroise, retire, and bid Jeanne prepare the valises. I have resolved to go forward an hour after dawn."

The manservant bowed, then said:

"But the supper, Madame la Comtesse? Who shall serve, madame? The remainder is not----"

"The server will do very well. Go and commence to assist Jeanne."

"Madame la Comtesse," Bevill thought to himself when the man had departed. "So this is doubtless the owner of the grand coach. And she is a Frenchwoman. It may well be that she understands I am no countryman of hers, though I know not, in solemn truth, why she should suppose I pretend to be one--unless the landlord or servants have told her, or she has looked in the register of guests." For here, as everywhere, all travellers had to give their names to the landlords, and Bevill was now registered as "Le Capitaine Le Blond, of the Mousquetaires Gris."

The supper went on still in silence, however, and the server attended both to the lady who had been styled "La Comtesse" and to Bevill. But he was nothing more than a raw Flemish boor, little

accustomed to waiting on ladies and gentlemen, and gave Bevill the idea that he was not occupied in his usual vocations. Once he dropped a dish with such a clatter that the lady started, and once he handed another to Bevill before offering it to the countess.

"Serve madame!" Bevill said sternly, looking at the hobbledehoy and covering him with confusion, while, as he did so, the lady lifted her eyes to him and bowed stiffly, though graciously. Then, as if feeling it necessary that some word of acknowledgment, some small token of his civility, should be testified, the lady said:

"Monsieur is extremely polite. He is doubtless not native here?"

"No, madame. I am a stranger passing through the land on my way towards the Rhine," while, as Bevill spoke, he was glad that, in this case, there was no need for deception, since Liége was truly on the road towards the Rhine.

"As am I. I set out to-morrow for Liége."

"For Liége? Madame will scarcely find that town a pleasant place of sojourn. Yet I do forget--madame is French."

"As is monsieur," the Countess said, with a swift glance at her companion, speaking more as though stating a fact than asking a question.

Bevill shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly, but as much as good breeding would allow. Then he said:

"Monsieur de Boufflers commands there. Madame will be at perfect ease."

"Doubtless," the other said, with a slight shrug on her part now. "Doubtless. Yet," and again she shrugged her shoulders, "war is declared. The English and the Dutch will soon be near these barrier towns. They say that the Earl of Marlborough will come himself in person, that he will command all the armies directed against us. Would it be possible that monsieur should know--that he might by chance have heard--when the Earl will be in this neighbourhood?"

"I know nothing, madame," Bevill replied, while as he did so two thoughts forced themselves into his mind. One was that this lady had discovered easily enough that he was no Frenchman; the other, that she was endeavouring to extract some of the forthcoming movements of the enemy--the enemy of France--from him.

"What is she?" he mused to himself when the conversation had ceased, or, at least, come to a pause. "What? Some spy passing through the land and endeavouring to discover what the English plans may be; some woman who, under an appearance of calm and haughty dignity, seeks for information which she may convey to de Boufflers or Tallard. Yet--how to believe it! Spies look not as she looks; their eyes do not glance into the eyes of those they seek to entrap as hers look into mine when she speaks. It is hard to credit that she should be one, and yet--she is on her road to Liége--Liége that, at present, is in the grasp of France, as so much of all Flanders is now."

Suddenly, however, as still these reflections held the mind of Bevill Bracton, there came another, which seemed to furnish the solution of who and what this self-contained, well-bred woman might chance to be.

"There are," he reflected, "there must be, innumerable officers of high rank at Liége under Marshal de Boufflers; it may be that it is to one of these she goes. Not a husband, since she is widowed; nor a son, since, at her age, that is impossible; but a father, a brother. Heaven only grant that, if she and I both reach that city safely, she may not unfold her doubts of what I am. For doubt me she does, though it may be that she does not suppose I am an Englishman. If she should do so, 'twill be bad for Sylvia Thorne and doubly bad for me."

As Bevill reached this stage in his musings, the Countess rose from the table, and, when he had risen also and hastened o the door to hold it open for her, passed through, after acknowledging his attention and also his politely expressed hope that her journey to Liége would be easily made.

After which, as he still stood at the door until she should have passed the turn made by the great stone staircase, Bevill observed this lady look round at him, though not doing so either curiously or coquettishly. Instead, it appeared to the young man standing there deferentially that the look on her face seemed to testify more of bewilderment, of doubt, than aught else.

"So be it," he said to himself, as now he returned to the room in which they had dined, and proceeded to adjust his sword-sash, which, with the sword itself, had been removed before the meal, and would, in any case, have been at once removed by him from his side on a lady taking her seat at the table. "So be it. Forewarned is forearmed. She misdoubts and mistrusts me. If we should meet again--as meet we surely shall, since we travel the same road and go to the same place--I must be on my guard. Yet, pity 'tis, if she should be a spy. Aye! if she should be. If she should be! Almost it is beyond belief."

He went now towards the stables, to which he had seen the mare led when he arrived. For

Bevill had been a good soldier once, and hoped that the day was not far off when he would be so again, and, above all else, travellers such as he was at this time looked to the care and comfort of their beasts. Also, in his ride from Antwerp, he had come to like this tetchy, wayward creature, which, when her tantrums were over, had borne him so well and swiftly on his road. Therefore he went towards her stall now, and noticed that she looked at him over the board of the division and whinnied as she recognised him, while rubbing her soft muzzle against his arm as he stroked and petted her, and, in doing this, he forgot the woman over whom, but a moment before, his mind had been so much exercised.

The woman who, as she had passed up the great stone-carved staircase, had said to herself:

"Who--what is he? Not a countryman of mine, well as he speaks our tongue--aye, marvellously well--and courteous as he is. And neither a Flemish nor a German boor. Is he an Englishman--is he--is he? Ah! if he were only that! Oh! if he were--he who will be in Liége as soon as I--he who will be there when the English forces draw near, as they will surely do."

CHAPTER VI.

That night Bevill Bracton slept well, and as he had not slept since he first went on board *Le Grand Roi* at Harwich two days ago. For the vessel had been full of persons, and especially children, who suffered from the sea; the passage had been rough and, consequently, noisy; while, although the wind was favourable for reaching the Dutch coast, it had rendered sleep impossible.

But this night had made amends for all, and Bevill Bracton, springing out of bed as he heard the clock of St. Peter's striking seven, prepared to make himself ready for the day's journey. Overnight, before he had sought sleep, he had thanked Heaven devoutly for having allowed him to penetrate so far as even this old city of Louvain, and into what was, in truth, the enemy's country--by seizure, though not by right. Now once more he prayed that, as he had been thus far favoured, so he might still be.

One thing he observed at once as he threw back the heavy shutters from his windows, which looked down into the great courtyard. He saw that the great travelling coach was gone. The Comtesse, whose title he had learnt from the landlord ere he sought his bed overnight was De Valorme, had departed with any following she might have other than the ancient domestic he had seen at table, and the woman, Jeanne, of whom they had spoken.

"Yet," Bevill said to himself, "at the pace La Rose," as he had now named the mare, "can travel as against the speed that heavy lumbering coach can attain, I should pass her ere she has accomplished half the distance to Liége--long before she has reached St. Trond, indeed. And," for still there was in his mind a thought, a fear--engendered doubtless by the dangers with which he must be now surrounded, and would be doubly surrounded as he progressed farther, and when he had entered Liége--that in this woman there might be hidden something that would imperil his safety, "and if she is a spy, at least it is as well I should be there before her. Let me waste no time therefore."

He folded up his haversack and cloak, although, as he could see by the courtyard, which was wet and had little pools of rain lying in the hollows between the old, worn stones, it must have rained during the night or early morning, although it was now a fair, sweet day. The late May sun was shining down fiercely on the red roofs; a thrush was singing blithely in its wicker cage as though rejoicing in the warmth and light; one or two of the heavy, clownish domestics of the inn were making an early meal of black bread and blacker beer at a table below him; all nature smiled.

He descended, therefore, carrying his haversack and cloak, and with his recently purchased pistols thrust in his sash under his coat, since no traveller left such weapons far from his hand when he slept in strange houses, and, going once more to the *Speiseraum*, ordered some breakfast. Then he went out to see that all was well with La Rose.

Half an hour later he was on the way to Liége, and was riding along roads that passed through orchards which were now losing all their pink and white blossoms as the fruit slowly developed on the trees.

Because he was young and strong and healthy; because, too, he had great hopes before him, he took a keen delight in all that was around him--in the fresh morning air that he drew into his lungs in great draughts, in the sight of the full-leaved, half blossom and half fruit gardens and orchards, even in the brooks that had been cut by the sides of those orchards in long past days,

and through which the water ran with a swishing sound--he was jocund. He felt how good it was to live and to be passing through the land on such a morning as this, to hear the birds singing and twittering, and to see the cattle already seeking shade from the morning sun; to cry out "Good-morning" to the peasants in the fields or "God be with you" to the old people sitting outside their houses, their life's labour done. He felt thus because he was young, and strong, and full of life; because, too, his blood was stirred by the thought of the adventures which must surely lie before him; because almost he felt as though he were some young knight-errant of dead and long-forgotten centuries riding forth to rescue a lady fair who, immured in some gloomy town or fortalice, waited for him with longing, eager eyes.

"And if the miniature does not belie sweet Sylvia Thorne," Bevill murmured to himself as the mare cantered along the white roads which the sun had now dried, "then no knight in armour ever rode in far-off days to the assistance of woman more fair than she. As a child she was winsome. I wonder if this stately woman, whose portrait I have gazed on so of ten since my lord gave it into my charge, is winsome still? Winsome--yes, it may well be so. But grave, almost austere, as those eyes that look out at me whenever I gaze on the portrait proclaim; stately in her bearing, almost cold. Well! Cold let her be. What matters it to me? She is not the guerdon that I seek to win, but only the means by which I shall win the guerdon I would have. Let me but do my best, and all will be very well. Mistress Thorne may freeze me with one glance from those calm eyes, and yet my lord Marlborough shall warm me back to life with his approval."

The day went on, the sun rose high in the cloudless sky, and, except for the various halts which Bevill made under shady trees, or on the cool side of old Lutheran churches and quaint Flemish houses, to rest La Rose--and once to refresh himself--he had wasted no time. So that he knew, not only by the sign-posts and the hamlets he had passed through, but also by a *routier*, or chart of the district, which hung in the dark hall of the "Duc de Brabant," that he must be nearing a small town called St. Trond, a place that lay nearer to Liége than to Louvain.

"Madame de Valorme set out at six, the landlord told me," Bevill reflected, "and I ere the clocks struck eight; I marvel much that I have not come up with her coach yet. Her horses must travel faster than I thought, or that coach be lighter than its appearance warranted."

Then, at this moment, there came an interruption to any further meditations on his part.

A shot rang out on the clear noontide air, one that caused the nervous, excitable mare to swerve and spring across the road, almost unseating Bevill; and then, while he recovered himself, to gallop wildly along the white straight road bordered by pollard trees.

"Gently, gently," Bevill exclaimed, as he endeavoured to soothe her, while, since he was a finished horseman, he knew better than to attempt to check her suddenly, but drew her up gradually. "Gently. Though, 'fore Heaven, that sudden report was enough to startle one less flighty than she. Whence," he mused, "did that shot proceed? To my left, surely, and from a side road which I passed a moment ere the report rang forth. Was," with a dark look on his face, "the ball intended for me? Well, we will see to it."

Whereupon, since now La Rose was, by the aid of much stroking of her neck and patting and soothing, restored somewhat to calmness, Bevill turned her head round in the direction they had come, and at last persuaded her, though it was not easy to do, to retrace her steps to the crossroads.

Also, he opened the covers of his holsters and threw them back, so that the butt of each of his new pistols should be ready to his hand.

"I may be indebted for a favour to some marauder," he muttered, "and I abhor debt. If I owe one, it shall be repaid in full." After which he loosened his sword in its sheath, and so reached the crossroads.

As he turned into it he saw nothing at first, unless it was the ominous twitching of the mare's ears; but a moment later he heard a voice, and that a woman's--a voice that exclaimed:

"You cowardly dastards! You--you Flemish boors! To attack a woman--to slay an old man!"

"Great powers!" exclaimed Bevill to himself, as now a touch of his knee sent La Rose forward swiftly, while at the same time he drew forth the pistol from the right holster. "'To slay an old man.' And that voice hers. Hers!"

"French! French! French!" he heard several voices exclaim together in the raucous, guttural, Low Frankish dialect of the district. "You are all French Papists, servants of the great Papist King in Paris, of the Italian Priest in Rome. We will not spare you. Or," one voice said, "not your wealth, if we spare your lives. And he, this dead one, should not have resisted us."

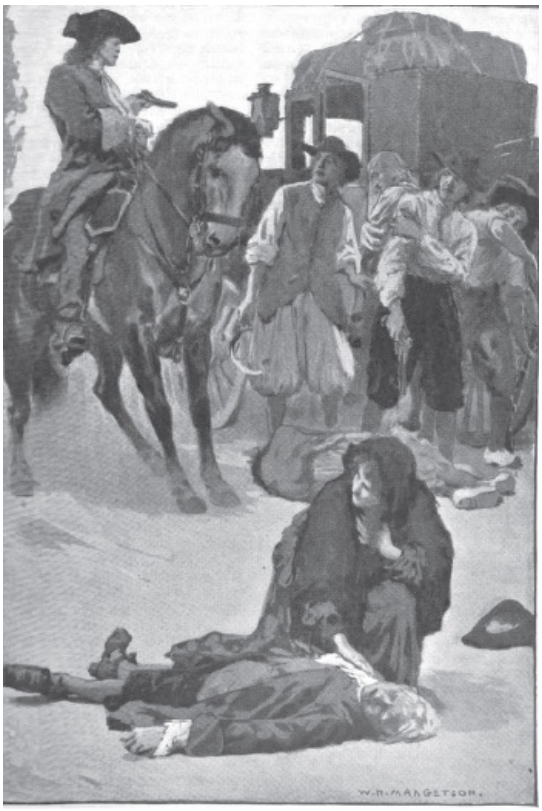
Whatever the ruffians who thus spoke might have intended doing was now, however, doomed to be frustrated. Bevill Bracton was amongst them--a party of seven men, armed some with great horse pistols, one or two with reaping hooks, and another with a rusty sword. In a moment they were, however, scattered, the mare knocking down two as she lashed out, while one received a bullet in the shoulder from Bevill, and, falling to the ground, vowed that he was dead.

But amidst the confusion, and while Bevill cried, "Stop, all of you. He who attempts to fly shall be shot on the spot," he was able to see at a glance what had happened.

The coach--the driver had doubtless been misdirected, or the horses' heads had not been turned down this side road--stood lower down the lane than those who had occupied it. At the feet of the horses lay the man who was undoubtedly the coachman; by his side knelt the Comtesse de Valorme, looking up at the boors who had attacked the party. Jeanne, her maid, an elderly woman, seemed to have fainted inside the coach; while old Ambroise, who was weeping and shaking all over, stood with a footman close by the side of his mistress.

Now, as Bevill dismounted, Madame de Valorme, looking up at him, exclaimed:

"Ah! The Capitaine Le Blond. Heaven be praised!"



"By his side knelt the Comtesse."

"By his side knelt the Comtesse."

But Bevill had no time to be startled at hearing himself addressed thus, nor to speculate as to whether the Comtesse had discovered his assumed name from the landlord, or had herself searched for it in the register. His attention was otherwise needed.

"You brute dogs!" he exclaimed in the best Dutch he could muster. "So 'tis thus war begins with you--by attacks on women and old men." While, as he spoke, he thrust his discharged pistol back into the right holster and drew out that in the left.

"We are starving," one man said. "You--you--French trample us down, take all--you, who are as bad as the Spaniards were. We retaliate when we can."

"Is there a rope?" Bevill asked, looking down from his seat on the horse and addressing Ambroise and the younger man, the footman. "One used in the coach? If so, fetch it."

"A rope!" the men howled now, while two of them flung themselves on their knees and whined and screamed for mercy. "A rope! Spare us--spare us! We have taken nothing."

"Except a life," Bevill exclaimed, glancing at the body of the coachman.

Meanwhile, the footman had mounted the box of the coach and was busily engaged in uncording the valises piled up on top of it. But while he did so the Comtesse de Valorme had risen to her feet and had held out her hand to Bevill, which he, after dismounting, took in his.

"How shall a helpless woman, travelling with only serving men in attendance on her, thank one who is strong and brave enough to rescue her?" madame asked. "How? Ah! monsieur----"

"Madame in Comtesse." Bevill replied, "I have but done that which every man would do for a woman. I beseech you say no more."

"It may be that at Liége," the Comtesse continued (and Bevill could not but observe how, as she spoke, her blue eyes looked into his as though endeavouring to read, to decipher, what impression her words might make on him), "at Liége I can return----"

"Madame!"

"----Some of your chivalrous service. Even though proffered to a French officer," and now those eyes shone like sapphires, "in safety--in--a French garrison, a woman's assistance may be worth acceptance."

"She knows me for what I am," Bevill thought; "or, rather, for what I am not. And she will not betray me."

The few words that had been exchanged between him and the Comtesse de Valorme were uttered in low tones, though, even had they been spoken clearly, it is doubtful if the boors who were trembling close by them would have heard, or, in hearing, have understood. For now their courage, their Dutch courage, had left them; they deemed their fate at hand, since, armed as this man was and with a horse on which to pursue them, flight would have been vain.

At this moment their fears were at their height; their whimpers were turned into shrieks and supplications. The footman had descended, bearing in his hand a rope some ten or twelve feet long; while, as the man who had shot one of them and, in a moment, terrified the rest into abject fear, took it in his own hands, they saw that his eyes were directed towards an elm that grew by the side of the road.

"In mercy's sake," the Comtesse whispered, since she, too, saw Bevill's glance, "in the name of Him Who forgives all sinners, proceed to no extremities. And--and--Joseph, my coachman, is not truly dead. The ball has but grazed his face and stunned him. Monsieur, I beseech you--nay, I----"

"Madame," Bevill replied, turning his back to the men who were, in absolute fact, his prisoners, "I had no thought of executing them. But still punishment is their meed. Therefore, I will have them bound to that tree and, at the next village or town--it should be one called St. Trond--there may be some Prévôt-Maréchal or Captain of Maréchaussée to whom we can denounce them. The French, our troops----"

"Yes. Our troops?" with another swift glance.

"Are all about. The line stretches from Antwerp to Cologne, and across the Rhine. Into their hands shall these ruffians be delivered. They shall be the instruments of justice."

Half an hour after this decision had been come to the coach of the Comtesse de Valorme was on its way once more; but now it was driven by the young footman, at whose side Ambroise sat. Outside was Joseph also, who had recovered from the shock he had received, and was now engaged in thanking Heaven for the narrow escape that had been vouchsafed to him, and in calling down blessings on the Comtesse and Jeanne (on whose shoulder his head rested) and Bevill indiscriminately.

Sometimes ahead of the great travelling carriage, and sometimes--though not often--by the side of the open window, where Madame sat, Bevill Bracton rode now as escort. But, as he did so, while keeping ever a vigilant look-out to right and left and in front of him--for he knew not if other groups similar to those who were now, with the exception of the man wounded by him, all tied firmly and back to back to the elm tree, might be about--his thoughts did not dwell on the rescue he had by chance effected, but on the woman he had preserved from outrage and insult. Also, they dwelt on what must be the state of that woman's mind at this time.

"For she is French, and I am a subject of her country's bitterest foe--and she knows it. Or, not knowing, still suspects. And yet--and yet--if I mistake her not, if I have read her aright, I have rendered her harmless. Likewise, she is a good woman. She pleaded for mercy for those vagabonds, not knowing that there was no need for pleading, since I am no hangman; she spoke of Him Who pardons all sinners. 'Tis not of such stuff as this that spies, denouncers, women who rend the hand that is held out to them, are made. Yet, knowing all, she must be torn with vastly conflicting feelings. How shall she reconcile herself to befriending one who is of those who would render her ambitious, evil King harmless? How shall she, a Frenchwoman, bring herself to be the ally of an Englishman?"

But still, even as Bevill mused, he knew that he and his secret, or as much as she knew or could guess of it, were safe in this woman's hands.

A moment later, he had certain proof that he had divined aright.

They were drawing near St. Trond now; ahead of them they could see the smoke curling up in the afternoon air, and they could also see the men lounging at the barrier through which admission was gained to the town.

"We shall be there," the Comtesse said to Bevill, who was at this time riding by the window of the coach, while directing her glance to the little place, "ere many moments are passed. Monsieur," and she put her gloved hand upon the sash and leant forward towards him, "those men will have suffered enough by the time they are released from that tree. I ask you not to call the attention of any Prévôt or officer of Maréchaussée to their being there, or to their attack on me."

"Madame is truly of a forgiving nature. Yet, since it is her concern, not mine----"

"It would be best, even though, unhappily, forgiveness plays no part in my desire. Questions might be asked, explanations required; nay," and once more the deep blue eyes looked full into Bevill's, "some of monsieur's brother mousquetaires may be here." And now those eyes looked strangely; almost it seemed as though they conveyed a menace. Yet, Bevill asked himself, even as a chill seemed to strike to his heart, as icy fingers seemed to clutch at it, could this woman be false; a traitress to one who had helped and succoured her? Was she no better than a female Sparmann?

"She spoke," he said to himself, "of Him Who pardons all sinners; she besought mercy for those who had molested her. Can such as she be a spy? I will never believe it."

Then, suddenly gazing down at her--and now the intensity of his glance equalled her own, while he saw she did not blench beneath it--he said, not roughly, yet determinately:

"Have done with equivocations, madame, with pointed words," remembering the accentuation of those words "monsieur's brother mousquetaires." "Speak plainly. Truth, openness, are ever best."

"If," the Comtesse said now, though still all was not open, her meaning not altogether apparent, "if you are what I believe--nay, what I know you to be--and you are discovered, your life is in awful danger. If you reach Liége you will, if betrayed, never quit it alive."

"Who shall betray me to my death? Answer me. Since you have told so much, tell more. What is it you know, and who and what are you?"

"A woman," the Comtesse answered. "One who does not betray gallant men to their deaths."

"This death you speak of is certain?"

"Certain. Beyond all doubt. For you are----"

"What?"

"Listen. Bend down from your horse. Not even they," with a glance above to where the servants were, "must hear."

"Great Heaven!" Bevill exclaimed when he had done so and she had whispered in his ear.

For the words she had thus whispered were: "You are an Englishman, and your name is not Le Blond. Have I not said truly? If you are discovered your doom is certain."

CHAPTER VII.

The names of some of its past rulers as well as Spanish governors have stamped themselves deeply over all Brabant; and scarcely was there an inn or wayside hostelry to be found in the towns and villages surrounding the old capital of Brussels that did not bear for sign either that of "La Duchesse de Parma," "Le Duc de Brabant," "Le Comte d'Egmont," or, greater still, "Le Prince d'Orange," it being William the Silent, the great Liberator, to whom reference was made.

These names constituted a strange mixture, and combined to form a strange gallery of reminiscences. The first recalled a stately woman of high lineage on one side and base origin on the other. She was the daughter of Charles Quint, of "*Charles qui triche*,"[2] and the sister of Philip, the thousandfold murderer--a woman fierce as the she-wolf when robbed of its whelps, yet often merciful; one who, to her eternal glory, despised that other murderer, that persecutor of all of the Reformed Faith, the Duke of Alva, and kept him in his place, while sometimes forcing even him to cease from shedding the blood of the innocent. The second recorded those rulers of Brabant, among whose numbers had been produced holy men and scoffers, poets and tyrants; *jongleurs* and minstrels and buffoons; knights as brave as ever Bayard was, and cowards who

shuddered and whimpered in their innumerable palaces if but a few of their subjects muttered in the streets or congregated in small knots at the street corners. The third perpetuated the name of Lamoral d'Egmont, brave, bold, and vain; one who had been shipwrecked in corners of the world that had then been hardly heard of; who had fought for the new faith like a lion, yet had almost dreaded death, but had, nevertheless, died like a hero and a martyr at the headsman's hands in the great square of Brussels. The fourth was he who crushed Philip II. and Spain and all their myrmidons under his heel, who established for ever the Reformed Faith as the recognised national religion from the German Ocean to the Ural Mountains, and who perished at the hand of an assassin bribed by Philip to do the deed.

In St. Trond, where the Comtesse de Valorme had decided to rest for the night, it was the same as at Louvain, Brussels, and all other places. Those names were still perpetuated over the doors of the inn; the lineaments of their bearers swung in the breeze or were painted on the walls.

"Another 'Duc de Brabant,'" the Comtesse said to Bevill, as now the coach passed an inn of this name. It was the first they came to, and the landlord, running out bareheaded, begged of Madame to honour his house.

"Well, so be it. It is to the former one that I owe my meeting with a gallant defender. I will rest here. And Monsieur Le Blond--where does he purpose sojourning for the night?"

Perceiving that there was probably in this question some feeling of delicacy on the part of Madame de Valorme, some sentiment of propriety as to their not entering the town in company--they who, until those whispered words of an hour ago, had been all but unknown to each other--and of afterwards staying in company in the same inn, Bevill, casting his eyes across the *place*, said:

"There is another inn for travellers over there, and it is called 'Le Prince d'Orange.' It has a quiet, peaceful air. It will do very well. Also, since I have constituted myself the cavalier of Madame until Liége is reached, I shall be near at hand to keep watch and ward."

"Monsieur is very good. Farewell, monsieur. Goodnight. When," she asked, as an afterthought, "does monsieur intend to set out?"

"Early, madame. Even though 'tis but little distance to my destination, yet I would fain be there and about the work I have to do."

"If," Madame de Valorme said now, after observing with one glance from her clear eyes that her servants--who had now all descended and were directing the porters of the inn what baggage was to be taken into the house and what might be left on the top of the coach for the night--were out of earshot--"if monsieur seeks for peace and repose in Liége--though in truth it is not very like that such as he will require any such things in a French garrison "--and her eyes were on Bevill, while almost seeming to smile at him and at the knowledge of his secret, which he now knew she possessed--"I go to join some kindred whose house will be open to him. Monsieur has been a gallant chevalier to me----"

"I beseech madame to forget any foolish, trifling service I have rendered her by chance."

"I shall not forget, and"--though now she paused, and said next a word, and then paused again as though in hesitation and doubt, and still, a moment later, went on again--"and it may be that all service--all mutual service--is not yet at an end between us. If, as I believe, there is some----"

"Some what, madame?"

"Nay; I will say no more. Or only this: I, too, go to Liége about a work I have to do. A work"--and now she leant forward in the coach from which she had naturally not yet descended, while continuing in a low tone--"to which I am vowed, to which my life is vowed; a task in which so long as I have life I will not falter. And I have a hope, a belief, a supposition--call it what you will--that in you I may by chance light on one who can help me at little cost to himself."

"I protest, madame," Bevill almost stammered at hearing these words, "I protest that----"

"Listen, Monsieur le Blond," the Comtesse said, speaking so low that now her voice was no more than a whisper, a murmur, yet a whisper so clear that, by bending his head, the young man could catch every syllable she uttered. "Listen. Yet, ere you do so, promise me that no word I let fall, no thought I give utterance to, shall cause you offence, or, if I may say it, fear?"

"Fear? I fear nothing on this earth. While as for the rest, I promise."

"Enough." Then in, if it could be so, a yet lower tone, the Comtesse de Valorme continued:

"As I have said, you are not what you seem to be. You are not le Capitaine le Blond for he was a kinsman of mine and I knew him well. I--I--a Frenchwoman--ah! shame on me, good as my cause is--only hope you may be----"

"What?"

"As faithful to my desire, my secret, when you learn it, as I will be to yours. If so, then all will be well!"

"What else can madame believe I shall be? Speak. I will answer truthfully."

"No; I have said enough--for to-night. Farewell. I, too, leave this place early. Farewell, or rather adieu." And the Comtesse put out her hand to Bevill.

The landlord had been standing in the great stoop of his house while this whispered colloquy had taken place; and now, while seeing with extreme regret that the handsome, well-apparelled young horseman who had escorted the lady in the coach to his door, was not himself going to patronise him, he came forward to the carriage. Wherefore, as Bevill turned the horse's head towards "Le Prince d'Orange" he murmured respectfully, "Madame la Comtesse"--since the coronet on the carriage, if not the servants' own words, had told him the personage with whom he had to deal--"the necessaries have been taken to madame's apartments. Will Madame la Comtesse please to enter?"

Meanwhile, Bevill had ridden across to the rival place of entertainment, had given La Rose into the charge of the stableman, and had chosen a front room on the first floor of that rambling but substantial house.

"There is some strange mystery in this woman," he mused, as he stood on the balcony to which the window of the room gave access, and gazed across to the opposite inn. "Something that passes comprehension. Still, no matter, since there is also a mystery about me. And she knows it; she informs me she knows it, and yet proffers me help and assistance. Whatever else she is, she is at least no traitor to the man who has rendered her some light, trifling service. I am here; she is across the *place*. If in the night aught of evil should befall her--and in this disturbed land troubles may well come--I am near her. We are friends, auxiliaries, though enemies by race."

But now, springing from out of these musings, there returned to Bevill's mind the memory of one word that had risen to it; the recollection that, in pondering over the mystery of the Comtesse de Valorme, he had discarded from his thoughts the suggestion that she could be a traitor of another description.

"To me? No! Never! Perish the thought!" he exclaimed, as he stepped back from the balcony and threw himself on an old couch by the window. "No; but what if she be a traitor to her country, to France! By birth, by blood, by all hereditary instincts we are foes, and yet she offers me help and protection. Le Blond, the man under whose name I masquerade, whose very horse I ride, was kinsman to her; yet she, knowing what I am, makes offers of assistance. She a Frenchwoman and I an Englishman!

"She prayed," Bevill went on, "that I might be what she believes I am. She asked earlier if I could give her information of my Lord Marlborough's movements and plans. Great heavens! Does she desire to betray her country into his hands?" Then, suddenly, he sprang from his seat, exclaiming, "No, no! Never will I believe it! Never There is some other cause that moves thig woman to act as she is doing. That is the reason for her desire to reach Liége. It is not, cannot be, treachery."

The evening was at hand now--one of the soft calm evenings which, in the Netherlands, in fine weather, are at times almost as soft and calm as the nights of more southern lands; nights when here, through all this marshy country, made fertile and rich by centuries of toil, the fireflies dance in the dusk as in far off Italy; when the sun sinks a globe of flame into the bosom of the German Ocean, and when as it does so, the stars begin to stud the skies.

Such a night, such a twilight as this was no time for indoors: and Bevill, recognising that for two hours at least it would be folly to seek his bed with any hope of sleeping, went forth after his supper to take the air. Or rather, since his ride had given him sufficient of that, to observe what might be doing in the little town.

Of French troops he observed that there were few about, though some men of the Régiment de Monsieur (the Duc d'Orléans) and some others of the Artillery were drinking outside an inn while being regarded with lowering looks by groups of the inhabitants.

"French--French always!" he heard one man say to the other. "French always and everywhere! When will the English or our own troops come?"

"Have patience," another said. "Already, a month ago, even before the war was declared, was not Kaiserswörth besieged by the English general Athlone? The city will soon fall now."

"English? Dutch--our countryman--you should say. Is not the Lord Athlone a Dutchman? Is he not Ginkell?"

"What matters, so that one or the other does it? Soon Marlborough will be here. Then we shall see."

"Meanwhile, he is not here, and the French are; and they eat us out of house and home, and do not pay too well."

"They will pay with their skins ere long."

But Bevill knew as much as this himself, so, continuing his walk, he soon returned towards the inns in which, he on the one side the *place* and the Comtesse de Valorme on the other, they were to rest for the night. But when on the *place* he could not refrain from letting his eyes wander to the "Duc de Brabant," while speculating idly as to where his companion might be installed in it.

He soon knew, however, since on the first floor of the house he observed that the long wooden shutters were open, and the windows thrown back, doubtless to admit the cool air of the coming night, while he also saw that Jeanne passed once or twice before them. As he did so he could not prevent his thoughts from turning once more to the mystery in which the Comtesse seemed to be enveloped, or from wondering again and again why she should testify such interest in him, a stranger.

Could he have gazed into one of those rooms in the "Duc de Brabant" could he have seen the Comtesse seated in a deep *fauteuil* wrapped in meditation; above all, could he have caught the occasional expressions that fell from her lips; or, gazing into her mind, have probed her innermost thoughts, he would have wondered no longer.

"For fourteen years now," he would in such a case have heard her say, or have gathered from the Comtesse de Valorme's thoughts, "we have suffered and borne all from him--and from her who sits by his side. From her, the scourge and curse of France, the snake that sucks the life-blood from all who do not worship as she does. Oh! God," he would have heard the undoubtedly unhappy woman exclaim, as she lifted her eyes, "how long is it to be? How long for all of us? Fathers, mothers, husbands, all--all--dead--done to death, either on the wheel or the gallows, or in the galleys or the dungeons. And for what? Because we desire to worship God in our own way--the way his grandsire promised solemnly that we should worship: the way for following which this one burns us, racks us, destroys our homes, drives us forth to exile and beggary."

Still gazing in at those open windows from the other side of the *place*, while unable to see the woman on whom his thoughts rested, Bevill did at last, however, discover that she was there. As he still stood and meditated, her form came suddenly before his eyes and he recognised that she must have suddenly sprung up from some chair or couch; while, from her commencing to pace the room and by her almost distracted appearance, he gathered that her mind was a prey to the most agitating thoughts. Even then, however, he could not divine what those thoughts might be, or that he was the central figure of them. This was as impossible as it was for him to hear her say:

"And now this man, who is, since he does not deny it, an Englishman; this man, disguised as a French soldier, while, in sober truth, I do believe him to be an English one, is on his way to Liége on some secret mission. 'Some work he has to do,' as he avowed. What work? What? Is he a spy of the English generals? Above all, can he help me? Can he bring me to Marlborough, give me the opportunity I have so long desired of throwing myself at his feet, of beseeching him to hurry forward that invasion of the South which can alone save those of us who are still alive? Can he? Can he? Oh, if I did but know!"

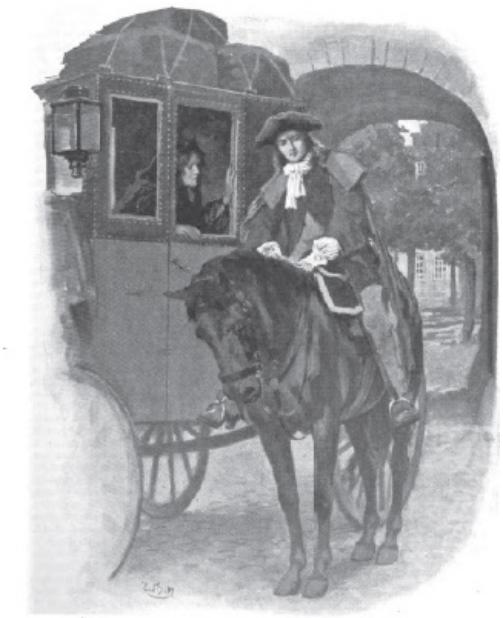
Suddenly, as Bevill stood there gazing at the undoubtedly unhappy, distracted woman there came the ripple of a cool evening breeze through the heated air that the day had left behind. A light breeze that shook the leaves of the orange trees in their tubs before the inn doors, and also those of the pollards which grew round the *place*. A moment later he saw Jeanne pull to the wooden shutters. Except for a streak of light that issued from the air slits at the top of them, all was now dark and veiled.

"Poor lady!" Bevill said to himself, as now, in the same manner as he had done overnight, and as he would do every night whenever he might be on the road, or on any journey--and as, perhaps, he would do should he and Sylvia Thorne be able to make their way out of Liége, in the endeavour to fall in with any of the English or Dutch forces--he directed his steps towards the stables of the "Prince d'Orange" to see that all was well with his horse.

Those stables were reached by passing down a small alley or *ruelle* that ran by the side of the "Prince d'Orange," and lay behind the house, entrance being obtained by a turn to the right when the end of the alley was attained.

Finding an ostler, or horse-watcher, in this alley, Bevill requested the man to accompany him to the door and unlock it; but, learning that the stables were not yet closed and would not be for yet another hour, and that there was a lanthorn hanging on the hook inside, he proceeded alone.

A moment later he pushed open the door and called to the mare, who by now knew not only his voice, but the new name he had given her, and learnt by her whimper that she had recognised his presence.



"'I, too, go to Liége about a work I have to do.'"—p. 318.

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"'I, too, go to Liége about a work
I have to do.'"--*p.* 318.

But as he advanced to see that all was well with her, he heard a rustle in the straw of an empty stall close by the door, and the next instant saw a man walk swiftly out of that stall and through the door into the alley--a man whose cloak was thrown across his face and held by his right hand, and whose slouching hat fell over the upper part of it. Yet this attempted and almost successful disguise did not altogether serve to cloak the whole of his features. His eyes, dark and flashing, appeared above the edging of the cloak. Where his hand held the folds together there protruded a wisp of grizzled beard.

"Where have I seen those eyes, that beard before?" Bevill wondered, while remembering a moment later.

"It is Sparmann!" he said. "Sparmann! And he is following either the Comtesse or me--or both."

After which he went swiftly to the mare and made a rapid but thorough inspection of her, thereby to discover if she was injured in any part; and also looked to see if the fodder remained untampered with in the manger; while, taking up next the half-emptied bucket, he threw the water that remained in it away, and, going out into the alley, refilled it.

"I will stay here until the stables are locked for the night," he said, approaching the horse-watcher. "I mistrust that fellow I saw creep out from here but a moment ago."

CHAPTER VIII.

"This threatens danger," Bevill thought to himself after he had spoken to the man in the alley, and had received from him a surly grunt and the information that the other was, like himself, a traveller having his own horse in another stall. But the ostler did not add the words that Bevill had expected to hear--viz., that this traveller was, also like himself, a Frenchman. He remembered, however, a moment later, that though Sparmann was now undoubtedly a French spy, he was absolutely as much a Dutchman as any native of St. Trond, and could, consequently, pass easily as a man who was voyaging from one part of the Netherlands to another.

In recollecting this, there came suddenly into his mind a thought--an inspiration--a reflection

that, in such a circumstance lay the chance of outwitting, of silencing--though only for a time, yet perhaps for long enough--this fellow who, beyond almost all possibility of doubt, was here with the view of causing harm to him.

"He is a Hollander," Bevill thought to himself as he stood outside the courtyard of "Le Prince d'Orange," while undecided as to whether he should endeavour to see, or at least to communicate with, the Comtesse. "A Hollander, yet one who is now in the service of France, and, consequently, an enemy to all things Dutch. If--if--I denounced him to-night to some of the burghers of this place, to some native magistrate here, as he will endeavour to denounce me to some of the French who hold the place, it will go hard with him. These Dutch may, because they must at present, tolerate the French army, but they will not tolerate a spy who is their own countryman amongst them. Yet how to do it? Above all, how to do it at once? Let me reflect."

As he so reflected, however, he was already crossing the *place*, and in a moment was in front of the courtyard of "Le Duc de Brabant," which, although it was similar to that of the inn where he had put up, was nevertheless considerably larger than the latter. Halting, however, under the archway that led into this yard, he saw the great coach of Madame de Valorme standing out in the dark, and observed that, from some of the lower windows of the inn, there still gleamed the rays of a lamp or other light, as well as the beams from a lanthorn hung on a hook outside the stable door. Thus the coach and the baggage on the top of it stood clearly out, thin and weakly though the rays of light might be, and by their aid he was able to perceive other things.

He saw that Joseph, the coachman, on account of whose ill-treatment by the Brabant peasants that afternoon he had lodged a bullet in the shoulder of one of them, was now strapping up a valise on the roof of the coach; a valise that he divined easily had already been used this evening and repacked and closed, and then sent down to be put in its place in time for the morning's departure. Near the coachman, who now seemed to be entirely recovered from his slight injury--which had been only prevented by an inch from being a fatal one--there stood a *facchin*, or porter of the inn, who had evidently brought down the valise and was now going away to, in all probability, fetch another.

"Joseph," Bevill said now to the man as he descended from the box on which he had been standing while strapping the valise, "Joseph, come down. I wish to speak to you on a matter of serious concern."

Astonished at seeing beneath him the dashing horseman who, at a critical moment for all concerned, had suddenly appeared amongst the boors who had attacked his mistress's coach, and--which he did not overlook--nearly killed him, Joseph sprang to the ground, while doffing the hat he wore and instantly commencing a long series of thanks and utterances of gratitude to Bevill, all of which he had previously uttered many times during the continuation of the journey.

"No matter for that," said Bevill, while looking round to see that they were out of earshot, and remarking that the *facchin* had disappeared. "I need no more thanks, nor have needed any. But, Joseph--your mistress? Where is she? If it may be so, if it can be compassed, I must speak with her to-night."

"To-night, monsieur? *Helas!* it is impossible. She has retired; the necessaries are all distributed there," glancing up at the roof of the vehicle, "save one small chest that remains in the rooms for use in the morning. It is impossible, monsieur," he repeated. "But," the man went on, "if monsieur has anything to confide, if he requires any service which one so humble as I can give, monsieur knows where he can obtain it. Monsieur punished the ruffians who endeavoured to slay me. If one so poor as I can----"

"Nay, no matter; yet--yet--it is of grave import. There has happened that which thrusts against my hopes of reaching Liége, of reaching that city in company of--almost, may I say, in charge of Madame----"

"What, monsieur, what?" the man exclaimed in a low voice. "Monsieur is in some peril? And he, our preserver----"

"Listen," Bevill` said, thinking it best to at once tell this man the worst. "It may be that ere morning I shall no longer be able to accompany Madame La Comtesse on her road."

"Oh, monsieur!" Joseph exclaimed. "Oh, monsieur! Monsieur is indeed in some peril. What is it, monsieur?"

"There is a man now staying at the inn where I am, at 'Le Prince d'Orange,' who knows a secret of mine which may undo me if divulged. He is a Dutchman, yet now he serves France--our country--as the basest of creatures. He is a spy, one employed by France. What's that?" Bevill broke off to say, hearing a slight noise in the stable close by.

"I heard nothing, monsieur. Doubtless one of the horses moving. It is nothing. Please go on, monsieur."

"Yet also is he, as I say, an enemy of mine. He may denounce me as one having sympathy with these Dutch, as one favourable to this Grand Alliance. Ha!" Bevill exclaimed, breaking off again. "Look! Did'st? see. That man who passed outside the entry but now, his cloak about him! One

with dark, piercing eyes and a flash of grey beard showing. That is the man. I will follow him, prevent him, if possible, from carrying out his intentions to-night."

"And so also will I, monsieur. Let me but get my coat and whinyard, and I will be with you. But an instant, monsieur. But an instant."

"Nay," Bevill called, even as the man sped towards the great wooden staircase that led out of the courtyard up to the balconies outside the various floors; "nay, stay here, I command you. Stay here by your mistress to whom your service is due. I need no assistance. It is man to man, as," he muttered grimly through set teeth, "it was two years ago in England."

Then, seeing that Joseph had disappeared up the stairs, Bevill went swiftly out of the courtyard and under the arch into the street.

But he did not know that, as he did so, another man had followed in his footsteps.

A man who, almost ere he was outside the entrance, had softly pushed open the stable door and then, after looking round stealthily to make sure that he was not observed, had come out himself, while thrusting into the folds of his coarse shirt something that gleamed for an instant in the rays of the lanthorn.

"What was it he said?" this man muttered to himself in a hoarse, raucous voice. "What? I could not hear all--yet enough. A Dutchman! One of us--who has joined these accursed French as a spy on us. On us--*ach! Himmel!* On us, his countrymen. Ha! Let me but find him, and he spies no more in this world."

And now this man was also in the *place*--the deserted place in which glittered but one or two oil lamps hung on chains stretched across the road, yet which was well lighted now by a late risen moon that was in her third quarter--a moon that was topping now the pointed, crenellated roofs of the old houses and flooding the whole space with its beams. By this light the man saw that he was not yet too late.

"'He's mine,' the watcher whispered to himself."

He saw the tall form of Bevill turning away from the door of "Le Prince d'Orange," and understood that the man, who had in his hearing denounced the other as a spy, had been to see if the latter had entered the inn. He saw, too, by looking up the one long street that led from the *place*, that the denouncer paused for a moment and then went swiftly along it. Seeing this, he understood, and himself followed swiftly, while now and again putting his hand in his breast as though to make sure of what was hidden there.

"He is gone that way," he muttered, "and the other knows it. So, too, do I know it now. Between us we shall run the fox to ground."

Thus they went on: the first man invisible to the last, but the second kept well in view by that last; then suddenly the latter paused.

He paused, with a muttered imprecation; paused while withdrawing himself into the deep,

dark stoop of an old house.

"He has missed him! Missed him! He is coming back. The spy has escaped. Ah! ah! the chance is gone. If he has missed him how shall I ever find him?"

A moment later this watcher started, while giving utterance to some sound that was, now, neither imprecation nor exclamation, but, in truth, a gasp. A gasp full of astonishment, nevertheless; a gasp that surprise seemed to have choked back into his throat.

For he who was coming back was not the tall, handsomely apparelled young man who had started forth in pursuit of him whom he had denounced as a renegade spy; but, instead, another. An older man, one who held a dark cloak across his features from which some wisp of a grey beard projected; one who, as he came swiftly towards that stoop where the man was hidden, looked back and back, and back again, and glinted a pair of dark eyes up and down the street as though in mortal fear.

"He's mine," the watcher whispered to himself. "He's mine. He will spy no more."

As he so spoke, the man who was returning drew near the stoop, his footsteps fell outside it. He was before it!

* * * * * *

"How did I miss him? What twist or turn did the vagabond take whereby to avoid me?" Bevill pondered the next morning, as now the soft, roseate hue of the sun suffused the skies that, half an hour before, had been daffodil and, before that, lit by the moon. For it was four o'clock now, and the daylight had dawned on one of the last remaining days of May.

Four o'clock! And Bevill Bracton, after he had re-entered his room, disheartened at having missed Sparmann, had sat from midnight until now on a chair at a table by the window, while sternly refraining from lying down for fear that, thereby, he might fall asleep and so be trapped by some of the French soldiery whom the spy would possibly have put on his track.

He had asked himself the above question a dozen, a score, a hundred times during these hours. He had muttered again and again, "How did I miss him? How lose sight of him?" yet was always unable to find an answer to the question.

Also Bevill had asked himself another, a more important question which, not only in his own mind but in actual fact, remained unanswered. Why, since Sparmann had escaped him, had he not already been denounced? Why, through the night as it passed away, or in the cool coming of the dawn, had he heard no tread of provost's picket, or corporal's guard, coming down the street to the inn to arrest him? Yet his ancient enemy had but to warn them that here, in "Le Prince d'Orange," was an Englishman on whom would be found a Frenchman's passport, the passport of a secretary of the French Embassy in London, for his doom to be swift and sure. A hurried examination, a still more hurried trial, and--a platoon of soldiers! That was all.

Yet nothing had come during those hours of the passing night. Nothing had disturbed the watcher and listener at that table by the window, nothing had caused him to even glance towards his unsheathed sword as it lay on the undisturbed bed, nothing to cause his hand to advance one inch towards the pistols placed on a chair by his side. A dog barking, some labourers going forth to their toil, the striking of the hours by the church clock; but nothing more. And now the day was come and he was still free and unsought for.

"Even had I been sought for it may be that I might have escaped from out the town at break of day," Bevill mused now; "but what of her opposite? What of the woman who depends on me and my succour if needed--the woman who, knowing that I am no Frenchman and am, since all the world is against France or France's king, doubtless her enemy, does not betray me? Might have escaped? No! I could not have done that."

"Why," he continued, still reflecting, "has that man held his peace? Does he doubt that he may be mistaken, that I am not his old enemy and victor; or does he fear that, as he might betray me to his new masters, so might I find opportunity to betray him to his old ones, to his countrymen? In truth, it may be so."

The little town was waking up to the work of the day by this time. Windows were being thrown open to the rays of the bright morning sun. Away, outside the town, the bugles and trumpets of those who held the place in subjection could be heard, and, a moment later, Bevill saw Jeanne thrust aside the shutters of the rooms of the first floor of the "Duc de Brabant."

"I had best make my way across," Bevill mused, as now he refreshed himself with some hearty ablutions and made the usual toilet of travellers of that day. "It seems that I am to be unmolested for the present. Therefore will I start at once, and the sooner the better! leaving word that, as near as may be, I will await the coach of Madame la Comtesse beyond the town."

Thrusting, therefore, his sword into his belt, and his pistols into his deep pockets, he threw open the door of the room and went out into the passage. As he did so, however, he saw the sun streaming through the open door of another bedroom farther down, and heard voices proceeding

from inside the room.

"Not in all night!" he heard one voice say, while recognising it as that of the landlady. "Not in all night! And he a man of years! Surely he is not a wastrel and a roysterer? It may be so, since he says he is a Frenchman, though he has not the air thereof. Perhaps he has been carousing with their dissolute soldiery. Or--*ach!*--if he should have ridden off without payment. *Ach!* 'tis like enough!"

"His horse is in the stable," another voice, that of an ancient *femme de chamber*, replied. "He has not done that. Yet, all the same, 'tis strange. *Ja Wohl*, it is strange."

"It must be *him* of whom they speak," Bevill thought to himself, as now he passed the door, and, giving "good-day" to the women within the room, went down the stairs and out into the street, after which he crossed the *place* to the "Duc de Brabant."

The coach of the Comtesse de Valorme was as he had seen it last night. At present there was no sign of departure; the horses had not yet been brought from the stable, and none of madame's servants were about. In the courtyard, however, the stableman and *facchins* were sluicing the whole place with buckets of water and brushing and mopping the stones, amongst them being the one who had brought down the valises to Joseph overnight.

Calling this man towards him with the intention of asking him to bring Jeanne Or Joseph down for a moment, so that he might leave a message for the Comtesse, he observed that he had a huge bruise on his face, one that was almost raw, and bled slightly.

"You have hurt yourself," Bevill said kindly to the fellow, after he had asked him to do his behest; and after, also, putting a piece of silver in his hand. "You would do well to put some styptic to your face."

"'Tis nothing, mynheer, nothing," the man muttered, as he pocketed the silver. "The lights were out as I went to my bed last night. The passages in this old house are dark as a pocket. It is nothing. I fell and bruised myself." After which he went away to summon one of the servants of her whom he called "Matame la Gomdesse."

A moment later Joseph appeared on the scene, and, ere Bevill could bid him inform Madame de Valorme that he thought it best to proceed past the barrier and out of the town at once, the coachman exclaimed:

"And the enemy of monsieur? The spy! What of him?"

"I lost him," Bevill replied. "He evaded me."

"And evidently he has not betrayed monsieur?"

"Evidently. It may be, Joseph, he supposed that in betraying me I might in return have betrayed him, if not to his new friends, at least to his old. Now, Joseph, I go. Present my respects to madame and say that a mile farther on the road to Liége I will await her coming."

CHAPTER IX.

Month before Bevill Bracton had set out on the task of endeavouring in some way to assist Sylvia Thorne in quitting Liége, and, should Providence prove favourable, of enabling her to return to England under his charge, the whole of what was termed, comprehensively, Flanders was filled with various bodies of troops that were drawn from almost all the countries of Western and, consequently, civilised Europe.

Used--as this great combination of various states had long been called--as "The Great Barrier"--*i.e.*, the barrier between the aggressions of France and the safety of the Netherlands, it was, therefore, now filled with the above-named troops of the contending nations. To the most northern portion of it--from Antwerp on the west to Cologne on the east, and then downward to Kaiserswörth and Bonn--the French held possession under the ostensible command of the royal Duke of Burgundy, but actually under the command of the Maréchal de Boufflers, styled the second in command. With these were the troops of Spain under the command of Le Marquis de Bedmar. Other marshals and generals, such as Tallard (who was afterwards to lose the battle of Blenheim) and De Chamarande held high command under them.

The English and Dutch troops, many of the former of which had never been withdrawn since

the Peace of Ryswick, made during the reign of William III., still held and garrisoned the more northern portions of the Flanders barrier. Of these, the principal commanders were, until Marlborough was appointed by the English and Dutch Governments Captain-General of the whole army of the Grand Alliance, Ginkell, Earl of Athlone, who was a Dutchman, and Coehoorn, who was another. Of towns and villages and outposts which the allied troops held at this time, Maestricht, a few miles north of Liége, was the principal; but rapidly, after the arrival of the Earl of Marlborough, many more were, one after the other, to fall into our hands.

By the time, however, that Bevill Bracton had reached Flanders, not only were continuous sieges and encounters taking place, but also continuous marchings and counter-marchings and deployings of troops. The ground which one week had been occupied and held by the French would, the next, be occupied by English or Dutch, Austrian or Hanoverian troops; Austria, which was the rival claimant to the throne of Spain, being the only Catholic country in the Alliance. Had her claims not been recognised and used as the pivot on which revolved the determination of the other Powers to break down, once and for all, the arrogant assumption of the King of France, she would never have been admitted as partner in this great alliance of Protestant princes. She was, however, the foundation stone of the great fabric, and could not be omitted.

The land, therefore, which formed part of the eastern portion of Brabant, as well as the whole of Limburg, the Electorate of Cologne, and the Bishopric of Liége, was at this time the scene of skirmishes, of attacks, and general hostilities that occurred almost daily; but, since these never attained to the dignity of a battle, they have gone unrecorded even in the most dry-as-dust of military annals. Indeed, they were frequently bloodless and often unimportant, the occasional hanging of a spy, or supposed spy, on one side or the other, or the detention of a person who could give no satisfactory account of himself, being unworthy of notice by any chronicler, even if any chronicler ever heard of the incidents--which is probably doubtful.

Almost directly St. Trond was quitted, the great Cologne road parted, as it still parts; the northern arm passing through Looz to Maestricht and the southern running straight to Liége by Waremme, only to reunite later out side Liége.

At this bifurcation Bevill Bracton, drawing up his horse, paused beneath some trees and determined to await the coming of the Comtesse de Valorme.

It was still quite early, and, since he had been subjected to no delay at the gate, his passport having merely been glanced at by the soldier stationed there (perhaps because of the excellent French he spoke, which was a great deal better than that of the man, who belonged to the Régiment de Perche from the far south of France) he knew that there was no likelihood of the Comtesse appearing yet. Therefore he rode on a few hundred paces farther towards where he had observed a signboard swinging from the branch of a tree, and decided that he would wait here for her arrival. Also, he had not yet broken his fast, and determined that now would be a good opportunity for doing so.

As he came within twenty or thirty yards of the signboard, which bore a heart painted on it--the emblem resembling more a heart painted on a card than that which is a portion of the human frame--and had beneath it, in Dutch, the words, "The Kindly Heart," he was astonished at hearing a voice call out "Halt!" Yet he was not so astonished at hearing the word, which is very similar in most languages, as in hearing the voice that uttered that word, since, undoubtedly, it was the voice of an Englishman.

Turning in the direction whence the sound came, Bevill did not see any person whatever. But what he did see was the short, squat, unbrowned barrel of a musquetoon projecting through the interstices of a quickset hedge and covering him. A moment later the voice of the invisible owner of it repeated:

"Halt, will you, or shall I put a plum into you?"

In absolute fact, Bevill had halted at the first injunction; but, on hearing the above words delivered in a most unmistakably English tone of voice, he said:

"My friend, you will pay me no such compliment as that. Since we happen to be countrymen----"

"Countrymen!" the voice exclaimed now. "And so I think, in truth, we must be. Yet, countryman, are you mad? Have you escaped out of some Dutch Bedlam to be roaming about here alone?"

"No more mad than you who cry out to one who may be a Frenchman to halt. Come out of that hedge and let me see you. What regiment are you of?"

"What regiment? The Tangier Horse--the Royal Dragoons, as we are now called.[3] What matters the name so long as the fruit is good!" the speaker said, as now he came out of a little wicket gate in the hedge and advanced toward where Bevill sat his horse. As he did so, however, he still held his musquetoon in such a manner that he could have fired its charge into the other's body at any instant.

"What are you doing here?" the latter asked, while recognising by the man's accoutrements and banderole that he was undoubtedly that which he stated himself to be. "Is," he continued, "your regiment near here? Or any portion of our army? If not, you must be mad to betray yourself to one who might belong to the present controllers of all this neighbourhood."

"That," the trooper replied respectfully, since he saw that he had a gentleman to deal with, and one who, though he wore no signs of being an officer, might very well be one, "you had best ask my captain and the lieutenant. They are breaking their fast in the inn."

"Your captain and lieutenant? Great heavens! Almost might I ask if they too, if all of you, are demented. Here, in this place, surrounded on all sides, garrisoned everywhere, by the enemy!"

"They are as like, sir, to go harmless as you. And we have a picket near. The enemy cannot get near us without our being warned in time to escape. We are spying out the land."

"Lead me to the officers," Bevill said.

Upon which the trooper motioned to him to dismount and leave his horse and follow him through the little orchard, out of which he had descended to the road. "They are," he said, "at the back of the house." While, as he did so, he repeated himself and said, "We are spying out the land, but wish no one to spy on us."

A burst of low, suppressed laughter reached Bevill's ears as now, after tying La Rose's reins to a stake in the quickset hedge, he drew near to the spot where the man had said the officers were. A burst of laughter, suddenly hushed by one who formed the group, as he said, "Silence! Silence! Here comes some stranger. If 'tis a Frenchman by chance----"

"'He is no Frenchman,' Bevill answered for himself."

"'He is no Frenchman,' Bevill answered for himself."

"He will not be a Frenchman or any other man long, unless he is of us."

"He is no Frenchman," Bevill answered for himself as he reached the grass plot, on which several officers sat round a table, and while taking off his hat in salutation as he did so; "but, instead, an Englishman. One who was once an officer of cavalry like yourselves, and hopes to be one again ere long."

"One who was an officer and hopes to be one again! One who *was!* Pray sir, of what regiment?" the older of the group asked.

"Of the Cuirassiers. By name, Bevill Bracton."

"Bevill Bracton? You are Bevill Bracton? The man who trounced that insolent Dutchman for traducing our calling? The man who was broken for doing so?" And the speaker held out his hand.

"The same. Yet one who is not yet quit of him. He is now a spy in the pay of the French, and at

Antwerp he almost betrayed me, and so again last night at St. Trond."

"And this time you killed him?"

"No. He disappeared. Something doubtless befell him--though not at my hands--since I passed safely out of the town half an hour ago."

After which, since Bevill's exploit of nearly killing Sparmann for his insolence more than two years ago had brought him into considerable notoriety (of an enviable character) with the whole of the army, while the harshness of the unpopular William of Orange in removing him from it had been very adversely commented on, these men, thrown so curiously together, began to discuss their affairs.

"Yet," said Bevill, as they commenced to "I pray you let your corporal keep watch and ward over the road leading from St. Trond past here. From out of the town will come ere long a travelling coach containing a lady and her servants----"

"What? Are English ladies travelling here, too, at such a time as this? And have you become a squire of dames? Pray, who can the daring lady be?"

"The lady is not English!"

"Oh. I protest! Surely, much as we are grappled to these good Hollanders, there is no need for a British officer, as you have been and will be again, to become a knight errant to their comely womankind."

"Nay. To be brief, the lady is a Frenchwoman. Ah! I beseech you," Bevill continued, "do not misunderstand me."

"'Tis very strange!"

"'Tis very simple. Listen, gentlemen. I go to help a young lady, a ward of my Lord Peterborough's----"

"What! A ward of Mordanto's!" the captain exclaimed, with a laugh. "The knight-errant *par excellence!*"

"The very same. He is my cousin--or, rather, I should say in all respect that I am his. I go to help this young lady to leave Liége in safety, and to escort her first to the English lines, and afterwards, if I can compass it, to England."

"She must be the only English lady there now. For very sure, if you get into Liége you will also be the only Englishman in it."

"It may be so--for a time. Yet, for certain, Liége must fall to us ere long. It is a place to be possessed of."

"But the Frenchwoman!" one of the younger officers exclaimed. "The Frenchwoman?"

"She is a wayside companion--one whom I came to know at an inn we both sojourned at. A widow, grave, serious, and withal somewhat young. A serious-minded woman. Some slight assistance I rendered her on the road 'twixt Louvain and that place," nodding towards St. Trond, "and since then I ride as her escort. Yet, in solemn truth, my mind is teased; for, French though she is beyond all doubt, and deemed me to be the same at first----"

"At first! And now?"

"Now she has discovered by some tone or trick of accent--I having the French well enough in ordinary since my father, Sir George Bracton, dwelt in Paris, and I was brought up and schooled there--that I am none. Yet, it may be, she knows not that I am English; but still--but still she has asked me if I know of the movements of my lords Athlone and Marlborough. If I can tell her when our army will draw near to Liége, when it will come, where it is now----"

"Tell her nothing," the captain said decisively. "She is a spy."

"No; she is no spy, I will be sworn. The cunning of spies harbours not behind such clear eyes or so honest a face as hers. If she is aught she should not be, and still I almost reproach myself for dreaming of such a thing, she is a woman who by some injustice, some wickedness done to her, is false to her own country, to France. Listen, gentlemen. This woman, the Comtesse de Valorme, desires one thing above all."

"What is it!" everyone of the dragoons asked in the same breath.

"To be brought to Marlborough or Athlone as soon as may be. How, then, shall she be a spy on us?"

"Upon a pretext to see one of these generals, upon seeing them, she might discover much," the lieutenant said; "yet she is but a sorry fool if she dreams of speaking with either of them or

learning aught. Bah! Athlone--Ginkell--would offer her a glass of his native schnapps, bow before her with heavy, stolid grace, call her, 'Zhére Matam la Gondesse,' and tell her nothing. While as for my Lord Marlborough----"

"Ay, my Lord Marlborough!" Bevill said. "Marlborough!"

"He would receive her with infinite grace. Doubtless, he would kiss her hand with the most engaging look on his handsome face. Also, he would let her think that he esteemed himself well fortuned in being able to place himself and all the army at her disposal, and--he also would do nothing. A man with the sweetest disposition in all the world, one bred a courtier from his youth, one who has been a French soldier himself, who knows France as other Englishmen know their native hamlet, will not be hoodwinked by any scheming Frenchwoman."

"She is no schemer, or, if she is, it is against her own land," Bevill exclaimed. "Oh! if I knew, if I could divine what reason there may be for any French, in such times as these, to look to the English for help and support! Gentlemen, you have been long on this foreign service. Have you heard no word? Can any French, any portion of France, be hoping for help from us against their own selves?"

But the officers could tell him nothing. They had, indeed, been abroad some time, but that time had been passed only in the Netherlands. They did not know--it was impossible they should know--that far away in the South, whose shores and golden sands were laved by the soft waters of the Mediterranean, things were being done that were turning honest, faithful subjects into rebels. They did not know that homes were being rendered desolate, children made orphans, and parents childless; that the nobles were escaping, where possible, to other lands; that the working classes were being succoured in Clerkenwell and Spitalfields, beneath the Swiss snows and on the burning shores of Africa. Therefore, they could neither think nor dream of what might be the cause--if there were any such!--which could make this woman of the French aristocracy false to France.

But now the trooper came back to where they sat with Bevill, and stated that a great travelling coach was coming slowly along, it having evidently issued from out St. Trond, which lay round a bend of the road. Upon which Bevill, wishing them a hasty farewell and exchanging swift handshakes with them, mounted La Rose.

"God speed!" they all cried out to him. "God speed" and "*Fortune de la guerre!*" while the youngest exclaimed, in boyish enthusiasm, "If you creep into Liége and cannot find your way forth again, keep ever a brave heart. We shall be near; we, or some of us, will have you out."

"And, 'ware *les beaux yeux* of Madame la Comtesse," the captain called.

"And those of the ward of my Lord Peterborough," said the lieutenant.

"'There is more danger,'" cried the youngest, misquoting, "'in one look of theirs than twenty of our foemen's swords,' as Betterton says as Romeo."

"So, monsieur le Mousquetaire--*monsieur mon cousin*, Le Blond," the Comtesse with emphasis said, as now Bevill rode back to the carriage and took up his usual position by the window, "you can speak English when you desire."

"Yes, madame, when I desire. I hope the sound of that tongue is not offensive to madame."

"An Englishman," the Comtesse replied, her calm, clear eyes upon him, "should ever speak the tongue he loves best--even as a valiant knight is ever knightly, no matter what his land may be."

CHAPTER X.

Liége was before them. From a slight eminence in this land, in most cases so utterly without eminence at all, they could look onward and see its walls, especially those on the left bank of the Meuse. Also, they could see upon what they saw was the citadel a great banner streaming out to the soft south-west wind--a banner on which was emblazoned the gold sun that was the emblem of him who gloried in the name of "Le Roi Soleil." So, too, on the right side there floated out that ostentatious, braggart flag from the roof of the Chartreuse.

Lying outside the city, as they were easily able to observe from the eminence on which they

had halted, were several regiments, their colours displayed from the larger tents amongst the lines; and some of these Bevill Bracton was able to recognise, since he had seen them before, when in Holland and Flanders under William III.

"Those," he exclaimed, pointing towards a large blue banner that streamed out above a great tent--a blue banner on which was a heraldic emblazonment that, had they been nearer, they would have recognised as a leopard *couchant*, "are the arms of a fierce, cruel general. The pennon to the right is that of the cavalry of Orléans; that to the left is the pennon of the dragoons of Piémont-Royal. We have met--I should say I have seen them--before."

Remembering, however, that much as the Comtesse might suspect or, indeed, actually know with regard to his being neither Frenchman nor mousquetaire, she did not know all, Bevill refrained from adding, "I have charged them in the past, and should know their colours."

"And this general you speak of--this man who is fierce and cruel? Who is he?"

"Montrével," Bevill replied.

As he did so he heard the Comtesse give a slight gasp, or, if it were so slight as to be unheard, at least he saw her lips part, while into her eyes there came a strange look, one that expressed half fear and half hate.

"Madame knows him?" he exclaimed.

"I know of him. He is, as monsieur says, fierce and cruel. He--he comes from a part of France I know very well--from Orange. And, worse than all, he is a--a--renegade."

"A renegade? He! One of Louis' most trusted leaders! He who has received the *bâton* of a Field-Marshal but recently! He a renegade?"

"One may be a renegade to others than king and country. To----"

"Yes! To what? To whom?"

"To God!"

After which the Comtesse seemed undesirous of saying more and sat gazing down towards the army lying outside the walls of Liége, while occasionally asking Bevill if he could tell her what other persons or regiments were represented by the various colours flying from tents and staffs.

But he, while doing his best to explain all that she had desired to know, and while pointing out to her the regiments of Poitou and Royal Roussillon--both of which he had also encountered--recognised that his mind was far away from a subject that, in other circumstances, would have occupied it to its fullest extent.

For now he could not keep his attention fixed on banners and bannerols and regiments, deep as might be the import they must bear towards England and his own safety. He could not even reflect upon how he, an Englishman passing as a Frenchman, would in the next hour or so have to make his way through the lines of those regiments while every word he uttered might betray him to sudden death. Sudden death! as must, indeed, be his only portion if, among those masses of troops below, one word mispronounced, one accent to arouse suspicion, should be observed. Sudden death! Yes, after a moment's interview with one of the generals or marshals--such a marshal, to wit, as the fierce cruel Montrével! Sudden death after another moment, and that but a short one, allowed for a hasty prayer.

And still he could not force his mind to think upon these things, since those words of the Comtesse de Valorme had driven all other thoughts away.

"Why?" he asked himself again and again as he sat his horse by her side. "Why does she speak thus of that truculent soldier? Why, among so many other matters that must have possession of her thoughts now, does this man's apostasy, for such it must be that she refers to, affect her so deeply. Ah! if I could but know!" And, as he thought thus, he let his eyes fall on those of the comtesse, and saw that hers were resting on him.

Suddenly, as he did this, he saw in them something that seemed almost as clear and distinct as spoken words would themselves have been; some pleading in them which, unlike spoken words, he could not understand, while still recognising that in her look there was a request. But yet he could not understand. He could not comprehend what it was that she desired of him, and so held his peace.

Now, however, the Comtesse spoke. She spoke as she leant forward, in the same way she had done before since they had first travelled in company, her gloved hand on the sash of the lowered window, her glance full of earnestness.

"We are close to Liége, monsieur," she said. "Little more than an hour will take us to the lines of that army lying outside the city. In two hours, by Heaven's grace, we may be inside. Monsieur, shall we not be frank with each other?"

"Frank, madame. How so? How frank?"

"Ah, monsieur, do not let us trifle further. Each of us has an object in entering that city. Yours I can partly divine, as I think; but mine I doubt your ever divining. Yet--yet--I know what you are, and I would that you should know who and what I am. If--if it pleases you, can we not confide in each other?"

Bevill bowed over his horse's mane as the Comtesse said these words; then, in a low tone, he replied:

"Any confidence madame may honour me with shall be deeply respected. Meanwhile, I have perceived that madame knows or suspects that I am not what I seem to be. So be it. I am in her hands and I do not fear. Let her tell me what she believes me to be and, if she has judged aright, I will answer truly. A frank admission can harm me no more than suspicion can do."

"I shall not harm you," the Comtesse said. "I have not forgotten your succour when those boors had attacked me." Then, glancing round to observe whether the servants were out of earshot, as was, indeed, the case, since they had gone some little distance ahead of the coach the better to gaze upon the troops environing the city, as well as on the city itself, she said:

"You are, as I have said, an Englishman."

"Yes," Bevill replied calmly, fearing nothing from this avowal which, made to any other French subject, would have been fraught with destruction to him. "I am an Englishman."

"Liége was before them."--*p.* 363.

"A soldier, doubtless, endeavouring to make his way to his own forces."

"No; I am no soldier--now. I have been one. But my mission is far different from that. I go, if it may be so, to escort a young countrywoman of mine out of Liége, and to take her back in safety to England."

"Alas! you will never succeed. That she may be permitted to leave Liége is possible, though by no means probable. Those in the city who are not French will scarcely obtain permission to depart, since they would be able to convey far too much intelligence to the enemy of what prevails within. While as for you----"

"Yes, madame?" Bevill said, still speaking quite calmly.

"You may very well stay in Liége unharmed since no Walloon would betray you to his conquerors, and the French troops are in the citadel, the Chartreuse, at the gates, and elsewhere. But you will never get out with your charge."

"Not as a Frenchman?"

"No. Not with an Englishwoman. That is, unless she can transform herself into a Frenchwoman as easily as you have transformed yourself into a Frenchman."

"Yet you have discovered me to be none."

"I discovered you by some of your expressions, the turn of your phrases, simply because--and this may astonish you--your French was too good. You used some phrases that were those of a scholar and not the idiom of daily life. It is often so." Then, with almost a smile on the face that

was generally so preternaturally grave, the Comtesse de Valorme said:

"Captain Le Blond, as you call yourself, would you discover that I am a Frenchwoman?"

And to Bevill's astonishment she spoke these words in perfect English--so perfect, indeed, that they might have issued from the lips of one of his own countrywomen.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, forgetting for the moment the perfect courtesy and deference which had marked his manner to her from the first. "What are you? Speak. Are you English or French? Yet, no," he continued. "No. There is the faintest intonation, though it has to be sought for; the faintest suspicion of an accent that betrays you. Madame," he exclaimed, not rudely, but only in a tone born of extreme surprise, "what are you--English or French?"

"French," she replied, while still speaking in perfect English; "but I have lived much in England, and--it may be that I shall die there."

"I cannot understand."

"You shall not be left long without doing so. Monsieur, as I must still address you, it is more than twenty years since I first went to England with my father, though I have returned to France more than once during those years. Now I have returned yet again. And--you have confided in me; I will be equally frank with you--listen. I am a Protestant."

"A Protestant!" Bevill exclaimed. "A Protestant? Ah! I begin to understand. A Protestant opposed to this war; linked with us against Spain and France; desirous of seeing these two great Catholic Powers subdued----"

"Alas!" the Comtesse said, "I cannot claim so noble an excuse for being here in the midst of this war. My presence here is more selfish, more personal. I--I--have suffered. God, He knows, how all of mine have suffered in the South----"

"You are from the South?"

"I am. From Tarascon. You saw me start when you spoke of that unutterable villain, Montrével. Montrével," she repeated, with bitter scorn; "Field-marshal and swashbuckler! Montrével, born a Protestant, but now of the Romish faith. A man who has persecuted us cruelly--one who even now desires to be sent to the Cevennes to persecute us still further."

Then, suddenly, the Comtesse ceased what she was saying, and, changing from the subject, exclaimed:

"But come--come. We have tarried here too long. We should be once more on our road to Liége. How do you propose to present yourself at the gates and gain admission to the city? You will run deep risks if you appear under the guise of a mousquetaire; for"--and now she took out a scroll of paper from the huge pocket let into the leather padding of her coach and looked at it, "there are two troops of the Mousquetaires Noirs at the Chartreuse."

"You know that? You have a paper of the disposition of the French forces?"

"I have, though with no view of betraying them to--the Allies. My disloyalty to my country is not so deep as that, nor even is it to the King who persecutes my people so evilly. Nevertheless, there are many of the Reformed Faith in these armies. There is a De la Tremouille, though he is but a lad, in the bodyguard of the Duc de Bourgogne; a De Rohan with Tallard; a De Sully in the Mousquetaires Noirs; also there are many others. I have means of learning much, though not all that I would know. These 'heretics,'" she continued bitterly, "may help me if trouble comes and I require help. Meanwhile, for yourself. You will never obtain entrance as a mousquetaire."

"I have another passport--one procured for me by a grand personage in England. With that I entered Antwerp, using only the papers of Captain le Blond after I had been recognised by an ancient enemy."

"Under what guise, what description, do you appear in that?"

"A secretary of the French Embassy in London--the embassy that now exists no longer."

The Comtesse de Valorme pondered for a few moments over this information, while, as she did so, there came two little lines on her white forehead, a forehead on which, as yet, Time had not implanted any lines of its own. Then she said:

"And what name do you bear on that?"

"André de Belleville."

Again she pondered for a moment, then said:

"It should suffice. It is by no chance likely that any of the secretaries from that embassy, now closed, should come here, or be here. Also, those at the walls cannot doubt me. It would be best you enter as a kinsman riding by my side as escort, as protector; for such you have been to me.

And we are kin in one thing at least--our faith."

"Madame, I am most deeply grateful to you. If----"

"Nay; gratitude is due from me to you. Yet what was it you said but now? That you had an ancient enemy who recognised you at Antwerp. If so, may he not follow you here?"

"I think not. At St. Trond he appeared again, only to again disappear. Some evil may have befallen him, though not at my hands. He would have denounced me by daybreak had that not happened."

"So be it then. Let us go forward. Once in Liége you will doubtless be safe. If 'tis not so, then you must rely on Heaven, which has watched over you so far, to do so still. Where have you dreamt of sojourning when you are there? At the house where dwells this lady you go to seek and help?"

"Nay; that cannot be. I have never seen her since she was a child. Her father is dead. I know not in what part of the city she dwells. I must seek some inn----"

"No, no. I have kinsmen and kinswomen there of your faith. Their houses shall be--nay, will be, freely at your service. Speak but the word and it shall be so."

For a moment Bevill Bracton pondered over this gracious offer, while, even as he did so, he raised the gloved hand of the Comtesse to his lips and murmured words of thanks for her politeness. But after a moment's reflection he decided not to accept this offer.

He recognised at once that he ought not to do so; that the acceptance of that offer would be unwise. For he knew, or, at least, he had a presentiment, that from the moment he reached Sylvia Thorne his duty must be dangerous; that what he had promised the Lord Peterborough-- ay! and also promised to do at all cost, all risk--might put him in peril of his life. He had known this ere he set out from England; he knew it doubly now. The French were all about and everywhere. Even during the next hour or so he would have to pass through a portion of that army to enter the city that lay before them. The difficulty of leaving it would be increased twofold--tenfold, when he had with him for charge a young girl, a young woman, who was also an English subject.

"Therefore," he mused, or rather decided quickly, while still the Comtesse de Valorme awaited his answer, "I must be unhampered; above all, untrammelled in my movements. God alone knows with what dangers, what difficulties, it may please Him to environ me; but be that as it may, I must at all hazards be free and at liberty to either face or avoid them. Courtesy, that courtesy as much due from guest to host as from host to guest, could not be freely testified in such circumstances as these. The quality of guest would not be fairly enacted by me. I should be but a sorry inhabitant of any man's house!"

Therefore, in very courteous phrases, conveying many thanks, he spoke these thoughts aloud to the Comtesse, while begging that the rejection of her offer might not be taken ill by her.

"It must be as you say," the lady said; "yet--yet--we must not drift from out each other's knowledge. Remember, I shall still be able to help and assist you; also I look forward still to your guidance and succour. You will not forget? It is imperative for me, if Heaven permits, to obtain audience of the Earl of Marlborough when he draws near, or, failing him, that of other of his generals. It is to England alone that we poor Protestants can look for succour."

CHAPTER XI.

An hour later they had passed through the lines of circumvallation thrown up by the French around Liége to prevent any attack from the Allies; and through the earthworks bristling with cannon and culverin. Also they had, since they were now arrived here, passed the first inspection to which they must submit and the only one to which they would be submitted until they were at the gates of the city itself.

As the carriage of the Comtesse de Valorme had approached the opening left in those earthworks, the coachman being guided to it by a track which ran between innumerable grenades piled up in triangular heaps and numbers of tethered chargers as well as various other signs of preparation to resist attack, Bevill, looking down at his companion, saw that she was very white, and that her face, usually so calm and impassive, gave signs of much internal agitation.

"You do not fear, madame?" he asked, more with a view to calming her if necessary than, as a

question.

"No," she replied, "I do not fear. My days for fear, for personal fear, are passed. I have suffered enough. But I am in dread for you."

"Dread nothing on my behalf, I beseech you," Bevill said. "I have a presentiment that that which I seek to do will be accomplished."

"I pray that it may be so. Yet--yet--I bear a name that stands not well in the eyes of Louis, and worse, doubly worse, in the eyes of the woman who rules him--the woman, De Maintenon. If the name of Valorme is known here to any in command--the name of Valorme, the heretic, the *reformée*, the *affectée*," she repeated bitterly, "it may go hard with us. I should not have bidden you to pass under the garb of a kinsman of mine. It would be best for you not to do so----"

But it was too late. Ere the Comtesse could finish the sentence, from behind a number of superb horses tethered together there rang out the words, "Halt, there!" and a moment later three officers and a trooper came forward, all of whose splendid dress showed that they were of the Mousquetaires Noirs.[4] Their blue riding coats were covered with gold and silver lace; on their breasts were crosses of silver emitting flames of gold, above each of which were stamped the *fleur-de-lis*; while the whole was passemented with more lace. Near where the horses stood, the banner of their regiment blew out to the warm afternoon breeze; close by waved also the guidon of the Mousquetaires, with its romantic legend, or motto, on it, "Mon Dieu, mon Roi, ma Dame."

"It is an officer's guard," Bevill murmured to the Comtesse.

"And of the Mousquetaires," she whispered back. "'Tis very well you are not Captain le Blond any longer."

Seeing that a lady was seated in the great coach, one of the mousquetaires advanced, hat in hand, towards the window, while apologising profusely to Bevill for causing him to back his horse so that he might speak to his companion. Then, in a tone as courtly as though he and the Comtesse stood in the salons of Versailles, he said:

"Madame voyages in troublous times. Yet, alas! 'tis war time. As officer of the exterior guard may I venture to ask for the papers of madame?"

Out of his politeness and innate good-breeding the mousquetaire but glanced at the papers handed to him, while muttering "La Comtesse de Valorme" then, with a bow, he returned them to their owner, saying, "Madame is at liberty to pass. I regret to have been forced to cause her trouble," after which, turning politely to Bevill, he now asked for his papers.

"*Là! là!!*" he said, "Monsieur is from our embassy in London," while adding, with a smile, "Monsieur may meet with some of the English ere long again. They gather fast. We shall hope soon to give them a courteous reception."

"Without doubt, monsieur."

"Were monsieur and his brother officials well treated in London?"

"He has nothing to complain of, monsieur. Every facility was given for leaving England peaceably."

"I rejoice to hear it. Madame la Comtesse, I salute you," again standing bareheaded before the lady. "Monsieur, I am your servitor. *En route*," to Joseph on the box; but suddenly he said, "Yet stay an instant. Jacques, *mon camarade*," to the trooper close by (the troopers of the Mousquetaires were all gentlemen and often noblemen, having servants to attend to their horses and accoutrements), "accompany the carriage to the city walls."

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc," the man answered, saluting.

"Thereby," the former continued, "shall madame's way be made easier for her. The ground is a little encumbered," he said, turning to the Comtesse.

After which, and when more politenesses had been exchanged, the coach proceeded on its way towards the city.

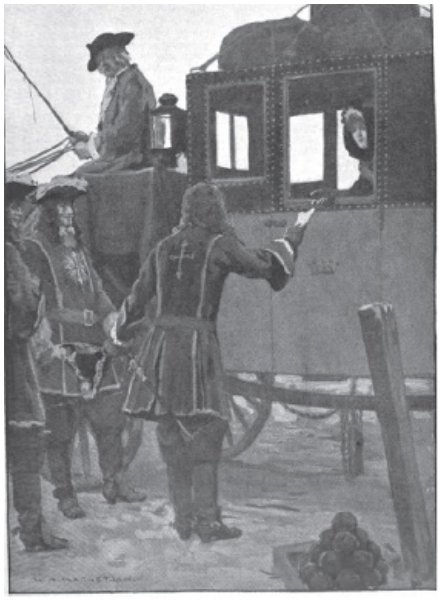
A few moments later Madame de Valorme spoke to the trooper who had vaulted on to a horse on receiving his officer's orders, and was now riding on the other side of the carriage from that on which Bevill rode, and asked:

"Who is that officer who was so gallant to me? He is a very perfect gentleman."

"He is, madame, the Duc de Guise."

"Ah!" she repeated, "the Duc de Guise!" while Bevill, who had glanced into the carriage as she asked the question, saw that her face was clouded as though by a sudden pain.

Still a few moments more and the trooper had moved his horse to the front of those that were drawing the carriage, evidently with the intention of piloting Joseph through the enormous mass of arms and weapons of all kinds, gun carriages, and other materials of war with which the track through the camp was encumbered. So that, seeing they were free from being overheard by the man, Bevill said:



"'Madame is at liberty to pass.'"

"That name caused madame some unpleasant thoughts. It is a great one, though not now prominent."

"It is the name of the greatest persecutors we have ever known. The bearer of it is the descendant of those who splashed the walls of Paris and dyed the waters of the Seine with our ancestors' blood. Can I--I--do aught but shudder at learning it, at being beholden to a de Guise for courtesy?"

"Those days are passed----"

"Passed Are they passed? Does not their memory linger even now. Is not the reflex of their wicked deeds cast on these present days? Oh, sir, you do not know, you cannot know what is doing even now in France, in the South. Ah, God! it seems to me as though the fact of this man, this inheritor of all the wickedness and cruelty of his forerunners, having been the first I encounter here, is an omen that I shall never succeed in the task I have set myself."

"Madame, think not so, I implore you. The Ducs de Guise are harmless now. Their power is gone, their teeth are broken. The ancient nobility can do nothing against the people without the King's command. He rules, directs all."

"Therein is the fear, the danger. Under that woman--faugh!--De Maintenon, he does indeed rule and direct all, but he directs all for cruelty. Who has filled the prisons, the galleys--ah! the galleys," the Comtesse repeated with an exclamation of such pain that Bevill wondered if, in any of those hideous receptacles of suffering and misery in which countless Protestants were now suffering, there might be, in their midst, some person or persons dear to her. "Who has filled those, who has strung thousands of innocent men and women upon the gallows, to the lamps of their own villages, on the trees of their own orchards, but Louis the King and those, his nobles, under him? Ah! ah!" she went on, "do you know what, in the old days, far, far off, long before they slaughtered us on St. Bartholomew's eve, the motto of the Guises was? It was one word only--'Kill.' And killing is in their blood. It cannot be eradicated; it is there. Is it strange that, in encountering this man. I fear? I who go to save. I who pray nightly, hourly, that my mission may help to save, to prevent, further slaughter?" And, as the Comtesse de Valorme finished speaking, she threw herself back upon the cushions of her carriage and buried her face in her hands.

"I pray God, madame," Bevill said, he being deeply moved at her words, "that the mission you are upon may bear good fruit. It is partly for that, also, that we, the English, are banded against France and Spain. Perhaps it may be that we desire not more to lower the pride, to break down the power of this King, than to prevent those whom he rules over from cruelly persecuting those of our faith."

Now, however, this discourse between them had to cease. They were at the gates of Liége,

outside the suburb of St. Walburg, which, although not the nearest point of admission, was the one to which those who were permitted to enter the city at all were forced to go.

Contrary, however, to any fears which either the Comtesse de Valorme or Bevill might have felt as to their admission being made difficult, they found that it was extremely easy. The fact of the trooper who accompanied them having been sent by the Duc de Guise as an escort brought about this state of things, since it was almost unheard of that, whatever might be the detachment on guard at the exterior lines, or whosoever might be the travellers, such thought for their convenience should be exercised.

Consequently, the slightest examination of the papers of each was made by those at this barrier, and a moment later the barrier was passed.

Bevill had accomplished part of the task he had set out to perform. He was in the city where dwelt the woman whom he had come from England to help and assist.

"I am in Liége," he whispered to himself. "Yet--yet the difficulties do but now begin. May Heaven prosper me as it has done hitherto!"

They progressed now through the long, narrow streets that recalled, as every street in the Netherlands recalled, and still in many cases recalls, the ancient rule of Spaniard and Austrian. And thus, continuing on their way, crossing old bridges over the canals and watercourses that run from out the Meuse, observing the burghers coming forth from the service of many of their churches, and remarking the rich shops and warehouses full of silks and brocades from the far-off Indies and Java, they came at last to one of the long quays that border the river.

"And so," the Comtesse de Valorme said, as now the coach drew up at a great solid house in a small square off this quay, "we part for the present. Yet, monsieur, we are more than acquaintances now, more than mere fellow-travellers----"

"Friends, if madame will permit."

"Ay, friends! Therefore will you not tell me what is your rightful name? It may be well that I should know it."

"My name is Bevill Bracton, madame. I never thought when I set out upon this journey that I should tell it to any but her whom I seek; yet to you I now do so willingly."

"You may tell it in all confidence, and you know you may. 'Bevill Bracton,'" she repeated to herself. "I shall not forget. 'Bevill Bracton,'" she said again, as though desirous of impressing it thoroughly on her memory. "But here," she went on, "you are to be known always as André de Belleville!"

"It would be best, madame. I shall be known to few and, if fortune serves, shall not be long here."

For a moment the Comtesse let her clear eyes rest on the young man, as though she were meditating somewhat deeply; then suddenly, though hesitating somewhat in her speech as she did so, she said:

"And this young countrywoman of yours--this lady whom you have come so far to assist? May I not know her name also? It is no curiosity that prompts me----"

"Madame," Bevill replied, "our confidence is well established, our friendship made. The lady's name is Sylvia Thorne."

"Sylvia Thorne! Sylvia Thorne! Why, I know her. We, too, are friends, and firm ones."

"You know her? You are friends?"

"In very truth. I have been here more than once before as guest of my kinsman. And--yes, Sylvia Thorne and I are friends. Ah! what a double passport would this have been to my friendship had I but known that you were on your way to sweet Sylvia."

"She is, then, sweet? Doubtless gentle also?"

"She is both. In Sylvia Thorne, whom you say you knew once as a little child, you will find a sweet, good woman. Grave, perhaps, beyond her years--she has suffered much by the loss of both her parents--and too calm and unruffled, it may be, for one whose footsteps have but now passed over the threshold of womanhood. Sincere with those who win her regard, contemptuous of those unworthy of the good opinion of any honest man or woman; while yet placed here as she is, she possesses one gift she had far better be without."

"And that is, madame?"

"The gift of beauty; for she is beautiful, but seems to know it not. And it may be that her beauty is too cold and stately; it has not the brightness, the joyousness, that should accompany the beauty of youth. But you will see her ere long. Observe, those whom I come to dwell with for

a time are at the door. Farewell--nay, *au revoir* only, since you will not enter. *Adieu* till next we meet. You know the house now; the door stands ever open to those who are my friends."

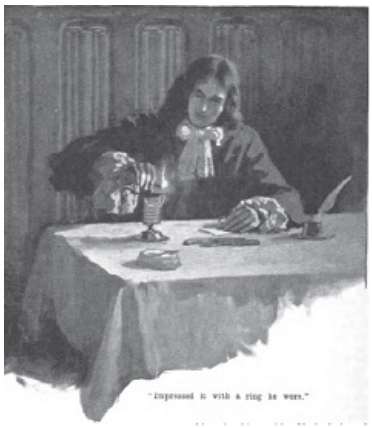
CHAPTER XII.

On that long quay over which the coach had passed but just now, Bevill Bracton, as he rode by its side, had observed an ancient inn, as all things were ancient in this old-world land--one that bore on its front the name, "Gouden Leeuw," and testified as to what its Walloon significance might be by having beneath it a fierce-looking gilt monster, that might be intended for a lion, as sign.

"That should be the house for me," Bevill thought, as now he rode back towards it. "A front room here, on the lower floor, if it may be obtained; the river almost at its feet, boats tied to old posts and stanchions. All is well. If danger threatens, as well it may, then have I the way open to me."

For Bevill had not been a soldier for nothing, nor had he forgotten that he who attempts daring deeds should ever have a retreat open in case of need.

That the business he was now about was, in absolute truth, of almost foolhardy daring he had known and recognised from the moment he decided to undertake it as he stood before the Earl of Peterborough at Fulham; while, as he advanced farther and farther through a land which, though not itself hostile to England, was in the clutches of England's greatest enemy, he had more and more recognised this to be the case. But now that he was here, in a city surrounded by those who had possessed themselves of it during a peace that had never been a complete one, a city whose heights and strong places were full of the enemy, he allowed no delusions to prevent him from acknowledging the perils by which he was surrounded. If he should be suspected, watched, and either denounced or arrested, there would be no hope for him. He was neither a soldier who would be saved by his calling nor a political agent who could be saved by any mission that might have been entrusted to him. He was merely a subject of the greatest enemy of France, disguised under a French name; a man who could have no ostensible reason for being here except as a spy.



"Impressed it with a ring he wore."

As, however, he reflected on all this, while forgetting no point that would tell deeply against him--there was not one that would tell in his favour!--he felt no qualm of apprehension, and fear itself was utterly absent. He had set his life upon this cast; the hazard of the die must bring him either a restitution of all that he desired, or total oblivion of all things in this world. He had elected to make the throw, even as the soldier stakes his life against either Fortune's buffets or rewards; fear had no part or parcel in the attempt. Yet, as with the soldier, it behoved him to be wary, to fling no chance away, to risk no more than every brave attempt requires to make it a successful one.

What Bevill hoped to find at the "Gouden Leeuw" was, happily, obtainable. A room was put at his disposal which, while looking across the quay on to the river, had also, since it was at an angle of the house, another window giving on to an alley that ran along the side of the inn.

"Therefore," Bevill said to himself, "all is very well. Should I be sought for when I am in this room I still have two other modes of egress beside the door. Should they attempt to get at me from either window, still I have the door. Short of surrounding the house, I can hardly be trapped, and not at all without making a good fight of it."

"Yet," he continued to muse, as now he endeavoured to make himself presentable and, at the least, well washed and brushed and combed, since he intended at sunset to make his way to Sylvia according to the directions on the letter he bore; "yet it may never come to this. I obtained entrance easily to this city; I have but the brains of a bird if, after I have made myself well acquainted with the place, I do not discover some way of getting Mistress Thorne and myself out of it."

By this time the sun was beginning to dip towards where the North Sea lay afar off; already its rays were slanting across the Meuse and into the windows of his room. The air was becoming cooler; soon the evening would be at hand; and then he would make his way towards the "Weiss Haus," as he knew the abode of the late Mr. Thorne was termed; and, if it might be, present his credentials to the young mistress of that house.

But first he must make a meal, since he had eaten nothing since he set out from St. Trond. Therefore he went now to the usual description of room where travellers ate, and, ordering a good substantial repast, at down to do justice to it. While he was waiting for his supper to be brought to him, he drew from the pocket in his vest the letter which Lord Peterborough had given him, and regarded it again.

It was addressed in the Earl's own hand to "Mistress Sylvia Thorne, of the Weiss Haus, Liége, in the Bishoprick of Liége," and tied with silk, but unsealed, his lordship having either adopted the ancient courteous custom of leaving all letters of presentation open, or perhaps desiring that the bearer of it should read the credentials he bore.

Needless to say that Bevill was not one who would have availed himself of the chance he had possessed for days of discovering what those credentials were. He would not have been here as the accredited agent of the Earl, and on such a mission as this, had it not been certain that the recommendation was all that was necessary to induce Sylvia Thorne to entrust herself to his hands. The confidence of Lord Peterborough told him plainly enough what the contents of that letter must be; while, even if it had not been so, Bevill would no more have thought of untying the silk bow and reading those contents than of breaking the seal had there been one.

But his astute lordship had made one slip in what he had written. In one corner of the folds, where the superscription was, he had written, "To present my cousin, Bevill Bracton, heretofore known to you.--P. & M."

"My lord must have supposed this letter would leave my hand only to be taken into the lady's," Bevill said to himself; "otherwise he would never have written my name thus. He should have put in its place, 'Monsieur André de Belleville,' since it must pass through the hands of some servitor or waiting maid to reach hers." Then, smiling to himself, he went on, "He warned me of the danger I must encounter should this letter fall into the hands of others than Mistress Thorne. Those dangers might well have been added to by this forgetfulness. However, it matters not now. 'Tis easily made safe."

He bade the serving man, who had not yet brought him his supper, fetch a sheet of papers a white wax candle, and some Spanish wax, and, when this was done, bade him bring also an inkhorn and pen. Then, folding Lord Peterborough's letter in the fresh sheet, he lit the wax and impressed it with a ring he wore, and, when the horn came, addressed it in French to "Mistress Thorne, at the Weiss Haus." Adding also, "The bearer waits."

"The house," he thought as now he ate his supper, "should be on this or some other quay. My lord said that great was the merchandise in which her father dealt, and also that he owned many vessels. He would be near the water's edge, since the river is navigable to the sea."

For precaution--the precaution of not doing aught that might in any way, if danger should arise, be inimical to Sylvia Thorne's security--Bevill had resolved that he would ask no questions in the "Gouden Leeuw" as to the situation of her house. He would give no intimation whatever that could connect his appearance in this city with the Englishwoman who, though not a captive, was at least not free from the environment of her country's foes. He had resolved that the man supposed to be a Frenchman named André de Belleville, residing at this inn, should not be known, in it at least, to be a visitor to the young Englishwoman at the Weiss Haus.

He went out shortly on to the quay and walked slowly along under the row of trees planted on it and on a similar one across the river, and observed that many of the burghers were taking the evening air with their wives and children. In their aspect there was little to be perceived that would have told a stranger that, either in their strong places or outside their walls, there lay the hostile army of the most dreaded monarch in Europe, which, at this time, meant almost the whole world. Neither did he see any French about, and certainly no soldiers of any rank; and he did not know that strict orders had been given in the Duke of Burgundy's name that all of them were to keep apart from, and, above all, not to molest, the inhabitants of any towns or cities they either held or surrounded.

He saw, however, many monks and priests, which did not astonish him, since he knew well that, though the Reformed Faith had been long since adopted here by the inhabitants, the Bishopric of Liége was in the Spanish interests, which meant the Romish, and always had been. Nay, had he not heard that here was a college of English Jesuits, as well as another of French?

Even, however, a Bevill continued his way, while thinking that, at last, he would have to ask some honest burgher to direct him to where the Weiss Haus might be, he passed a group of men, one or two of whom were clad in the garb of a priest, while the others were undistinguishable by their attire.

One of the latter, a young man of almost his own age, had fixed his eyes on Bevill as he drew near--as, indeed, many other eyes had been fixed on his erect figure and comely face before--while, as the group passed him, this young man not only stared hard at him, but, as Bevill could observe by a side glance, turned round to look again as he went by.

"I' fags!" Bevill said to himself, walking on slowly, "the man seems to know me, though never have I consorted with any of his seeming friends to my knowledge or recollection. And yet--and yet--those dark eyes that glinted at me under the trees do not appear strange, any more than did his other features. Where have I seen him before, or have I ever seen him? Tush! if 'twas ever, it must have been when I was in the last campaign. We were much given to running against these gentry."

He had reached the end of the most frequented part of the quay by now, and had, indeed, come to a part of it where the high houses, built in many cases of dark blue marble, no longer presented an unbroken array. Instead, they were detached from one another, and stood in large gardens having walls round them; while on the front, towards the quay, were openings in which were enormous iron gates. In many cases great warehouses close by lifted their heads high into the air, so that here they alternated with the residences and spoilt the latter (whose appearance was handsome) by their own unlovely though businesslike aspect. But, farther away still, there stood another mansion deeply embowered in trees and, at some considerable distance beyond it, an enormous warehouse, yet one that was such a distance off that, since the house itself was surrounded by the trees, it would in no way disturb the peace of the latter or the views from it. And the mansion itself now gleamed out white in the evening sun.

"It may well be her abode," Bevill thought to himself. "Very well it may; and if it is not, then must I ask the whereabouts of the Weiss Haus; or, maybe, it is across the river. Yet that matters not. I passed a ferry but now."

When, however, he stood in front of that great white mansion he learnt that he had found the house of her whom he had come from England to seek.

Through the bars of the great iron gate which this mansion possessed in common with the others hard by, Bevill could see the gardens laid out in the stiff Dutch fashion he had so often seen before, though still, it seemed to him as if some attempt had been made to give to them an English appearance. Beyond the straight beds of tulips, the flowers of which were now almost all gone, there was a lawn, or grass plot, green as any lawn in England, smooth and well kept, and having at its edges beds of roses placed in front of formal statues and summer-houses.

"There is some touch of our land here," Bevill said to himself. "In good truth, I do believe that I have found the lady."

Seeing through the bars an old man weeding 'twixt the rows of tulip plants, though he seemed to do his work in a half-hearted way as though indifferent to what success his efforts might produce, Bevill, addressing him in the best Dutch he could summon up, asked, "Is this the house of Mistress Thorne?"

"*Ja; Ja wohl*," the old man said, looking up from his work. "What do you desire?"

"To see her. It is for that I am here."

The gardener let his eyes rove over Bevill as he received this answer, and observed that he was well and handsomely dressed, although his dress, and breast and neck lace, showed signs of travel in spite of the brushing they had received; then he said:

"The Juffrouw sees little company now--none but old friends, and specially none of those who lie out there or there," waving his hands with a sweep which included, as Bevill very well understood, those who lay outside the town and in the citadel and Chartreuse.

"It may be she will see me," Bevill said. "At least, I will make trial of it. Take this," he continued, while drawing from his breast the letter he had so recently furnished with a further wrapper and giving it to the man; "and this for your labour," putting a rix-dollar into his hand. "Now, go and do my bidding."

The coin did for Bevill that which, perhaps, neither the packet nor his own tone of command might have been able to accomplish, and, thrusting his hoe into one of the flower beds, the gardener went off towards the white house, while muttering:

"I can take it as far as the stoop, but no farther. There it must be given to a house servant, who may deliver it into the hands of the Juffrouw. I can answer for no more."

"Do that, and it will serve. Make haste, the night falls; it is growing late."

When the old man had shambled off, Bevill, standing by a thicket at one side of the garden, let his eyes roam over the great white front of the old, solid house while observing how firmly it had been built, and how strong and handsome it was.

In front of the ground floor, to which three stone steps led up, there ran a long verandah, also of stone: above, on the first floor, where, Bevill supposed, the saloons were, there projected huge, bulging stone balconies leading out from the windows, and on one of these there was a great table placed, with chairs by it, so that he supposed people sat out here in the cool of the evening when the sun was gone. Also, there were flowers in china tubs everywhere, and orange trees and shrubs all about, and awnings too, whereby the great house presented not only a look of great solidity, but also one of comfort.

But now he saw the old gardener coming back towards him, and observed that his hand no longer held the letter. And next he remarked something else.

He saw a great striped curtain drawn back from behind the window, and from behind a lace curtain also, and, a moment later, there stepped on to the balcony a young woman clad all in black, though her long robe was broidered with white lace--a woman who, he saw at one glance, was tall and slight; while--also in the same glance--he perceived that she was beautiful.

After which, as he advanced hat in hand, until he was almost directly under that balcony where now the lady, her hands upon the edge, stood looking down at him bowing before her, he saw that she waved a sign of salutation to him, and, as she leant further over, said:

"Sir, for this visit I thank you. It is long since we have met. You are vastly welcome. Enter my house, I beg. One of the domestics will bring you to me."

With a bow, accompanied by a courteous acknowledgment of her words, Bevill proceeded towards the house, when to his astonishment he heard the old gardener, who had reached his side before this, mutter some words in an angry voice--the words, "He here again! He! No matter. To-night he shall not enter."

Attracted by these mutterings and also by the old man's glances directed towards the great gate, Bevill could not refrain from following those glances, and, as he did so, saw that a man's eyes were staring in through the wrought-iron bars.

The eyes he recognised as those belonging to the same man who had stared so inquiringly at him on the quay less than half an hour before.

CHAPTER XIII.

The hall of this old house was large and square, its floor composed of brown and yellow diamond-shaped marble tiles, over the greater part of which were thrown down various rugs of gorgeous hues. Facing the entrance was a large staircase, also of marble, that, after ascending for five steps, turned to either side and so led up to a gallery above, from which the first floor rooms opened all round.

Now, as Bevill entered the hall, he saw that Sylvia had descended from that floor and was standing on the top step of the five awaiting him. Then, as he approached, she descended the other four steps and, coming swiftly towards him with both hands outstretched, exclaimed:

"So you are Bevill Bracton, who once played with me in the gardens of Carey Villa at Fulham--the young man who pined to be a soldier and became one. In truth, and I am well pleased to see you; yet, had I met you elsewhere I should have scarce known you for my old playmate."

"Nor I you, Mistress Sylvia Thorne; for then you were a little winsome child and now----"

"Now I am a woman. One too," she added, while a shade crept over her face, "whom you find in sad and sorry plight. For, as you know, my father has gone from me--from me who loved him so!--and I am here in this beleaguered city, not knowing whether to leave it or stay on and brave the worst. Yet be that as it may, I thank you for coming here, for offering your services to your kinsman on my behalf."

Murmuring his regrets for the loss of her father and also for the situation in which she found herself placed, while protesting that that which he had done and hoped still more to do was nothing, Bevill could not but let his eyes roam over the features of the young woman who stood welcoming him. And, as he did so, he acknowledged how truthfully the Comtesse de Valorme had spoken when she told him that she had the gift of beauty.

For beautiful Sylvia Thorne was, with that beauty on which no man gazes without giving instant acknowledgment thereof, even though that acknowledgment is never outwardly expressed by eye or voice.

The child's large dark grey eyes--perhaps they were a dark hazel--yet who may tell the shade of women's eyes at one swift glance!--fringed with dark lashes, as he had recalled to the Earl of Peterborough, were, of course, the same; but the rest had changed. The dark chestnut hair that, in Sylvia's girlhood, had flowed loosely about her, was now coiled in masses above her white forehead; the clear-cut features that had promised so much in the young girl had redeemed in her young womanhood that which they promised. And those quiet, calm eyes well became the oval face, straight nose, and small mouth, the upper lip being divinely short; while, when Lord Peterborough had agreed that she was passing fair, and the Comtesse had said that she was beautiful yet seemed not to know that she was so, each had judged aright. Also, there was in her the tranquillity that the latter had spoken of, but shadowed, too, by the memory of a recent sorrow. For the rest, she was, like Rosalind, "more than common tall," upright, and full of dignity; a woman who, as years went on--if they were peaceful, quiet ones, with all that should accompany them, such as love, home, and children; years undisturbed by the struggles for triumph or the tears of failure--would develop into a stately, and it may be commanding one.

Doubtless, as Bevill looked on Sylvia Thorne, so, also, she looked to see what changes time had wrought in the youth who, once little better than a stripling, was now a man, strong, firm, self-reliant. If so, what she saw should not have impressed her unfavourably. The handsome features had not altered, but only become more firmly set; the mouth, well shaped, spoke of determination, and told of one who, without obstinacy, would still remain unturned from any resolution he had come to; the stalwart form of the man had taken the place of the tall, promising youth.

Seated in that great hall into which by now the rays of the evening sun were pouring, and to which two servants had brought great candelabra filled with white wax candles, while they had already lit those in the sconces on the pillars, Sylvia and Bevill spoke of what the future might have before them. But that which Sylvia now told the young man seemed scarcely to convey the idea that he had undertaken a journey likely to bear much fruit.

"Since my dear father's death," she said, after Bevill had described some portions of his journey from London, though omitting the fact of his having been recognised by Sparmann, since he thought it inadvisable to tell her that there was danger in his undertaking, "I have lived here with a companion. Almost, one might say, a *chaperon*, or, as the old tyrannical rulers of the land would have termed her, a *duenna*. Yet now she has fallen sick--in truth, I think the French have terrified her into a fever. Therefore she has departed--it was but yesterday--to her own people at Brussels, where, however, she will also find the French; and I am alone in this great house."

"What, in consequence, have you resolved on doing?"

"On shutting it up and seeking refuge at Mynheer Van Ryk's----"

"The house to which your friend the Comtesse de Valorme has gone!" Bevill exclaimed.

They had already spoken of the Comtesse, Bevill telling Sylvia that that lady had said the latter was well known to her, and also that she had told him ere they parted that Van Ryk had married a connection of hers.

"Yes, that is the house; yet--yet I know not if it is well for me to go there. If----"

"But," said Bevill, "if you resolve to follow my lord's advice--and he is left your guardian--and do me so great an honour as to permit me to endeavour to escort you safely to England, you will scarce need to ask for hospitality of Mynheer Van Ryk."

"I know not. Frankly, I know not what to do. To be very honest, you should know I am in no danger here--from the French. They have their faults, and those are neither few nor small; but they are gallant to women, and, except that they drive hard bargains for all they require, they have not molested those who dwell in the towns and cities they either possess themselves of or surround."

"Until now," Bevill said, while feeling somewhat surprised and somewhat disappointed, too, at this last utterance of Sylvia, since it seemed to express a doubt on her part as to whether she should avail herself of the service which he had come to perform--"until now they have but made themselves secure of those towns and cities, with a view to what the future may bring forth. But it is war time at last, and half Europe has declared against France and Spain. Will France restrain herself so much in the future? Especially since Holland--the Netherlands--have banded with England against her?"

"Ah, yes; ah, yes," Sylvia replied meditatively. "It is true I had forgotten that. Affairs will doubtless be much changed; and also--also," she said in a low voice, as if speaking more to herself than to Bevill, "I am averse to becoming an inmate of Mynheer Van Ryk's house, hospitably as he has pressed me to do so."

Recognising that in this there lay hidden some reason which, probably, Sylvia Thorne knew to be a good one for preventing her acceptance of the hospitality of the Liégois house, yet still one which she did not desire to confide to him, Bevill held his peace, and decided that it did not become him to ask what that reason might be.

Yet, since he asked no question, nor, indeed, uttered any remark at the conclusion of what Sylvia had said, she looked round at him as though in wonderment at his silence.

Then, a moment later, she said:

"Between you and me there must be no secrets. The service you have done me, the service you came here to render me, the service you may yet do me--nay!" she said, seeing his motion of dissent, "it is in truth a service. Do not refuse to regard it as one. There must, I say, be no secrets between us. Therefore, I will be very frank, and tell you why I do not like the thought of sojourning at Mynheer Van Ryk's."

Bevill made a motion with his hand, as though not only to deprecate her appreciation of what he had undertaken to do on her behalf, but also to prevent her from making any confidences to him that she would have preferred not to divulge. But Sylvia, sitting upright in her chair on the other side of the old carved oak table that was between them--while he observed the calm, almost impassive, dignity with which she spoke of a subject that must be far from pleasant to her--said:

"There is in that house a man--a young man--a kinsman of Madame Van Ryk and, consequently, of the Comtesse de Valorme also, who--who--well, wearies me with his attentions. He professes to admire me, and desires that his admiration should be returned."

"Yes?" Bevill replied in a tone of inquiry, while in that tone there was no expression of astonishment. It may be, indeed, that there was no cause for astonishment in what Sylvia had told him. She was beautiful--"passing fair," as he had himself said when musing on what the child he had once known might have become by now, and as Lord Peterborough had echoed; also she was young and--which might well serve for much--wealthy. There was, he thought, no great cause for wonderment. Therefore he said simply, "Yes?" and waited to hear more.

"The matter," Sylvia continued, "would be unworthy a thought, but that it may make my sojourn at Mynheer Van Ryk's irksome to me."

"There being no hope of reciprocation?"

"It is impossible. To me this man--this Emile Francbois----"

"This *who?*" Bevill exclaimed in a voice that caused Sylvia to turn round suddenly and glance at him under the lights of the great candelabra. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "is it possible you know him, or know of him?"

"No, no! The name struck me as--as one that I had heard before in--in far-off days, while unable to recall where or in what circumstances I had done so. I pray you pardon my interruption. You were about to say that to you this man, this Emile--what is it?--Francbois was----"

"Repellent. He is--oh! I know not what--yet one whom I mistrust. Neither know I why he is here. He is, of course, a Frenchman, yet he consorts not with those who hold Liége in their hands, and speaks as though his sympathy is with all who are Dutch."

"And, if he were different," Bevill asked quietly, "would your sentiments be also different?"

"Oh--oh!" Sylvia exclaimed, "how can you ask? Yet it is true you do not know him; you have not seen him yet. Doubtless you will do so, however, if I am compelled to accept the hospitality of his kinsman's house."

"Yet need there be no such compulsion. You will not have forgotten what Lord Peterborough's desires are, what I am here for. To take you away from Liége. Liége that, it is true, has not been harmful to you as yet, but that may now become terribly so. The Earl of Marlborough must be on his way here by this time; he may be in the Netherlands by now; when he comes, war will be carried on in terrible earnest. Will these French, who do but lie around this city at present, be considerate for those who are within its walls when they themselves are between those walls and the troops of the Allies?"

"For myself I do not fear. I am a woman, and therefore safe; but----" "But--yes?"

"The risk will be terrible!"

"The risk? You are safe, yet fear the risk?"

"Not for myself," Sylvia answered with a half-smile; then, changing her tone, speaking once more now in her calm, steady voice, she continued: "Mr. Bracton, do you deem me a heartless, selfish woman thinking only of her own safety? I pray not. Nay," seeing that he was about to reply, "I entreat you, let me speak." After which she went on: "For me there is little or no danger here. Your cousin, who has ever had kindly thoughts for me, has overrated the danger in which I stand. I repeat there is no danger. But--what of you? In what a position has he placed you?"

"Ah! never think of it. What care I for danger? And--has he not told you in the letter I was bearer of that I courted danger? I asked for this office on which I now am. I besought him to let me be the messenger who should reach you, who should be, if not the man who saved you, at least the one who should accompany you, help you, serve you in your journey to England."

"You are very brave," the girl said, looking up at him as now he stood before her, since he had risen and taken up his hat, knowing that, because the night had come, it was time he left her--"brave and gallant. From my heart I thank you."

"No thanks are due. I do not deserve them. Do you know my unhappy circumstances, and how I hope to mend them? Do you know how I, who held not long ago the position I loved--the one I had hoped for since I was a boy----"

"I know," Sylvia Thorne said, looking at him. "I know, and still I thank you; and, in good faith, I would be gone willingly enough from out this place, but not"--and for a moment, just a moment, her stateliness left her, and she placed her hands before her eyes--"not at the risk, the danger to you, that must surely arise."

"The danger is not worth a thought. The English are all around, are near. Only a few hours ago I encountered some English officers not twenty miles from here. Once we reach Athlone's forces, or those of Lord Cutts, we are in safe hands. Our lines stretch from near Venloo almost to Rotterdam; an English road would not be more safe. And the sea is ours; the fleets of Rooke, of Shovel, are all about. Decide--and come, I do beseech you."

"The danger to you," Sylvia said, as now she escorted him to the verandah, "is neither in Holland nor on the high seas. It is here. Here, in Liége! If it is once discovered that you, an Englishman, have entered this city as a Frenchman, that you are endeavouring to quit it while assisting a countrywoman to also do so, you will never leave it alive. Never! Never! Your chivalry will have led you to your doom. Ah! Mr. Bracton," she continued, "there is no danger to me; therefore, I implore you, leave me. Leave me. Escape yourself, as, alone, you may well do. Escape while there is time."

"Never!" While, as he spoke, Sylvia Thorne, looking at him in the light of the now rising moon, saw that he smiled. "Never! If you will not come, if you will not do your guardian's bidding, then I have another resource."

"Another resource?"

"Why, yes: I stay here with you!"

"Ah, no! Ah, no!"

"Yes, I remain with you. When the Allies come near here, as come they surely will--are they not besieging Kaiserswörth--do they not hold Maestricht--is not Venloo, close by, threatened?--there will be terrible trouble in Liége. Those French regiments outside will be drawn nearer; some will be thrown into the city, besides those already in the Citadel and the Chartreuse; a terrible state of things will prevail, an awful licence. I know the French--we have met before! Therefore I will not go and leave you, having found you. I undertook to do this thing, and I will stand by my word--my word given to my kinsman and your guardian. We leave this city together on our road to the Allies, if not to England, or----"

"Yes--or----"

"We remain in it together. I will never set eyes on Peterborough's face again till I stand before him with you by my side--and safe."

As Bevill Bracton spoke thus while standing, hat in hand, on the crushed shells of the path below the verandah steps, and while looking upwards at the young mistress of the great house, the summer night had fallen almost entirely, and, beyond the faint light of the dusk and that of the stars, all was dark around.

Also, the night was very still, save that, afar off, some nightingales were singing in a copse, and, now and again, the voices of the boatmen could be heard on the river and, sometimes, the splash and drip of their oars as they touched the water.

"He could hear her words distinctly."—*p.* 506.

"He could hear her words distinctly."--*p.* 506.

The night was so still that, though Sylvia Thorne spoke now in little more than a whisper, he, standing below and gazing up at her, could hear her words distinctly.

"You will not go," she murmured; "you will not go, leaving me here. Ah! well, you are truly brave and daring." Then, releasing the tendrils of a passion flower growing round one of the great pillars, with which she had been playing, she held out her hand while continuing:

"A wilful man must have his way; but, at least, go now. Farewell. Goodnight."

While, as Bevill turned away and went towards the gate, she murmured to herself:

"Lord Peterborough should be proud to call you cousin, to have chosen you as his emissary."

CHAPTER XIV.

Turning to look round once more, and to again salute Sylvia as he reached the gate (at which he found the ancient gardener waiting to let him out and make all fast when he had gone), he saw that the girl still stood upon the balcony and, through the darkness of the night, was looking towards the spot he had now reached. The flare of the candles in the large candelabra within the hall streamed out of the great open door, making a patch of light behind Sylvia and causing her to stand out clearly before his eyes. By this he could perceive that she was leaning against the pillar and looking down towards where he was, and that behind her head the passion flowers gleamed white, as though forming a setting to it.

Then, while doubting whether she could see his action, he nevertheless raised his three-cornered hat again, and so passed out into the road between the great gate and the river.

Once beyond the gate, however, he paused, and, dropping his hand to his sash, took his sword-handle in it and softly drew the blade up and down in the sheath to make sure that it ran loose and free.

"Francbois," he said to himself as he did so. "Francbois, Emile Francbois! 'Tis strange I did not recall his name before. And he is here in Liége. Also, he loves Sylvia, and would be loved by her. So, so; that way trouble may come. Od's heart!--soon we shall have as good a comedy here--or will it be a tragi-comedy?--as ever George Farquhar or Mrs. Centlivre has written. Well, we will see to it."

Continuing his way towards the "Gouden Leeuw," and continuing it warily too, for he knew not whether from behind some wall, either of warehouse or solid, comfortable mansion, he might not

see in the moonlight a pair of dark eyes glinting at him, or the phosphorescent sparkle of a rapier's blade that an instant later might be making trial of his coat's thickness, he also continued to muse.

"Sparmann at Antwerp and then at St. Trond--what was it seized on that vagabond and caused him to hold his hand and disappear?--and now Francbois here! Francbois, who was at the Lycée in Paris with me--the boy I sometimes beat for his impertinence regarding my countrymen, and to whom I sometimes gave a trifle for doing my impositions. And I did not know him this evening! Ah, well, 'tis not so strange either. Thirteen years have changed him much. If they have done the same for me, it may be that neither does he know me. And yet--and yet--I would be sworn he did. One glances not at another as he glanced at me without having good reason for't."

As Bevill Bracton reflected, so the matter was. This Emile Francbois, this man who had stared so at him on the Quai as he went towards the Weiss Haus--this man who had undoubtedly followed him to that house, and peered in through the bars of the gate while evidently aghast at discovering that the other, whom he knew to be an Englishman, was also known to the woman whose love he desired--had been a schoolfellow of Bevill's in Paris.

And, now, the latter recalled him, as he had done from the moment Sylvia uttered his name. He recalled the slight, sickly-looking boy who came from Limousin and dwelt with a priest outside the Lycée--the boy who told tales of his comrades both inside and outside of school that often earned for them beatings and punishments. Also, he recalled how preternaturally clever this boy was, how easily he mastered lessons and subjects that other scholars stumbled over, and how he made money by his wits, by doing the lessons and impositions of those others for them.

"The man is," Bevill continued to muse, "what the boy has been; the boy is what the man will become. I doubt me not that as Emile Francbois was, so he is now. Crafty and clever, fawning and malignant. Ready to obtain money by any unclean trick. He knows my name; he will not have forgotten it--if he has, he will soon recall it. If there is aught to be earned by betraying, by denouncing me, then he will do it. I must find the means of silencing him. Yet how? Shall I give him money, or, better still, this," and he fingered the quillon of his sword as thus he meditated.

"So he loves Sylvia, does he?" he went on, as now he drew near the 'Gouden Leeuw,' "and she despises him. Ah! 'tis very well; the game is afoot. If she does not set out soon for England with me, it is as like as not that I shall never set out at all. All the same, I will take no trouble in advance."

After which he entered the inn, though not before he had looked well around to see if anyone--if Francbois--might be hovering near to spy on him; and so went to bed and slept peacefully.

Meanwhile, among many others in Liége who that night, as every night, were full of thoughts and anxieties as to what was soon to take place either in it or outside it, Sylvia Thorne was one. The Weiss Haus was closed now for the night, the great hall door barred firmly, with, in the house, some of her menservants keeping watch by turns. For these were truly troublous times. At any moment the French might be attacked by some of the forces of the Allies, in which case they would in all probability instantly enter the city and quarter themselves wherever accommodation might be found. Therefore, all property was in imminent danger; at any moment the burghers old houses might be turned into barracks and their warehouses into stables, their granaries taken possession of, and their servants used as the beleaguerers' own.

To-night, however, all was peaceful; the city was very quiet; excepting only the distant sounds that occasionally reached Sylvia's ears from the French lines--the call of a trumpet or bugle and, sometimes, the hoarse challenge of a sentry in the Citadel, or the Chartreuse, borne towards her on the soft evening breeze--nothing disturbed those who slept or watched.

Seated in her own room, with the window set open for coolness, Sylvia was thinking deeply over the sudden appearance of Bevill Bracton, and, womanlike, she was dreaming over that which never fails to appeal to a woman's stronger senses--a man's bravery, the more especially when that bravery has been testified, aroused, on her behalf.

Now, though still she knew that he had set out upon this perilous journey towards her--this undertaking whose risks had scarce begun as yet--intent on doing something gallant that should earn the approbation of Marlborough when it came to his ears, she did not put that in the balance against him. For, womanlike again, she told herself that, no matter what his original object might have been in entering on this task, no matter that he would as willingly have taken part in some terrible siege or fought unaided against a dozen foemen as endeavour to assist her, now her own personality was merged in his great attempt, it must be she, and not his prospects, that would henceforth be paramount.

Even had Sylvia not thought thus, even had it happened that Bevill Bracton, sojourning in this beleaguered city, had chanced to hear that she might stand in need of help, and, hearing, had proffered that help, she would have admired his prompt, unselfish chivalry as much.

"'I stay here with you,'" she murmured now, repeating the words he had uttered. "'We leave together or remain together.' Ah, my Lord Peterborough," she murmured, "you spoke truly when you wrote that you sent a knight to me, a sentinel to keep watch and ward for me."

She put her hand now to the lace she wore, and, drawing forth the Earl's letter, read it again, as she had done thrice over since she had entered the house after hearing the last footfall of Bevill Bracton in the road when he left her. It ran:

"SWEET SYLVIA,

"War is declared now. Well I know that, placed as you are, your situation is precarious. You will be alone in Liége; your house, your goods, your own fair self in jeopardy. For the first two it matters little. You may close the house up; dispose of the merchandise to some of the steady burghers amongst whom you dwell. But you--you, my stately, handsome ward! You must not be left alone. What shall become of you? Now read, Sylvia. There was with me to-day one who, as Will Shakespeare says, seeks his reputation--a restoration of it--at the cannon's mouth. You knew him once; he has played with you oft in your childhood. 'Tis Bevill Bracton, once of the Cuirassiers, who lost his colours because our late sour Orange contemned him for wounding of a Hollander who had insulted his service. He is young, yet steady and calm; what he attempts to do he will do unless Death seizes on him. Therefore he will attempt to reach you, to assist you to leave Liége, to put you in security either in some of *les villes gagnées* by us, or in England itself. In return for which, use him; above all, trust him. He will be your very knight, your sentinel to watch and ward over you. Accept his service as he proffers it to you, the service of a gallant gentleman. He seeks his restoration to his calling, I say; that is the guerdon he aspires to for his pains. It may be that he will win another, sweeter to wear than either corselet or plume. Yet of this I would fain not speak. Only, above all, be merciful. Be not too grave nor solemn--not more so than becomes a maiden placed 'midst difficulties. Be gracious as you ever are, yet not too kind; above all, veil those glances that even I, Mordanto, could not resist were I as young as your cavalier that is to be.

"This for the last. He bears your miniature about him. I will be sworn he will know your lineaments well long ere he reaches Liége. And still one more last word. In your fair hands will be all his earthly chances, even unto his life; his future career, when he has found you. Make no false step that may mar his plans; hesitate not when he suggests the road to safety; hamper him not. Follow where he will lead you; it will not be astray. That soon may I welcome you to Carey Villa is my prayer. That is if I, who long to draw the sword against these French once more, be still thwarted and refused. Farewell. Out of my love for your dead father and mother and your young self, I pray heaven to prosper you.

"PETERBOROUGH AND MONMOUTH."

Sylvia let the letter fall to her lap as she finished the reading of it, and sat gazing out of her window across the river beyond the garden wall, while watching, without seeing, the stars that twinkled in the skies; while listening to, without hearing, the nightingale answering his mate or the swirl of the water against the bank.

"All his earthly chances, his life, his career in my hands," she whispered at last, "when once he has found me. Alas! on me there falls a heavy charge. And 'hesitate not when he suggests the road to safety.' Ah, heaven, what shall I do?"

As still she pondered over these words she became almost o'erwrought; but suddenly it seemed as though some swift decision, some decisive banishment of all doubt, had come to her mind. Springing up from the deep chair in which she had been sitting for so long, she went to the window and out on to the great stone balcony which it, in common with all the other windows on the front, possessed: and stood there, gazing towards the city in which, one by one, the lights were rapidly becoming extinguished.

"His life," she murmured once again, "his earthly chances in my hands. His--the life, the chances of one so brave and gallant as he! Ah! and my lord bids me not mar him, not thwart him, but, instead, follow him where he leads. And still I hesitate--or--do I hesitate?" she went on, whispering to herself.

Then, an instant later, she exclaimed, "What am I? What? That which I averred to-night I was not? A selfish woman! Am I that? Am I? Because I am not in personal danger shall I forget the awful, hideous peril in which he has placed himself in undertaking this task? Nay, never," she said now. "Never! Never! Perish the thought! To detain him here, as detain him I shall if I refuse to go, means detection, ruin, death for him. Oh! oh! the horror of it! And on my head! But to go--if heaven above prospers us--may mean at least escape from this place, may doubtless mean the reaching of the English or Dutch forces. Safety! Safety for him! I am resolved." While, as Sylvia spoke, she struck the stone parapet of the balcony lightly with her hand. "Aye, determined. To-morrow--for to-morrow I shall surely see him--I will tell him so. I will tell him that I fear for my safety--the pretence is pardonable where a brave man's life is at stake--that we must go. All, all is pardonable so that he be saved!"

On the morrow she did see him again, though not as early as she had anticipated she would do. Yet she knew there was a reason for his absence, and that a strong one.

From daybreak there had been a strange, unaccustomed stir through all the city--a stir that made itself noticeable even here on the outskirts. The Liégeois seemed to have arisen early, even for them, and were gathering at street corners and on the stoops of their quaint houses, and under market-halls that stood on high wooden posts. Also, on the river, there was more movement than usual; boats were passing up and down more continuously than they had done before; all was life and movement.

Sylvia, who had herself risen early after a somewhat disturbed night, was now regarding as much of this as possible from her balcony. On the opposite bank she could see the rays of the morning sun strike on some objects that glistened and sparkled beneath it, and recognised what those things were--breast-pieces, corselets, the lace on scarlet or blue coats, the scabbards of swords, and, often, the bare swords themselves. She heard, too, the sounds of drums beating and bugles sounding; while, from across the water, there came orders, issued in sharp, decisive tones, and, next, pontoons filled with soldiers crossing the river and disembarking at various points on the other side.

After seeing which Sylvia descended to the hall and asked those who were about downstairs what all the movement and excitement meant.

"It is the French coming into the city, Juffrouw," one of the servitors replied. "They say the Earl of Athlone's forces draw near, that Kaiserswörth is taken by the Allies. Also they say----"

"What?" Sylvia exclaimed, impatient of the man's slow, stolid speech.

"That the great English commander, Marlborough, has come; that he is in Holland; that ere long he will march to relieve Liége."

Sylvia turned away as she heard these words, and went out slowly into her garden and sat down in an arbour placed half-way between the house and the great gate.

"Will this," she mused now, "tell for or against his chances--our chances? The city will be occupied by the French, instead of having them outside of it. Alas! alas! it will be against those chances. He runs more risk with the streets and inns full of French officers and soldiers than with none but the townspeople inside the walls. Also, the difficulties of exit are multiplied now. Heaven send the English forces here at once or keep them away until we are safely out of Liége."

Thinking, pondering thus, the girl sat on for some time, though at intervals she would return to the house to give some orders or to ask if there were any further news from outside. In this manner the morning ran away and the day went on; but, at last, when Sylvia began to be alarmed at the absence of the man for whose safety she was so concerned, she saw that he was before her. Raising her eyes, she observed that he was standing outside the gate gazing in at her.

This gate, as always of late, was kept locked, the key being left in the lock on the inside; and now, full of some feminine fear or instinct which seemed to hint that while Bevill was outside the gate he stood in more danger than if he were inside, with the great structure between him and those who might seek to harm him, she went swiftly down and turned the key, while bidding him come in quickly. Pushing with his shoulder one of the great halves of that gate, he had soon done as she bid him, while she, holding out her hand to him, exclaimed:

"You have not--not been--oh! Danger has not threatened you?" seeming to gasp a little as she spoke.

"Nay, nay; why should you fear?" he replied. "Though that you should do so is but natural. The French are sending in two of their regiments the better to hold the town if their out-lines are driven back; yet you will not be molested?"

"I--" Sylvia said, though now she spoke in a more self-constrained voice--a voice that, maybe, had in it a colder accent, "was not concerned for--for--but no matter. I did but deem that with the city full of French now you might have been--troubled--molested."

"Ah, forgive me. I misunderstood your thoughts. Now," he continued, "I have brought you news that may be either pleasant to you or otherwise. Marlborough is in Holland."

"I know," she said, as she led him out of the glare of the sun towards the cool shade of the hall. "I know. Yet it may be that this news is none too pleasant. I--I--had resolved last night to quit the city, as both you and my Lord Peterborough think it best for me to do; to consult"--and as she spoke her voice seemed even more grave, more cold than before--"*my safety*. Now it may not be so easy to perform."

"I' faith," Bevill said, with a smile, "easy is not the word. The gates are barred against all and everyone. Short of being a French soldier there is no exit from Liége now."

CHAPTER XV.

Though the approach of the Allies had not taken place within a week from the time when it was supposed to be near, and was at least premature, the two regiments of soldiers--that of La Reine and that of Les Gardes Françaises--as well as two squadrons of the Mousquetaires Noirs, remained in the city. To supply these with temporary barracks some of the large warehouses on the quays had been occupied by the French (who, however, spared all dwelling-houses), and amongst them were Sylvia's warehouses.

But the proximity of these troops had rendered the Weiss Haus no longer an agreeable place of residence to her, and, consequently, she had accepted the oft-repeated invitation of Mynheer Van Ryk and his wife to occupy their house with them. Neither the would-be host or hostess were, however, aware that she had come to the determination of quitting Liége at any moment that an opportunity should arise.

Nor, indeed, would it have been easy for Sylvia to explain her reason for thus desiring to be gone. If she had stated that it was her intention to escape out of the city, the sober-reasoning minds of the Van Ryks would simply have formed the opinion--which was, in absolute fact, the one she had herself long since arrived at--that she was far safer in Liége than she would have been in quitting it and traversing a land now swarming with contending armies.

Yet how would it be possible for her to, on the other hand, inform them that her reason for departing was not that of self-preservation at all, but, instead, of consulting the safety of a man who, in his desire to serve her, no matter what the origin of that desire was, had placed himself in terrible peril?

One person existed, however, who was well aware of all Sylvia's thoughts and intentions; who could understand the nobility of the girl's mind in deciding to quit a place in which she was in no likelihood of danger, simply with the view to the preservation of a man who might at any moment be exposed to the greatest of dangers. Consequently, this person, who was the Comtesse de Valorme, not only admired Sylvia for her intentions, but, since she herself was equally desirous of quitting Liége for her own purposes, had decided not only to render assistance to the undertaking, if it were possible to do so, but also to form one of the fugitives.

"Yet," said Sylvia to the Comtesse, as now they talked over the determination they had both come to, "fresh troubles arise at every step. 'Twas but this afternoon that M. de Belleville"--for so both ladies spoke of Bevill for precaution's sake, though the Comtesse had known for days that he was an Englishman--"confided to me that M. Francbois was once at school with him in Paris, and that he can by no chance have forgotten what his country is nor what his name is."

"Where should the trouble be?" the Comtesse asked. "Francbois is a crafty man, especially when craft may serve his purpose. But here it will serve none. Were he to denounce M de Belleville, it might, in truth, lead to the latter's downfall, but would not enrich him. Your friend would be tried as a spy and----"

"No, no! Say it not!" Sylvia exclaimed, with a shudder, understanding well enough what the next word must have been. "Say it not. Think how nobly, how chivalrously, he has found his way here."

"It would not enrich Francbois," the Comtesse repeated; "therefore he has no reason to betray him."

As she spoke these words, however, Sylvia knew very well that Francbois had not only one reason for betraying Bevill, but had very plainly told her that, if driven to desperation, he would undoubtedly betray him.

Living in the same house that Sylvia was now in, since he too was a connection of the Van Ryks, Francbois had countless opportunities of pressing his suit with her, and these opportunities he did not neglect. And then, after he had discovered that not only was this Englishman, whom he hated in his boyhood, here in Liége under a false name and nationality but, as he had also learnt, was in the habit of seeing Sylvia frequently, he had added to this discovery a very strong suspicion that he was an English admirer, if not lover, of hers. But that there was any intention on their part of quitting Liége he did not as yet imagine. Even so, however, he knew enough.

This Englishman, passing as a Frenchman, was, he admitted, handsome, gallant, and *debonnaire*--a man whom any woman might well love and be proud to love. And Sylvia, he remembered, had refused all the addresses that other men had attempted to pay her, including his own. She was ever cold, stately, and almost contemptuous of men's admiration. Yet now, now that this man had appeared, they had been much together, as his own observations had shown him--was it not possible that, in her frequent visits to England with her father, she had met this countryman of hers and learnt to love him, and that now he was here, not only to carry on his suit, but also to be with her in time of trouble? He knew too that, although Bevill had not yet

entered Van Ryk's house, he had met Sylvia and the Comtesse on the quays and in the public gardens of the city. He did, indeed, know enough.

Therefore, this very day, he had spoken plainly to the girl--so plainly that, without indulging in any actual threats, he had made her see clearly how much there was to fear from him if she still refused to listen to his protestations, his desire to obtain her hand.

"This very day he had spoken plainly to the girl."—*p.* 513.

"What does he threaten, what hint at?" the Comtesse de Valorme asked as she listened to all that Sylvia told her; while, as she spoke, there was a strange look in her eyes.

"He threatens nothing, yet suggests much. He said but this morning that a word to M. de Violaine, who is in command of the Citadel----"

"Monsieur de Violaine! De Violaine! The Brigadier! Is he in command of the Citadel?"

"Why, yes. So Monsieur Francbois said. Do you know him?"

"Ay, very well, for many years. He is, like me, from the South. So! A hint to him. Well! What is this hint to convey? What harm is it to do?"

"To cause Mr. Brac--M. de Belleville to be arrested as an Englishman passing as a Frenchman, and doubtless, in the French mind, as a spy. To be tried as the latter--to be executed. Ah, no, no, no!" Sylvia concluded. "Not that--surely not that."

"Let him denounce your compatriot to M. de Violaine. Bid him do so when next he makes his vile suggestion. Only, to the defiance add this: ask him if he knows to what faith M. de Violaine belongs; ask him if he knows which man the Governor of the Citadel would deal harder with--an Englishman passing under the garb of a Frenchman, or a Frenchman who is----"

"What?"

"Ah! well, no matter for the present. Also, on second thoughts, do not ask him that. Instead, say: Madame de Valorme is a friend of M. de Belleville. He who injures him incurs her enmity. It will be enough. Now tell me, when do you expect to see your countryman again?"

"He is coming to-night to see us both. Alas! he may not come in open daylight, since he recognises that it is not well for him and Francbois to meet here face to face. But still he would fain see you, since you have promised to leave the city with us, if such a thing can be accomplished; also he comes to tell us how stands the chance of our succeeding."

"When does he come?"

"At nightfall. Knowing that Mynheer keeps his bed of a quinsy, and Madame stays with him, while Francbois has gone to see his friends at the Jesuits' College----"

"Ah! his friends at the Jesuits' College," the Comtesse repeated quietly.

"Monsieur de Belleville will come in by the garden gate. It may be, he says, that he will have discovered some chance, or, at least, have conceived some scheme whereby we shall be enabled to leave the city and make our way to the Allied Forces."

"Does he know my mission, the reason why I so ardently desire to see Lord Marlborough? Does he know why I so long to cast myself at that commander's feet--to beg him, to implore him on my knees to send the long-promised aid of England to those of our persecuted faith in Languedoc? To send it now--now--when France is attacked on all sides, when England and Holland are hemming her in with bands of steel in the north, when Prince Eugene is hurling his armies against her in Italy. For now is the time. Now! Now!"

"He knows," Sylvia said, touching her friend's hand gently. "I have told him."

"And does he know the rest? All. Have you told him that?"

"Oh, do not speak of it! Do not think of it! Ah, Radegonde!" addressing the other by her Christian name. "Do not speak of it, I entreat you."

"Not speak of it! Not think of it!" the Comtesse exclaimed, while as she did so her eyes were wet with tears, her cheeks being also as wet with them as leaves bedashed with rain, her whole frame being shaken with emotion. "As well bid me not dream of it night by night, nor let my existence be broken with unhappy memories. Not think of my father's death--my father, an old, grey-haired, feeble man!--in the dungeons of Nîmes--my father, who, had he not thus died, would have been broken on the wheel. Not think of that! Nor, perhaps of my husband----"

"Oh, Radegonde!"

"----sent to the galleys, beaten, driven to his doom even as he sat lashed to the oar. He! young, gallant, an honest, God-fearing man! And all for what? For what? Because they and thousands like them--all good and true subjects of this tyrant Louis, of this priest-ridden, woman-ridden Louis--did but wish to worship in their own way! Not think of it! My God! shall I ever cease to think of it?"

"Nay, do not weep, I implore you," Sylvia exclaimed. "The English will help; so, too, will all the Netherlands. All who think and worship as those in the South worship will help. And soon, soon, freedom, peace, must come. An end must come to all their sufferings."

"Does he know all this?" the Comtesse asked again when her passionate sorrow had somewhat spent itself. "Does he? If not, he must do so. Otherwise, what will he deem me--me, a Frenchwoman seeking to reach Marlborough, the most hated, the most feared foe of France!"

"He knows," Sylvia whispered, "and, knowing, understands all."

But by now the night was near at hand. Through the great, open, bow-shaped window of the solid Dutch house was wafted the scent of countless summer flowers, the perfume of the roses, now dashed with the evening dews, mingling with that of many others. Also the sounds that summer always brings more plainly to the ears were not wanting; the birds were twittering in the trees ere roosting for the short night; from the Abbey of St Paul the solemn sounds of the great bell boomed softly while the silver-toned carillons joined in unison. In other of the city gardens close by the voices of little children could be heard as they played their last rounds ere going to their beds, all unconscious, or, at least, unheeding, in their innocence that they were in a beleaguered city that, if war's worst horrors rolled that way, might ere long be the scene of awful carnage and see its old streets drenched with blood.

"It is the time, Sylvia," the Comtesse said, "that he should come. Is the gate unlocked?"

"Nay, not yet. I will go and see to it." And Sylvia, passing through the low window and down the steps to the garden, went along the neatly-kept path towards where the gate was.

Then, at the moment she was about to turn the key in the lock, and, next, to leave the solid wooden gate an inch ajar, so that, when Bevill came, he might push it open as he had done more than once since she had taken up her abode in this house, she heard a footstep outside in the lane--one that she had already learnt to know well enough!

"Ah," she exclaimed, turning the key quickly and drawing back the door, while she held out her hand to Bevill a moment afterwards. "Ah! you have come."

"To the moment," he replied, taking her outstretched hand and bending over it. "Did I not say that I would be here before the carillon had finished its chimes? And here am I! Yet--yet--almost I doubted if it were well for me to come to-night----"

"You doubted that!" Sylvia exclaimed, while stopping on their way towards the house to look up at him. "You doubted if you would come! Knowing how we were waiting here, how we were expecting your coming!"

"Ay, knowing what danger lurks near to you; to your desire and that of Madame de Valorme to

quit Liége. Also, in a lesser degree, to me, though that matters not----"

"That matters not!" the girl exclaimed, repeating his words again, while in the dusk he could see her starry eyes fixed on his--eyes that resembled the stars themselves gleaming through the mists of summer nights--"that matters not!"

"Danger," he went on, unheeding, though not unobserving, "if Francbois knows my movements, if he knows that we meditate aught like flight from Liége. Have you not told me of his unwelcome desires and hopes--of his----?"

"Hark! Stop!" Sylvia whispered, interrupting him. "Listen. There is another footstep in the lane. It may be he--following, tracking you. And the gate is open! Heavens, he is there! The footfall stops. If his suspicions are aroused he will halt at nothing. He will denounce you!"

"Will he? We will see to that. Go back to the room, welcome him as he returns----"

"But you? You! The danger is yours, not mine."

"I am safe. I fear nothing."

"Ah, yes; when he has entered you can escape, can leave by the door. 'Tis so. Farewell until to-morrow. Farewell." And as swiftly as might be, the tall, graceful form of Sylvia sped back to the room while Bevill, crossing the grass plot, entered an arbour at the side of it.

"Ha!" he said to himself. "Escape! Leave by the door! She does not know me yet. Escape!" and as he spoke he drew still further within the darkness of the arbour.

Neither he nor Sylvia had been too soon in their action. Looking through the interstices of The vines which were trained to grow outside the open woodwork of the arbour, Bevill saw that Francbois was advancing up the path towards the steps leading to the open window of the old room.

As he did so, however, a reflection entered his mind which caused him to wonder if, after all, there was any connection between Francbois' doing so and his own visit. The man lived here with the Van Ryks. Might it not be, therefore, that this was his ordinary way of returning home? A moment later, however, Bevill recognised that this could not be so. The gate was always locked inside at night; as was the case with himself but just now, and on former visits during the week, it had to be unlocked from the inside for entrance to be obtained.

"Francbois comes this way to-night," he muttered, "because he knows, has seen, that I too did so!" and as he so thought he brought his sash a little more round and felt to discover if his sword ran smoothly in its sheath.

Meanwhile, the other had entered through the open window of the room, and had found Sylvia by herself, since the Comtesse must have quitted it for some purpose during the time the girl had gone to unlock the gate. He could see that she was by herself, for the lamp, which had been brought in some time earlier, was turned fully up.

"Mademoiselle is alone," Francbois said, though as he spoke his eyes were peering into the corners of the room that, in spite of the lamp, were in partial darkness; and also peering, as far as possible, behind the great Java screens. "Alone!"

"Apparently," Sylvia replied in the usual indifferent tones she adopted towards this man. "Madame de Valorme was here a moment since."

"Madame de Valorme!" Francbois echoed. "Madame de Valorme alone?"

"Whom else did you expect to see?"

"One whom I had good reason to suppose was here--your 'French' friend, Monsieur de Belleville."

"Your eyes prove to you that your supposition is wrong."

"Surely he has entered the house. I followed behind him on my way here."

"He has not entered the house. That you 'followed' him I do not doubt And, even had he entered the house, which as I tell you he has not done, you are not the master of it. Also, Mynheer Van Ryk, who is, has bade me welcome here any whom I desire to receive."

"It is incredible!" Francbois said. "Incredible. He passed down the lane before me. And--and--that door," pointing to one which led out of the room into a small library or study, "is not fast shut. And there is a light within."

"Monsieur Francbois," Sylvia said very quietly, and now she stood before him drawn to her full height, stately, contemptuous, as an affronted queen might stand, "if you choose to believe your own thoughts as against what I tell you, do so. Look in that room and see if my 'friend,' Monsieur de Belleville, is there. Only, from the moment you have done so, never dare to address one word

to me again. There," extending her arm, "is the door. Enter the room and observe for yourself. Afterwards, you will doubtless search the house."

"'Enter the room and observe for yourself.'"—p. 515.

"'Enter the room and observe
for yourself.'"--*p.* 515.

Vacillating, uncertain how to decide; sure, too, that his eyes had not deceived him, Francbois knew not what to do. If he looked in the room and did not find the Englishman, then his remotest chance with Sylvia was gone for ever; while, if he did find him there, his recollection of Bevill's earlier character told him that he would have to pay a heavy reckoning for his curiosity. Yet, how could the man be there? Would Sylvia have bidden him enter the room had that been so; would she have bidden him do that which must stamp her as utterly untruthful should the Englishman be found?

Still halting, not knowing what to do, he nevertheless took a step or two towards the library door, while observing that Sylvia's glance was fixed contemptuously on him; then, suddenly, he exclaimed, "I will know!" and advanced close to the door.

At that moment it opened wide and the Comtesse de Valorme appeared.

"You see," she said, speaking with withering scorn, "I am the only person the room contains. Now do as Sylvia suggested--search the house."

"Monsieur Francbois need scarcely trouble so far as that," a voice said from the foot of the garden steps, while all turned their eyes on Bevill standing below. "I have heard enough to know that he seeks an opportunity of speaking with me. Monsieur Francbois, I pray you to descend. I, too, must have some talk with you. Afterwards, we can arrange our affairs pleasantly, I do not doubt. You understand?" looking at Francbois.

CHAPTER XVI.

Francbois, his face become suddenly ashy, as both ladies observed, from the moment he had heard Bevill's voice and saw its owner standing at the foot of the steps, nevertheless did as he was invited and went out to the verandah. Then, seeing that, without any further word or sign, the Englishman was slowly making his way towards the gate, he followed him. Yet once the thought came to his mind as he did so, "If this were not the garden of the house wherein I dwell, if those women were not there, how easy 'twould be--now, as he walks ahead disdainfully--to put him out of my path, for ever." While, as he thus thought, his hand itched to draw the spadroon at

his side.

In the room which he had left, the women were now standing at the open window, gazing down at the figures of the retiring men. On Sylvia's face there was a look of intense anxiety, of nervousness--an expression that, on the face of a woman of less heroic mould, might have been construed into one of fear. But, though this look was not, truly, one that depicted fear, the agitation that possessed her whole being was the outcome of fear. Not for herself--that could never be!--but for him--him--the man whose every path, every footstep, was day by day and hour by hour becoming more environed and beset by danger.

"And the bitterness of it all is," she thought to herself, "that the danger need never have arisen. I was safe. Short of this city being besieged by the English and fired by grenades or bombarded, or sacked and destroyed by the French in their rage, naught could harm me. Yet, to protect me, to shield me from harm, as he deemed in his chivalry, danger surrounds his every movement, his whole existence. How-- how--shall I therefore save him, how repay him in turn? If we cannot leave this city, if I cannot save him by the pretence, the make-believe, that he is saving me--oh! what shall become of him? What?"

"They have passed out through the gate," the Comtesse said at this moment. "They----"

"What! is he going to kill him? To force him into a duel?"

"'Twere well he should do so," the Comtesse de Valorme said in a hard, dry voice that sounded strangely in Sylvia's ears, or would have done so had she not been too agitated to observe the tone of the other. "Very well it would."

"Radegonde! How can you speak so of one allied to you, one dwelling beneath the same roof as you? He has not harmed you; he is only dangerous in so far that we fear the harm he may do."

"While Francbois and Monsieur de Belleville inhabit this city there is no safety for your friend. I know Francbois. He is treacherous, subtle as a snake, and--and--it is much to his interests to have M. de Belleville removed from--well, from your companionship."

"Why?" the girl asked, looking at her companion. "Why?" Though, as she spoke, there came to her face the rose-blush that had but recently quitted it.

"You should guess why as easily as I. M. de Belleville," the Comtesse continued quietly, "is the representative of your guardian. Do you imagine that, holding this office, he would look with approval on Francbois' desires to--to--ah! you know what he desires."

"If," said Sylvia, speaking now with her usual calm, "neither my guardian nor Monsieur de Belleville had any existence, M. Francbois' desires would be no nearer their attainment. Ah," she exclaimed suddenly, "what is that? Is it the clash of swords? Listen!"

"I heard nothing. The night is tranquil; there is no sound. Sylvia, you are overwrought, overstrung. What do you fear? Such as Francbois cannot slay one such as he, except by treachery, by betrayal."

"If I fear aught it is that he should slay Francbois. I would not have a gallant gentleman stain his sword with the blood of such as that man is. I would not have Monsieur de Belleville bring fresh trouble, fresh risks of danger on himself."

That Sylvia was, indeed, overwrought must have been the case since, undoubtedly, she could have heard as yet no clash of swords proceeding from the spot which the two men had reached some minutes before.

When Bevill Bracton, followed by Francbois, had passed through the gate giving from the garden into the lane, he had continued for some paces until, arriving beneath the foliage of a tree that protruded over the wall of another property, he halted and, turning round, faced the other. Then he said:

"Monsieur Francbois, you remember me. We were at school years ago at the Lycée Saint Philippe. You have not forgotten?"

"'Monsieur Francbois, you remember me.'"—*p.* 553.

"'Monsieur Francbois, you remember me.'"--*p.* 553.

"I have forgotten nothing. You are an Englishman. Your name is--*peste!*--I--I know it, yet for the moment it has escaped me. Nevertheless, I shall recall it."

"It would be best that you should not endeavour to recall it," Bevill said, looking down on the man--and there was light enough for Francbois to see that the glance was a stern, determined one. "Also that you do not intrude on my affairs. If you do so, it will be dangerous for you."

"Dangerous for me!" the other exclaimed, with a contemptuous laugh. "For me! On my life, monsieur, it is not I who stand in danger here. Liége is dominated by the French, and I am a Frenchman. You are an Englishman. Your life is not worth a fico if that is once known."

"Short of you and what you may do, it cannot be known. Now listen to me. I am here in the garb of a private man, desiring not to draw my sword either in the disputes between your country and mine, or in personal quarrel. But that sword lies against my side ever ready to leap from its scabbard--as it will if I am thwarted in what I have set myself to do; if I am betrayed or falsely denounced by anyone--by you, since there is no other here who can do so. Ponder therefore on whether it will profit you to thwart, to betray me."

"*Ohé!*" Francbois exclaimed in a light and airy tone, which was probably but a poor outward sign of what his inward feelings were. "If it comes to drawing swords--ay, and crossing them too--there are others who can do as much. We Frenchmen know something of the swordsman's art. Witness how you English cross the Channel to take lessons in it from us."

"That is true. I myself took those lessons, and I have profited by them."

"Ah I it may be so," Francbois said, though the recollection of this fact, which for the moment he had forgotten, did not add much to his equanimity. "But as for the betrayal! Once betrayed, a man has little chance of avenging himself on his betrayer. The rat in the cage cannot bite his captor."

"He can bite him before he is caged. Now listen to me, Francbois. If I supposed to-night that you came into that house with a view to betraying me, you would never return to it. I know, however, why you followed me to it, why you were resolved to discover if I was within it. I know that you pester Mademoiselle Thorne with your addresses----"

"And I know," Francbois exclaimed, stung beyond endurance at the contemptuous tones of the other, "that you are an English lover of hers; that you have come here to be by her side, to endeavour, if it may be so, to remove her from Liége to your own land."

"It is false. I am no lover of hers. Except when she was a child of ten I have never set eyes on her until I did so here a week ago."

"It is very strange," Francbois sneered. "You found your way, made your entrance, to the Weiss Haus with ease. From the balcony Mademoiselle Thorne extended you a gracious welcome, bade you enter. Is it the habit for English donzelles to extend such cordial greetings to every passer-by? Do----"

But he stopped, seeing that he had said too much, for he had gone too far.

For the moment Bevill Bracton said nothing, yet his action was, indeed, louder than any words could have been. His hand drew forth his sword, lightly he ran the glittering blade across his left cuff; then, pointing with his left hand to the weapon by Francbois' side, he uttered one word--the word "Draw!"

"What if I refuse?" Francbois asked.

"Your fate will be the same, therefore you must defend yourself. You rogue," he went on through his teeth, "you dare to make aspersions on my countrywoman! You dare--you!--such as you!--to raise your eyes to Sylvia Thorne and, to make yourself safe with her, as you suppose you can do, you intend to denounce me to the French here. So be it. Only there shall be no betrayal. Either you remove me from your path now and for ever--now, this very instant--or I put an end to all your hopes and all your intended treacheries."

"You had best beware," Francbois said, and Bevill perceived that there was a laugh in his voice--a laugh that was half jeer, half sneer. Also he observed, and the observation surprised him, that there was no fear in the man. If he was treacherous and crafty--a villain--at least he was a bold one.

"Far best," Francbois continued. "I have crossed the Alps in my time. Monsieur may have heard of the *stoccala lunga* and the *botte secrete* and other strange passes taught in Italy----"

"Ay," said Bevill, "as well as the *botte des laches!* I will essay them. Doubtless it is the latter I have most to fear. Monsieur I am your servant. *En garde*."

And now, through the calmness of the night, the two women must have heard--sorely they heard--a sound not often familiar to women's ears, yet one that, once heard, especially in such days, could scarcely be misunderstood, even if not fully recognised.

A sound not unlike the hiss of the hooded snake as it glides towards its victims--or, as one of those old Italian fencing-masters has described it, "water hissing on hot iron." Also they must have heard the "tic-tac" that steel makes as it grates against steel--a sound that is not noise. And once, also, they must have heard a voice, the voice of Francbois, ejaculate, "Ah!"

"They are engaged," the Comtesse whispered hurriedly to Sylvia. "They----"

"Engaged!" the girl replied. "He and that man! Oh, Radegonde, hasten! Come! Come, ere it is too late."

"Ay," Madame de Valorme exclaimed, "Francbois is a master of fence. Monsieur de Belleville's life is too good for such as he to take."

Then, together, they sped down the garden path and through the gate into the lane.

But now the scraping of the steel had ceased, while the obscurity of the night beneath the overhanging tree was such that they could scarcely perceive the figures of the two men. Yet that they were there they knew. The darkness of the lane could not disguise their presence.

"Stop!" the Comtesse said, advancing towards the deeper gloom that stood out in that darkness and testified to, at least, the figure of one man. "Stop, I command you. Monsieur de Belleville, hold your hand. Francbois, if you injure him, you are lost!"

While uttering these sentences in a clear voice, though in a somewhat incoherent manner, she, followed by Sylvia, reached the spot where the men were.

That Bevill was uninjured the Comtesse and Sylvia recognised at once. He was standing upright in the middle of the path between the hedges, and in his hand he held his sword, point downwards to the earth; on which Sylvia murmured, "Thank Heaven above!" as she recognised this to be the case.

As for Francbois, he, too, was standing upright, only his sword was not in his hand; and now both ladies heard Bevill say:

"As for your *lungas* and *bottes*, Monsieur Francbois, truly they are not wonderful. A somewhat strong wrist and a trick of disengaging has defeated them. Pick up your weapon and sheathe it: we will renew the matter elsewhere."

"Nay," the Comtesse said, "you will not renew it. I," she continued, "have that which should render Emile Francbois harmless. Come," she said now, turning to the other. "Came, follow me some steps farther down the lane. I must speak with you, and at once. Come," she said again, and this time she spoke in a tone that plainly showed she intended to be obeyed--a tone that would have required no great effort of imagination on a listener's part to cause him to suppose that a disobedient dog was being spoken to.

"You are not hurt?" Sylvia asked softly, as she stood alone with Bevill and looked up at him through the density of the night--a density that now, however, the swift rising of the moon was dispersing. "Oh! I pray not."

"In no way," Bracton replied. "He plays well, yet his defence is weak in the extreme--and it may be that the darkness was my friend. But, Sylvia," forgetting his courteous deference for the moment, yet observing, as he recalled himself, that either she had not remarked his utterance of her name, or heeded it not, "but I have left him free--free for harm, for evil."

"I think not. It would appear the Comtesse has some hold over him, knows something that may keep him silent; yet, nevertheless----"

"Yes--nevertheless?"

"We--we must go. Escape! I--we," she went on, speaking tremulously, "are not safe. I am afeard."

"Afeard? You? Yet you have told me the French, even though the worst befall, will not hurt a woman."

"I have changed my thoughts. It is--a--woman's privilege to do so. I would put leagues and leagues betwixt myself--betwixt us--and Liége: betwixt us and all this land ravaged by war and contending armies. I--I--cannot bear to remain here longer. In truth, I fear--I am sick with fear."

Remarking Sylvia's strange agitation, an agitation so strangely new-born, so different from the calm indifference and absence of all apprehension which she had testified when first he reached her, Bevill could not but wonder at the change that had come over her. For now she was but in little more danger--if any--than she had been a week past. There were, it is true, the rumours that the Allies were drawing near, that Kaiserswörth had fallen to them, that Nimeguen had either done so too or was about to do so, that Marlborough was hastening to take chief command of all the forces. Yet what mattered this! She, like every other woman in all the land, in every hemmed-in, beleaguered town and city, was safe from personal violence--safe as a child itself.

"And she knew it," he thought, as he gazed at the outlines of Sylvia's face, now plainly visible in the light cast by the moon through the leafy branches of the great tree. "She knew it, and she knows it still. What is it she fears? What fear has come to her?"

Suddenly he asked:

"Is it Francbois you fear?"

For a moment Sylvia did not answer, turning her head away instead, but saying in a whisper a moment later, "Yes."

"And I have let him live--live, when I might have slain him without effort," while adding the next instant, "How can he harm you? No man can force a woman to listen to his plaint, to accede to it. And I--am I not by your side?"

"Ah, yes," she whispered again, while murmuring next through closed lips some words he did not catch--words that almost appeared to sound as though they were the words "Knight" and "Sentinel."

After which, speaking more clearly, Sylvia went on, "Still I would fain depart. Ah! let us go."

"In spite of my protection! Through fear of Francbois?"

"In fear of Francbois--yes," looking straight into his eyes, while adding inwardly, "Fear of him--for you."

"But Liége, the exit from Liége, is forbidden to all except the French, since all others would avail themselves of the opportunity of divulging the disposition of their forces round the city and in the city also. It is impossible to go."

"Yet you are French--are supposed to be French. You have the means wherewith to be De Belleville, the *attaché*, or Le Blond, the mousquetaire. You can baffle suspicion with your knowledge of their tongue, with your accent."

"Nay; I could not baffle a true Frenchwoman, the Comtesse, whatever I may do with these Netherlanders. Neither could I deceive a mousquetaire, and Francbois knows I am an Englishman. I will not go. I will not expose you--and Madame de Valorme to the danger of travelling with me the few miles necessary, to the danger of endeavouring to pass out of Liége."

As he uttered these words it seemed to him that there came a low, yet swiftly suppressed moan from the girl's lips, and, looking down wonderingly at her while not understanding--for had she not said that, come what might, all women were safe in Liége--he was about to ask her why his determination moved her so much, when the Comtesse and Francbois returned to where they stood.

"Emile will not divulge your nationality," the former said now to Bevill. "He--well, I have persuaded him. Is it not so!" addressing Francbois.

"Monsieur de Belleville may rely on me. He--he--misunderstood my intentions," Francbois replied, holding out his hand to Bevill.

Owing possibly to the darkness, the young man failed, however, to see that hand, whereon, a moment later, its owner allowed it to drop to his side.

CHAPTER XVII.

At this time the excitement in Liége among those who were shut up in it and also among the French who lay around it, as well as in the citadel and Chartreuse, had become intense. For the latter knew by despatches from their field-marshals and generals, and the former from those who, in spite of the besiegers' vigilance, still managed to pass in and out of the city--when they were not caught and promptly hanged at one of the gates--that the Allies were more or less triumphant in the engagements that took place with their foes. Athlone had already defeated detachments of the French in several encounters; Kaiserswörth, if not already fallen into our hands, must undoubtedly soon fall; Nimeguen, the frontier town of the United Provinces, was in the same condition, and Venloo was in a very similar one.

Yet all heard--the French with anxiety, and the whole of the inhabitants of Holland and the Netherlands with joy--of something more. The Earl of Marlborough had undoubtedly arrived and after a considerable discussion--in which such various and remarkably diverse personages as the King of Prussia, the Archduke Charles of Austria, the Elector of Hanover, and the Duke of Zell, including, of all persons in Europe, Prince George of Denmark, supported by his wife, Queen Anne, had all aspired to the commandership-in-chief--he had been appointed to that high post.

Marlborough, as the French very well knew--and the knowledge of which they did not disguise--had never yet lost any skirmish, battle, or siege at which he had commanded. His present foes could not know that, during the whole of his long military campaign in the future he was never to lose one solitary skirmish, battle, or siege, and was to stand out amongst the great commanders of all time as the single instance of a soldier who had never experienced defeat.

The fact of this general's presence near Liége, since now he was marching on Kaiserswörth to assist Athlone, was amply sufficient to induce the French to tighten their hold over all places at present under their domination. For their marshals and generals remembered him as colonel of the English regiment in the service of France, as well as what he had done in the Palatinate under Turenne; their King at this time, growing old and timorous, remembered that once again Marlborough had offered his sword to France, had asked for the command of a French regiment--and had been refused. Now Le Roi Soleil remembered that refusal, and recognised that it had raised up against him and his country the most brilliant and powerful enemy France had ever had to contend with.

Consequently, in Liége as elsewhere, no living soul who was not French could quit the city except by cunning or strategy; it was useless to attempt to do so. Also, pickets patrolled the streets day and night, sentries were posted on the walls with orders to shoot any who could not give the password; boats, filled with armed men, patrolled the river, making inspection of all and every craft upon it; watch fires burned around. On the other hand, none were molested nor their houses visited; trade was carried on as far as possible in the city, though only such trade as was necessary for provisioning the inhabitants and supplying such food as was already inside the walls, since nothing could now enter them.

"You see," said Bevill to Sylvia one morning at this period, which was now the middle of June, as they talked over all these things, "how impossible any attempt to leave Liége would be. We could not get as far as one of the gates without being stopped and subjected to rigorous examination."

"If it were not for us," the girl said, looking at him, "you could doubtless do so.

"What!" he exclaimed, looking at her in turn. "What! You suggest that? That I, who came here to enable you to leave this place, should now consult only my own safety and go away again while leaving you behind? Oh!"

"Ah, forgive me, but--but--I do so fear for you. For us there is no actual danger; I am an inhabitant of the city; the Comtesse de Valorme is a Frenchwoman. But you--oh, it is terrible--terrible!"

While, as Sylvia spoke, there came to her mind another thought to which she quickly gave utterance.

"If it is dangerous," she said, "to attempt to leave Liége, is it more so to you than remaining here? Once outside you would, at least, be free from the treachery of Francbois."

"The treachery of Francbois! Do you still fear that?"

"Yes. No matter what hold the Comtesse may have over him--and that she has one is undoubted--if he wishes to betray you he will do so."

"Yet why wish to do so?"

"Ah!" Sylvia exclaimed, and then was suddenly silent, her eyes lowered.

For how could she tell him that which she knew must be the motive of any treacherous act Francbois might perform; how tell him that which, she thought, he should have divined for himself? She could not tell Bevill that Francbois declared him to be his rival, the obstacle to his hopes with her; that he believed that they had met often in England, that they loved one another.

But still she thought he should have understood. Meanwhile, though this divination came not, as yet, to Bevill's mind, there sprang suddenly to it a light, a revelation.

He saw, he understood, that it was his safety she alone considered--not her own.

He recognised the nobility of her character, the self-sacrifice she was ready to make in being willing to quit a place where, if the discomfort was great, her personal security was almost certain, so that by acting thus the one chance of his safety, the one road to it--if any such road existed--was open to him. And in recognising this he also recognised another thing--a thing that he had not dreamt of, not suspected in himself, but that he could no longer doubt possessed him. He understood that, from the first, he had been drawn towards this girl not more by her beauty and stately grace than by her womanly attributes, her lack of thought for herself, her noble self-respect and her personification of honest, upright, English womanhood. This English womanhood, valiant, self-contained, was fearless through consciousness of lacking every attribute that could attract evil towards her; strong because girt with woman's strongest armour--innocence.

And now he knew that, day by day, he had been gradually, though unperceived by himself, learning to love her; he knew that as she had said those words. "I do so fear for you," and not only had said them, but had testified to their truth by the anxiety for his safety that she showed, he was no longer beginning, learning to love her, but *had* learned to love her.

"What shall I do?" he asked himself as they sat on this summer day in her host's garden. "How act? Now is no time to tell her what has sprung full grown into my heart. Honour bids me be silent, and I must obey. No word, no plea, must come from me until she stands free and unfettered in her, in our, land. I must draw no interest, no credit, from having placed myself here in a position of danger on her behalf, 'specially since the danger is not to her--but to me. That may procure me her esteem and regard; it must not be used as a means whereby to win her love."

Therefore he did not repeat his question as to why Francbois should wish to betray him, but, when he had concluded the above reflections, contented himself with saying:

"I must not, will not, go hence. Since you aver there is no danger to you here, so shall there be none to me. I promised the Earl that I would enable you to quit Liége; seeing there is no need nor call for you to go, I remain also."

"You misunderstand me," she said. "The danger may be small, but the existence is unbearable. I do most earnestly wish to go, to attempt to reach England; yet I know. I feel--it is borne in on me--that if I attempt to do so, to reach the allied forces or the coast in your company, I shall bring harm to you; and--and--oh!" she said, "I could not endure that. But by yourself alone you may pass safely. Oh, go, go, go!"

"It is impossible. No more can I pass out alone than with you and the Comtesse."

"What is to be done?" Sylvia almost wailed.

"We can stay here. Here, where I am in no danger----"

"Not from Francbois!" she exclaimed, recalling again to her mind that which Bevill had undoubtedly not dreamt of--the fear that Francbois deemed him his rival and would stop at nothing to remove him from his path. "Not here," she went on, "where any stranger who enters the 'Gouden Leeuw' may chance to recognise you."

"It is improbable; yet, even so, I can leave that hostel."

"But where can you go? Here you would be welcome in the garb of one who was of much assistance to Madame de Valorme, as one who is my friend, my would-be protector; yet--there is Francbois to contend with. While, if you choose another inn, the danger would be as great as at the 'Gouden Leeuw.'"

As Sylvia uttered these words she saw by Bevill's face that some fresh idea had sprung to his mind, that he was thinking deeply.

"What is it?" she asked. "What?"

For a moment he did not reply, but sat with his eyes fixed on hers, then suddenly he asked: "You have said that I can escape alone; and I know, I feel as sure as you yourself, that together we cannot escape. But what if----"

"Yes, yes," she whispered, stirred to excitement at his words.

"What if I should go alone, and you and the Comtesse go together, we meeting outside the French lines?"

"Ah, yes. That way! Yes, yes! What more? Tell me. Oh, tell me!"

Still speaking slowly, deliberately, so that she understood that he was thinking deeply as he spoke, that he was weighing carefully each word as it fell from his lips, he said:

"Your house is now deserted. There is no servitor there?"

"None," she answered, "excepting only the gardener, the old man you saw. He dwells in a little cottage some distance behind. What is your plan?"

"This. It may be best that I withdraw from the 'Gouden Leeuw.' I--I can leave it at dusk, as though with the intention of passing out of the city. The people of the house deem me a Frenchman, and therefore hate me. They will not regard my departure as strange; while, if it were well to confide in them, they would not betray me. It was so with the landlord at Antwerp who, in truth, saved me. It might be--would be so here, if needed. The French are their oppressors; they look to the English to save them from the French."

"And afterwards?" Sylvia asked almost breathlessly. "Afterwards?"

"I should not leave the city--then; but if, instead, I might find shelter in your house for some night or so----"

"Yet how will you live with none to minister to your wants? How support your horse?"

"I must confide in the gardener. He, like the rest here, is heart and soul for us, for the English. As for what remains to do, there shall be no light in the house at night, and I will lie close and snug all day. Thus Francbois will be deluded into the thought that I am gone. If he has hoped to gain aught by my presence here, he will soon learn that he has missed the mark."

"And for us--for Radegonde and myself? What shall we do? She is a Frenchwoman, armed with all passes necessary; but I am an Englishwoman, although resident in Liége. It may be they would not harm me here, even if the worst comes to the worst--if the Allies besiege the town, if the French are all driven into it; yet, since I am English, neither will they let me go forth, fearing what information I might convey outside."

Again reflecting for a moment, while still his eyes rested on the soft, clear beauty of the girl whom now he knew he loved, though, in truth, he was not at this moment thinking more of that beauty than of how he might contrive that he and she should escape together out of this city, he was silent. Then he said:

"The Comtesse is free to go or stay as pleases her. They will not prevent her from doing either. Yet her domestics remain; they cannot go. If she is persistent in reaching Marlborough or Athlone, she cannot travel accompanied by that company. She is in the heart of war, she will be surrounded by troops of all denominations. If she goes, she must go unaccompanied or almost unaccompanied."

"She is very resolute. She will go. If only to throw herself at the feet of our great generalissimo and plead for succour for those in the South."

"Accompanied by one maid, or companion, or attendant, she would pass unnoticed; while I, dressed in more sober clothes than these I wear, might pass as follower--as a humble servant from the South. Thus should I risk less chance of detection from any tone or trick of voice."

"Ah!" Sylvia exclaimed, again stirred to excitement as Bevill unfolded his ideas. "But the attendant, the companion?"

"Why, yes, the attendant," he replied. "And would you disdain to play that part? Could you bring yourself for a few days, one day or two at most, to sink yourself and your dignity----"

"Springing to her feet and with her blood on fire"--*p.* 559.

"Springing to her feet and
with her blood on fire"--*p.* 559.

"Ah, ah!" the girl exclaimed, springing to her feet and with her blood on fire--quicksilver--now at the scheme his suggestions unfolded before her, at the prospect of safety--for him, above all for him!--that they opened up. "My dignity! Ah, it shall be done! At once! Yet, no," she went on; "not at once. It cannot yet be done; there are precautions to be taken."

"What precautions?"

"That you should have safe entry to my house; also, be safe in it. And yet," she added regretfully, "you will be so solitary and alone."

"It will not matter, so long as I find the means for our escape; yet what other precautions are needed?"

"Above all, that of your safety, since 'tis you alone who stand in danger; yet, still, some other precautions too. The Comtesse's following are all bestowed at the 'Kroon,' there being no place for them here. They must be warned to hold their peace until the Comtesse returns, as she may do--alone. And, further, there is that firebrand, Francbois. He cannot have the dust thrown in his eyes in one day. He must not know that, as you are gone, so, too, are we; or that we are going too. For that would arouse his suspicions once more, and suspicion with him would lead to deadly action. Also I must see old Karl, and bid him leave open a door in the Weiss Haus and in the stable too, and--and provide sustenance for you. Our knight," she added softly, "must not die for want of nourishment."

"You think of all--of all others but yourself," Bevill murmured.

"Ah, no! I think only that he who risks his life for me should have that life cared for by me." After which, since perhaps she did not desire that this portion of the subject should be pursued, she continued: "When do you purpose putting your plan in action? When will you commence seeking shelter in what will be but a dark, gloomy refuge?"

"At once--the sooner the better. If Karl can be warned by you to-day, then I will go to-night. If danger threatens from Francbois, it will not grow less by being given time to grow and thrive."

At this Sylvia was herself silent for a moment, as though wrapt in meditation. Then slowly she said:

"It may be best--very well it may. Francbois is away from home to-day; he sleeps sometimes at the Jesuit College----"

"The Jesuit College? Is he a Jesuit?"

"He may be, so far as a layman can be one, if that is possible. But I do not know. At least, he is greatly their friend, and is, Madame de Valorme thinks or knows, used by them for their purposes. It is in this that she has some hold over him which may keep him silent. The French do not love them."

"And he is away from this portion of the city to-night?"

"Yes."

"So be it. To-night is the night of nights for me. If I can enter the Weiss Haus after dark, I will do so. I do but wait your word."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Weiss Haus lay that night beneath heavy black clouds that rolled up from the west in threatening masses, and, of a surety, foretold rain ere morning. Also there was the feeling in the air of coming rain, of some storm that was swiftly approaching, or rather was close at hand. The earth of the flower beds exuded a damp, moist odour, the perfume from the flowers themselves--many of them tropical plants brought from far-off Dutch possessions--was now a faint, sickly one which spoke of what was near, while the leaves of the trees, after hanging lifeless for some minutes, would then suddenly rustle with a quivering noise as a cool, wet wind swept through them.

But now, gradually, the clouds, edged with an opal shade which hinted that, from afar off, the late moon was rising behind them, banked themselves into thicker and thicker masses, while from them fell some few drops of rain--the heralds of a coming deluge. At this time, too, the darkness all round the square, white house became more profound, so that the mansion looked like some great, white stone gleaming in a setting of ebony. Under the trees which bordered a great drive that swept round the Weiss Haus the darkness was still more impenetrable, and was so dense and thick that here nothing could be perceptible against the deep obscurity unless it, too, was white or gleaming.

Yet one thing there was that nevertheless glinted occasionally from out the gloom--a thing that only those accustomed to deciphering such signs would have recognised as the startled glare of an eye; and that not the eye of a human being, but of an animal--an animal made more nervous than was natural to it by the presence of the approaching storm and also by the deep muttering of the thunder.

"She will neigh in a moment," a man holding the creature's bridle said to himself, while drawing off his cloak as he did so, and whispering soothingly to La Rose, since it was she. After which he placed the cloak over her head. "That must not be," he continued. "This house is deserted by everyone. A horse's presence here would tell any who might be about that something strange is happening."

Bevill led La Rose now towards where he knew the stables were placed--towards where, also, he knew a door would be open, since Sylvia had told him an hour or so ago that the old servitor had been warned of what was to be done; and, in spite of the mare shivering all over in her nervousness at the approaching storm, he managed to induce her to enter them. Arrived there, his hands told him that the manger was full of fodder and the rack above well filled with hay, as was also the bucket with water; and then, having eased her of the saddle and bridle and replaced the latter by a halter, he pondered as to whether he should leave her or not. The key was in the stable door, he had discovered, so that he could secure the mare from harm--if harm should threaten--yet, should she neigh in terror at the storm, her presence would be known, and, perhaps, his also.

Suddenly he came to the determination to remain with her until the storm had passed. The night was cool now, it was true, yet the stable was warm, and it was well littered down. In his earlier campaigning days he had slept in worse places than such as this. To resolve his doubts, at this moment there came a vivid flash of lightning, a terrific crash of thunder broke over the spot, and a moment later he heard the rain falling in a deluge, while La Rose whimpered and moaned and gave signs of neighing.

Standing by her head, stroking her soft muzzle, whispering to her, he contrived, however, to soothe the creature so that, at least, she did not neigh, while, staying by her till at last the storm had rolled away, he contrived to reduce her to calmness--such calmness, indeed, that at last he felt her neck drooping over the manger and knew that she was feeding.

"But still I will not leave her," he reflected. "Who can tell but that another storm may follow swift upon the one now gone; also, if by any chance I have been tracked from the 'Gouden Leeuw,' if it is known that I am here, what would an enemy's first act be? To prevent my further progress! To injure the one thing that can carry me to safety, that can alone enable me to assist Sylvia and the Comtesse."

Whereupon, since the precautions that he, with every soldier, had long learnt to take as regards his charger were well remembered, he lay down now upon the straw in the next stall--so

that he might be well out of the reach of La Rose's heels should she become again excited--and prepared to pass the night there, knowing that his voice would be sufficient to soothe her.

In spite, however, of the fact that the mare was now quite tranquil, except that once he heard her hoofs stamping in the straw and once observed that she was drinking from her bucket, he could not sleep, his thoughts being much occupied with two out of many things. The principal of which things was that, by the blessing of heaven, it might be granted to him to lead this girl in safety back to their own land; another the love that had sprung into his heart for her; while still there was a further thought, a thought that was truly a fear--the fear that, much as he had now come to love Sylvia, there might be no respondent love in her heart for him.

"Gratitude, yes!" he said to himself. "That is already there; also, it may be, a tender hope, a gentle dread for me and of my successful issue out of the conditions I have surrounded myself with. But--love? Ah! how shall I know? Her calmness, her dignity will give no sign that will help me on my way to the knowledge I desire; while, when the time comes for me to speak, what will her answer be? 'Tis well that that time is not yet, not now, since were it so my fears of failure would so much unnerve me that I should also fail in all else I have to do."

One other thought arose, however, in his mind and set him wondering at a subtle change that had taken possession of him--a change caused by a great desire that now triumphed over what he could not but deem at this time a lesser one.

He recognised that, strong as had been his hopes that his present undertaking should lead him back to the calling from which he had been wrongfully cast out, those hopes were now but secondary, even if as near as secondary, to a greater, a more supreme one--the hope that he would win the love of Sylvia Thorne, win her for his wife.

And as he so thought it may be that he reproached himself. For he was a man, and, being one, knew that he should set his career, his honour in the world's eyes, before a woman's love!

As thus be became immersed in such reflections as these--reflections that, he doubted not, had driven away all hope of slumber for the present--an incident occurred that instantly dispelled those musings, that stirred him once more into a man of action.

Upon the deep tranquillity of the night--since now the storm had quite passed and, as he could see through the mica panes of the stable window, the late risen moon was shining clear in the heavens--he heard a door close violently within the Weiss Haus--close violently while sending out into the silence a heavy, dull thud such as a noise made in a shut-up house sends forth. As that noise reverberated he heard La Rose's halter shaken suddenly as by a start, and a tremulous whinny issue from her.

Quieting her with a gentle word as he rose from the position in which he had been lying, and going towards her as he spoke, Bevill's attention was still strained to the utmost for any further sounds. Yet, now, all was still, the night was undisturbed by any noise. Even from the warehouses some three hundred yards off, which were filled with French troops, there came nothing to tell of their presence.

"Can my ears have been deceived?" Bevill mused. "And if not deceived, how has that door closed thus? Ere I brought the mare from under the trees I had made sure that the one at the back of the house was closed, though unlocked, and it was not that door which shut so violently, but one within. Why did it so? The wind has died down long since; no current of air through any open window--if there were any such, which is not to be supposed--could have closed it. What is best to do?"

An instant later he had determined on his action. He would enter the house and discover what had caused so strange an occurrence on a night that was so perfectly calm as this one was now. It might be, it was true, an occurrence for which he would be able to discover an absolutely plain explanation; but if it were not so, then it were best he determined the cause of it.

He spoke a few words to La Rose even as he drew his sword, intending to carry it bare in his hand, and while hoping that Providence might see fit to prevent her becoming frightened and, by her fears, calling attention to her presence. Then he went forth from the stable door, locking it behind him and dropping the key into his pocket.

As he did so, he heard the clock in the Abbey church strike three, as well as the sound of the other clocks striking one after the other, and, also, the chiming of the carillons on the calm night air.

"It is the time," he said to himself, "when those who break into the houses of others seek to do so. It may, in truth, be some such as they, or else an enemy, seeking me. Well," through his teeth, "it it be Francbois, he shall find me--only, when he does so, let him beware. If 'tis he, no *botte* shall save him this time; and there is no Comtesse now to help him."

A moment later he stood outside the door at the back of the Weiss Haus--the door of which he had said to himself a moment since that "it was closed though unlocked."

But now he discovered that it was no more closed than locked. Some hand had opened it to

enter the house, since even the wind could not lift a latch--the hand of someone who had entered the house and forgotten to shut the door behind him. Unless it had been purposely left open, thereby to afford a means of easy exit!

"And still it was not this door that shut with such a report," Bevill reflected, "but one above," and slowly he made his way into the interior of the house, while resolving to discover and make sure of who the intruder was. Because all shutters had been close fastened ere Sylvia left her house, and, discharging her servitors for a time at least, gave afterwards the care of the place into the hands of old Karl, the darkness was intense.

Bevill did not know, therefore, where he was, though guessing by aid of his knowledge of the mansion that he was now in the domestic offices. Consequently he decided that, should he be enabled to progress further without interruption from closed doors--or from an enemy--he would ere long reach the hall. And then his way would be clear before him. He knew the manner in which the stairs mounted to the floor above.

He went on now, running his hand along the wall of the room he was in while touching on various shelves the ordinary array of utensils used for preparing meals--dishes, jars, and so forth--and at last his fingers lighted on another door, a door that, like the first, was open an inch or so.

"Whoever 'tis," Bevill thought now, "he leaves the road clear for his return, for his escape. Yet that shall not be, or not, at least, until I know who and what this lurking midnight intruder is." Whereupon he drew the key of the door forth from the inner side of the lock and, taking it with him, made fast the door on the other side when he had felt for and found the key-hole; after which he went on, after putting the key in his pocket.

He discovered now that he was in a long, narrow passage, one having, as his touch told him, doors on either side of it, all of which were locked, and with no keys in the locks; but as he still progressed, doing so gently on his tiptoes, he saw ahead of him a patch of gleaming light, and he understood what that light was. He knew that it was the moonlight on the marble-tiled hall, and that the moonlight had found its way in from the great window on the first floor, the window that served to light the hall by day, and by night, too, when there was a moon.

"I shall be upstairs," Bevill said to himself, "ere many moments are passed. If you are there, my enemy, we should meet."

"He lifted the heavy brocade that curtained off the passage"

"He lifted the heavy brocade
that curtained off the passage."

His sword in hand, he lifted with the other the heavy brocade that curtained off the passage from the hall, and, observing carefully the portion of it that was outside the great splash made by the moonbeams, went on through the deepest shadow towards the lowest stair. Then, keeping to the side of those stairs that was itself free of the rays, he mounted to the first floor.

"Now," he thought, "we are near close quarters, if it be not the wind that has played at tricks with me. Above this floor is nought but the servitors' quarters; short of being driven up by fear, Francbois will not attempt them."

At this moment Bevill saw that, suddenly, the great patch of moonlight below was fading, and also that the light was obscured on the side of the house that a moment before had been touched by it. Glancing up through the roof-window, he observed the rim of a dense black cloud passing beneath the moon.

"The house will be in utter darkness again ere long," he said to himself. "Ah, well! if I cannot thereby find my enemy, at least he cannot see me. And I can return and wait for him at the door I have but now made fast, if I find him not up here. There, he will not foil me."

As thus Bevill mused a step fell on his ear--a soft footfall, almost a shuffling, halting one--a step that, in its creeping oncoming, caused even creepiness to one so brave as he--a footfall that seemed ghostly in its lagging progress towards where he stood. Yet, as the sound of it approached nearer and nearer, he knew that, for the present, it was not to his interest to obstruct whoever it might be that drew near, but rather to watch, to follow, and at last bring to bay this nocturnal intruder.

The night itself aided him even as he drew back against the wall, for now the darkness was profound and, also, the rain beat down pitilessly on the great window; while the wind, risen once more, was again howling round the Weiss Haus. But ever still he heard--or did he feel?--that footfall drawing stealthily nearer and nearer to him.

At last Bevill heard something also--something he could not understand, something the meaning of which he could in no wise comprehend.

He heard a sliding noise upon the wall in a line with the spot where his face reached, and he fancied that it was varied now and again by something else which sounded like the light touch of fingers tapping on that wall.

"Whoe'er it is," he said to himself, suddenly recognising what that scraping sound, interrupted by an occasional touch on the wall, was, "he feels his way carefully. Let me be ready to greet him--ah!" he ejaculated, lunging out straight before him with his sword, though piercing nothing. "Ah!"

Fingers had passed across his face: an instant later something long and hairy had swept across his left hand, even as he lunged with his right: still a moment later the sound of a figure springing down the wide staircase fell on his ears; and, ere another moment had elapsed, he was springing after it.

But, even as he did go, he muttered to himself:

"This is not Francbois! He had no beard. Who, then, is it? Ah! Sparmann perchance!"

CHAPTER XIX.

Some hours after the morning had broken grey and desolate, but with still a promise in the heavens that the storms of the night were past, Bevill Bracton arose from the great lounge in the hall on which he had laid himself down and on which he had been enabled to snatch some broken rest. For it was six o'clock ere he had deemed it prudent to attempt this, and he had not even then done so until he had satisfied himself that, whosoever the man might be whose hand had passed across his face and whose beard had swept over his disengaged hand, he was not present in the house now.

While, however, discovering this to be the case, he had made discovery of something else. He had found signs that this man had not been the only visitor to the Weiss Haus beside himself, but that there had been another. Also, he had arrived at the conclusion that each of the men had come here on some secret purpose unknown to the other, and that they had met in the dark and had fought with each other. What that purpose was might not be hard to discover, he thought, yet, even so, he could not resolve why, if both of these intruders were his enemies, they should have come into deadly contact with each other. But that this had been the case there was no room left for doubt.

After chasing down the great staircase the form of the man whose hand had crept over his face, he had, notwithstanding the fact of his having locked the door at the end of the lone passage, missed his quarry. In the darkness of the night that quarry had evaded him; in the coming of the dawn he knew that it had done so effectively. He made sure, in the grim light of the dayspring, that the house was absolutely empty of all human existence except his own, doing so by going into every apartment, large and small, that it contained.

Observing carefully the direction from which the man came, looking to see if his fingers had left any marks on the wall along which he had felt his way in the dark, regarding the sides of the passage that ran round the balcony over the hall, Bevill discovered some signs of that man's advance towards him. He saw that, before this midnight wanderer through the house had drawn

close to him, he had come from the farther or northern part of it. He perceived, also, at twenty paces from the spot where he himself had stood listening to the approach of his footfall, a shred, a wisp, of black ribbon lying on the floor. Stooping to look at this, while doubting for the moment if it might not have been some ribbon that had fallen from Sylvia's black robe ere she quitted the Weiss Haus some ten days before, he understood that such was not the case. The piece of ribbon had at its end a little tag, showing that it came from some "point" or aglet of a man's dress, worn either at his wrist or knee. He noticed, too, that it was clean cut as though with a knife or other sharp weapon; while, picking it up, he discovered that it was damp and that the dampness left a red stain on the finger and thumb between which he held it.

Then Bevill understood.

"It is from the man's sleeve-point," he said to himself. "Another man's rapier has cut it asunder ere transfixing his arm. There has, indeed, been an encounter in this house."

Going still farther down the passage, he came to an open room, a little apartment that was more an alcove than a room in actual fact. Here there was no longer a possibility of doubt left as to what had taken place. A table of quaint Eastern make was half overturned and leant against a wall, two chairs were entirely so, a man's hat lay on the floor, and the carpet was splashed with blood. Also the window was open to the balcony, and against the balcony there stood a ladder reaching to it from the path below.

"A man's hat lay on the floor."—*p.* 699.

"A man's hat lay on the floor."--*p.* 699.]

"So, so!" Bevill said to himself, interpreting these signs easily enough. "The one was here, the other came and found him, and--they fought. Yet, it may be, each thought the other someone else and thought me that someone. Whom else should they seek? 'Tis very well. I have been shrewdly watched. Yet who were *they?* Is that far to discover? There can be but two in this land who thrust against my life and security--the one whose grudge is undying, the other who deems me his rival."

He took up now the hat lying on the floor, and, in the dim light of the rain-soaked dawn, turned it over and regarded the lining to see if that might tell him aught. Unhappily, however, it told him nothing. The day had not yet come for hat-makers to stamp their names inside their wares, and there was no private mark to testify to whom this hat belonged.

"'Tis but a poor, common thing," Bevill mused, regarding the coarse felt, the tawdry galloon and rough lining. "Doubtless 'tis Sparmann's. Francbois apparels himself bravely; he would not wear such headgear as this."

Still continuing his reflections, Bevill arrived at all, or almost all, that had happened. He concluded that in the darkness, and also in the noise of the storm, each of these men had decided that *he* was the other man. Doubtless, therefore, Francbois considered he had thrust his rival from out his path; perhaps, indeed, thought he had killed him, while Sparmann, being wounded, probably deemed that his old enemy had again defeated him, and so would decide to try no more conclusions with such an invincible foe.

"Wherefore," said Bevill, "I shall be safer here to-night than last; neither victor nor vanquished will come again to molest me. Yet how has Sparmann escaped from out the house?" while, glancing next at the balcony and the head of the ladder resting against it, he added, "How the

other both came and went when his work was done is easy enough to see."

Determined, nevertheless, to discover the method of Sparmann's evasion, he returned to the spot where he who was undoubtedly Sparmann had passed him, and whence he had sprung down the staircase. Arrived at this point, he saw that a sign, a clue, was ready to his eyes.

In the now almost broad daylight, though a daylight still somewhat retarded by the rain-charged clouds rolling away, he perceived that on the white marble foot of the stairway there was a blood-stain and still another to the left of it.

"To the left!" thought Bevill; "and the door I locked fast is to the right! 'Twas to that I returned. No great wonder that I lost him."

And now all became as clear as noontide.

"Doubtless when he came in he would leave the door open behind him," Bevill pondered, even as he proceeded to the left of the staircase, "thinking I was already in the house. Learning that he had not one but two enemies to contend with, he may have feared to return the way he came, not knowing but that a fourth might be awaiting him at the entrance. Has he found an exit to the left, or has he dropped dead before he did so? Here's to discover."

After which Bevill proceeded down the corridor on the left, which was a similar one to that on the right, though leading towards a *plaisance* which he and Sylvia had one day visited when the sun was on the other side of the house. But the door opening on to this was fast locked and bolted; whoever the man was who had escaped from him he had not done so that way.

Nevertheless, the mansion was empty of any other living creature than himself, as now he made sure of by visiting every room and cupboard that was open in the house. He could swear there was no human being but himself within it, and, thus resolved, lay down upon the lounge and slept--uneasily, as has been said.

He had slept all the same, and so awoke refreshed, while noticing that the ancient clock in the hall pointed to noon. To noon! And he remembered he had not gone near La Rose since he discovered that the place was deserted of its recent visitors. Chiding, reproaching himself for this neglect--above all, for seeking rest ere going to see his most precious possession, the one by which he hoped soon to put a long distance between himself and Liége when once Sylvia and the Comtesse were ready to set out with him, he now left the house by the door on the right and went toward the stable. As he put the key in the door while calling to the mare, his ears were greeted by her usual whinnying, and, going up to her, he at once discovered that all was well. No matter who or what those men were who had been able to track him to the Weiss Haus, and to themselves obtain admission to it within a few hours of the time when he had left the "Gouden Leeuw," they either had not known his steed was with him, or, had they done so and desired to harm her, had found no opportunity for harm. In that respect all was very well.

Filling La Rose's bucket for her now, and seeing that both rack and manger were still well provided with fodder, he determined to return to the house and there remain close until the evening came, at which time Sylvia had promised that she would make her way to him accompanied by Madame de Valorme. For then he was to learn what provision they had been able to make for leaving Liége, and the time when they would be prepared to depart.

Between the stables and the house itself--or, rather, between the stables and this back entrance to the house--there was a little copse of trees and shrubs which had doubtless been planted some long time ago with the intention of shutting off the view of the former from the latter, and more especially from the windows of the back rooms on the floor above, which, as Bevill had observed in his search through the house, were furnished as small sleeping apartments. Through the copse there ran a path straight to the door, one that was probably used by the stablemen and ostlers in their going to and fro, and, also, it would seem, as some little retreat in which the domestics might sit in their hours of leisure. This Bevill judged, since there was a bench built round the largest tree of all, and, also, there were some rude wooden chairs which seemed to suggest that, once, they might have occupied a more honourable position on the lawn or in the arbours of the front, but had afterwards been relegated to the back.

Walking slowly along this path when he had left La Rose, and doing so because not only did the shrubbery and trees partly shelter him from the fierce June sun, but likewise from any prying eyes that might be on the watch, Bevill stopped with a start as he drew near the bench.

For, seated on it, his bare head bent forward on his breast while his limbs presented an appearance which combined at one and the same time an extraordinary suggestion of extreme lassitude and extreme rigidity, was the figure of a man. The man's garments, even in the full noontide heat, looked as though they were soaked with wet; a man on whose breast there hung down a long, iron-grey beard.

"Who is that?" whispered Bevill, as he halted for an instant at this sight, and the next went swiftly forward. "It is Sparmann! Is he asleep--or dead?"

His closer approach determined for ever any doubts he might have entertained. One touch of his finger on the man's wrist--a wrist that was pierced through and through, and, in the sunshine

that peeped through and danced on the quivering leaves, was as red as if painted--told him that he was already cold.

"Dead!" he whispered solemnly, fearfully, since, used as he had been to the sight of and acquaintance with death in his campaigns, that had at least been open death and not death dealt out in the darkness of midnight. "Dead! Yet, I thank thee, Heaven, not at my hands. But how has it come to him? How? That wound, bad as it is, would not slay, or, at least, not so soon."

Looking farther, however, at the dead man, he learnt whence his death had come. Beneath the rusty beard he saw that Sparmann's poor, common linen frills--doubtless he had been very poor of late--were all torn asunder as though in the agony of some mortal spasm, and in his chest he saw a great gaping wound that was enough to tell all.

"So," Bevill whispered as he stood there gazing on his dead foe and observing (as we so oft observe the most trivial matters in our most solemn moments) how a butterfly settled on the dead man's hand for an instant, as well as how the nether lip was caught between his teeth in some final paroxysm of pain, and how wet and soaked his poor, shabby garments were. "So this is the end of you--poor, broken soldier! Alas! whate'er your failings you were a brave man once; none knew it better than I who have crossed swords with you. Ah, well! you risked your life last night to slay me--as I must think--and lost it, though not by my hand, God be praised! Farewell. Death wipes out all bitterness."

As the young man stood before the poor, dead thing, while feeling naught but compassion for his end, there did spring to his mind the recollection that, with Sparmann gone, one of two bitter foes was swept from out his path. Yet, had he but known what a few hours were to bring forth, had he but been able to peer but a little way into the future, he would have recognised that Sparmann dead might work him even more ill than Sparmann alive and seeking to slay him in the deserted Weiss Haus in the darkness of the night.

Now, however, his thoughts turned to present things, and he was wondering, even as he still gazed on the dead man, what it was best for him to do.

If the body remained where it now was it might be probable that none would pass along this path in the copse until he and both the ladies were out of Liége and far off from it. But what if the opposite should happen? What if 'twere known that he who was being tracked by Sparmann had harboured here that night? What if---- Then, suddenly, he broke off in these cogitations, disturbed by a slow, heavy footfall that approached behind him.

Looking round to see who the advancing intruder might be, he observed old Karl coming towards him--old Karl, who, as he drew close to where the living and the dead men were, asked, "Who is he? Does he sleep, mynheer?"

"For ever," Bevill said, answering the second question first, while to the former one he made reply, "His name was Sparmann. He was a Hollander once----"

"Once, mynheer, once?" the old man's bleared, grey eyes glittering as they looked curiously into Bevill's. "Can a man be born of one land yet die the subject of its bitter foe?"

"This man did so. He sold himself to France. He was a spy of France."

"*Himmel!* Therefore the enemy of us, of the land that gave him birth. And yet, mynheer should be French--is French--and has slain him."

"Nay. He was slain by--another--Frenchman, as I believe."

"Here? In the garden?"

"In the house. He was my foe. He would have slain me, yet the other slew him. He, too, was foe to me, yet thinking that this one was I, took his life."

After which Bevill gave as much explanation as he considered safe to the more or less bewildered old man.

"Who was the other?" Karl asked, after he had grasped as much as Bevill cared to tell him.

"No friend of mine, I tell you; nor, which concerns you most, of the Jouffrouw."

"Ha! a traitor to his country, no friend to my young mistress. So be it. He is better dead than alive. What shall we do with him? He must not be found till you and the Jouffrouw are safely gone."

"I know not. I am no ghost believer, nor am I afeard of the dead; yet if I stay here another night or so I care not to have this man keeping his silent watch outside the house."

"Leave all to me. I have a tool-house near my cottage; to-night I will remove him there. When you and she and her friend are gone he shall have Christian burial."

"It will bring no harm to you?"

"Nay, nay. I have been a soldier. I can still wield a sword. Also, when the magistrates know of his treachery they will ask few questions. They will think 'twas I who found him in the darkened house and slew him for a robber. All will be well. But--you must go soon, very soon. That tale will only be good if told near to the hour of his death."

CHAPTER XX.

No matter though their conquerors lay around the city--for conquerors in one form the French and their auxiliaries were--and no matter whether their grasp would tighten more and more upon the beleaguered place, or be suddenly relieved and loosed by the English and their allies as they advanced near to Liége, the inhabitants did not cease to continue as far as might be their ordinary pursuits, and also their relaxations.

It is true, the business that they did was much curtailed: their silks and satins, spices, and other tropical wares could now no longer reach Liége either by water or land, or, having reached it, could not in many cases enter. Also, it was true, the burghers could neither feast nor drink as copiously as had once been their wont, since food was required for the investors inside and outside the city, who took care to be first served.

But some things there were that neither investment nor a reduction in rations, nor, which was the same thing, a tremendous increase in the price of all rations, could prevent them from enjoying. Such things, to wit, as their walks and promenades along the quays on either side of the river or in the public gardens and places of the city.

For which reason fathers and mothers still took their daughters out of evenings and gave them an airing, and treated them to the coffee drinking beloved of Dutch wives and maidens, while the men smoked solemnly their pipes, since the city was well provisioned with such things as coffee and tobacco, no matter how short it might fall of fresh bread and meat and fish and vegetables.

And, because the heart can ever remain light so long as the most terrible calamities have not yet befallen that can well befall, and can especially do so when the heart is young, the daughters and sons of the honest Liègois would laugh and talk and sip their coffee under the flowering acacias, while, through the eyelits of their masks, the former would cast many a glance of curiosity at those whom they were taught to hate and loathe.

For now that the city, as well as the country that lay around it, was filled with French soldiery, there would sometimes pass before their eyes handsomely accoutred mousquetaires and dragoons, or sometimes a fierce and swarthy Cravate, and sometimes a young cadet of the regiment of Royal-Condé or of the superbly decorated Garde de la Reine. And from the eyes that sparkled behind the half-masks would be shot glances that told of one of two things--or it may be of both!--namely, of hatred for the invader or of that admiration which scarlet or blue, or gold and silver lace, scarcely ever fail to extort.

Beneath the leafy branches of some acacia and ialanthus trees there sat this evening a group of four people watching all the promenaders, native and foreign, who passed before them. One, the chief of the group, was an elderly man who seemed more immersed in intricate thought than concerned in what met his eyes. By his side was a lady, herself no longer young, and, consequently, unmasked; a woman with a sweet, sad face, who might have given to any onlooker the idea that her thoughts were little enough occupied with the affairs of this world--an idea that would, perhaps, have been increased in the minds of those who should regard her by the appearance of delicate health which her face wore.

Next to her were two ladies, each masked and young, though one, if the lower and uncovered portion of the face was sufficient to judge by, was much younger than her companion. For surely the dark, chestnut hair of this latter, as it curled beneath the broad-brimmed, black-feathered hat she wore, while undisfigured by any wig or powder, belonged only to a woman in her first blush of early womanhood. So, too, must have done the tall, slight form clad outwardly in a long, dark-coloured satin cloak, and the slim hands from which the white gauntlets had been withdrawn. Also, the eyes that looked calmly through the eyelets of the mask, the sweet yet grave-set mouth beneath, and the white, smooth chin, would have told that here sat one who was young yet sedate, beautiful but grave.

As for the lady next to her, she too was grave and solemn, and, for the rest, clad much the same as her companion.

"And so," said the elderly gentleman, speaking now, though not until he had looked carefully

round the *bosquet* in which they all sat to see that there was no one about to overhear his words, "and so you are resolved to go--both of you--and to inform your--your cavalier of your determination to-night?"

"Yes," the elder of the two masked ladies replied, "we are resolved. If for no other reason than for the one that, while we remain, he will not go himself. And, ah! he is too brave, too noble, to have his life sacrificed by us. Is it not so, Sylvia?"

"In very truth it is," the girl replied. "If he remains here he does so at imminent deadly peril to himself; and that must not be. I, at least, will not have it so."

"Nor I," said the Comtesse de Valorme.

"I do aver," Madame Van Ryk said now, with a half-smile upon her sad face, "that Mademoiselle de Scudéry and Madame de Lafayette might have drawn inspiration for one of their romances from you. And--how strange a working of chance is here! This cavalier sets forth to rescue a maiden who, in plain fact, needs no rescuer, but in her turn is forced to save the cavalier. Our Netherlanders have no romance. 'Tis pity! They should know this tale."

"Romance or no romance," Sylvia replied, "this gentleman shall throw away no chance of safety, and it rests with me to prevent him from doing so. Ah! ah!" she went on, "if evil should befall him through his hopes of succouring me how should I bear my life?"

Van Ryk shot a glance at his wife as Sylvia spoke thus--a glance that the lady well understood--then he said drily:

"At least he wins a rich reward, a rich guerdon"--and Sylvia started at the word, remembering how the Earl of Peterborough had himself used it, as well as in what sense he had used it--"in having gained your interest in his welfare."

"Should he not gain reward, does he not deserve it, remembering the interest he has testified in my welfare? And he will do so. If I should chance to stand face to face with my Lord Marlborough, he shall know how much 'Monsieur de Belleville' aspires to wear his sword for the Queen."

"And so shall he know it from me," the Comtesse said, "if I, too, find myself before this great commander."

"We go together," Sylvia said. "If I obtain the ear of his lordship so shall you."

"What must be must be," Van Ryk said. "Now, see, the twilight is at hand. Soon it will be dark. I will but call my wife's chair and send her home, and then escort you to your own house. Monsieur de Belleville will doubtless be awaiting your coming--your decision."

Half an hour later the three stood outside the wall of the Weiss Haus, by the side entrance that led past the stables and through the little copse in which, that morning, Bevill had found Sparmann seated dead.

"Sylvia heard a soft, yet firm footstep on the path."

"Sylvia heard a soft, yet firm footstep on the path."

Tapping on the door gently as she sought admission to her own house, Sylvia heard a soft, yet firm footstep on the path a moment later. Another instant and the door was opened, and Bevill

stood before them.

Then, when they had all exchanged greetings and Sylvia had asked him how the previous night had passed, receiving for answer the information that, after the storm was over, he had been enabled to sleep, Bevill desired to know where they wished to retire to, there to confer on any plans that she and Madame de Valorme might have decided on.

"Let us remain outside," Sylvia replied, "in one of the arbours. The night is warm, and the sun to-day has dried the wet of last night. Come," she said, addressing the others, "to the *bosquet* on the lawn. There we can talk in comfort."

Upon which they proceeded along the path that ran through the copse--there was no silent figure now on the seat around the great tree, though Bevill could not refrain from casting one glance at the spot where it had been in the morning--and so reached the arbour the girl had spoken of.

One thing Bevill had determined on, and, in so doing, had also impressed on old Karl, and this was that no word should be uttered to Sylvia of all that had occurred in the house overnight. For he knew, or, at least, already understood, that, should she be made cognisant of these occurrences, no power on earth would prevent her from instantly deciding to set out with him from Liége, so as, thereby, to ensure, if possible, what she would believe to be his safety. Yet in doing this she might not be absolutely ensuring his safety, while, undoubtedly, she would be jeopardising her own. And he would not have that. If Sylvia desired to go, she should go with him in her train, but she should not go on his behalf. Never! He had come there to save her, not to force her to imperil herself by saving him. That must never be. While, for the rest, what mattered it to him now whether he stayed here in danger, or, if she desired it, courted additional danger by going with her? In either case he would be by her side unless disaster came; while, if it came, he would still be near to, it might be, shield and protect her, perhaps to save her. He would leave the decision in her hands, would abide by her determination. He was learning to love her--pshaw! *was* learning! Nay, he did love her. Nothing should drive him from her. As she decided so it should be--short of her deciding to do aught that should part him from her.

Now that they were all seated in the arbour, Sylvia at once began to unfold her plans by saying:

"Mr. Bracton, the Comtesse and I have decided to quit Liége to-morrow night."

"Ah, yes," he answered, seeing that, beneath the stars now twinkling in the evening sky, another pair of stars, not less bright than those above, were looking into his eyes as though expectant of his reply. "Ah, yes. Yet are you well advised? Have you thought deeply on what you do? You told me but a few days past that you were safe here, being a woman."

"Safe--yes, perhaps. Yet desperately desirous of leaving this war-ridden land, of reaching my own; of imploring the assistance of the Captain-General of our forces to put me in the way of doing so. Also, I desire to snatch the chance of travelling with Madame de Valorme, who is herself resolved to implore Lord Marlborough to--to--ah! you know what her desires are."

"As all know here," the Comtesse said. "There is no need for silence. England has promised help to us poor Protestants in Languedoc, and, for the help that England can give, Lord Marlborough alone can decide. Today, he stands here as England, he is England; he is the one foe whom Louis fears, the one who may bring Louis to his demands. And the time is now. Environed east and west and north and south by his enemies, England's help given in the Cevennes may free us from our sufferings; may enable us at last to worship God in our own way, as his grandsire allowed our people to do. I must see Marlborough. I must! I must!"

"Being resolved," Bevill said, "doubtless your plans for leaving Liége are decided on. How have you determined to quit the city?"

"For our purpose," Sylvia answered, "we are all French. You are M. de Belleville, Madame is truly the Comtesse de Valorme, I am her maid."

"Yet her actual maid is old," Bevill said.

"They will not know that at the gate."

"'Tis best," Van Ryk said now, speaking for the first time, while remarking that the wind was rising and rustling the leaves behind the arbour, "that you leave at a fixed time. The east gate is the last left open, but even for the French themselves that is closed to them and all and every as the clock from St. Lambert's strikes eleven, after which none can enter or pass out. It will be well, therefore, that you should meet the ladies," he continued, addressing Bevill, "ere they reach the gate. If chance is with you all you should be outside in safety ere the hour has struck."

"Where and when shall it be?" Bevill asked.

"By the Prince's palace at ten of the night. Then are our townsmen in their houses and shortly after in their beds, and the streets are therefore well-nigh deserted. Also our invaders," he went on bitterly, "are all called in at sunset, the town is quiet. Beyond your questioning at the gate

there will be naught to impede you."

"Is it agreed on?" Sylvia asked of Bevill.

"As you command," he answered, "it shall be. At ten of the night to-morrow I shall be outside the Prince's palace or no longer alive."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvia, shuddering at the very thought of Bevill's being no longer in existence twenty-four hours hence. "Never speak nor dream of it. If I thought there was danger of such horrors would I quit Liége?"

An instant after Bevill had spoken he knew that his words were ill-timed. He recognised that to alarm Sylvia at this moment--the moment when she had decided to set out on the road to England--was madness. Madness, because he knew--he could not help but know--that after the episodes of the last night in the now gloomy and deserted Weiss Haus his own life was in serious danger; not from any violence that Francbois might attempt against him--that, he doubted not, he could meet and overthrow--but from his treachery. And though, soldier-like, he thought but little of his life and was willing to freely set it against the prize that success and increase of honour would bring, he was not willing to set it against the sweet, new-born hopes that had sprung to his heart; against the desire to win this beautiful and stately woman for his wife.

"Yet," he mused, even as he heard Van Ryk telling her how he charged himself henceforth with all care of her property and affairs; how, in truth, he would regard himself as her steward and agent in Liége until brighter days should dawn, "yet, if I am betrayed, if I die here, I lose more than my life, more than that life is worth; while she--ah! no--I may not dream nor hope as yet to win what I desire. Though still--still I fain would hope that this life of mine may grow precious to her--that she would as little part from me as I from her. If it should be so! If it should!"

They had all risen now, and were once more making their way towards the thicket by the stables, Mynheer Van Ryk walking with Madame de Valorme and Bevill by Sylvia's side; and as they went, he said to her:

"There is one fear within my heart, one dread that I would have allayed. May I ask a question, hoping to receive an answer to it from you?"

"Ask," Sylvia replied, looking at him in the starlight, while, since she herself was tall, her eyes were not so far from his but that he could gaze easily into them.

"You do not set out upon this journey, do not leave Liége on my account alone!" he said now. "I could not bear to deem that you are going on a perilous journey--for perilous it may be--only to ensure the safety of one who, perhaps foolishly then, placed himself in a position of which there was no need."

"Then--And now?" Sylvia murmured.

"But who now regards the enterprise he undertook as--it may well be so--the happiest, the best determination he ever embarked upon. Ah! answer me, Sylvia."

"I set out to-morrow night," the girl replied, "because I fain would quit Liége--because I would be gone from out of it at once. The place thrusts against my desires, my wishes--ay, all my hopes of--happiness--to come. Ask me no more since I have answered you. Farewell," holding out her slim, white hand to him. "Farewell until to-morrow night. You will not fail, I know."

"I shall never fail you. Farewell. Goodnight."

CHAPTER XXI.

The next night was already very quiet, although it still wanted some time ere ten should strike from St. Lambert's and all the other clocks of the city.

Van Ryk had spoken truly when he said that by this time most of the Liégois were in their homes, though some who had not yet retired to them were on the various bridges over the streams running through the city from the Meuse. For the night had grown almost insufferably hot, and the interiors of many of the houses, which were built of timber and stood in narrow, stuffy streets, were not inviting. Also, some few were strolling about or seated on the quays.

Outside the Prince's palace--which was that of the Prince-Bishop--there were, however,

scarcely any persons about, and those only beggars, who sometimes at night crept into the outer cloisters to sleep.

In the darkest shadow cast by these cloisters Bevill Bracton sat on La Rose's back while endeavouring to keep her as quiet as was possible, though no efforts could prevent her from pawing the earth, or shaking her bridoon, or snorting impatiently.

His dress, in which at one time he had thought of making some alteration, he had, however, left as it was, since it was neither too handsome nor too conspicuous for a secretary of legation on his travels with a French lady of rank who, if necessity should call for such a declaration, would state that they were family connections.

He had arrived at this spot and taken up the position he now occupied some quarter of an hour ago, and during that time, while casting searching glances to right and left of him to see if there were as yet any signs of the approach of Madame de Valorme's carriage, his mind had been much occupied with all that had transpired since Mynheer Van Ryk had escorted the two ladies to the Weiss Haus.

Yet strange as had been one, or, at least, two, occurrences during the past twenty-four hours, another matter, the recollection of one other incident, dominated his mind more than aught else--the recollection that the last words Sylvia uttered had been almost an avowal of her regard--he dared not yet tell himself that it was an avowal of her love--for him.

"Her voice, her tone, her anxiety to depart from Liége," he had said to himself a hundred times since he parted from the girl, "scarce leaves me room to doubt her sentiments for me, while throwing open the door of a vast, a supreme hope. Ah, if it is so! If, when once we are free of this place, I may dare to speak, and, in speaking, win the reply I fain would receive, what happiness will be mine! With Sylvia for my love, my promised wife; with her safe in England, what may I not undertake in the future? Once more a soldier, as I hope to be, may I not follow where duty summons me, knowing that, if it pleases Providence to spare my life, it will be to find Sylvia awaiting me and ready to fulfil her promise to be my wife when I return."

As he had thought thus during the past hours so he thought again while, statue-like, he sat his steed in the deepest shadows of the palace cloisters and waited to hear the tread of the Comtesse's horses approaching, or to see the carriage emerging from one of the narrow streets that led into the great open space around the palace.

Still, however, he had those other things to occupy his mind--strange things that, had it not been for the overmastering thoughts of the woman he had learnt to love--the woman who, he dared to hope, had either come or was coming to love him--would have never left his mind. Things, occurrences, that now cast a strangely different light on all that had happened during the storm of the first night in the Weiss Haus, and that had raised oft-recurring doubts as to whether he had accurately understood all that had taken place in the darkness of that night.

When Sylvia and the Comtesse de Valorme had departed with Mynheer Van Ryk, Bevill--partly attracted by the beauty of the evening and partly because it was still early, and perhaps, also, because he knew full well that, after Sylvia's last words to him, there would be little likelihood of his sleeping at present--determined to remain outside the mansion for some time before attempting to obtain any rest.

Naturally--as, maybe, needs no telling--his steps were unconsciously directed back to the arbour in which their late conversation had taken place, and, as he approached the spot, the calm tranquillity of the night, the entire absence of the lightest breeze, forced itself upon his attention. Even, however, as this took place he recalled how Van Ryk had said that the wind was rising and rustling the bushes and long grasses; and, while doing so, Bevill wondered why the merchant should have given utterance to such a remark; for, as he thought upon the matter, he knew that no breath of wind had disturbed the air, that not the slightest breeze had blown that would have stirred a leaf.

His faculties aroused by all the necessities for caution which had formed part of his existence since he left England on the undertaking he was now about--faculties that had long since been trained and sharpened in his earlier campaigns--he stood gazing at the bushes and tall, wavy, Eastern grasses which surrounded the arbour, as though in them he might, dark as it was now, discover some natural cause that would have furnished Van Ryck with the supposition that the wind was rising.

Seeing nothing, however, that could suggest any such cause, he walked round those bushes and grasses to the back of the arbour and endeavoured to discover if the reason was to be found there.

At first he could perceive nothing in the darkness, while feeling gently about him with his hands and feet, as those feel to whom the aid of light is denied while they search for aught they may expect to discover.

But, at last, it seemed to Bevill that the grass behind the arbour was strangely flattened down longwise, and, pausing at this discovery, his sharpened instincts were soon at work wondering what this might mean.

"A large dog sleeping here might almost have made for itself a bed," he reflected, "yet there is no dog about the place, nor, even though there were, would it have lain so straight and long. What, therefore, may have done this? What? Perhaps a man."

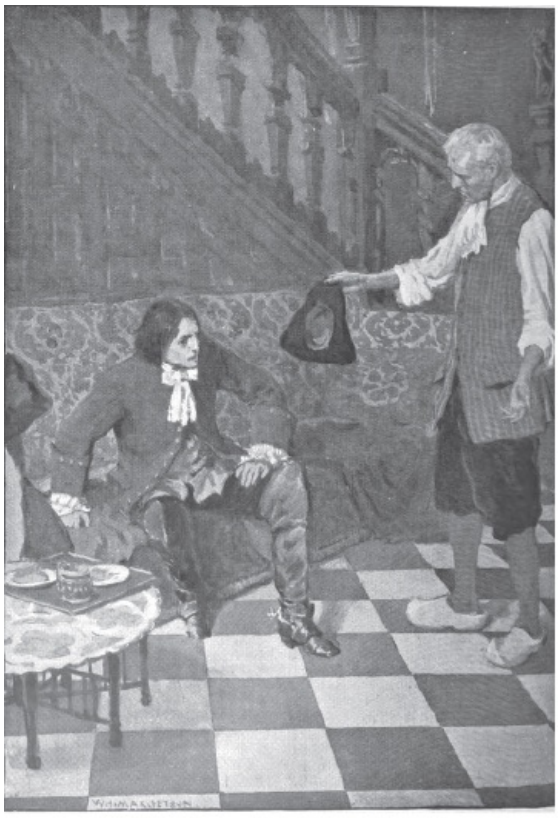
After which he stooped again, and, placing his hand on the pressed-down grass, discovered that it was warm.

"Something has indeed lain here but recently," Bevill said to himself. "Some eavesdropper who has heard our plans, who knows them all by now, who has it in his power to foil us. Can it have been Francbois?"

Supposing this might well be the case, Bevill determined to search the grounds and afterwards the house as thoroughly as might be, while understanding that, no matter how much he might endeavour to make that search complete, it could by no possibility be so. The gardens were too vast, the house too extensive. As he approached one spot any person whom he sought might easily move to another; chance alone, the luckiest of all chances, could bring him into contact with any lurker who should be about.

Nevertheless, he decided to attempt the search, and, feeling for his pistols, which in no circumstances was he ever separated from, he began to make as thorough an inspection of the place as was possible. Yet, when all was concluded, and when he had been all about the grounds, and had peered into the other arbours and *bosquets* and behind bushes, and had then once more wandered over the vast, lonely house, he had found nothing. After which, since still he felt sure there had been some listener crouching behind that arbour while the plans of himself and the others were being determined, he brought out a chair on to the lower verandah and, wrapping himself lightly in his cloak, since now the night was growing cool, determined to keep watch as long as possible.

The early summer dawn came, however, and Bevill was still awake, but had seen nothing, whereupon he at last decided that it must have been some animal that had been sleeping behind where they all sat.



"The gardener carried something else in his hand."

"The gardener carried something else in his hand."

An hour or so after this and when he had obtained some refreshing sleep on the great lounge in the hall, old Karl appeared, bringing the usual food which he had received instructions from Sylvia to provide each day so long as Bevill should remain at the Weiss Haus. The gardener carried, however, something else than this in his hand, namely, a three-cornered hat, which he at once said he had found in the path that led from a little wicket gate he alone used, and which opened from the road leading from his cottage to the grounds behind the stables.

"Another hat!" Bevill exclaimed, taking it from the old man's hands and turning it over in his own. "Another! Whose this time?"

To whomsoever it might have belonged, it did not, however, appear to the young man that it was any more likely to have belonged to Francbois than had done the earlier discovered one. If anything, it was an even poorer specimen of headgear than that had been, and was a hat that, though originally not of a common order, gave signs that it might in its existence have passed from one owner to another; from, indeed, a well-to-do man down to one who would be willing to accept it in its final state of usefulness.

"It is very strange," he said, half aloud and half to himself. "Were there three of them here last night, or were there only two, and was Francbois not one of them? Had I two enemies besides him, and still have two with him since Sparmann is gone? It is vastly strange." After which he turned to Karl, and said:

"You have just found this thing. Therefore it was not there last night nor yesterday morning?"

"Ah," the old man replied, "I cannot tell. Yesterday I used not the path at all, having gone first to the Jouffrouw at Mynheer Van Ryk's in the morning; and, last night, I was busy with *him*," nodding his head towards where the corpse by the stables had been, "after dark."

"What have you done with him?"

"He is gone," Karl said vaguely. "Gone. No matter where. He will not come back to--to--the Weiss Haus or Liége."

By which remark Bevill was led to suppose that the old man had cast Sparmann's body into the river.

"Therefore," the latter said, "we have no knowledge of whether that hat was left behind by one who was here during the storm of the night before, or last night. Yet," turning the thing over in his hands, "surely it must have been the first night. See, it has recently been soaked by rain, the lining is still damp, and last night there was no rain whatever."

"It may be," Karl replied, apparently much astonished at this clear reasoning. "It may be. Therefore, you had three visitors on that night."

"I cannot say. I have but proof of two. The wearers of the two hats at least were here. Yet they may well have been the only visitors; in solemn truth there may not have been three. Though strange it is that, if there were but two, both should have parted with their hats. One must have lost his in the encounter in which he received his death-wound, the other in fleeing away."

For, now, Bevill had grave doubts as to whether Francbois had been at the Weiss Haus at all on the night before the one now past. Still, if it were not Francbois who had mortally wounded Sparmann--while almost of a certainty supposing Sparmann to be another person, namely, himself--who was it? Who was the other enemy he possessed? He knew neither of personal enemy nor spy tracking him, nor of French soldier or official likely to do so.

All the same, there was, there must be, a third enemy, even though Francbois had not been of the number that night, since it was almost certain that neither of those hats would have been worn by him--even as a disguise. There must be two others beside him while Sparmann was alive!

"And still there is more mystery," Bevill mused as the old man stood gazing up at him, "more that is inexplicable. Sparmann did not find his way out through either of the doors, nor, since I followed him as he fled down the stairs, did he do so by the ladder against the balcony. How, then, did that come to pass? Did he hide somewhere in the house until I had opened the door leading to the stables, or was there some window near the ground through which a man wounded to the death might yet escape?"

But no answer came to these reflections. Whatever had taken place in the Weiss Haus, other than all which he already knew, had left no trace behind.

* * * * * * *

Ten had struck, and, next, the quarter, from all the city clocks ere Bevill had concluded these reflections, and still the carriage which he was to accompany to the gate (since, as has been told, it was finally decided that all should leave the city together, or attempt to leave it) had not appeared.

As, however, the half-hour rang out, Bevill perceived it drawing near. On the box he recognised Joseph, he being, doubtless owing to the necessity for a coachman, the only servant whom the Comtesse de Valorme had thought fit to bring with her.

Slowly the carriage drew near until, now, it was almost abreast of where Bevill sat his horse, when, allowing La Rose to advance, he rode up to the side of it and, bowing low to its occupants, asked if all was well with them.

"All is very well," the Comtesse and Sylvia said together, while the latter added, "as we pray it

is with you. Ah!" she went on, "how we do pray that the next half-hour will see you safely out of this place."

"And I," Bevill said, "that we shall all be safely out of it together."

Any further remarks they would have made were, however, checked by what they deemed to be an ordinary occurrence in a city in the condition that Liége now stood.

From the direction in which the travelling carriage had come there appeared--their corselets gleaming under the oil lamps slung across the end of the old street--half a dozen men of a dragoon regiment, having at their head an officer. As they advanced at a trot, Bevill observed that no sooner had they approached close to the party than the officer gave an order for them to proceed slowly, so that now the *cortège* presented the appearance of a carriage accompanied first by a gentleman as escort, and next by a guard--small as it was--of cavalry. Still, however, as the great vehicle proceeded through narrow, tortuous streets, while emerging occasionally into little open spaces having sometimes fountains in the middle of them and, here and there, an old and timeworn statue, he saw that, wherever he and the carriage went, the dragoons followed. Also, if any interruption occurred, or any halt was made by Joseph in the confined streets, they halted too, so that, at last, he felt sure that their close following of him and those with him was no mere coincidence. This was, he soon decided, no night patrol returning from its round to its own quarters, but resembled more a guard which had taken possession of the travellers after having come across them.

He saw, too, that the ladies knew what was behind and were already alarmed.

Turning sound suddenly over his cantle, therefore, while raising his hat at the same time, Bevill said to the officer:

"Monsieur proceeds in the same direction as ourselves. It is to be hoped that we in no way interrupt his progress or that of his troops."

"In no way, monsieur," the officer answered equally politely, while returning Bevill's salute. "But," speaking very clearly and distinctly, "we are warned that an English spy will endeavour to leave Liége to-night in company with two ladies who travel by coach, and, until monsieur has satisfied those who are at the gate, he will pardon us if we inflict our company on him and his friends."

"An English spy!" Bevill exclaimed.

"Unhappily, it is so. One whose name is as well known as the French name with which he thinks fit to honour our country by assuming."

CHAPTER XXII.

When the officer of dragoons had uttered those last words there remained no longer any hope of escape in Bevill's mind. It was impossible to doubt that he was the person for whom this small body of troops was searching, or to suppose that there was in Liége any other Englishman who, as the officer had said with delicate sarcasm, was honouring his country by assuming a French name.

At first he knew not what was best to do, though, had he been alone, his perplexity might easily have been resolved, since there would have been one of two things open to him, namely, on the one hand, an attempt to escape by flight through the narrow streets which surrounded them all at this time--an attempt to dash suddenly away on the fleet-footed La Rose, in the hope that she would bear him more swiftly through those cramped streets than the heavy troop-horses of the dragoons could follow, or ride through, side by side. On the other hand, an effort to cut his way through these soldiers, though they were seven against him, might by supreme good fortune be successful.

But, now, these ideas could by no possibility be acted on. He was there in company with Sylvia and the Comtesse as their cavalier and escort; while, although it was his safety and not theirs which was in peril, his place was by their side to the last. Consequently, there remained one thing alone to do: to state that he was the Englishman of whom these men were in search, while adding that he was no spy, but, instead, one who had made his way from England to Liége with the sole object of assisting a countrywoman to leave a city surrounded by the eternal enemies of the English.

Before, however, Bevill could follow this determination, at which he arrived suddenly, since from the time the officer of dragoons had uttered his last words until now not two moments had elapsed, he saw the face of Madame de Valorme at the window of the travelling carriage, and, an instant later, heard her address the officer.

"Monsieur," she said, "ere we reach the gate may I beseech the favour of speaking to the gentleman of our party in private? I have some few words to say to him in connection with our journey when we shall be outside the city. I am confident that monsieur will not refuse so simple a request."

"Madame may rest well assured of that," the officer replied, as now he sat his horse bareheaded before the Comtesse. "Madame shall not be incommoded by listeners to anything she may have to say to her friend." After which he ordered three of his men to advance twenty paces in front of the carriage and halt there, and the other three to retire twenty paces behind it; while he himself rode forward and took up his position in front of the foremost men.

The Comtesse and Sylvia, with Bevill at the carriage window, were, therefore, as free to discourse without being overheard as though the soldiers had not been in the neighbourhood.

"Ah!" the former said now, speaking of course in a low tone, as at the same time Sylvia thrust forth her hand and clasped Bevill's silently, while one glance at her sweet face was enough to show him how agitated she was, the look in her eyes telling him of that agitation as clearly as the tremor of her gloved hand could do. "Ah! what is to be done? Have we failed so soon in our undertaking? Have we brought you to your destruction?"

"Nay, never, never!" Bevill whispered back. "If I have met my fate"--while, as he spoke, he heard a moan, which was in truth a gasp, from Sylvia's lips, and felt her hand tighten convulsively on his--"I have brought it on myself; I can meet it boldly. I set myself to do this thing, looking for a reward, though never dreaming how fair a reward might at last be mine," he added, with a glance beyond the Comtesse to where Sylvia was. "If I have lost shall I not pay the stake, shall I not look ill-fortune bravely in the face?"

"How has this disaster come about?" Sylvia asked, speaking for the first time. "What precaution has been omitted? Or is it----?"

"Treachery!" the Comtesse said. "Ay! that way the disaster has come. Say, is it not so?"

"I fear, indeed, it is," Bevill replied. "Listen. Someone, either Francbois or another, was in the garden of the Weiss Haus last night behind the arbour, and overheard our plans. I have been denounced, our plans have been revealed, by the eavesdropper."

"Maledictions on him!" the Comtesse whispered through her white teeth, while now her eyes were worthy rivals in splendour of Sylvia's own as they sparkled in the light cast by a lamp suspended across the narrow street. "May vengeance confound him, whoe'er he is; and if 'tis Francbois, let him beware! I hold him in my hand. If--if--you are--are----"

"Cease in mercy's sake!" Sylvia exclaimed. "Ah, say it not. It cannot--cannot--be."

"If you are betrayed by him, you shall be dearly avenged," the Comtesse continued. "Yet, see, that officer gives some order to the men by his side. Quick--what will you do? What?"

"Proclaim myself an Englishman, yet no spy. Speak truthfully, and acknowledge that I came here to save my countrywoman----"

"Madame," the officer exclaimed now as, after turning his horse, he rode back to the carriage, "the clocks are striking the last quarter. If madame and her friends are not at the gate in ten minutes there will be little hope of their passing through it to-night. Even provided," he added below his breath, "that the papers are in order."

For this well-bred young dragoon had a full certainty that he had found the quarry which he, as well as two or three other small parties of soldiers, had been sent out that night to waylay if possible. Yet he had caught a glimpse of Sylvia in the depths of the carriage and more than a glimpse of the aristocratic though sad features of the Comtesse, and he regretted that it had fallen to his lot to light on those who were sought for. As for Bevill, he recognised that he was one of his own class--a gentleman and, by his appearance, perhaps a soldier; but he believed him to be what he had been described as being, a spy, a thing accursed in every land, and for him the young officer felt little sympathy.

"It must be so," Madame de Valorme said now. "Monsieur," speaking as calmly to Bevill as she was able to do, "pray bid Joseph to proceed."

A moment later the group had again set forth, three of the troopers riding ahead and three behind the carriage, only now the officer rode very close behind Bevill.

It took but little longer after this to reach the gate set in the walls, which at this time were very high and strong, the gate-house itself looking like a small fortress built into a still greater fortification. Inside it, three or four mousquetaires were standing as sentries as the carriage

approached, while, since all recognised the young officer in front, no challenge was given, but, instead, a salute.

Then the latter, speaking to one of the mousquetaires, said:

"Inform the officer of the guard that Captain d'Aubenay has arrived in company with a party who desire to pass out."

Ere, however, this could be done, the officer himself had come forth from the guard room, and as he did so the Comtesse uttered an exclamation, while muttering beneath her breath:

"It is De Guise. Again! Ah, that man is fatal to all of us!"

In the manner of the young Duc de Guise there was, however, nothing to suggest any disaster, since, courteous as he had been at the western gate when the Comtesse entered with Bevill, so he was now as she and Bevill endeavoured to leave by the eastern one.

"We meet again, madame," he said; "and, this time, when madame would depart. The formality is nothing. I merely require to see the papers of herself and friends. Yet I have seen it before," he went on, as now he took the *laissez-passers* of the Comtesse and Sylvia from the former's hand. "Ah, yes, yes," he muttered, though as he did so he glanced at Madame de Valorme and, past her, at Sylvia. "Madame la Comtesse de Valorme and her *dame de compagnie*. *Si, si*. And monsieur?" he continued, looking up now at Bevill, while all noticed that he had not used one of the accustomed phrases, "*Passez, madame*," or "*C'est tout en règle*," nor had he as yet returned the papers.

"Ah, yes!" the young Duke said now, as he looked at the paper Bevill handed down to him. "Monsieur de Belleville. I remember very well. Of the embassy in London. Yes," still looking up. Then he said, "I regret to do so, but I must ask monsieur to descend from his horse."

"Descend!"

"Unfortunately it must be so. We have received orders not to permit monsieur to pass the gate for the moment. Doubtless for the moment only. It is very regrettable----"

"And," asked the Comtesse, "has monsieur le Duc also received orders not to permit me and my *dame de compagnie* to pass out?"

"*Je suis désolé*, but, alas!----"

"Is it so?"

"It is so, madame."

"Are we to be detained here? And for how long?"

"Ah, Madame la Comtesse! For how long! But for a moment. Monsieur de Violaine, the Governor, makes the night rounds regularly, reaching here at eleven as the clocks strike, or very little later. Madame may rely on seeing him in a few minutes. If he decides that it shall be so the gate will be opened to let madame and mademoiselle pass out."

"And as for me, sir?" Bevill asked.

"Monsieur, I cannot say. Our orders were simply to detain you if you presented yourself at the gate."

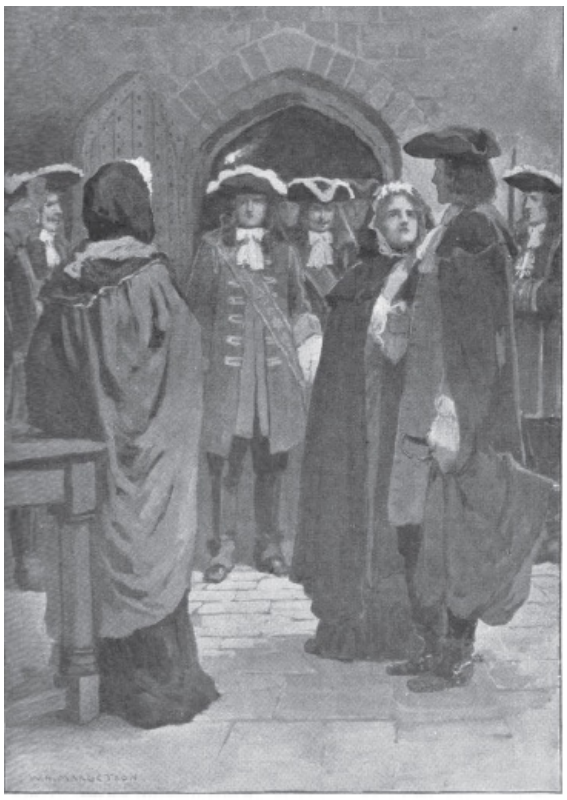
Then, again addressing the Comtesse, the young Duke said:

"Will not madame and mademoiselle give themselves the trouble to descend from the coach? The guardroom is at their disposal: while," looking at Bevill, "monsieur is quite free to accompany his friends inside."

After which the Comtesse and Sylvia left the great carriage, and Bevill, after assisting them to do so, in which attention he was joined by the Duke and another officer of mousquetaires, accompanied them to the guardroom.

Hardly, however, had they set foot in the place than the clatter of several horses' hoofs was heard outside; the voice of a sergeant was also heard giving the order to salute, and, a moment later, the Governor, M. de Violaine, entered the room. As he did so the eyes of those three were turned on him whom they well knew was, for the time being at least, the arbiter of their destiny; while Madame de Valorme seemed to become even more pale than she usually appeared. For, as she had said once, this man was well known to her, and, like her, belonged to the South of France; while, in other days, he had aspired to win her hand, though this no one in Liége but herself and De Violaine knew.

The group was now one at which any onlooker, not knowing all that agitated the hearts and minds of those present, might have gazed in interested wonderment.



"De Violaine muttered beneath his breath, 'It is she—Radegonde!'"—*p.* 747.

"De Violaine muttered beneath his breath,
'It is she--Radegonde!'"--*p.* 747.

De Violaine, tall and handsomely accoutred, had stopped short as he entered the guardroom, and, his eyes fixed on the Comtesse, had muttered beneath his breath, "It is she--Radegonde!"

By Bevill's side, to which she had drawn close as they entered through the clamped door, was Sylvia, gazing at him, silent for some moments, yet whispering next.

"You thought to save me--would have saved me. If on this earth there exist any means by which I can do by you as you would have done by me, they shall be used. You said last night that you would never fail me. Now I exchange the pledge. By God's will never will I fail you."

"Sylvia!" Bevill murmured, and then was silent from agitation at her words. But a moment later he said, speaking so low that none but she could hear, "Sylvia, I am in God's hand, not knowing what His decree may be; yet--yet--if this is not the end, if to-night we do not make our last farewell----"

"No, no!" she moaned, turning her face away so that the others should not see her fast falling tears. "Not that! Never! Ah, it cannot be!"

"I pray it may not be so; but, Sylvia, if happier days shall ever dawn, if some day I may stand face to face with you again; if I should then dare to tell you all that is in my heart? Ah!" he exclaimed, as now he felt her hand touch his beneath the long, dark riding-cloak she wore. "Ah! am I answered?"

"Yes," she whispered, "answered as none shall ever be again," and turned her face away--from him this time, so that not even he should see it.

Meanwhile, whatever emotion De Violaine and the Comtesse may have experienced in meeting under such strange circumstances, circumstances so different from those of other days, when he who now commanded besought pity, and she who was now almost a captive could not vouchsafe mercy to her then captive, they had at least obtained control over themselves.

Quietly, with the easy calm of that old French *noblesse* which, above all things, permitted no emotion to be apparent, the Governor had advanced towards Madame de Valorme and, in a few well-chosen words, had informed her that matters which had come to his knowledge prevented him from allowing her to use her right of quitting the city at present, or of leaving Liége until she had answered some questions satisfactorily.

"What matters? What questions, monsieur?" the Comtesse asked.

"Firstly," M. de Violaine said gravely, "the reasons for which you are desirous of travelling at this moment. It is an unhappy time for ladies to select for setting out upon a journey. They might," he added, with significance, "come into contact with the English or some other of our enemies; they are all around."

For a moment the Comtesse looked at the Governor; then, seeing that the others in the room were not close, she said:

"Have you, a De Violaine of our unhappy province, forgotten how the eyes of all there are turned towards England? Even though I should 'come into contact' with the English would that be harmful to me, or those of whom I am one?"

"I have not forgotten that I am a soldier, a servant, of France," the other answered. "As one who has sworn a soldier's duty to his King I must, for the time, forget all else. Madame la Comtesse, I ask of you to return to the house from which you set out and remain there. You have been denounced to me as one who is desirous, for a purpose of which I know as well as you, of obtaining an audience of Lord Marlborough."

"Denounced! Naturally, I do not desire to be informed of the name of my denouncer. I know it--and I pity him."

De Violaine looked at her for a moment; then, turning towards Bevill, he said:

"Monsieur, the name on your passport is not your name. You are, I am informed, an Englishman and a spy."

"I am an Englishman, monsieur. I am no spy."

"That you will have to prove, as well as your object in being here in any position except that of a spy. For the present you will be detained at the citadel. The gate," he said, addressing the Duc de Guise, "will be opened no more to-night."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Through all that had taken place in the guardroom, M. de Violaine had conducted himself as a gallant gentleman, and neither in his tone, words, nor bearing had there been any of that hectoring or browbeating towards one who, if he was what he had been denounced as being, might well have been subjected to such treatment.

For a spy, found in a city subject to those who were already sore pressed by the very country to which that supposed spy belonged, could scarcely look for gentle treatment at the hands of one who was in command of the principal fortress of that city; while, polished as the French *noblesse* and gentry might be, soldiering was conducted with a considerable amount of roughness at this time, and it was the habit of all in command in the chief European armies--which were the armies of England and France alone--to treat suspected prisoners with scant consideration.

Yet Bevill could not complain of any roughness on the part of the man whose captive he now was. De Violaine, except that his manner was cold and austere towards him, had behaved as well as one gentleman brought into contact with another, and that other the subject of a hostile country, could have been expected to behave. For all of which there was a reason, over and above the fact that the prisoner was undoubtedly the friend of the woman whom De Violaine had once loved tenderly and hoped to win, as well as apparently something more than a friend of the beautiful companion of the Comtesse--that stately, handsome girl from whose eyes the tears had fallen fast in compassion for the man who was now his prisoner.

This reason was that he had been face to face with the denouncer of Bevill, and, later, with Bevill himself--the denounced--and the first had impressed him unfavourably, while the second, Englishman though he was, had produced a vastly different effect on him.

That morning, early, Francbois had obtained an audience with the Governor, and, after many crafty hints and a considerable amount of falsehood, had told sufficient to cause De Violaine to issue his orders for preventing Bevill and his companions from leaving Liége.

But when Francbois, after stating that not only was the principal accused an Englishman, but also a spy of the enemy, as well as being a Protestant--whom he termed generally *heretiques* and *reformes*--but also one who had committed other crimes against France which he would unfold,

the soldier bade him be silent.

"You state," De Violaine said, "that you can prove he is an Englishman; that he travels under a false name while bearing a passport made out in that false name, a French one. That is sufficient for his arrest."

"Sufficient, monsieur, for his arrest! His arrest! But surely not sufficient--surely not--for his condemnation--his punishment?"

"That will come later--at the court-martial, since it is by that he can alone be judged. Then you can tell all else you know."

"A court-martial! Is that necessary? Is he not a spy and are not spies condemned without many formalities? Are not Protestants the enemies of France?"

"No," De Violaine said, regarding coldly the man before him. "I am one. Am I an enemy of France? So, too, are half the inhabitants of this place, yet they submit."

"Monsieur le Gouverneur is a Protestant!" Francbois exclaimed, taken aback at learning a fact of which he was in utter ignorance. "A Protestant!" he said again.

"One of many who love France well and serve her well. Also, you speak of la Comtesse de Valorme, and state that you know what she is in Liége for. Knowing so much, you know too that she is of the reformed faith. Do you not suppose, also, that this Mademoiselle Thorne, this English girl of whom you speak, is the same?"

"There is nought against Mademoiselle Thorne."

"There will be if she attempts to leave Liége without my particular permission. Now go, monsieur. You have told me enough to cause them all to be prevented in their intention. Later, you can tell the officers who will judge this Englishman all that you know. Only," with a strange look in his eyes as De Violaine regarded Francbois, "be careful not to leave Liége yourself: you will be wanted."

"I--I----" Francbois stammered, utterly taken aback, not only at the knowledge he had now obtained that the Governor was a Protestant, but also at learning that he himself would be required at whatever form of trial there might be. "I hoped that I should not be called upon to appear personally; I hoped that my information would be sufficient."

"You will have to be present. Where is your abode?"

"At--at----" But he paused. If he gave the house of Van Ryck as his place of abode he stigmatised himself as one who betrayed a woman dwelling under the same roof as he; while if, on the other hand, he told this man sitting before him and regarding him so coldly and contemptuously, that he was an inhabitant of the Jesuit College, he proclaimed himself as one whom this Protestant soldier would regard with abhorrence and all other Frenchmen with mistrust.

"Answer me," the Governor said, seeing that the other hesitated. "Answer, I say. Where do you dwell?"

"I--I--am for the moment at the Jesuit College, Monsieur le Gouverneur," Francbois cried, seeing a look appear upon De Violaine's face which he could not comprehend, so strange, so inscrutable was it. "I am of the religion of France, as most Frenchmen are. There is no crime in consorting with Jesuits."

But still De Violaine looked at Francbois, who now stood before him with his features white as a corpse within its shroud; while, as the former regarded him, he felt that he was trembling.

"No," De Violaine said at last, speaking very calmly; "there is no harm in consorting with Jesuits, unless it be to do harm. Yet----"

But now he paused and added nothing further, though still looking Francbois through and through with calm eyes.

Inwardly, however, his reflections were profound.

"The Jesuits' College!" he was saying to himself. "A portion of that confraternity which secretly is opposed to the claims of France to the Spanish Throne since, once possessed of Spain, France would attempt to suppress the Inquisition. The Jesuits' College in this place, from which De Boufflers has hinted more than once that news of our projects and plans is disseminated to the enemy. Ah! who is the greater spy on us--that Protestant Englishman of whom this man speaks, or he himself who harbours in that college under the sheltering wing of the order. *Carogne!* if I trap one 'twere best I held the other in my hand as well," and once more the Governor's eyes fell on the man before him.

"Monsieur," Francbois said now, as, still white and still trembling, he again met De Violaine's glance, "Monsieur, is my presence needed further? I--I--have affairs of consequence in hand."

"Doubtless! Yet I have changed my mind. When do you say this Englishman masquerading as a Frenchman is about to quit the city with those ladies?"

"To-night, Monsieur le Gouverneur--before the hour of eleven strikes."

"So be it. You have told me much, but not sufficient. To-night, before eleven, they will all be stopped on their intended journey. The Englishman will be brought here"--"here" being the citadel in which this conversation was taking place--"and your charges against him must be made at once. It may be that all you state is capable of explanation."

"Here, monsieur? I would have desired not to be present, not to be forced to accuse this spy face to face. A silent, an unknown, an absent witness is sometimes more useful than a present one. Yet, since monsieur desires it, it shall be so. I will be here. Monsieur may rely on me."

"Reliance is not necessary," De Violaine replied, while knowing well that, if once this man was allowed to go, the inside of the citadel would never see him again. "You will remain here till the gate is shut and that man in our hands. He shall be brought here at once; you shall stand face to face with him and tell your tale. If what you state, and that which you say you can state further against him, cannot meet inquiry, he will be in grievous peril."

"But, Monsieur le----"

"No more. You will be well cared for, and, providing you speak truly, no harm can come to you." After which De Violaine struck upon a bell by his hand, and, upon the appearance of two of the men on guard outside, bade them remove the gentleman before them to a room in the north wing of the citadel and be careful to treat him with all care and attend well to his wants. But before Francbois was removed from his presence, and ere he reached the door, the Governor bade the men retire outside the room again until he summoned them. Then, when once more alone with Francbois, he said:

"There is some reason for your denunciation of this Englishman. What is that reason? Is it to obtain money, reward?"

"Monsieur?" Francbois exclaimed, making a sorry attempt to draw himself up to his full height and to look the Governor fairly in the face. "I am a gentleman--a Frenchman and--a patriot." But, impassively, De Violaine--though it may be that his shoulders were shrugged almost imperceptibly--continued:

"Are these ladies with whom this Englishman will endeavour to leave the city known to you?"

"Yes," Francbois replied, speaking truthfully, since he could not doubt that ere long--by eleven o'clock this night, if no sooner--any falsehood he might utter would be unmasked. "Yes. La Comtesse de Valorme is, in a manner, of my kin."

"Of your kin?" while beneath his lips the other drew a quick breath. "Of your kin? La Comtesse de Valorme is kin to you! But there are many De Valormes in--in the South. Is she by chance the wife of Gabriel, Comte de Valorme, who was sent to the galleys for his religion?"

"She is, monsieur, the widow of Gabriel. He died in the galley *Le Requin*."

"Ah! so he is dead." And again De Violaine drew a subdued breath. Then he went on:

"And the other lady? She is, you say, English. A countrywoman of this man whom you denounce. Who is she? What is she? What does she here in Liége?"

That the French Governor should not know this was natural, since, between the military investors of Liége and those residing in the city there could be no intercourse whatever, or only the very slightest between the commanders of the former and the magistracy of the latter; and, consequently, all that Francbois now told him was unknown previously. But of Sylvia De Violaine asked no further questions, and, going to the door again, called in the guards and bade them escort Francbois to the room he had ordained.

After which, and when left alone, he sat down in his chair again and gave himself up to his reflections and to many tender, yet sad, memories.

"So Gabriel is dead," he said to himself. "Poor Gabriel. Dead in one of those accursed galleys. Dead! He to be dead thus! And Radegonde is here--here in Liége. Radegonde, the one woman who ever rose as a star above my life, the one woman who might have been the flower of that life. Yet it was never to be. Never! Never! When Gabriel came all hope was gone for me. Gone! Nay, it never existed. What was it she told me on that last night? That, had her heart been hers it should have been mine--only Gabriel had gained possession of it and would hold possession of it for ever. And now--now--Gabriel is dead, and it falls to me to interrupt her, to thwart her--her, to whom once I would have given my life had she demanded it."

De Violaine brushed his hand swiftly across his eyes, thrust his chair back, and rose from it to pace the room, while muttering to himself, "That is done with, put away for ever. Duty alone remains--the duty, the allegiance I have sworn. A soldier's loyalty! No matter what he ordains,"

and his thoughts flew to far-off Versailles, "no matter how much she persuades him to evil, he is the King and I his soldier. Duty to him--and France! Yet, oh! that he were different."

"As for this fellow," the Governor continued, contemptuously now, "who and what is he? Has *he* dared to raise his eyes to Radegonde, to dream that he shall ever occupy the place Gabriel held; and does he hope by some low cunning, some base intrigue, to bring her to his hand? Emile Francbois! Emile Francbois! Ha! Have a care! You may have thwarted her, you may have brought this Englishman to the halter, but--there is rope enough in this fortress to hang more than one. A spy deserves no worse fate than a traitor."

He sent for the officer of the guard now, and gave his orders for despatching a handful of cavalry under the command of one officer to one part of the town and a second to another part, and gave instructions that from dusk each should be on the watch for a carriage, containing two ladies and accompanied by a man on horseback, that would be making its way towards the only gate open after sunset. He also gave instructions that if this party was met with it should be conducted to that gate and there detained until he arrived at the conclusion of his rounds.

And so the trap that Francbois had baited was set. No travellers such as he had described would be able to pass out of the city this night. While, so strong was the sense of duty, of loyalty to France, engrafted in the heart of De Violaine--badly as France was treating that class of her subjects to which he belonged--that, even had Madame de Valorme been his sister or his wife, he would not have permitted her to continue her journey--a journey on which she went, as he could very well imagine, with a view to conspiring with France's most powerful enemy, England, as represented in the presence of Marlborough.

Yet it was hard to do!--hard to thwart the woman whom he had loved and lost, the woman he had once dreamed of winning for his wife; and hard, too, to prevent that woman from endeavouring to obtain help for those of his and her own faith now suffering for that faith.

But if he drew his existence from those of that faith, so, too, he drew it from France, and, as one of her soldiers, he had sworn to protect her.

Not even his love for a woman whom he had lost could make him false to that vow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

When De Violaine gave the order to the young Duc de Guise that the gate was to be opened no more for the night, Francbois, had he been present instead of in the citadel, might well have considered that he had succeeded in his betrayal of the man whom he regarded as his rival in the affections of Sylvia Thorne. For that man was now a prisoner in the hands of France; while the actual fact of his being in Liége by aid of a false passport was one that must in any case tell heavily against him. Also, some other statements--which were not facts--that Francbois was prepared to weave into his denunciation would, beyond all doubt, accomplish his destruction.

That those statements would soon be made none who were present at this time could doubt when, following on the order to have the gate kept fast until daybreak, another was issued by the Governor.

"Call Captain d'Aubenay," he said now to one of the mousquetaires under the command of De Guise, while, turning to Bevill, he continued. "You will be taken to the citadel; there you will hear the charge against you--the charge upon which, later, you will be tried, as well as upon another, of being present in a city under the control of France while falsely passing as a Frenchman."

To which Bevill made no reply, except a courteous bow, since he deemed silence best.

But, if he had nothing to say, one person at least--the Comtesse de Valorme--saw no reason for also being silent.

Approaching De Violaine, who stood some little distance apart from the rest, she said therefore:

"There is but one man in all Liége who can have denounced your newly acquired prisoner. That man is named Emile Francbois" while, remarking that the other neither assented to nor denied this statement, she added, "It is so, is it not?"

But still De Violaine kept silence, whereupon the Comtesse continued, while adopting now a different form of inquiry--a more impersonal one.

"Whosoever the man may be," she said, "who has thought fit to testify against monsieur, to formulate the charges against him of which you speak--charges of which you could not otherwise have known--he must have sought you out to do so. Monsieur, I beseech of you to at least answer this, even though you answer nothing else."

Whereupon, stung by the coldness of his questioner, stung also by the almost contemptuous tone in which she spoke--she whom once he had loved so much--De Violaine replied:

"The person who has informed against the prisoner waited upon me at the citadel."

"And is present there now to repeat his charges against--the prisoner?"

To which question De Violaine contented him by answering with an inclination of his head.

"So be it," the Comtesse replied, and there was in her tone a bitterness that her listener could never have supposed her to be possessor of. "So be it. I know--nay, we all know"--with a glance that swept over Sylvia and Bevill--"who this informer is. But, since Monsieur le Gouverneur is by the way of listening to his informers," and she saw De Violaine start and flush as she spoke, "he will not refuse to give audience to another informer--at the citadel."

"Another!"

"Yes, another. Myself! Monsieur de Violaine will not perform his duty to France in a half-hearted manner. He gives open ear to the first one who tells him of spies being about he will not surely turn a deaf ear to a second informer who wishes to denounce a traitor."

"A traitor? Who is he? And who is to denounce him?"

"I am the latter. The man you received in the citadel--Emile Francbois--is the former. I claim the right to be received at the citadel by you in the same manner that you received that man. Only, my denunciation shall be an open one, made before others--not one made, as doubtless this was, within closed doors."

"So be it. The right is yours. When will Madame la Comtesse honour me by----"

"When? To-night. Now. At once!"

"At once? It grows late."

"Late! What matters the lateness of the night in comparison with the exposure of a villain? Monsieur de Violaine, I demand to be allowed to accompany your prisoner to the citadel and to hear what Emile Francbois has to assert against him."

"And I also," Sylvia said, since [illegible] ...tion had ceased by now to be c [illegible] ... tones and could easily be overheard in the guardroom.

"You, Mademoiselle!" De Violaine exclaimed, not knowing but that Sylvia was, in absolute truth, that which she was supposed to be, namely the *dame de compagnie* of Madame de Valorme. "You? Surely Madame la Comtesse does not require your support at such a scene."

"That," Sylvia said, as she stood tall and erect before the Governor, so that he no longer deemed he was speaking to any other than a woman who was herself of equal rank and position with the Comtesse, "that is not the question. It was to enable me, to assist me to leave Liége, to protect me as I did so, that your prisoner made his way to this city--for this that the base, crawling creature, Francbois, denounced him to you."

"You are then Mademoiselle Thorne?"

"I am Mademoiselle Thorne. If Francbois has much to tell you about Monsieur Bracton, since that is his rightful name, so too have I," and as Sylvia spoke her eyes were turned for a moment towards Bevill--for a moment only, but it was enough. Enough to tell Bevill that, even though he should be condemned to-night and executed at dawn, it mattered little now. That glance had told him more than a hundred words could do: it had told him he was the possessor of Sylvia's love!

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The *salle d'armes* of the citadel, in which half an hour later De Violaine, the Comtesse, Sylvia, and Bevill stood, was large enough for half a regiment to bivouac in, and had, indeed, in past ages served for such a purpose, as well as many another of blacker memory. For in that great hall, wainscotted with oak from floor to roof, that dark hall in which those who stood at one end of it by night could scarce see to the other, deeds of blood and cruelty had been perpetrated the recollection of which had not by then been effaced. Here prisoners innumerable had heard their doom pronounced; while on other occasions those within the citadel had made many a last stand ere being captured or slain.

To-night this hall was but partly lighted by the wood that flamed in a huge cresset at the further end of it, and by great, common candles that flared from sconces fixed into the walls, while dropping masses of grease to the open floor as they did so.

Yet, sombre as was the light thus obtained, it served well enough for what was now occurring. It served to show De Violaine standing before the enormous empty fireplace that reached to the roof--one in which many persons might sit as in a room and warm themselves on winter nights; to show, also, the Comtesse de Valorme and Sylvia seated together on a huge oaken bench on which, in earlier days than these, Spanish, Burgundian, French, and Walloon soldiers had lolled as the citadel was held in turn by their various rulers and generals--a bench on which at times trembling prisoners had awaited the pronouncement of their doom. Also, that light showed Bevill standing erect and calm not far from where Sylvia was seated, with, behind him, four troopers of the Régiment de Risbourg, which was quartered partly in the citadel and partly in the Chartreuse, or Carthusian, monastery.

There was, however, one other man present, behind whom there also stood four soldiers. One other--Francbois. Francbois, white as a phantom, yet speaking with an assumption of calm while protesting that that which he was now saying was uttered in the interests of France and justice.

This protestation made, Francbois went on to state how, from the moment he had seen the prisoner on the Quai, he had recognised him as an Englishman with whom he had been at school in Paris years before; and, consequently, in the interests of his beloved France he had resolved to discover what reasons he might have for being in Liége.

"Was it not possible," De Violaine asked, in his clear, quiet voice, "that the reason the prisoner now gives for his presence here may have been the true one--that he had come from England to escort his compatriot, Mademoiselle Thorne, back to their country?"

"Monsieur, had that been so this Englishman, Bracton, would have proceeded differently. From the moment he landed at Antwerp, almost from the first moment, his actions were marked by deceit and, alas! by wickedness unparalleled. He landed under the assumed name that he has borne here--André de Belleville. When he was recognised as an Englishman by one whom he had deeply injured in earlier days, one whom he had driven to ruin, he passed as an officer of Mousquetaires named Le Blond----"

"Le Blond of the Mousquetaires. He is long since dead. I knew him well."

"And I," said the Comtesse. "He was my cousin."

"Monsieur," said Francbois, "it was that dead man's papers he possessed himself of. The very horse he rides was that of Le Blond."

"How," asked De Violaine, still with ominous calm, "are you acquainted with these matters?"

"Monsieur, the man whom he had so injured tracked him here--tracked him when he had recovered from the wound inflicted on him at St. Trond by the prisoner."

"It is false," Bevill said now, speaking for the first time; "by whomsoever the man may have been wounded at St Trond, that wound was not given by me." While, as he spoke, he learnt for the first time how it was that Sparmann had not denounced him at St. Trond, how it was that he had been enabled to quit St. Trond without molestation.

"In what way," said De Violaine, repeating what he had said before, "are you acquainted with these matters? You tell me that they have happened. What I desire to learn is who you have obtained your knowledge of them?"

"Monsieur le Gouverneur, that man--his name was Sparmann--came to Liége when his wound was healed, still determined to expose, to denounce the Englishman. He and I met--by--by--accident, and I discovered what his intention was."

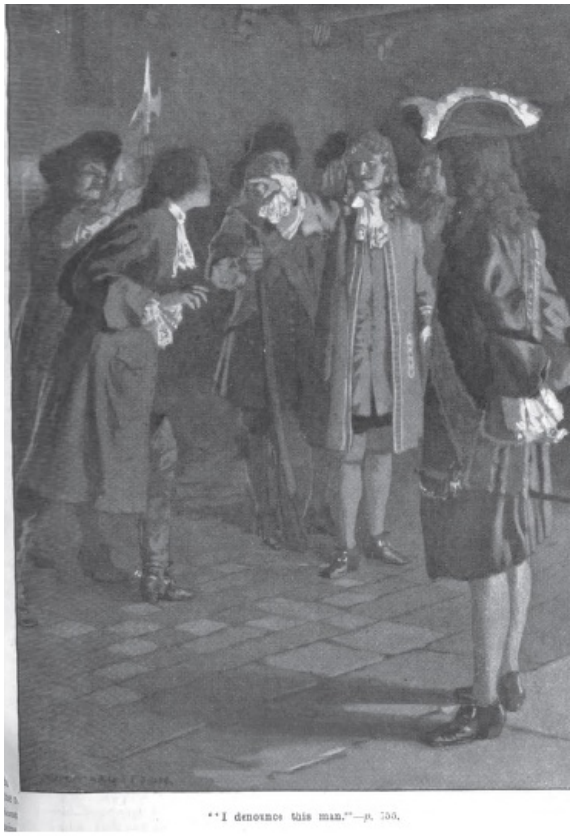
"It is strange that the only two men in Antwerp who desired to denounce the prisoner should have met. What was this man?"

"He was a Hollander who had been vanquished by the prisoner in a duel. For that he fell into ill-favour. Later, he became a spy of France."

"A spy! You consort with spies!"

"Ah!" murmured the Comtesse de Valorme at these words of the Governor, yet the murmur was loud enough for all present to hear, and to notice also that it was full of meaning--so full that, unconsciously, De Violaine's eyes were turned to her for an instant. Then the latter continued:

"Nevertheless, this man has not denounced the prisoner. It may be he confided that task to you."



"'I denounce this man.'"--*p.*755.

"Monsieur," Francbois said now, and it was apparent to all that he was about to make his supreme effort, "Monsieur," drawing himself up to his full height, "I denounce this man, not because the task was confided to me--I am no spy, no denouncer, whose office it is to do these things--but because that other is not here to do it for himself. He was murdered by that man, that Englishman, your prisoner!"

"Liar!" exclaimed Bevill, and in a moment he had sprung at Francbois, when, seizing him in a grasp of iron, he would have throttled him had not the troopers intervened and torn Francbois from his grasp. "Liar! If 'twas any who slew him that night in the Weiss Haus 'twas you!" though even as he spoke he had his doubts, remembering the signs he had discovered of the presence of a third man beside himself in Sylvia's house.

But now, amidst the excitement caused by Francbois' words and Bevill's prompt action to avenge them, amidst the contemptuous exclamations of both Sylvia and the Comtesse against Francbois (while, as the former spoke, she had sprung from the oak bench and stood by Bevill's side, whispering words of belief in his innocence of the horrible deed of which he had been accused), De Violaine's quiet tones fell once more on all their ears.

"You declare this man murdered that other one, that spy. What is your proof?"

"I saw him do it," Francbois replied, though as he spoke he was careful to draw close to the side of the soldiers. "I had gone there with Sparmann to assist in capturing this man."

"Yet did not give help. Had you no weapon with which to assist your 'friend,' your '*confrère*,' or, unable to do that, no power to avenge his death?"

"I--I----" Francbois stammered. "I----"

"Enough!" De Violaine said. "Your story does not bear the impress of truth upon it. Remove him," he said now to four of the soldiers. "It needs," he continued, "that I learn more of you--of who and what you are. There lies more matter behind all this than you have seen fit to divulge."

"That you shall know at once--on the instant!" the Comtesse exclaimed. "Let him remain here and listen to what I have to narrate. Also let Mr. Bracton remain. Beside what else there is to tell of that man, Francbois, he hates this Englishman for a reason he has not deemed it well to divulge--for the reason that he believes Sylvia Thorne----"

"What!" De Violaine exclaimed, startled.

"For the reason that he believes I love this man," Sylvia said, drawing even closer to Bevill as she spoke, and holding out her hand to him. Then, as Bevill clasped it in both of his, she turned and looked the others proudly in the face, while adding: "As in truth I do. If you slay him on that wretch's word, you slay the man I love--the man who, I pray, may live to call me wife; the man

who has risked, perhaps thrown away, his life for me."

CHAPTER XXV.

The declaration by Sylvia of her love for Bevill had caused so much agitation among those assembled in that gloomy *salle d'armes* that, for the moment, all forgot there was another declaration to be heard--namely, the denunciation of Francbois by the Comtesse de Valorme. To him who was most principally concerned--to Bevill Bracton--the proclamation of Sylvia's love came not, however, so much as a surprise--since, had she not loved him, the words she had but hitherto whispered would never have been uttered at all by one so calmly dignified and self-contained as she--as a joy supreme. In the joy, too, was merged an honest, manly pride in having won for himself the love of a woman who nobly, before all present, had not hesitated openly to avow that love.

And still, even now that the love was acknowledged, every action of the girl as he drew close to her and, in his deepest murmur, whispered his own love and pride in her, but tended to increase his reverence. For as she--disdained all assumption of embarrassment, of having uttered words before others which, in ordinary cases, should have been whispered in his ears alone--now stood by his side with her hand still clasped in his, and with her calm, clear eyes fixed on him, he recognised more fully than ever he had done before how royally she was clad with womanly dignity. It was given to him to understand how that outspoken love for him had become her even as, oft-times, the murmured confession of their love by other women becomes them.

"Sylvia," he said now, "what shall I say, how prove to you all that is in my heart? How repay the love you have given me, the love I hoped so dearly to win?"

"Repay! Is it not mine to repay? You might have left me here alone. It was in your power to go, yet you resolved to stay. And," she said, gazing at him, "I love you. The words you uttered last night told me of your love for me; to-night I have avowed my own in return. Yet, ah!" she almost gasped, "in what a place, in what a spot, to plight our troth, to exchange vows!"

"Fear not, sweet one. The place matters nothing; the balm is administered, is here," and he touched the lace above his heart. "Even though they keep me prisoner for months, even though they slay me for being that which, God knows, I am not----"

"No, no, no! Not that! Not that!" she murmured, losing momentarily her self-control and clenching her under-lip between her teeth to hide its trembling. "Not that. It cannot be." Then looking up at him more firmly, though now he saw her eyes were welling over with tears, she added, "We have not met thus to part thus. It cannot, cannot be."

"By Heaven's grace we will never part. Once free of this, once safe, and--together--always together--we will never part on earth again. Heart up, my sweet! Heart up!" While, as he spoke, the pressure of his hand by hers told him that, as far as resolution could come to her aid, she would never despair. Nay, more--if such a thing might be--it conveyed in some subtle form to him the knowledge, the assurance, that if there lay in her power any chance of saving him, that chance would be exerted. Yet how, he asked himself, could she do aught towards saving him?

What was there to be done? His presence in this city, his assumption of being French while actually the subject of France's most determined enemy, was enough.

Meanwhile, there were others present--one other at least, the Comtesse--to whom this declaration of Sylvia had, if it came as a surprise at all, only come as one by the manner in which it was made. For she had seen enough, had observed enough to comprehend how, day by day, this man and woman had been gradually drawing nearer and nearer to one another; to discern how dear to each was the presence of the other, and to perceive that, as so they were drawn closer and closer together, the strands that drew them must tighten more and more until they could never be unloosed.

But if this avowal carried, therefore, no surprise to Madame de Valorme, to Francbois it brought an added agony to that which had gone before, even if, to him also, it brought no surprise. For he could not but ask himself what he had gained by his betrayal of this man--a betrayal that alone would have been justified, alone might have claimed extenuation, had it been the outcome of an honest, straightforward desire to serve the country he belonged to by injuring its enemies.

"Gained?" he reflected. He had gained nothing, while losing much, perhaps everything. Sylvia Thorne loved this man; she was not the woman to ever love another--above all, not him who had

betrayed the beloved one. And, yes he had given this rival into the hands of the enemy. It might be, it doubtless was the case, that he had brought about his doom; but there--there!--but a few paces from him was one, his own connection, who was now about to send him also to his doom. For she knew enough to do so; she had told him so that night in the lane when, after the Englishman had disarmed him, she had taken him apart, even as, in the same breath, she had told him that if harm came to that other so it should come to him. And now--now--it had come to that other. In a few more moments it would come to him. She was about to speak. Gained! Out of his own mouth, by his own evil disposition, he had brought about his own fate.

As his mind was tortured thus the Comtesse de Valorme commenced the exposure which must lead to his undoing.

"Monsieur de Violaine," he heard her saying now, even as every fibre in his body trembled and seemed to become relaxed and flaccid, while the moisture stood in great drops on his cheeks and forehead, "you have heard Mr. Bracton proclaimed a spy, though he is none, but only a man who assumed a false name, a false nationality, to help a woman whom," she added, "he loves. He is no spy; but, if he were, is a spy worse than a traitor?"

De Violaine started as she uttered these words, since he remembered how the same thought, the same question, had arisen in his own mind that very day; then in reply he said:

"Each is an evil thing--contemned by all honourable men. Yet one man's evil-doing does not justify that of another."

"That is undoubted. Yet listen. This man," her eyes on Bevill, "is no spy; this one," and they fell with withering contempt on Francbois, "is a traitor."

"Have you proof of your words?" De Violaine asked, his marvellous calm always maintained.

"Proof? Ay, as much as you require. Le Maréchal de Boufflers comes here ere long, it is said, to see that all is prepared, all ready to resist the Allies; to, it is also said, resist Marlborough himself. When he comes show him these, after you have read them yourself." As she spoke thus the Comtesse de Valorme thrust her hand beneath the great *houppelande*, or travelling cloak, she had set out in and still wore; while, thrusting it next into the lace of her dress, she drew forth a small bundle of papers. "There is enough matter there," she said, "to hang a score of traitors." After which, turning to Francbois, she added: "You should have burnt those long ago instead of keeping them; or, keeping them, should have found sanctuary for them in the college of your friends and patrons, the Jesuits. Van Ryk's house, the house of a heretic," she said bitterly, "was a poor depository for such things; the bureau in a room sometimes occupied by a heretic woman the worst place of all."

But Francbois was now almost in a state of collapse; it was necessary for the stalwart troopers of the Risbourg dragoons to support him. For at last he knew that, whatever might be the fate of this Englishman whom he had striven to ruin, there was no ray of doubt about his own fate; while--and this was the bitterest of all--he had brought that fate upon himself. She, this tigress in woman's form, as he called her to himself, had warned him in the lane behind Van Ryk's house that it would be so if he betrayed the other; she had said the very same words that she had but just now uttered; had said that she had enough proof against him to hang a score of traitors. Only--she had not told him the exact nature of that proof. While he, who received so many letters by channels so devious that he could scarce remember how each reached his hands, had lost all memory of how once, when disturbed, he had thrust a small packet of them into the topmost drawer of an old bureau in a room that he generally occupied, except when other guests were in the house. In absolute fact, he had forgotten that bundle of letters until now.

For some moments Francbois could not speak; his breath seemed to have failed him. Nay more, even though the breath had been there to give utterance to his words, his mind was incapable of forming thoughts that, in their turn, should be expressed in words. He could but gasp and whine and raise his hand to his brow to wipe away the hot sweat oozing from it; he was so prostrate that the sturdy dragoons holding him thought that he would sink lifeless to the floor. Yet all the time he knew that the eyes of the others were upon him, were fixed coldly and contemptuously on him; the eyes of all except those of De Violaine, who, beneath the greasy candle guttering in their sockets, was reading the papers he had but now received. Yet, once Francbois saw that the Governor turned over a letter again and re-read it, and that--then he raised his eyes from the sheet and also looked at him for an instant. In that instant Francbois anticipated, perhaps experienced, the agonies of death a hundred times.

"Francbois saw that the Governor turned over a letter again."

"Francbois saw that the Governor turned over a letter again."

At last, however, he found his voice: thoughts to utter by its aid came to him. Struggling in the troopers' arms, he raised himself into a firmer, a more upright position and was able to assume something more of the attitude of a man. Then, freeing his right hand from the grasp of one of the soldiers--the hand in which he held his handkerchief, now a rolled-up ball--he lifted and pointed it towards the Comtesse; after which he said, in a harsh, dry, raucous voice:

"Spies! You--you--both--have talked of these." It may be he forgot in his frenzy that from him alone had such talk originated. "So be it. Yet, besides this English bully, this swashbuckler who slays in dark houses, those who would bring him to justice, are then no others present? What is this woman who in her self-righteousness denounces me as a traitor----"

"She has done more; she has proved you to be one," the Comtesse said.

"What is she?" Francbois went on. "What? Her husband died a traitor at the galleys; if women could be punished thus, she would be in a fair way to do so, too. Is she no traitor? She? She who is here to meet with Marlborough, or Cutts, or Athlone; to throw herself in their path, to intrigue with them for an invasion of the South--she who would have escaped to-night with those others had I not warned you of her. Warned you! There was no need of that! You who, like her, are of the South--a Camisard, a Cévenole."

Again De Violaine looked at this man, and the look had in it more terror for the abject creature than a thousand words might have possessed; after which, addressing the soldiers, he said:

"Remove both prisoners--each to a cell. Each of you," addressing both Bevill and Francbois, "will be subjected to a general court-martial when a sufficiency of officers can be collected to form it, and after the Maréchal de Boufflers and the Duc de Maine have been consulted. Mesdames," addressing the Comtesse and Sylvia, "you must return whence you set out. The Captain d'Aubenay and his men shall escort you."

Thus the expedition, the escape from Liége, had failed, since all who were to have gone on it, as well as he who prevented its accomplishment, were prisoners. For that the Comtesse de Valorme and Sylvia were now in a way--though a different one--as much prisoners as Bevill Bracton and Francbois they could not doubt. Except that they would be free of Van Ryk's house and gardens--free, possibly, of the city itself--instead of being confined in some room, or rooms, in the citadel, all freedom was gone from them, and they knew and understood that it was so.

But, still, in each of those women's hearts there had sprung up some hope for the future, the reason whereof neither could have explained, since whence hope was to come neither of them knew. From De Violaine there was, of a certainty, nothing to be looked for. Though no Camisard or Cévenole, as Francbois had stated, he was, nevertheless, a Protestant serving a cruel King who oppressed those of his faith; yet, being one, the Comtesse de Valorme knew well that nothing would turn him from his loyalty. Neither his early love for her, nor any hope that, now she was free, he might win her love, nor his belief--if such were possible--that Bevill had done nothing to merit condemnation as a spy, would weaken his fidelity so long as he bore the commission of Louis. From him there was nothing to be looked for but a stern, unflinching execution of his duty. And, if not from him, whence should hope come? At present they could find no answer to this question that they had each asked of their own hearts; they saw no glimmering ray to give them confidence. And still--still each hoped already, and the hope would never die within their hearts until the last chance was gone.

"I love him I love him! I love him!" Sylvia was whispering to herself now, even as preparations were being made to remove Bevill from this old, dark, and weird hall that reeked of the memories of innumerable cruelties; Francbois being already removed. "I love him. And--and he thought to save me. He deemed I needed assistance, rescue. Now it is he who needs earthly salvation, he whose impending lot cries for prompt succour. Ah, well! help, succour, shall be forthcoming unless I die in an attempt to obtain it. Oh!" she gasped, her hands to her breast, "they are leading him away--from me!"

With one swift movement she was by Bevill's side; a moment later she was clasped to his heart; another, and he was murmuring words of love and farewell in her ears.

"Adieu! Adieu, Sylvia," he said. "Nay, my sweet!" he whispered, "let fall no tears; weep not for me. I have won your love; the happiest hours of my life have come. Since I may be no more by your side--as yet--I have the thoughts of you to solace me; the thought, the pride of knowing I have won your love, that I alone dwell in your heart."

While, seeing that De Violaine in his delicacy had turned his eyes away, and was gazing into the great empty fireplace until this sad parting should be made; seeing, too, that even the rough troopers had turned their eyes from them, he embraced Sylvia for the first time--the first time and, as he feared, the last.

"I love you," he whispered. "Whate'er betide, remember my last words are these. Remember that, if the worst befalls, my last thought shall be of you, my last prayer for you, your name the last word on my lips. Farewell."

CHAPTER XXVI.

The weather that, through the latter part of June and July, had held so fine, had changed at last. With that persistency which for centuries has caused all in the Netherlands to say that their climate is the worst in Europe, or at least the most unreliable, a rainy season had again set in accompanied by considerable cold. The rivers were so swollen now that, in the case of all the great ones, the usually slow, turgid streams had turned into swirling volumes of water, resembling those which, in mountainous regions, pour forth from their icy sources; even the smaller waterways had overflowed their banks and submerged the low-lying fields around them. Thus, except in some particular instances, all military operations had come to an end for the time; the thousands of soldiers who composed the rival armies, and were drawn from half the countries in Europe, lay idle in their tents--when they had any--or in some town they had possessed themselves of; or, in many cases, on the rain-soaked ground.

Of these armies none suffered worse than did the principal portion of the English forces--namely, that under the Earl of Marlborough. For the torrid heat of July was all gone now--that heat of which, but a week or so before, Marlborough had made mention in one of his frequent letters to his wife, while adding the hope that it would ripen the fruit in their gardens at St. Albans, the gardens so dear to him since he knew well enough that she walked in them daily and thought always of him. For whatever John Churchill's faults might be, and whatever the faults of his beautiful but shrewish wife might be, neither failed in their absorbing love for one another--the love that had sprung into their hearts when he was but a colonel and gentleman of the bedchamber to the Duke of York and she a maid of honour to the Duchess.

The heat and fine weather were gone, and for refuge, there was little but the open left for the English troops. It was true Kaiserswörth was taken at this time, Breda was occupied by the English, Maestricht was the same, and Nimeguen had been long in our hands; but with these exceptions Marlborough, with 60,000 men under his command, lay almost entirely in the open. His lordship was at this time at Grave on the Meuse on his way to Venloo, there to attempt the siege and capture of that town, it lying some forty-five miles south of Grave and fifty miles north of Liége.

But however impassable, or almost impassable, the roads were at this present moment, traffic on them, other than that caused by the French and allied armies, had not ceased, for the sufficient reason that it could by no possibility do so. Along every road there streamed wagons and provisions, which, since the latter were to be offered to the first would-be purchasers, were in little danger of being seized as contraband of war by either side, especially as both the contending forces paid for what they appropriated, though, as often as not, the payment was not what the vendors demanded.

Horsemen were also frequent on these same roads, since, provided they were neither soldiers

nor spies, nor bearers of despatches or disguised letters, as was soon apparent if they were stopped and searched rigorously, they were not molested, though in many cases the errands upon which they rode were more harmful than even secret news might have been. For many of these men were, under the assumed titles of suttlers and army agents, nothing more nor less than professional gamblers and "bankers," who, once they had got within the lines of either army, contrived not only to strip the officers of all the ready money they possessed, but also, in cases where they knew the standing and family of many of these officers, to lend them money (which they afterwards won back from them) at exorbitant rates of interest, the payment of which frequently crippled them or their families for years.

Besides these, there haunted the neighbourhood of the armies, like ghouls or vampires, or those vultures which can scent bloodshed from afar, a class of women, most of whom were horribly bedizened and painted hags, who followed, perhaps, one of the most dreadful trades to which women have ever turned their attention. But, though they passed along these roads under false names and sometimes titles, and rode in good hired vehicles and, as often as not, in handsome ones that were their own property, they presented a different appearance when a battle had taken place. For then their silks and satins, their paint and patches, their lace and jewels, and also their pinchbeck titles of marchionesses and countesses and baronesses, were discarded, and they stood forth as they really were--as women still in women's garb, it is true, yet in all else furies. With knives in their girdles; with, in outside pockets or bags, the hilts of pistols and some times--nay, often--rude surgical instruments bulging forth; with, too, more than one gold-laced coat buttoned across them, or with the sleeves knotted and with their other pockets crammed with scraps of lace and costly wigs, and miniatures and gold pieces, they stood forth as those earthly cormorants, *les chercheuses des morts*, and, in most cases, as the murderesses of the living. With their knives or pistols they put an end to the lives of wounded men, whom they afterwards robbed of their money and trinkets, and, also with those knives, they scalped the dying, since hair was valuable. Likewise, with their surgical instruments they wrenched the teeth, also valuable, out of dying or dead men's heads; while, if the wounded were still able to protect themselves, they played another part, that of the Good Samaritan, and offered them a drink of Nantz or usquebaugh, which generally finished the business, since it was usually poisoned.

Along a road between Venloo and Grave, over which a dyke had overflowed from the heavy rains, so that the horses passing over it were fetlock deep in mud, there went now a vehicle, or, rather, rough country cart, springless and having for shelter nothing but a rough covering of coarse tarred canvas supported on bent lathes. Seated on the shaft of this cart was an old man who, out of tenderness for the value of the beast that drew it, if not for the beast itself, never proceeded at any but the slowest pace possible. Inside, under the awning or cover, were Sylvia and Madame de Valorme, who, as is now apparent, had managed to escape out of Liége.

Yet it had been hard to do, and doubly hard to these two women, who, the soul of honour, had to deal with one other--De Violaine--who was himself a mirror of honour and loyalty.

And still they had done it.

In common with many other escapes recorded in past and even present days, theirs had been accomplished in the most simple manner, namely, by simplicity itself. Indeed, captives who, with their appearance unknown to their warders, had walked out of their prisons, both before and after this time; men who had been known to stroll out of such places as the Bastille, or Vincennes, or Bicêtre, and sometimes from English prisons and lockups, as well as he who, on the road to the guillotine, had escaped by the simple device of dropping out of the back of the *charrette* and then crying "*Vive la Revolution!*" and "*À bas les aristocrats!*" had not done so more easily than had these two women.

Only, it had taken time for Sylvia and the Comtesse to arrange their plans, and time, they soon knew, was of all things the most precious. For De Violaine, who had one morning come down to the Comtesse de Valorme from the citadel with a view to asking her why she had jeopardised her own freedom by espousing the desires of the Englishman, had confessed that, though Bevill could not at present be brought to trial, his peril was still extreme.

"De Boufflers is here," he said; "he has come to draw off all troops that can be spared, as well as to examine the state of defence in which Liége is."

"To draw off the troops!" the Comtesse and Sylvia both exclaimed, while the latter felt her heart sink within her at his words. "Is Lord Marlborough not coming?"

"Alas! it is because he is coming, mademoiselle, that it is done. We who are French desire to oppose your general in every way, so that he shall not reach Liége," and De Violaine sighed as he spoke; for he knew as well as De Boufflers that, if Marlborough appeared before Liége with one-fifth of those 60,000 men who were now under his command, the city would probably fall an easy prey to him.

"Why should this prevent an innocent or, at least, a harmless man from being put to his trial and released?" the Comtesse asked. "What evil has he, in truth, done? He has but committed a gallant action in attempting to carry away to safety the compatriot whom he loves, the woman who loves him."

Now, in one way, Sylvia and the Comtesse had thrown dust in the Governor's eyes from the beginning; they had concealed from him the knowledge that Sylvia and Bevill had not been lovers when first the latter made his way into Liége--the one piece of information, as they shrewdly guessed, which might stand as Bevill's excuse, his justification, for doing that which he had done.

"And," the Comtesse continued, "beyond this, what sin against France has Mr. Bracton committed? Is the fact that he, being an Englishman, should also be a Protestant a crime?"

"Nay, nay," De Violaine said; "that is no crime, else you and I are criminals; but----"

"But what?"

"There are other matters that may weigh heavily against him. Ah! mademoiselle," he cried suddenly, hearing a slight exclamation issue from Sylvia's lips while noticing that the rich colouring had fled from her cheeks, and that she seemed about to swoon, "I beseech of you to take this calmly. All may be well yet."

"What are these other matters, monsieur? On my part, I beseech you to tell me," Sylvia almost gasped.

"I--I? Nay, what need to tell? He may be absolved by the court that tries him; his attempt to save the woman he loved may justify all. We of our land are sometimes self-sacrificing in our love," with a swift glance at Madame de Valorme; "we should scarcely bear hardly on a foe for being so."

Other glances that De Violaine did not see had, however, been exchanged as he spoke thus--the glances of the two women as he uttered those words, "his attempt to save the woman he loved may justify all." Glances that conveyed to each the thought that was in the other's mind--the understanding that, in no circumstances, must it ever be known that the love had come to Bevill and Sylvia after they had met in Liége, and not before. If that were known or discovered, one of their principal hopes for his escape was gone. Also, as each of those women flashed the signal to the other, each remembered, and in remembering thanked Heaven, that even that base and crawling creature, Francbois, believed the love to be of an earlier origin than Bevill's arrival. Thence, therefore, sprang the hope that one frail chance in his favour might still remain, and that, from this secret, aid might be forthcoming.

In an instant, however, since glances are almost as swift as lightning itself, the episode had passed and Sylvia had asked once more:

"What are those other matters? Ah! do not torture me with concealment. You--surely you, must, noble as you appear to be--must have loved some woman once, have won the desired love of some true woman. Think, I implore you, think if her feelings had ever been wrung as mine are now, if she had ever been distraught as I am, how your heart would have been stirred with misery for her. Ah," she cried again, unable to restrain her sobs, "if you cannot pity me, at least show pity for my grief, my misfortune."

"From my heart I pity you, mademoiselle," De Violaine said, while as he spoke his voice was calm as ever, though, nevertheless, both women knew that the calmness was but due to self-control. "Even though," and now it seemed as if he braced himself to utter the next words, "I may--never--have known what love is; above all, have--never--known what it is to win the desired love of some true woman. Yet is pity shown to those who suffer, to those who fear, by placing our hand upon the sore, by telling them where the evil lurks?"

"What we know is less than awful imaginings. Let me learn the worst against the man I love," Sylvia continued, and now she was drawn to her full height once more; except that her cheeks were still wet with recent tears she was herself again. Tall, upright, almost commanding, beautiful as ever, she stood before De Violaine, and, in her nobility of nature, seemed to issue an order he dared not disregard. "Let me know the worst. I will not live in further suspense."

"A letter has been found upon him."

"A letter! What letter?" her thoughts flying back fondly to the one he had brought from her guardian--the letter that had commended Bevill Bracton so much to her regard--the letter she had kept and read a hundred times.

"A letter from one who is our bitterest foe--a restless, intriguing man seeking ever his country's glory and aggrandisement at the expense of ours; ever intriguing against us, setting those who are well disposed to us against us----"

"Who is this man, perchance?"

"The Earl of Peterborough."

"Ah! and is he all that you say? He is my guardian, and was my father's dearest, earliest friend."

"Your guardian! Your father's dearest friend!" De Violaine repeated, while inwardly he said to

himself, "This must never be known. Otherwise, Heaven help her! She will stand in almost as much danger as her lover stands now, should it be discovered that she is Peterborough's ward."

But aloud he said, "In that letter Mr. Bracton"--De Violaine knowing Bevill's proper name by this time as well as Sylvia or Madame de Valorme knew it--"is addressed as 'cousin' by the Earl. Is he that?"

"He is," Sylvia replied fearlessly. "Some degrees removed, yet still his cousin."

"He could scarcely own a worse kinsmanship--in--in De Boufflers' eyes," De Violaine muttered once more--to himself.

To himself he had muttered these words, yet words were not needed to tell either of the others that here was a circumstance which must tell hardly, cruelly, against Bevill. They understood that by some act of forgetfulness, some inadvertency, he must have kept about him a letter that prudence should have warned him to destroy the instant he had set foot in the neighbourhood of the French; and now--now it would tell against him with awful force. They could not doubt this to be the case; no further doubt could exist in either of their minds. De Violaine's face, as he thought to himself that the unfortunate prisoner could scarce claim kinship with a more dangerous man in the eyes of France than the Earl of Peterborough, had been enough to tell them all, to banish all hope from their hearts.

CHAPTER XXVII.

If the Comtesse de Valorme had taken but a secondary part in the conversation that had occurred, it was because she recognised that, to Sylvia, the moment was all important. Also she recognised, or understood well, that at the present moment the preservation, the earthly salvation of Bevill Bracton, if such were possible, stood before all else. Her own desires, her own hopes of coming into contact with the Generalissimo of the allied armies, or, short of him, of someone in high command, must, if only temporarily, give place to the saving of this man so young and so fearless. Yet, even as this thought possessed itself of her mind, she acknowledged that all power of so saving him was outside the efforts of Sylvia or herself.

What, she asked herself, was there that either of them could do to assist in that salvation--they who were themselves in a sense prisoners? De Boufflers was here at this moment; he would doubtless make himself acquainted with everything in connection with the prisoner, or, indeed, the prisoners; he would give orders as to what was to be done in the form of a trial, a judgment; and against these orders there could be no disobedience on the part of any. Nor could there be any suggestions of mercy. There were none who could venture to disobey or to suggest, or who, thus venturing, would be allowed a moment's hearing; while, worse than all, the facts were overwhelming. Bevill Bracton had placed himself in this position--a position that in war time was the worst in which any alien could stand. For, having, as an alien, obtained an entrance to Liége, he had next disobeyed the stern order that no aliens who happened to be in the city should attempt to leave it and thereby find the opportunity, should they desire it, of communicating with the enemy. To all of which was added the additional terror that, villain though he was, Francbois was a Frenchman, and the Frenchmen who listened to what he had to say might be tempted to believe his words. While, to cap everything, a letter of Lord Peterborough's had been found in Bevill's possession--Peterborough, of whom it was as well known in France as in London itself that he had loudly denounced the French succession, had counselled the rupture with France, and himself thirsted to take part in the present war.

Yet, even as Madame de Valorme acknowledged that there were none who could help him who now stood in such imminent deadly danger, a counter-thought, a counter-question ran through her brain like wildfire. "Is it so?" she asked herself. "Is it truly so?" and almost sickened as she found the answer that there were two persons who still had it in their power to afford timely help, though, in doing so, their own feelings, their own self-respect, their sense of honour, might be forfeited. The first was one who might be brought to influence the council, the court-martial that decided the unlucky man's fate--De Violaine!

And the second was one who might influence him. Ah, yes! She, the woman he had loved and lost--the woman whom--since it was idle to juggle with herself--he still loved. Herself!

Herself! and the moment had come when, if it were to be done she must do it, though, even as she knew that it was so, she loathed, execrated herself. For in her heart there dwelt, as there would ever dwell, the thought, the memory, of her unhappy husband who had died beneath the horrible tortures, the beatings, the sweat, the labour of the galleys; while in De Violaine's own

heart there dwelt one thing above all--his honour, his loyalty to the country he loved and served and to the King he despised, yet had deeply pledged himself to obey faithfully.

But still the essay must be made. The honest, upright life of Bevill Bracton should not be sacrificed without some effort on her part, wicked though that effort might be, and surely--surely God would forgive her! The sweet, fair promise of Sylvia's young life should not be wrecked if she stood, if she could stand, for aught.

And the moment had come. Sylvia had left the room, unable to bear further emotion; had left it to retire to her own room, there to cast herself on her knees and pray for Heaven's mercy on him she had learnt to love so fondly. The Comtesse de Valorme and De Violaine were alone. He was glancing out through the window at the garden, now drenched with rain, while she was seated by the table as she had been seated since first he was announced.

"Almost in a whisper the Comtesse spoke"--*p.* 850.

"Almost in a whisper the
Comptess spoke."--*p.* 850.

For an instant the silence between them was unbroken; then, almost in a whisper, the Comtesse de Valorme spoke to the man who still stood with his back to her. For this was no moment for the practising of that ceremony which was the essence of all intercourse between the well-bred of those days, but, instead, a moment when courtesy must sink before those emotions that sometimes in men and women's lives pluck at and rend their hearts At last, however, the woman spoke, and the man was forced to turn round and meet her gaze.

"André de Violaine," she said now, and he observed how her voice faltered as she uttered the words and how her colour came and went, "have you forgotten a promise, a vow you once made me ten years ago, while demanding no vow in return from me?"

"I have forgotten nothing," the other answered, his voice more calm than hers as he turned towards her, yet with his eyes lowered so that they did not meet hers. "I have forgotten neither vows nor hopes--vows, the fulfilment of which has never been demanded; hopes that withered even as they blossomed. Shall I recall them, to show how clear my memory is?"

"Nay; rather let me do so. I recall a man who vowed in days gone by--far off now--that there should be no demand a woman--I--could ever make of him that he would not meet, not carry out by some means, even though at the cost of his life."

"His life," De Violaine said, lifting his eyes suddenly to hers. "His life. Yes."

"What can a man give that is more precious? What else is there for him to fear who fears not death, the end of life?"

"Nothing," De Violaine said now, leaving that question unanswered, "has ever been demanded of me by that woman--by you. Madame, there are some men so lowly, so unheeded in this world, that favours from them are scarce worth accepting or even asking for. Had you ever called on me to do you any service, to give you even my life, the service would have been done, would have been given without a moment's hesitation."

"How he dwells on the word life!" the Comtesse said to herself. "How he shields himself behind it! Because he knows there is another word neither of us dares utter." Yet, a moment later, she was to hear that word uttered.

Then she continued:

"And now it is too late to ask for favours. That time is too long past for vows to have kept fresh--even as, perhaps," and he saw she trembled, it may be shuddered, as she spoke the words, "it is for hopes."

"Too late for vows to be redeemed? No. For life to be freely given if required? No. For hopes? Yes, since no price can be demanded for the fulfilment of those vows."

"Is hope dead within your heart, or has it but turned to indifference?"

"Radegonde," De Violaine said now, speaking quickly, yet with a tremor in his voice, "all hope died within my heart ten years ago, on the day when, at Nîmes, you married Gabriel de Valorme. Nay," seeing she was about to speak, "do not tell me that he is dead; I know it now. But his memory, your love for him, is not dead."

"Ah!" the Comtesse gasped. For De Violaine's words were true, and she despised herself for having, even in so great a cause as this she was now concerned in, endeavoured to rouse fresh hopes within De Violaine's breast.

"Now," the latter said, "tell me what you desire--what your words mean. Though you are still wedded in your heart to Gabriel, still bound to him by memory's chain, there yet remains--my--life."

"No, no," she almost cried; "not that. Why should I ask your life--I who slew the happiness of that life--I who could not give you what was not mine to give? Instead----"

"Yes--instead?"

"I seek to save a life, a guiltless one." Then, rising from her chair and advancing close to De Violaine, she said, "You can preserve this Englishman. If," and she wrestled with herself, strung herself masterfully to utter the words, "if you ever loved me, if in your heart there still dwells the memory of that dead and gone love, I beseech you to save him. He is innocent of aught against France."

"The memory of that love is there, never to be effaced; but for what you ask--it is impossible."

"Oh! oh! And this is the man who vowed to give his life to me!" the Comtesse murmured. "The man who is supreme here, in Liége, yet will not do that!"

"My life is yours, now as it has ever been--to do with as you will--instantly--to-day, at once. But you demand more of me; you ask that which I cannot give--my honour! You have said that he who fears not death fears nothing. Alas! you--you--Radegonde de Montigny, as once you were when first I knew and--Heaven help me!--loved you; you, Radegonde de Valorme as you now are, should know that death is little beside honour: and I, before all, am a soldier."

"You will do nothing?"

"I can do nothing."

Madame de Valorme sank into the chair she had quitted a moment ago, and sat there, no longer gazing at him, but, instead, at the ground. Then, suddenly, she looked up at De Violaine, and he saw so strange a light in her eyes that he was filled with wonderment at what the meaning might be--filled with wonderment, though, as she spoke again, he understood, or thought he understood; for now, though using almost the same words she had but just uttered, they were uttered in so different a tone that he deemed understanding had come to him.

"*In no case* will you do anything?"

"In no case," he answered in a tone so sad that it wrung her heart. "Whatever may be, can be, done, cannot be done by me."

After which, without attempting to touch her hand even in the most formal way, De Violaine whispered the word "Farewell," and left her.

And she knew that in one way she had won what she desired. She knew that, should she and Sylvia attempt anything which might have in it the germ of a chance for Bevill's ultimate escape from death, that attempt would not be frustrated by him, although he would have no hand in it.

From this time the two women turned their thoughts to but one thing--their own chances of quitting Liége and communicating with Marlborough. While, as they did so, they remembered that, in a way at least, these chances must be more favourable than heretofore. There was now no such crawling snake as Francbois at liberty to spy on them or to denounce them and their plans when once he knew them.

Meditating always on what steps might be taken to ensure the success of this evasion, consulting with Van Ryk on what opportunities might arise, even as, for exercise and fresh air, they walked about the quays or drove in and round the city, it gradually became apparent to

them that the attempt need not be hard of accomplishment. Many of the French soldiers had been at this moment withdrawn, since De Boufflers had decided that it was best to mass them on the road the English forces must traverse, and so, if possible, check Marlborough ere he could reach Liége, instead of awaiting his attack on the city itself. Meanwhile, they observed many other things. They saw that all the gates were open in the mornings for the entrance of the peasantry with their country produce, and, afterwards, for their exit; they perceived also that those who came in with the sparse provender they still had left for sale did so with the slightest of inspection, and, with their baskets and panniers over their arms, went out entirely unmolested.

"Alone we could do it," the Comtesse said. "I know it, feel it. Only, each must do it alone--you at one gate, I at another. And, outside, we could meet directly it was done. Seraing is close--'tis but a walk--so, too, is Herstal. And Herstal is better; it is on the way we must go."

"Doubtless," said Sylvia, "it is best we go alone, apart. Thus, if one is stopped, the other may escape, may be able to continue the attempt alone. Ah! Radegonde, if we should succeed! If we should be in time to save him!"

"Ay! 'tis that. If we should be in time! Yet time is one's best friend! They will not try him yet. They cannot. Except at the citadel and in the Chartreuse, Liége is almost denuded of troops for the moment. There are not enough officers to try him now, and--and--I know it, am sure of it--De Violaine will not advance matters. Oh! Sylvia, we must succeed."

So now they made all plans for ensuring their success, and decided that, on the next morning after this conversation, those plans should be put into execution. Fortunately one thing--money--was not wanting to aid them.

That next morning broke wet and stormy; the rain poured down at intervals, though followed, also at intervals, by slight cessations in the downpour, and by transient gleams of sunshine. Owing to which the peasant women who had sold their fowls and eggs and vegetables, as well as those who had been less successful, were forced to cower under antique stoops around the markets or under the market roofs themselves, or to trudge away in their heavy sabots--which, at least, served to keep their feet dry--towards the gates and out into the open country.

Amongst others who were doing the latter was a tall, fine peasant girl whose eyes, gleaming out from beneath the coarse shawl thrown over her head, belied, in their sombre gravity, the old Walloon song she hummed as she went along. A tall, fine girl, who, with her basket over her arm, splashed through the mud and slush until she reached the northeast gate and asked the corporal, who stood carefully out of the rain, if he did not require a fowl for his *pot-au-feu* or some eggs for his midday meal.

"If I had a wife like you to cook them for me!" the Frenchman gallantly replied. "But, tell me, are all the girls from Herstal as handsome as you?"

"Handsomer," the peasant girl replied lightly. "My sister to wit. Buy some eggs from me, corporal."

"Seeing a strange look in the girl's eyes, he changed the word he was about to utter"—*p.* 852.

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"Seeing a strange look in the girl's eyes, he changed the word he was about to utter"--*p.* 852.

"I have no money, and eggs are dear here now. Give me one for----" Then, seeing a strange look in the girl's eyes, he changed the word he was about to utter into "luck."

But since the peasant was now outside the gate it may be that, even if he had said "love" instead "luck," it would have made little difference to her. For she was out of Liége; she was free--free to begin her efforts, her attempt, mad as it might be, to rescue the one man on earth with whom and whose name the word and meaning of love could ever be associated in her mind.

Free to stride on in her coarse, rain-soaked peasant dress towards the village of Herstal, and, when two hundred yards from it, to fling herself into the arms of another peasant woman some few years older than herself and to murmur, "Outside and free, Radegonde! Oh, thank God! thank God! Free to attempt to save him."

"Ay, and free to set out at once. Mynheer Van Ryk's old domestic still keeps the inn here. The *charrette* is ready. We have but to remove these peasants' clothes and sabots, and we can depart. Come, Sylvia, come!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Had Philip Wouvermans lived half a century later than he did, the splendid brush he wielded would have found greater scope in the region he knew so well than it ever obtained, superb as his work was. For now, over all that portion of Europe known generically as the Netherlands, or Low Countries, there was the movement and the colouring this master delighted in--armies marching and fro, encamping one night at one place and at another on the next, bivouacking here to-day and there to-morrow, attacking or attacked, conquering or being repulsed. Armies, regiments, even small detachments, were clad sometimes in the royal blue of France, sometimes in the scarlet of England; while, intermixed with the former, might be seen the yellow grey of Spain or the dark green of Bavaria; and, with the latter, the snuff-brown of Holland or the pale blue of Austria. As they marched along the roads, singing the songs of the lands from which they drew

their birth, or across fields, the ripened corn and wheat were trampled under their and their chargers' feet or beneath the coarse, iron-bound wheels of their gun carriages, since, now that war was over and around all, the luckless peasants and landowners found but little opportunity of reaping those fields.

Yet neither was it the passage of these armies alone that disturbed those unfortunate dwellers in the scene of contest, since, sometimes, their fields and orchards and copses would witness some small yet sanguinary conflict between the hostile forces. On such occasions their downtrodden corn would become dyed crimson; the branches of their fruit trees would be cut down by whistling musket bullets or heavy cannon balls; their copses, sought out for shelter, would become the death-bed of many a gallant man whose eyes had opened to the light in lands far distant from those in which they finally closed. And then, routed, the vanquished would not march but rush along the roads once more, the victors would hurry after them in furious pursuit, and the unhappy owners of the soil and all it bore would be left bemoaning the ruin that had befallen them, ruin that the passage of years could alone repair.

Amid such scenes as these the Comtesse de Valorme and Sylvia were passing now as gradually they drew near to Maestricht, where, as they had learnt, they would, even if they did not come into touch with some portion of the English army, at least discover something as to its whereabouts. They knew this, they had learnt it, by words overheard outside inns at which they halted at nights; by witnessing the frantic gestures and listening to the excited talk of the half-Brabant, half-Guelderland boors as they discussed the coming of the English and others. Also, they had learnt by now that to make their way easily along these roads it were best they should be anything but French; for the English were sweeping like a tornado through all the land, the French were in most instances retreating or fortifying themselves in old towns and castles; the English, for whom all Netherlanders had been looking so long, were at hand at last.

Therefore, from now, neither Sylvia nor the Comtesse spoke in anything but English, excepting only when the native dialect was necessary to cause their desires to be understood, when Sylvia, whose long residence in Liége had enabled her to be well acquainted with the local dialects, used that.

"There is no news of the approach of the allied forces as yet?" the Comtesse asked, as Sylvia, looking out of a carriage they had taken possession of when they had discarded the rough country *charrette*, drew in her head after a slight conversation with a peasant.

"None," the girl answered wearily. "None. And during all this time they may have----" and she paused, shuddering.

"Nay, dear heart," the Comtesse said, her English clear and distinct as it had been when she astonished Bevill by addressing him in it. "Nay, have no fear. I--I--extorted from De Violaine--Heaven help me! I was but endeavouring to play on his memories of the past for our, for your sake--the knowledge that he could not yet be brought to trial. I myself have no fear of that."

"I myself cannot but have fears; for he has won my heart, my love. Oh! Radegonde, had it been you who loved him, you whom he loved, you could not be as calm as now you are."

"It may be so," the Comtesse said softly. "Doubtless it would have been so had it chanced that I had learned to love him--if he had learned to love me," and then was silent.

Something, however, some strange inflection in her voice caused Sylvia to look round at her companion, when, seeing that the Comtesse's face was averted, and that she was gazing out of the window, she added:

"Ah! forgive me. Who am I, a girl who has but now found happiness in a man's love, to speak thus to you who have suffered so--to you whose own heart died with M. de Valorme?"

But the Comtesse, beyond a whispered "Yes," said no more.

That, however, these two women, always good friends and companions and now united in one great desire--the desire of saving the life of a man who possessed in their eyes the greatest charm that can, perhaps, appeal to woman's nature, that of heroism--should cease to talk of him as much as they thought of him, is not to be supposed. While, as they so thought and also talked, each was reflecting on every chance favourable and unfavourable that might tell for or against their hero.

"Who was this spy, I wonder," Sylvia said now, "of whom Francbois spoke? The man whom he accused Bevill of slaying that night in the Weiss Haus? Radegonde, did he confide in you?"

"No more than in you," the Comtesse answered. "Surely, too, he would have chosen the woman he loved for his confidante?"

"Or, rather, have doubly feared to confide in that woman and to, thereby, bring fresh misery to the heart he had but just won for his own."

"Ah, yes," the Comtesse said, again in a low voice. "Doubtless that was his reason."

Returning, however, to the matter of the spy, Sylvia, who thought that in this man's death might lurk some deeper danger to Bevill than even that which was threatened by his obtaining entrance into a town beleaguered by the French, and by his doing so under a false name, as well as doubly threatened through a letter from Lord Peterborough being found in his possession--asked again:

"Not even in your journey from Louvain to Liége did he mention him?"

"Yes, if this man is the same as he who sought to have him detained, first at Antwerp and afterwards at St. Trond; if, too, Emile Francbois has not coined one further lie in his desire to ruin him. Yet you know all this as well as I, Sylvia. You have learnt from Mr. Bracton of his escape from Antwerp on the horse, with the passport of Le Blond, and of how, after seeing the man again at St. Trond, he left the place next morning before I did so, though that man had then disappeared and had not even returned to his lodging at the inn where they both put up."

"Yes, that I know. He told me more than once of his escapes from the broken soldier, Sparmann, who had become a spy in the service of his country's enemies, as also he told me how he hated passing under a false name, a false guise, no matter how good the cause was. Ah!" she went on, "his honour, his full sense of honour shone forth in every regret he uttered, even while he acknowledged how good was the cause which compelled the subterfuge. It must be Sparmann who was wounded to the death in my house, though not by Bevill, since he denies it. Yet, had he in truth slain the man who sought to slay him, it would have been no crime."

"He did not slay him. His every action, his every tone, when Francbois denounced him as having done so, was a testimony to the truth of his denial; though, since both Sparmann and Francbois were each working to the same end, were each in that lonely deserted house, intent on slaying Bevill--Mr. Bracton--why should they fight, why should each attempt to slay the other?"

"Ah!" murmured Sylvia, "if we could but know that--which, alas! we never shall, since Sparmann is dead, and Francbois will never utter aught but lies--then that heavy charge against him would be removed."

"It is in truth the heaviest, if not the one that will bear hardest of all against him."

"Which, then, is the worst?"

"The possession of Lord Peterborough's letter. Sylvia," the Comtesse said, strangely agitated as she thought on all that threatened Bevill. "If the Allies have not taken Liége ere he is tried, I dread to think of what may befall him. I pray God that Lord Marlborough may already be on his road."

After which both women became so overcome and, indeed, almost hysterical by the terror of what might happen to Bevill, that for a time they could speak no more, but, instead, took refuge in tears.

They could not, however, cease their endeavours to discover what chances there were of Marlborough being somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood. They recognised that, even if he were near and they could reach him and obtain speech with him, the mission on which they came could have but little, if indeed it had any, influence on his plans, all-absorbing though that mission was to them. Only they were distracted with grief and horror of what was impending in Liége, and in their distraction clutched at the only hope in the existence of which they could believe.

The carriage was at this time passing through one of those many plantations of young trees that, from far-off times, it has been the custom of the inhabitants of this rich marshy soil to plant at regular intervals, with a view to always providing themselves with vast stocks of timber for building as well as fuel. But since the road, if it were worthy of the name, was not only a muddy track but also encumbered by logs of felled wood that had been thrown across it by some of the many contending forces with the intention of impeding the progress of their rivals, the vehicle proceeded but slowly when it proceeded at all, and often enough the wheels stuck fast.

Looking out of the window as an obstruction once more occurred for about the tenth time since the carriage had entered this plantation, or young forest, Sylvia suddenly uttered an exclamation; while, drawing in her head, she said in a tone that the Comtesse could not mistake for aught but one of joy:

"They are here! We have found them! Heaven above be praised!"

"Here? Who?" the Comtesse also exclaimed. "The English? The Allies?"

"Some of them at least. Oh! Radegonde, I have seen their scarlet coats, and, on one, the gorget of our dragoon officers. Yet, alas! alas! they are retiring; he who wears the gorget has disappeared behind a larger tree than all the others."

"Cry out then! Cry to him! Call him back! Let us do anything to arrest their attention. If we fail to speak with them now we may not find their commander for days."

"No, no; we need not," Sylvia again exclaimed now. "They have observed us. They are coming towards us, doubtless to see what this carriage contains. Two officers. And they *are* English. Thank God!"

As she said, so it was. The two officers now approaching the carriage had seen it long before Sylvia had perceived them, and were at once inspired with the scouts'--for such they and their men were--proper sense of duty, namely, to discover what was the business of everyone with whom they might chance to come into contact. But--as the phrase which had sprung into use when the century, still so young, had but just dawned, ran--"It was seventeen hundred and war time," and, above almost all else, in war time prudence is necessary. Therefore, on seeing the carriage approach, the officers had retreated behind the great tree, while their troopers had ridden deeper into the plantation and, from there, the former had been able to observe who and what were those inside the vehicle.

"Women!" one said to the other. "Dangerous enough sometimes, when armed for our subjection and clad in velvet and Valenciennes, yet harmless here, unless they be spies of the enemy. No matter, 'tis our duty to discover who and what they are." Whereupon the officers turned their horses' heads towards the carriage, and the animals picked their way through what was almost a quagmire until they reached it.

"Their laced hats in hand, the two young men drew near the window."

"Their laced hats in hand, the two young men drew near the window."

Their laced hats in hand, the two young men bowed gracefully as they drew near the window, after which the captain, speaking in fair French, though not such as Bevill Bracton spoke, asked in a gentle, well-bred voice if there were any directions or assistance they could give mesdames to aid them on their route? But, ere he had concluded his courteous speech, he halted in it and finished it in but a shambling manner; for his eyes, discreetly as he had used them to observe the equal, though different, beauty of each woman, had told him that one at least of those before him was not seen for the first time. And that one--the Comtesse--was herself gazing fixedly at him.

"Madame travels far; madame's journey is not yet concluded," he murmured. "Madame has left Liége."

"It is so, monsieur," the Comtesse said speaking in English. "I understand monsieur. It was outside St. Trond that he saw me when his late brother officer, Mr. Bracton, joined me," while as she spoke she felt Sylvia start.

"That is the case, madame. But madame still travels on, though unaccompanied by Bracton. Another companion," he said, with a faint but respectful smile, "has usurped his place. Does he still remain in Liége; has he not yet succeeded in that which he desired to do--namely, in removing the lady he went to seek from out the grasp of our good friends the French?"

It was not, however, Madame de Valorme who answered his question, but, instead, her companion.

"Sir," said Sylvia--and as the captain's glance was drawn to her as she spoke he saw that her large grey eyes were full of a sadness that, to his mind at least, by no means obscured her beauty--"I am the woman he went to seek."

"You? Yet you are here alone. Where, then, is he?"

"Alas! alas! he is a prisoner. He--oh! it is hard to tell, to utter. He did all that man might do, but he was denounced to M. de Violaine by a vile spy who recognised him, and--and--ah! God help him, he is a prisoner in the citadel; and I--I--am free--I who should be by his side in safety or in danger. I who should be as much a prisoner as he."

Bewildered, the young man looked from Sylvia to the Comtesse and then back to Sylvia, while muttering, "We heard something of that spy and what he attempted on him at Antwerp and St. Trond----"

"That is not the man. He is dead----"

"Bracton slew him at last!"

"No, no! Another--some other did so. Perhaps the man who finally betrayed him," the Comtesse de Valorme said, since Sylvia seemed now almost incapable of speaking, so agitated had she become. After which, seeing that the captain of dragoons appeared to be totally unable to gather the meaning of what had happened, though recognising the danger in which Bevill stood, the Comtesse at once proceeded to give him as brief, though clear, an account of all that had occurred in Liége as it was possible to do. And, also, she told him their fears for what might still occur ere long. But one thing she did not tell him--namely, of how her own original desire of reaching Marlborough with a view to imploring his influence that aid might be sent to the Cevennes had, for the moment, given place to a far greater desire--the desire of in some way obtaining Bevill's earthly salvation, the salvation of a man whose life, though now bound up in that of Sylvia's as Sylvia's was in his, had become very precious to her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Captain Barringer--as the young officer of dragoons had now told Sylvia and the Comtesse his name was, while presenting the lieutenant to them as Sir George Saxby--showed both by his tone and words that the gravity of Bevill's position was extreme, though he took care to add that the fact of there being no Court of Inquiry ready to be formed at the present moment was a considerable point in his chance of ultimate escape.

In absolute fact, however, had it not been for the grief-stricken face of the handsome girl before him, the girl in whose eyes the tears now welled and hung upon the lids, even if they did not drop, and also the grave, solemn face of the Comtesse--he might have told them, as gently as possible, that in his soldier's mind the chances of Bevill's escape were almost nonexistent. "What," he asked himself, the question being but a flash of thought through his brain, and not expressed in words, "would our commanders have done had a Frenchman made his way into one of the strong places we now hold, as Bracton has made his way into Liége? What, if he were accused of slaying one of our supposed spies, if he had in his possession a letter from as great a hater of England as Lord Peterborough is of France, and if, contrary to all orders issued, he had endeavoured to escape out of one of those places with a young Frenchwoman who might divulge to her countrymen our plans and intentions? What, also, if that Frenchman had passed as an Englishman and had possession of two false passports made out in English names?"

Yet in another instant there had flashed to this astute young officer's mind another thought--one that was, this time, a recollection.

He recalled how at Nimeguen an almost similar case to this had occurred a little before Marshal de Boufflers had attempted to retrieve that city for the French, to wrest it from the Allies' hands. A Frenchman, named the Marquis de Cabrieres, a gentleman and gallant, too, had managed to obtain entrance into the place under the guise of an Englishman--a Jersey man--armed with papers describing him as a subject of the Queen; and had then endeavoured to assist a young French lady, his affianced wife, to leave in disguise under his care. Now he lay under sentence of death, since the warrant awaited the signature of Marlborough or Athlone when they should be in the neighbourhood again.

But a flash of thought alone, of memory, was all that passed through the young officer's mind, even as Sir George Saxby was telling Sylvia and the Comtesse that at this moment the Earl was encamped near a village called Asch, but half a day's journey off; yet his sudden recollection was enough--enough to convince him that, even as De Cabrieres was doomed by the English, so must Bevill Bracton be by the French for a parallel offence.

Now, however, he had no further time for reflection. Sylvia, hearing of their nearness to the one man who, in their minds, could by any possibility save her lover, was imploring both captain and lieutenant to either conduct them to where the great English commander was, or at least to direct them on the way to him.

"We can escort you," Captain Barringer now said, forcing himself to drive the above thoughts away and answer her, "since we are even now on our way to Asch. There is little more to be

learnt here; for the moment the ground is clear of Frenchmen and Spaniards. Though, doubtless, ladies, you will scarcely believe," he went on in a purposely assumed lighter vein, hoping thereby to banish the agony of mind in which both the Comtesse and Sylvia were, "what excellent neighbours, warm and close, we have been sometimes with those Frenchmen and Spaniards. A hedge, a little copse, has sometimes only divided our pickets and outposts from theirs; the very tables on which we have broken our fast at some tavern have been used by them for the same purpose but an hour before; and sometimes, too, we have courteously exchanged a few volleys of musket balls with each other, but that is all! The great battle that must come soon is not yet; not yet. Still, it will come," he added more gravely.

And now they set forth for Asch, though but slowly and with difficulty, since the wheels of the carriage (which was only a coarse country thing, large and cumbersome and roughly made) had by now sunk deep into the oozy morass, and required not only the efforts of the driver, but also those of the troopers, to force it on its way. Nevertheless, Sylvia and her companion were soon on their road towards the goal of their hopes, but, although such was the case, Captain Barringer deemed it necessary to say that it was by no means certain that, even when they had reached the end of their journey, they would be able to see and speak with Marlborough.

"For his secretary, Mr. Cardonnel, guards him like a fiery dragon," the captain said; "and he is surrounded by his staff, who are also veritable watch-dogs; notwithstanding which we will hope for the best. While, since my Lord Marlborough is a very gallant gentleman, he will surely turn no deaf ear to ladies who desire to ask his services?"

With which, and many other courteous as well as hope-inspiring phrases, not only Captain Barringer but also Sir George Saxby endeavoured to cheer the way for these who were now under their protection.

It was as the sun set that, from the windows of the rough carriage, Sylvia and the Comtesse gazed out upon the lines of the English army upon which were fixed the hopes of all who still trembled in fear of the powerful and arrogant monarch who from Versailles sent out his orders for wholesale spoliation and aggrandisement. He was the hope of Protestants in the sunny south of France, as well as of those in the more temperate land of Prussia and of those who dwelt all along the fair banks of the Rhine; the hope of all those who inhabited that vast district which stretched from the German ocean to the north of France on one side, and to Hanover another. While--bitter mockery when it is remembered what the origin of the present war was!--the same hopes for the downfall of this Grand Monarque--this prince termed the "God-sent"--were felt in far-off Spain by Roman Catholic hidalgos who loathed the thought that a French king should sit upon the throne once owned by those in whose veins ran the blood of Castile, of Aragon, the Asturias, and Trastamara. Hopes shared, too, though silently, by the rude fishermen of Biscay and Galicia as well as by the outlaws and brigands of Traz os Montes and Cantabria, who, while they bowed the knee to Romish emblems and statues, cursed in their lawless hearts the monarch who would endeavour to obtain for himself the throne that they and their forerunners of centuries had fought for, while putting aside temporarily their existence of plunder and brigandage.

Beneath a blood-red sun setting behind purple clouds that told of further storms and downpours still to come, the Comtesse de Valorme and Sylvia saw the long English line stretching from village to village; from the hamlet of Asch on the right to that of Ghenck on the left, and with Recken and Grimi on either flank. Also, they saw that with which both were well acquainted--the banner of England flying from a large tent in the middle of the camp, as well as the colours of regiments which, in that day, young in service, have since transmitted and gloriously maintained the reputation then acquired.

"Here, if nowhere else," the Comtesse said, "one should feel safe; yet, oh!" she whispered half to herself, "that I, a Frenchwoman, should have to seek double succour from my country's enemies! Simply because the ambition, the fanaticism of one man bears heavily on thousands of lives. Double succour! On one side for my own people; on the other for one, also my country's foeman, whom I have learned--to pity."

But Sylvia heard her words, low as the murmur was in which they were spoken, and answered gently:

"You are but one of all those thousands whose hearts he--this splendid bigot--is turning from him; but one alone of those who, throwing off their allegiance to him for ever, are peopling lands strange to them. Regret it not, reproach not yourself for that. Better die an outcast, yet free; a voluntary exile than an ill-treated subject, a slave. While as for Bevill--but ah! I dare not speak, not think of him. Beyond Heaven, in whose hands we all are, his--our--hopes are in him whom now we go to seek."

The carriage, escorted by the two dragoon officers who rode ahead of it, and by their handful of troopers behind, was now nearing that great tent over which streamed in the light of the setting sun the flag of England, and also passing through lines of English soldiers. Past the Cuirassiers, or Fourth Horse, it went--Sylvia's hand to her heart as she recognised that this was the regiment to which *he* had once belonged, from which he, wickedly, unjustly, had been cast

out. Past, too, the gallant Scots Regiment of White Horses, as well as "Coy's Horse," or 2nd Irish Horse, the King's Carabineers, and many others of the cavalry, as well as several infantry regiments, including fourteen companies of the Grenadiers. And, at last, they were outside Marlborough's tent: the moment to which both had looked forward, from which they hoped so much, was at hand.

"I will enter to my lord's staff," Captain Barringer said, "and state your desires. Meanwhile, something of your names and condition I must know. What shall I tell him, whom announce?" and his eyes fell on the Comtesse, perhaps because she was the elder. Upon which she answered:

"Tell him," she said, "that a Protestant Frenchwoman from Languedoc seeks assistance from him on two matters--both grave, and one vital. A Frenchwoman whose name is Radegonde, Comtesse de Valorme."

The captain bowed, while repeating the words to himself as though to impress them thoroughly in his mind; then he looked at Sylvia.

"Tell him," she said in turn, "that an Englishwoman, one Sylvia Thorne, is here to seek succour from him for the man she loves--the man who, if God so wills it, is to be her husband. And that man is a countryman to both my lord and her. Also he has been an English soldier. But this you know."

It was half an hour later that the captain came back, and, speaking in a low voice, said that the Earl of Marlborough would receive the ladies who desired to speak with him. After which he handed them out of the carriage, and, taking them to the opening of the tent, passed them through the sentries on either side. From there he confided them to a man who had the appearance of being a body-servant, one who bade them respectfully follow him.

But as they left the captain he whispered in their ears:

"Have no fear, no trepidation; and tell him all--all! You are about to see the most brilliant soldier, the most courtly gentleman, in Europe."

A moment later the man had held a curtain aside and had retired after letting it drop behind them again, and they were face to face with the greatest captain of the age.

He was standing in front of a brazier in which burned some logs, for the evenings were growing colder now and the damp was over all, and as the women's eyes fell on that handsome presence and noted the wonderful serenity of the features, any trepidation they might have felt vanished.

Clad in his dark blue coat--he was Colonel of the Blues--with, beneath it, the ribbon of the Garter across his breast, he stood facing the curtain until they appeared, and then, advancing towards them, lifted the hand of each to his lips, while murmuring some courteous phrase, immediately after which he placed two rough chairs before them and begged them to be seated.

"Madame la Comtesse," he said now, and they noticed the refined, courtly tones of a voice that, though soft and even, was a little shrill. "I have heard your tale briefly from Captain Barringer. If help can come from me it shall. Yet am I vastly concerned to know how I can offer aid."

"My lord," said Sylvia, lifting her eyes to his, while little knowing how he had noticed her beauty in one swift glance, "it is said in Liége that you will be soon there; and then--then--then the French will be no longer in possession of that city."

His lordship smiled slightly as she said this and seemed to muse an instant, after which he said:

"It may be so; but ere that can be, I must clear my way to Liége. There are towns and fortresses upon the road. Venloo is one, and time is necessary."

"Time! Oh!" the girl almost gasped. "Time! And in that time they may have tried Mr. Bracton and--ah! I cannot utter it!"

"It may indeed be so," he murmured, seeing the look on Sylvia's face. "I would not say a word to alarm you; but courts-martial, trials in war time, are apt to be swift. And the condition of Mr. Bracton is perilous; he has placed himself in a dangerous position."

"My lord," the Comtesse said, "we have heard but lately that in your hands is one, the Marquis de Cabrieres, who lies under sentence of death for a similar offence against you and a town in your possession. Yet he still lives. May it not be the same, may we not hope the same respite, for Mr. Bracton?"

As she spoke, not only she, but Sylvia too, saw that her words had had some strange effect on the Earl. They observed a light come in his eyes, a little more colour mount to his cheeks--evidences that those words had produced in his mind some striking effect. That effect they were soon to learn.

He went to a coarse, wooden table, covered with papers--a table that had, doubtless, been purchased with many others for a few gulden at some town through which the army passed, and, taking from off it two of those papers, said, as he held them in his hand:

"Here is a letter to M. de Boufflers which I have caused to be written--such things are usual enough between the conflicting armies--suggesting an exchange of prisoners----"

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvia. "I understand."

"Yet, see," Marlborough went on imperturbably, "I destroy it," and he suited the action to the word. Then observing, as he observed everything, the look of horror, of broken-hearted grief, on the faces of the others at his action, he added, "Because Mr. Bracton's name is not in it; because I was ignorant of him, though now I remember his name and the circumstances of his removal from the Cuirassiers. Yet, I beseech you, be easy in your minds. Another letter shall be written; it shall contain his name."

"God in heaven bless you!" Sylvia murmured.

"This," his lordship went on, touching with his finger the second paper, "is my warrant for the execution of the Marquis de Cabrieres--as a spy; but that too shall be destroyed," and again he suited the action to the word. "Each of those men has committed the same offence--for an offence it is against the opposing forces. Only, it is war time, and, as the offence is equal, so may the pardon be. If it can be done, if Mr. Bracton has not yet paid the penalty, it may be that the Maréchal de Boufflers and I can adjust matters."

"Sylvia flung herself at Marlborough's feet."

"Sylvia flung herself at
Marlborough's feet."

With a sob wrung from her heart by those last words as to Bevill having possibly paid the penalty, Sylvia flung herself at Marlborough's feet while uttering all that she felt at his graciousness and mercy. But, as she did so, as still she held his hand and called on heaven again and again to bless and prosper him, and while he, gallant, chivalrous as ever and always, endeavoured to raise her to her feet, he said:

"Only, above all, hope not too much. Do not allow your hopes too full a sway. England and France, Anne and Louis, De Boufflers and I are at war to the death, and war is merciless. Further defeat may drive the Marshal to desperation. Also, we know not what may be transpiring at Liége. I would not rouse more fears in your heart than it already holds. Heaven knows, I would not do so. Yet still I say again, 'Hope not, expect not, too much.'"

"I must hope," Sylvia moaned. "I must, I must. I have nought but hope left. I must hope in God's mercy first, and--under Him--in you."

It was well indeed that she should have hope to comfort her at this time--well, too, that she did not know what was doing in Liége even as she knelt at Marlborough's feet.

For had she done so she must have deemed there was no longer any hope to be expected on earth either for her lover or herself.

CHAPTER XXX.

Some of the French troops had returned to Liége. For almost every day now there came to the ears of the different commanders in the vicinity the news that the Allies were sweeping south; that town after town and fortress after fortress was falling, and that gradually, before the serried ranks of steel and the discharge of the heavy guns that the huge Flanders horses dragged over muddy roads and boggy swamps, the "Barrier" army was being driven back. To which was added now the news that Venloo was invested by Lord Cutts--he who had gained the sobriquet of the "Salamander" from friends and foes alike, owing to his contempt for the enemy's fire--and the Prince of Hanover, and like enough to fall at once.

Therefore many of the French forces were now back in the citadel and Chartreuse at Liége, or lying out on the heights of St. Walburg; while Tallard, who was afterwards to command the French and be defeated at Blenheim, was now second in command in the vicinity under De Boufflers. For the Duke of Burgundy had some time since returned to Paris, where he received but a freezing welcome from his august grandsire, and the Maréchal de Boufflers became first in command and Tallard second.

These changes in both the command of the French army and in the redistribution of the French forces, provided a sufficient number of officers to form a Court of Inquiry on the prisoners in the citadel--a court which, as Tallard had left orders before marching towards the Rhine, was to be commenced at once.

Of these prisoners there were now three, since another had been added to Bevill and Francbois, all of whom were charged with separate offences. The charge against those two has already been told; that against the third had still to be promulgated, though it came under the general one of treason, and was described in the quaint wording of the time as "*Lèse majesté* against the King, his State, and friends."

Of Francbois short work had been made by those assembled in the old *salle d'armes* in the citadel. The letters he had overlooked, and which had been found by the Comtesse de Valorme and handed to De Violaine, were sufficient to condemn any man in a time of peace, let alone one of war; but further inquiries, subtly made in the city by other such spies as Sparmann had been, showed that the traitor had made considerable sums of money by obtaining early knowledge of the French plans and future movements, and by selling them to the Dutch agents who were instructed by the States General to obtain all information of a similar nature. Francbois had consequently been condemned to death by hanging, and that death only awaited the signature of Tallard to be immediately effected. Meanwhile, he, proved spy and traitor as he was, was not regarded as too base and ignoble to be allowed to testify against one of the other prisoners--namely, the Englishman, Bracton.

Against the third prisoner, a Hollander named Hans Stuven, the charge was that he had attempted to slay two of his own countrymen in Liége, who were now in the service of the French King as couriers and frequent bearers of despatches from Louis to his marshals in the Netherlands; and that, when in drink at a tavern, he had been heard to announce that when he came into contact with the newly-created marshal, Montrével, he would slay him as an apostate from the reformed faith and a persecutor of the Protestants. For this man there could be but one hope--that he should be found to be insane.

To try these two the Court sat in the *salle d'armes*, lit now by the morning sun, De Violaine, in his capacity of Governor, being President. As representative of the King of France, he wore his hat and also the *just-au-corps au brevet*, or undercoat of the *noblesse* and those holding high office; a garment of white satin on which was stamped in gold the *fleur-de-lys*. Among the other officers who formed the members of that court one, a mousquetaire, alone wore his hat also, the plumed and laced hat of that aristocratic body. This was the young Duc de Guise, who sat thus covered because there ran in his veins the royal blood of an almost older race than the Bourbons, and because, as he and his called the King--and all Kings of France--cousin, it was his privilege to do so.

In face of these officers Bevill Bracton stood in the midst of a file of soldiers, outwardly calm

and imperturbable, but inwardly wondering what Sylvia was doing and where she was, while knowing that, no matter where she might be, her thoughts were with him alone. But, although he was well resigned to whatever fate might befall him--a resignation that many nights of solemn meditation had alone been able to bring him to--there was in his heart a sadness, a regret, that could not be stifled.

"We met but to love each other," he had whispered to himself a thousand times during his incarceration in this fortress; "to love but to be parted. And though the words could never be spoken, since I scarce knew the treasure I had won ere we were torn asunder, in her heart there must have sprung to life the same hopes, the same desires that had dawned in mine. The hopes of happy years to come, to be passed always side by side; together! The dreams of a calm and peaceful end, also together. And now! Now, the thought of her sweet face, her graciousness, her love, the only flower remaining in my soon to be ended life; my memory all that can be left to brighten or to darken her existence."

For never since the night he was arrested had he dared to dream that he would leave Liége alive. His attempted escape from the city with Sylvia, his passing under the false guise of two different Frenchmen--the necessity for which he had always loathed, while understanding that in this way alone could he reach her--the testimony that Francbois would surely give against him, and the imputed murder of a man in the pay and service of France, must overwhelm and confound him.

Thinking still of the woman he had learnt to love so dearly, he let his eyes roam over that gloomy, solemn hall and observe all that it contained while heeding little. He saw the officers of his country's immemorial foe conversing together ere they should begin to question him. He saw, too, the ancient arms that hung all round the walls--pikes, swords, maces, and halbards, musketoons and muskets; also, he saw far down at the other end another man who was, undoubtedly, like himself, a prisoner. A man guarded by more soldiers and with his hands chained together; one whose face was bruised and raw, as though, in his capture, he had been badly wounded; one who, leaning forward with that face resting on his hands, and his eyes upon the ground, presented an appearance of brutish indifference to his surroundings as well as to his almost certain fate.

"The witness who will be produced before you, and the prisoner's own actions, will give you the matter," De Violaine said now, addressing the other members of the court, "upon which you have to form a conclusion. The witness is the traitor, Francbois, whom you condemned yesterday. What he knows he must tell in spite of his condemnation, or means will be used to make him do so," and he glanced towards a man leaning behind one of the great stone columns that, at regular distances, supported the heavily-traced and groined roof. For there was still another man within that hall, one on whom Bevill's eyes had not yet lighted--a man, old and grizzled, yet strong and burly and roughly clad--a man who stood by a strange-looking instrument that lay along the floor and was a complicated mass of rollers and cords and pulleys--a thing that was, in truth, the rack. Near this there stood, also, four or five great copper pots, each holding several gallons of water, and having great ladles of the same metal in each. These things stood here close to the rack and that dark, forbidding man because, as all of that Court knew well, when the rack failed to elicit the truth from prisoner or suspected witness, the *question à l'eau*--namely, the pouring of quart after quart of water down the throats of the wretched victims, never failed in its effect.

"Let us hear the man," an officer who was in command of the Regiment de Montemar said. "If he endeavours to lie or to deceive us the----" and he glanced towards the executioner as he leant against the column.

"Bring in the man, Francbois," De Violaine said now, addressing some of the soldiers who were near Bevill, and a few moments later the already condemned traitor stood before those who had judged him yesterday.

Whether it was the horror of that condemnation which now sat heavily on his soul, or whether it was the fear of what might be the outcome of any evidence he should soon give--he had glanced affrightedly at the rack and the great water-pots and the grim attendant of both as he was brought in--he presented now a pitiable aspect. His face was colourless, or almost ashy grey, and resembled more the appearance of a terrified Asiatic, or an Asiatic whose blood was mixed with that of some white race, than the appearance of a European. His eyes had in them the terrified look of the hare as it glances back, only to see the hound that courses it upon its flank; his whole frame, in its tremblings and flaccidity, bespoke the awful terror that possessed him.

"*Pasquedieu!*" the young Duc de Guise muttered, as his eyes glanced from the shivering object to the tall, sturdy form and calm, unruffled, though solemn, countenance of the man against whom the other was to testify. "*Pasquedieu!* that this one should have his life in the hand of such as that." And, though those by his side did not hear the words muttered beneath the Duke's slight moustache, it may well be that their thoughts kept company with his.

"Tell your tale again as you told it to me when you came here to inform against this Englishman," De Violaine said now in an icy tone; "and tell it truthfully, remembering that----" but he, too, paused in his words, the sentence being finished by the one glance he cast towards the column down the hall.

Then, in a voice that trembled in unison with the tremors of his frame, though it gained strength--or was it audacity?--as he proceeded without interruption from any of those listeners seated before him, Francbois told the same story he had told at first to the Governor, Only, if he were to die, as die he now knew he must, he was resolved that he would leave no loophole through which this other--this accursed, contemptuous Englishman who stood by his side so calmly, as though he, too, were a judge and not a prisoner--should escape and live.

He pictured him as a browbeating, turbulent Briton even in those far-off days in Paris when both he and Bracton were schoolmates; he told how he was ever filled with hatred of France and Frenchmen; and how, even here in Liége, Bracton had boasted that he would outwit any Frenchman in and around it, and slay all who attempted to thwart him. And, next, he told how he and Sparmann, going to the Weiss Haus to arrest this man, had been set upon in the dark by him; how Bracton had stabbed Sparmann through the breast and disarmed him, Francbois, so that he was unable to succour his companion.

But now he was forced to stop in the unfolding of his narrative.

Bracton, who until this moment had uttered no word but had contented himself with standing calmly before his judges, spoke now.

"'Messieurs—this story is false.'"

"'Messiers--this story is false.'"

"Messieurs," he said, very calmly, "this story is false. It may be that in my attempt to save a woman I have learnt to love, a woman whom I loved with my whole heart and soul even ere I went to the Weiss Haus that night, I have put myself in the grasp of your military laws. But be that so or not," and now his voice was more firm, even perhaps stronger, "I will not be saddled with a false accusation and hold my peace. Sparmann was already wounded to the death, as I know now, though I knew it not when he passed me, touched me, in the dark and then fled down the stairs from me, deeming me most probably the man from whose hands a moment before he had received his death-wound. But it was not from my hand he received it. I am no murderer, no midnight assassin. I had fought once with Sparmann in England, and vanquished him in fair fight. Messieurs, you know well enough that the man who vanquishes another in the open does not murder him afterwards in the dark. Had I found him in the Weiss Haus that night, I should have seized on him, it may be I should have forced him to fight with me again, but I should not have done that of which this traitor accuses me."

These words had made a good impression on those to whom they were addressed--so good a one, indeed, that, had there been no other charge against Bevill, he might possibly have gone free at that moment. Unhappily, however, there did remain the other charges that stood so black against him, and those charges required neither the assertion nor the corroboration of Francbois. They proved themselves.

But whatever impression his words may have made on those who were now the arbiters of life and death to him, a far deeper impression--a palpable one--had been produced on the man who sat with his head buried in his hands close by that column against which the doomsman leaned.

At the first sound of Bevill's voice this man, this fanatic who appeared to have vowed himself to the slaughter of renegades and apostates, had lifted his bloodstained and bruised face from his hands, and had stared amazed as though a spectre had suddenly appeared before him; yet even this expression of open-eyed astonishment gave way to a still deeper appearance of bewilderment as now Francbois, in answer to Bevill's words, repeated again his assertions while asking if he who now stood on the threshold of his grave had any reason to lie?

So deep an appearance, indeed, had that man's bewilderment assumed that, at last, he appeared unable to support it further, and let his face fall once more into its previous position.

And in all that great hall there was not one, or only one--the dreadful creature who stood near Stuven--who had witnessed the man's astonishment and the lifting of his face out of his hands.

"You say," De Violaine said now to Francbois, "that you have no reason to lie since your grave already awaits you. Yet death is but the last resource, and even that impending death shall not shield falsehood. If you have lied to us----"

But he paused, astonished by what he now not only saw but also heard.

For at this moment the prisoner Stuven had sprung to his feet and was gesticulating wildly, even as he struggled in the hands of the men who guarded him--gesticulating wildly as he cried:

"He lies. He does lie! 'Twas I who slew Sparmann that night--Sparmann, the Hollander, who sold himself to your country. I--I--alone did it--but he, this false witness, was there too. Not to slay Sparmann, but that man before you. I lost my hat there in the struggle with him whom I slew; it may be in that deserted house now. But no matter whether it be or not, I demand that you listen to me. I, at least, will speak the truth, since I neither heed nor fear what my fate may be."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Half an hour later Stuven's tale had been told; the Court knew that, no matter what else might weigh heavily against the Englishman, at least the murder of the Dutch spy in the pay of the French did not do so.

At once, after startling all in the *salle d'armes* by his frenzied outcry, Stuven had been bidden to narrate all the incidents of the night in question, while warned that it would be well to speak the absolute truth, since, though nothing could save him from his fate, that might at least save him from torture, from those awful instruments which lay upon the stone floor of the great hall.

But the warning had been received by the man with such scorn and contemptuous utterance that all present recognised that it might well have remained unuttered.

"The truth! My fate!" Stuven had cried from the spot to which he had now been dragged by the soldiers, a spot immediately facing his judges and near to Bevill. "Why should I lie? You have enough against this man already," glancing at Bevill, "to hang him; while, for that thing there," with a second glance at Francbois, "who would lie to save him? And, for my fate--bah! I regret it only that it will prevent me from slaying more renegades whom you and your country buy with your accursed gold."

"Tell what you know," De Violaine said sternly, "and make no reflections on us who hold you in our hands. We can do worse than slay you, should you merit it. Proceed."

Yet as the gallant Frenchman spoke, the loyalist who, in spite of his ruler's own evil-doing and tyranny, served that ruler as he had sworn to do long ere Louis had become the bitter oppressor of those of his own faith, knew that, in his heart, this fellow's rude, stern hatred of traitors and renegades, and those who employed them, was not amazing. Stuven might be, might have become almost, a demoniac in his patriotism and loyalty to the land that bare him, but at least he was noble in comparison with such as Francbois and, perhaps, with such as the dead traitor, Sparmann.

But now Stuven was speaking, partly in his Walloon *patois*, partly in some sort of French he had acquired--Heaven knew the opportunities had not been wanting during the last cycles of oppression and invasion of the Netherlands by France!--he was telling what he knew, what he had done in Holland's cause.

"It was," Stuven said now, his raw, bruised face bent forward towards the members of the Court, his eyes gleaming red as he spoke, his raucous voice made almost impressive by the intensity of his passion, "at St. Trond I first attempted to slay the spy--*ach!*" and he spat on the ground--"the traitor. At St. Trond where I learned who and what he was, by overhearing this man, this Englishman, tell another. And--and--I swore to kill him then--or later; some day, for sure. That night I failed, even though waiting for him, having him in my hand. I struck not deep enough, and, ere I could strike again, the patrol came by. I missed his heart by an inch or so; I--I had done no more than wound him in the shoulder. No matter, I told myself; I would not fail next time.

"Some of the patrol carried him to the Lutheran Spital; some chased me; one came so near that, with his pike, he tore my face, as your men have torn it again in capturing me," and Stuven laughed horribly. "But I knew the streets and alleys better than they--*I* was no stranger, no

invader, so I escaped them.

"Then for three weeks I waited. I worked no more; I watched only. None came out of the Spital, none went in, but I saw them. I begged at the gate--it was a good vantage place--I tried to get into the Spital to wait on the sick, to help bury, carry out the dead. Had I not failed in my desire I need not have waited so long."

At this the young Duc de Guise muttered to his neighbour, "This fellow should have lived in earlier days. For one's rival now--an enemy--our dearest foe--he would have been the man."

"Nay," that neighbour, an older, grey-headed officer, muttered back, "he would have been useless. His fire was for his country's enemy, for his own. As a hired bravado, a paid assassin, he would have lacked the necessary spark. A handful of crowns would have awakened nothing in him."

"He came out at last," Stuven went on, even as those two whispered together, "three weeks later. He found his horse at the inn where he had left it; he rode slowly, a wounded man--wounded by me--to Liége. But he never rode from me, out of my sight. We entered the gates close together; he found a lodging, I slept in the street outside it. Then--then--after I had tracked him for some days I knew that he was tracking another. And at last I knew it was this man here," and again Stuven's eyes were turned on Bevill. "If I could have warned you," he said now to the latter, "I would have done so, but I could not leave him and I never saw you except when he drew near to you.

"So it went on. Had he had time, I think he would have come to you and denounced him," and now the man looked at De Violaine, "but he had not. He rose early, went to his bed late; and he was wary. In dark streets at night he had his sword drawn beneath his cloak; once, too, he noticed me, and from that time he feared for his own life. I think he understood that I was the man who fell on him at St. Trond.

"But now the night was come, the night of the storm. We--it was always *we*--he intent on following this man, and I on following him--were on our road to that great white house. Since dark I had been near the Gouden Leeuw, and I saw this Englishman come forth, mount his horse and ride to the house. I saw him enter a postern gate, opening it with a key; it took him some time to help his horse through it. Then the gate was shut again.

"A few moments later Sparmann went round to the wall on the other side, and, finding another postern gate in that, took from his pocket a key and entered; but he did not shut the gate, desiring doubtless to leave the way clear to escape quickly if he needed to. Then I knew he had been there before, or had been well directed how to gain entrance. Also, I remembered that more than once I had seen him with a man who on one occasion handed him something. I thought then that it was money; now, on this night, I understood that it was the key that he was using. And the man was *this*----" Stuven added, his eyes on Francbois, the contempt of his voice as biting, as burning as the bite of vitriol on live flesh; the very gesture of his hand, as he indicated the other, blighting, withering, in its disdainful scorn.

And Francbois, trembling before his late judges and present warders, and white, too, as the dead within their shrouds, could only mutter "False, false, false--all false!"

"Since Sparmann had left the door open behind him, my way was clear," Stuven went on, ignoring Francbois' feeble moan. "Five minutes later I knew that he was creeping slowly up the back stairs, and I, my knife in hand, was near him. The storm was at its height; now and again the great hall was lit by the lightning, so, too, was the whole house; it penetrated even to where he was, where I was, too. And now I knew that he feared something. The lightning showed me his backward glance, the glare of fear in his eyes, the look of the rat hunted through the streets by dogs. I guessed that he knew there was someone--something--near him that threatened danger. It may be that he thought it was this Englishman; or, also, he may have feared that it was I, the man who had failed once, but would never fail again."

"It will be bad," the Duc de Guise muttered, brushing his jewelled fingers across his forehead, "if all Louis' enemies are like this, all who are opposed to us!"

And again the old grey-haired soldier answered him, saying, "Be at peace, monseigneur. The man he tracked was his country's betrayer; he is not the enemy of Louis or of us."

"Sparmann," Stuven continued, "had reached a room at the end of the corridor; I was behind its open door, observing him through the chink beneath its hinges. And again the lightning played, and I saw that he was standing at the open window regarding something outside the balcony of that window. It was the head of a ladder that rose above the ledge some foot or more. And I heard him whisper to himself 'Can it be Bracton has come this way; I do fear he lurks near. I--I--ah! he will slay me.' While saying this he turned and made for the door to flee the room. As he so left, I, from my place behind that door, drove my knife deep into his breast, even as I whispered in his ear 'Traitor; renegade, foul, apostate!' and slashed at him again, missing him, but striking, I think, his arm or hand. Then, as he staggered down a great balcony round the hall, I knew that it was time for me to go, and that the ladder outside was my road.

"The wind of the storm had closed the door noisily, heavily, as he passed out; the noise

reverberated through the empty house; opening the door now, I rushed to the window. As I did so I saw the ladder head slowly sliding to one side, and I knew that it was being removed from its position against the balcony. And I leant over the ledge to see who was this third man who had been in the room, believing I should see this Englishman. But it was not he, but that other one, that traitor to you and your country," and again Stuven's finger pointed with scorn at Francbois. "And he saw me, but, in his turn, since the night was black and dark, thought I was the Englishman. Whereon he hissed, addressing me by some name I did not comprehend, 'So, so! English spy, English brigand, you add midnight murder to other things, here in the house of the woman you and I both love, the woman who--malediction on her!--loves you. I have you now--you! you!--the murderer of those in the service of France. You will never leave Liége alive!"

As Stuven reached this portion of his narrative, which was in absolute fact the end of it, since none cared to hear, or he to tell, of how he had left the house on the other side of it, losing his hat in the hurry of his flight, there came to his ears the sound of a thud, a heavy fall. Looking round, as did also Bevill, while the members of the Court of Inquiry and the soldiers could see what had happened, he perceived that Francbois had fallen in a swoon to the floor. What he had heard from this man's lips was, in truth, sufficient to cause him to swoon, since it was now proved that one of his principal charges against Bracton was false; though, had he known that against his enemy there still remained a graver charge than all--namely, of being in correspondence with one of the most bitter enemies of France--his agony of mind might not have been so great. For though Francbois could not hope that there remained the thousandth portion of a chance for his own life, the rendering up of that life might have been less bitter had he been certain that, with his existence, his enemy's would likewise be forfeited. Also, the sweetness of vengeance was lost to Francbois if, in death, that enemy should fail to recognise that it was to him he owed it.

Had the wretch but retained his faculties some moments longer, or, instead of being borne out of the *salle d'armes* by the men in whose custody he was, had he been allowed to lie until he regained his senses--as he shortly did when removed--some of the wild delirium of fulfilled revenge would have been his.

Now that Stuven had told his story, of the truth of which no person present had entertained a doubt, De Violaine addressed Bevill, saying:

"That you are innocent of the murder of that wretched man who was in the service of France, of the King," and he and the Duke touched their hats while the others bowed as he mentioned their august ruler, "the Court allows. But of the other charges it is not easy to acquit you. You entered a city invested by us under false names, bearing false papers; you endeavoured to leave the city, while also endeavouring to remove from it a woman who by our orders--orders common in war--was not to quit it. Also a letter has been found on you from your countryman, Lord Peterborough, in which he tells you he hopes soon to take part in this war against us, and bids you, at the same time, observe carefully our strength and the disposition of our forces, and to communicate with him thereupon. You have been a soldier in your own country's service, you have fought against France in the time of your late King, therefore you know the laws of war. You know, too, what action the present commander of the English forces would take if he discovered a Frenchman in the position in which you have placed yourself."

As De Violaine ceased his eyes were not removed from Bevill's face, wherefore the latter, taking this as an intimation that if he desired to speak this was the time, said:

"To what you say, Monsieur le Gouverneur, my answer must be brief, since, in truth, I have but little answer to make. Yet I crave hearing for my words. I am one who was cast out of his country's service because he avenged the insults uttered against it by that dead spy, Sparmann. When once more your country and mine were at war, I sought fresh service in the field, yet, being but a broken man, it needed to obtain that employment that I should bring myself before the eyes of those who might bestow it on me. A chance arose; I deemed it Heaven-sent. The woman whom now I love with my whole heart and soul, whose image is enshrined in my heart, and will be ever there till my last hour is told, was here. I thought I saw the chance, and snatched at it as one that might make me a soldier again. You, to whom I speak, are all soldiers; had your case been mine, had the chance come to you to reinstate yourselves, would you have refused to do so? Enough of this.

"And the rest is soon answered. I am no spy. Had I escaped from here with her whom I love, no word of your plans and dispositions should have ever passed, not even though Peterborough had bade me speak and divulge all; though he had told me that on my utterance all my future hopes rested. As for the passports, listen, messieurs, I beg. I loathed landing under an assumed name on the soil acquired by you; had it been possible, I would have come in plume and corselet, as once I came against you when an English cuirassier. But that was not possible, while as for the second papers--ah, well! there was no other way. That unhappy man now dead would have avenged my honourable defeat of him--one given face to face, by man to man--by himself denouncing me behind my back in his new shape of spy, of informer; he who had been our ally, the countryman of our King! In Antwerp, in St. Trond, he would have done so; also in Liége, had not this man whom you have heard slain him. Messieurs, there is no more. I have been what you are all. I have faced death before; it will not fright me now, much though I desire to live." And beneath his breath Bevill added, "For her."

He ceased, and, in ceasing, knew that in his few, quietly spoken words he had better pleaded

his cause than if he had uttered one word for mercy. For though the eyes of all his judges had never left his face, they had been grave, but not hostile. He knew--he felt--that, had there existed no absolute code by which they were forced to condemn him for that which he had done, there would be no condemnation. But still there was the code, as he had known from the moment when Peterborough had first opened to him the matter of his quest for Sylvia; from the moment he set out upon his enterprise.

The heads of the members of the Court were close together now; the registrar was reading a paper to them he had written; a moment later the paper and a pen were handed to the Duc de Guise, who, although the highest in position, was the lowest in military rank, and was therefore to sign first.

For a moment this young man of superb lineage, though a lineage on which there rested, as it had rested for more than a century, so dark and awful a blot, sat gazing at the paper before him while biting the feather of the pen; then he said, or asked:

"The prisoner is a Protestant?"

"He is," De Violaine answered, gazing astonished at him.

"I will not sign," the Duke said, throwing down the pen.

"Monseigneur!"

"'I will not sign,' the Duke said, throwing down the pen."--*p.* 1034.

"No, I will not sign. We," and the Duke's hand caught the lace at his breast in its grasp, as though its owner were stirred by some internal agitation, "we--ah!--we of our line have testified in the past all that we have felt towards those of his faith. I will not have it said that another Guise should sign the finding of this Court against a man whom he respects, no matter how much that man has erred, because he is a Protestant."

"I, too, respect him," De Violaine said, even as he laid his hand, unseen by the others, upon the young Duke's and pressed it. "But I myself am a Protestant, and also the President of this inquiry. Yet I shall sign. Neither will I have it said that, being of the prisoner's faith, I used that bond between us to shield him from the punishment he has brought on his own head."

CHAPTER XXXII.

To die. That was the sentence, awaiting only confirmation from Tallard to be at once carried into effect. To die--though, because he had once been that which his judges were now, because the "one touch of nature" had made these French soldiers and that English soldier kin; because, too, his quiet, manly bearing, his restraint from all plea for mercy, had touched the hearts of those who sentenced him--not by the rope, but by the hands of soldiers. Not to be hanged, as Francbois and Stuven were to be, but to be shot as he stood upright before a platoon of soldiers; his eyes unbandaged, so that he might look them and the death they dealt him as straight in the face as he had often before looked the enemy and death.

Also, it may be, the hearts of those judges had been softened to this extent by the avowal of his love for the stately, beautiful woman whom some of them--De Guise, De Violaine, D'Aubignay--had seen; whom these, at least, had heard cry "I love him, I love him, I love him!" Remembering that cry of Sylvia's, remembering how in that moment, so fraught with evil to both their destinies, the girl had cast aside all sense of mock diffidence, and how nobly she had avowed her love while recognising that, in doing so, no reproach of want of reserve could come anigh her, De Violaine, as he signed the finding of the Court over which he had presided, muttered to himself:

"To have heard Radegonde thus proclaim her love for me would have caused this sentence to fall harmless. Harmless! Nay, rather, welcome."

While, as for De Guise, duke and peer of France though he might be, with, in his veins, the old illustrious blood of Lorraine and Burgundy--what would he not have given to hear one woman utter that cry on his behalf from the depths of her heart? He who might, doubtless, obtain such avowals from many a nobly born woman hovering round the garish, bizarre Court of the great King, yet would, in doing so, scarce be able to bring himself to believe in the truth of even one of them.

Some days had passed since Bevill had heard his doom pronounced by De Violaine in a voice full of emotion; days in which he had stood, sometimes for hours together, at the window of the great cell, which was in truth a room, gazing across the town. Across the town, since the citadel was built on the brow of a hill that overhung it, to where, perhaps, he dreamt that, even at the last moment, succour might be expected to come. For though he did not know that the Comtesse de Valorme and Sylvia had by now contrived to escape out of Liége, he knew that this was the direction in which Marlborough must be; that, if there was any hope to be looked for, it was thence it must arrive. Yet he knew, too, that, if it came, also must it come swiftly.

"De Violaine said," he had told himself a hundred times, "that the finding of the Court would be sent at once to the Marshal Tallard for his approval. Ah, well! the time will not be long. With Marlborough as near as he must be by now, Tallard cannot be far away. Whispers filter even through these prison walls; the soldiers amongst whom I am allowed to walk below, and to get the air, are gloomy and depressed. Also, I have caught ere now the name of Venloo on their lips. If Venloo has fallen, then Liége will be the next. It will be its turn. But mine!" Bevill would add, with almost the shadow of a smile upon his face, "will my turn come first?"

"And she, my sweet, my love," he would continue. "What of her? Where is she, what is she doing? Yet why ask, why ponder? She is dreaming, musing, thinking of me now, I know; pitying my fate--it may be endeavouring in some way to avert it. Ah! Sylvia, Sylvia, if ere I go from out this world we might stand face to face again; if I might look once more into those fond, pure eyes, and read therein the love that I must part with, leave behind, death would not seem so bitter and parting be lighter sorrow than I deem it now."

Yet even as he spoke he chided himself for his consideration of himself alone; for thinking only of the love that he, going out into the darkness, must leave behind, not of the one left behind in a deeper, because a living, darkness.

As thus he mused one morning by the spot at the window at which he always stood while these, or similar, reflections occupied his mind, he heard the great bunch of keys in the possession of one of the soldier-gaolers rattling outside, and a moment later heard his cell being unlocked. Knowing that this was not the time for the man to visit him, either to bring food or to take him forth to walk in the courtyard of the citadel, he wondered who might be coming, and, with a leap at his heart, a quick bound of hope, wondered also if it were she who might have obtained admission to him.

A moment later De Violaine entered the room, and again Bevill's heart leapt within him, since he could suppose that this visit must bode but one thing, the announcement of the hour fixed for his execution. Wherefore he murmured to himself:

"Be brave. Fear naught. Remember 'tis but a dozen bullets. What are they to one who has faced thousands?"

If, however, the Governor of the citadel had come with any such intention as that which Bevill supposed, he at least did not declare it at once. Instead, he asked his prisoner if, so far as might be, he had been well attended and treated well.

"I have no complaint to urge," Bevill replied, "even if one placed as I am might venture to do

so." Then, bracing himself to that which was nearest to, was never out of, his heart, he said: "Yet, monsieur, I may, perhaps, ask of you a question I might scarce put to those who have me in their charge." Then, seeing that De Violaine showed no signs of dissent, he continued: "I would fain know how it is with her--the woman whose affianced husband I am, and shall be while life remains. Also, if all is well with that noble lady the Comtesse de Valorme."

"I have seen neither of them since your appearance before the Court of Inquiry."

"Yet you were the friend of one of them at least--of Madame la Comtesse."

"Yes, of Madame la Comtesse--once."

"If--if--" Bevill said, while observing the hesitation in the other's words, the pause before that last word "once"--"if my doom is not close at hand, if still there remains even one day, some few hours, to me of life in this world, I would fain crave a boon at your hands, make one request. Ah! if it might be granted it would make my parting with life easier; it may be she would better be able to bear our eternal separation."

"What is it you desire?" De Violaine asked in a low voice, his eyes fixed on the other.

"To see her once again. To bid her one last farewell, to hold her in my arms for the first and last time. You know, you must know, that our love grew from out this attempt for which I am now to suffer; that, even as the knowledge came to both our hearts that the love was there, so, too, the parting, the end was at hand. Ah! if to you the love for a woman has ever come, if it has ever so fortuned that you should love and lose----"

"It is impossible!" De Violaine interrupted, his voice at war with his features. For, though there seemed to be a harshness in the former, there were tears in the latter. And Bevill, hearing the harshness even as he saw the tears, was amazed--staggered, too, as he showed while repeating the word "Impossible."

"Ay. They are not here. Not in Liége. They have left--evaded--the city."

"Left! Gone!"

"Yes. Doubtless you of all others best know whither."

"I know nothing."

"You knew where they would go when you sought to accompany them. You can have little doubt where they are gone without you."

To say now that he did not know, that he could not conceive which way those two women had for certain directed their steps would, Bevill recognised, be but to add one more equivocation, one more evasion of the absolute truth, to those he had been obliged to perpetrate in his desire to escape with Sylvia from Liége. But now--and if he could welcome the perilous position in which he stood he was almost brought to do so by De Violaine's last utterance--equivocations, evasions, were no longer necessary. Henceforth, since he had failed and Sylvia had escaped from Liége, and also was undoubtedly either with the English or some portion of the Allies, he need never again utter one word that was not absolutely a true one. He had failed in that which he had undertaken, yet, he thanked God, that failure mattered not. Out of it had at least come the escape of her he loved.

He stood, therefore, before De Violaine neither asserting nor denying the last words of the other; while that other, observing the calm frankness of his manner, thought that, should there be any future before this man, should he and the woman he loved ever come by any chance together, how proud, how happy in her possession of him, should that woman be.

A moment later he said, perhaps as though desirous of answering his own suggestion, perhaps of showing his prisoner that he, too, was under no doubt of where Sylvia and her friend--the one a woman the prisoner loved, the other the woman he loved--were.

"Doubtless," he said, "they are not very far. Venloo has fallen," and De Violaine sighed as he told of one more defeat to his country.

"To Marlborough!"

"To the Allies at least. Marlborough draws near. Yet Liége may not fall so easy a prey to him as other of these towns and cities have done. If Tallard returns from the Rhine, if Boufflers but succours us--ah! England cannot win for ever!"

"The time is almost past," Bevill said now, and even as his words fell from him the noble heart of De Violaine, the heart of the man who held this other in his grasp, was full of pity and compassion; "the time is almost past when it matters for me whether Marlborough or Tallard reaches Liége first, whether England or France wins at last. My day is almost done. But to go leaving her behind, unmarried yet widowed, since no other man will ever win the love she gave to me; to leave her to a long life cheerless and blank! Ah! ah!" he murmured, breaking off, "I dare not, must not think of that," while, his manly stoicism giving way, he turned his back on the other

so that he should not see his face, and moved towards the deep embrasure of the window.

As he did so De Violaine, observing Bevill's emotion, his poignant grief, stood for a moment looking at him. Then, some feeling stronger than a soldier's duty, a soldier's necessary harshness towards a prisoner, an enemy, one taken as Bevill had been taken, under a false name and bearing false papers, stirred him deeply. They were no longer, he felt, captor and captive, French soldier or English, but man and man. Advancing towards the embrasure, yet hesitating ere he did so, De Violaine placed his hand on Bevill's sleeve.

"Be cheered," he said, impelled to do that which his humanity, in contradistinction to his duty, prompted him towards. "Be cheered. Until either De Boufflers or Tallard comes, the warrant for your--your--for the end--cannot be made. The finding of the Court cannot be carried out. And there is another chance, a hope for you. At Nimeguen the English hold a prisoner of our side who is to suffer for doing that which you have done."

"Ah! if they should spare him."

"If Marlborough has not signed his warrant, and almost I doubt it, seeing that day by day he places a greater distance between him and that city, there is a possibility of an exchange; while until Tallard returns here he cannot sign. No messenger from us can reach him now, since, Heaven help us! an iron ring is round us. Also, it may be, Tallard cannot fight his way here. Even though the worst befalls you, your fate is not yet."

"But still prolonged, still in the balance! Ah! if she were here," Bevill said again.

"She is not. She and Ra--Madame de Valorme--have taken their own way--have placed leagues between them and this place. If she were here, she should see you."

After which, as though feeling that he had said more than became the Governor of this fortress, and of others in the city, who held in his hands a prisoner belonging to the enemy, De Violaine went towards the door. Arrived at it, however, he paused, and looked back while saying:

"Whatever faults you have committed against France, there was not one of those who judged you a week ago who did not sympathise with, nay pity, you. You heard the noble reason De Guise gave for not signing; the reason I gave for signing. And of the others--some of them worn veterans who have crossed swords with those of England scores of times--all acquitted you in their hearts, even while, in duty, condemning you. Tallard will be no harder than they, provided ever that Marlborough has himself been merciful to De Cabrieres, the prisoner whose fault is as yours."

"All sympathised with, all pitied me," Bevill said to himself when De Violaine was gone. "Even though they condemned me as they did so. Ah! well, I must bear my lot whate'er befall. I knew the chances and faced them ere I left England; they have gone against me--let me face that, too."

"Yet," he continued to muse, "'twas strange that the one from whom the Comtesse de Valorme feared the worst might come--De Guise--should have been the only one who refused to sign my condemnation."

But now, as ever, his thoughts wandered from any fate, good or bad, that hovered over him to what she, his love, was doing, to where she might be. And in those thoughts there was always one surety strong and triumphant over all the rest. The thought, the certainty, that his image was never absent from her heart, the confidence that, since she had escaped out of Liége, the escape had only been made with a view to endeavouring to obtain succour for him.

Though whether that endeavour, wild, almost hopeless as it must be, could meet with success was more than he dared dream of.

"I am in God's hand," he murmured. "In God alone I must put my trust."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

October had come by now, Marlborough's camp was at Sutendal, and the army was but waiting to receive the latest information as to the disposal of the French round Liége to throw their pontoons across the river Jaar, and, after crossing, to march in two columns on that city. Venloo was taken, so, too, were Ruremond and Stevenswaert; the Earl, to use his own words, had now but one enemy between him and Liége--the weather.

Meanwhile, there had passed between Marlborough and Le Maréchal de Boufflers some of those courteous epistles which, at that time, it was customary for the principal commanders of hostile forces to indite to each other. Cartels, as they were then termed, in which the one would inform the other that he had so many prisoners in his hands whom he desired to exchange for some of his own men who might happen to be in the hands of his adversary, and that he would be obliged by the consent of the other being given. In one of the most recent of these, Marlborough had stated briefly the case of Bevill Bracton, while making comparisons between it and that of the Marquis de Cabrieres, and had informed the French commander that he was willing to exchange the latter gentleman against his own countryman, now a prisoner in Liége.

To this there had been returned an answer by De Boufflers in which he stated that, with regard to the ordinary prisoners in his and Marlborough's hands, the exchange should be willingly made, but that a regards the Englishman now a prisoner at Liége it was not in his power to do anything. The decision, he continued, rested with M. Tallard, who was at the moment near Bonn, although De Boufflers added that, if it were possible for him to communicate with Liége, he, as supreme commander of the French army of the Netherlands, would send orders that, presuming the English prisoner had not been already found guilty and executed, the execution should be delayed.

"This is, perhaps, no very satisfying news," the Earl of Marlborough said, when, after having received this letter from his adversary, he proceeded to a tent near his own pavilion in which the Comtesse de Valorme and Sylvia were installed. Nor were they the only women present in this camp, since, wherever an army definitely halted for any length of time, there always appeared on the scene the wives and daughters of the local peasantry intent on selling any provisions and drink they might chance to be possessed of. Also, they were always willing to hire out their services in washing and mending, attending to the sick and wounded, and, sometimes, if they were of the worst species, of robbing the latter. But in the case of Sylvia and the Comtesse, an honest, respectable creature had been found at Asch who acted as general maid to both, and, when the camp was removed to Sutendal some few miles off, was willing to accompany them in that capacity.

"Yet, my lord," Sylvia said, in answer to the Earl's remark, "at least it is something. Except for those last awful words, 'if the prisoner has not yet been found guilty and executed,' there is much hope in the letter. Le Maréchal de Boufflers says if he could communicate with Liége he would send orders for delay."

"That, however," the Earl replied, "it is impossible for him to do. We are between him and Liége, and another portion of our forces is between M. Tallard and Liége. In no way can that letter reach the Governor."

"Therefore," said the Comtesse, "neither can the warrant, which your Lordship says would undoubtedly have to be signed by one of these two generals, reach him either. If one of the enemy, bearing that which will save Bevill Bracton, cannot reach M. de Violaine, how is it possible for the warrant to reach M. Tallard, and how be returned?"

"That is indeed true," Marlborough said reflectively. "While, for our army, we cannot invest Liége yet. We must wait for our reinforcements. And even at the last moment, when the men of the garrison find themselves attacked by us, they might proceed to the extreme. Or--" but he paused. He would not repeat again that which must at least be as obvious to those women as to him, that which had been obvious to the Maréchal de Boufflers--the possibility of Bevill having been already found guilty and executed.

A moment later, however, the Earl added.

"'Tis pity--a thousand pities--we cannot yet advance on Liége or communicate with the Governor--reach his ear somehow. For this reply from De Boufflers to me would be sufficient. With that letter from the Generalissimo of the French army in his hand, not even the signed warrant of Tallard could have effect."

"You cannot reach him, you cannot communicate with him, my lord!" Sylvia exclaimed, her whole body quivering with excitement as she spoke, her eyes glistening like stars. "You cannot reach him!"

"It is impossible. If I send forward a regiment they will be fallen upon, annihilated by some out of the thirty thousand troops that are near here; even an English regiment cannot fight half the army of France and Spain. Though," he added, "it is our curse to be always too self-vaunting and to believe we can perform superhuman feats."

"They will not annihilate me," Sylvia said. "What an English regiment cannot do an English woman hastening to save her lover can."

"You, Mistress Thorne! You!" Marlborough exclaimed, taken almost aback, if one so calm as he could by any means be startled. "You!"

"Yes, I. I reached here in safety. I can return."

"But you will be stopped; your reasons will be demanded. And--you may not fall into the hands

of French officers--of gentlemen. Their patrols, pickets, outposts, are commanded by sergeants and corporals. They are not always even French but, instead, Spanish, and mercenaries at that. Also they may not be able to read the Maréchal's letter, to understand----"

"They will understand what I tell them," Sylvia exclaimed, carried away by the excitement of her thoughts and desires. "That I, an Englishwoman, one who, after escaping out of Liége when her lover was to be tried for his life as a spy, was forced--by her love--to return to his side. And," she continued, "they, those French and Spanish who hate us English so dearly, will not thwart but rather assist me to re-enter the jaws of the trap. Only they will not know that in my possession will be that letter of their supreme commander; one that will o'erweigh even the orders of M. Tallard, should he have sent them. If," she added, almost hysterically, as her memory reverted to those written words of the French marshal, "it is not too late. If it is not--ah! Heaven grant it may not be."

"Sylvia threw herself weeping into the arms of the Comtesse."—*p.* 1176.

"Sylvia threw herself weeping into
the arms of the Comtesse."--*p.* 1176.

And Sylvia threw herself weeping into the arms of the Comtesse.

For a moment--only a moment--Marlborough's eyes rested on her even as, it may be, he thought that here was a woman whose love and heroism, whose loyalty to the man who had gained her heart, might match with the love and loyalty of the woman who was his own wife--the woman who, hated by many for her imperious nature and haughty spirit, was the most fond, proud wife whom any husband's arms had ever enfolded. The woman who, even while she teased and vexed him with her overbearing temper and violent disposition, loved him as deeply and fondly as the day when first they became lovers.

A moment later and when now Sylvia stood once more upright before him, he, taking her hand and raising it to his lips, said:

"It may not be that he shall perish. Mr. Bracton must live even to claim you for his bride. Therefore, your desire to return to Liége with the letter--it is a shrewd one, worthy of a woman's wit!--shall not be gainsaid. While, for the rest, you shall be accompanied some part of the way, 'Tis but a day's ride. Also," and now his voice sank a little lower so that the shrillness that was so often apparent in it was no longer perceptible, "if they permit that you should see him, your affianced husband----"

"Ah!" Sylvia said. "If--if I should see him! If--no! no!" she almost moaned. "I cannot say the words." But recovering herself a moment later, forcing herself to be valiant, she continued, "If he--is--still--alive it may be we shall become fellow prisoners. Once M. de Violaine has me in his keeping again he will give me no further chance of escape."

"Nor me," the Comtesse said. "In his stern sense of honour he will deem me a traitor. Though I am none to France but only to the King and 'her'--to the woman he has made his wife." For it was as "her" and "she" that all France spoke of the "dark and fatal woman," De Maintenon--all France, no matter of what faith, while at the same time refusing to accord her the title of Queen or the right to bear that title. De Maintenon who, born a Protestant, had now been for years the most cruel and vindictive oppressor of all Protestants.

"If it may be so," Marlborough continued; "say to him, I beg, that from the moment we meet again he shall become once more a soldier of the Queen. Even though he has not accomplished that which he set out to do, the attempt was gallant, was well worthy of reward."

"Heaven above bless you," Sylvia said, and now she held out her hand to Marlborough, while, as he took it and as, for a moment, his eyes scanned all the troubled beauty of her face, she added: "Henceforth, no matter what befall, in the prayers of a humble subject of that Queen her greatest subject shall be remembered. Farewell, my lord. I thank you from my heart."

"Not farewell. We shall meet again at Liége. We and one other--your future husband. I pray it may be so. Such noble bravery as yours cannot surely go unrewarded."

And now, ere departing, he turned from Sylvia to the Comtesse de Valorme, his manner to her equally full of the chivalrous courtesy which never failed him.

"Madame," he said, "ere you, too, depart with your friend, believe that, as I have already said, England is preparing to make the cause of those in the South of France hers. Already there are thousands of French Protestants who have found succour and shelter in our land; the Queen's intentions towards all of the Protestant religion cannot be doubted. The matter is already broached. The Council is deliberating on sending a fleet to the Mediterranean to succour those of your faith and ours. Rest assured, madame, nothing will be forgotten that can aid them."

As the Earl of Marlborough spoke, doubtless through the information he was regularly supplied with from England, so things occurred. Sir Cloudesley Shovel, the English admiral, did send the *Pembroke* and the *Tartar* to the Gulf of Narbonne with a view not only to supply the Camisards with money and arms and ammunition, but also to land men to assist them. But, when they arrived off the coast and made signals all night, there were none on shore who could comprehend them, for the simple reason that the French Protestant who had been sent by the Earl of Nottingham from London with the key to these signals, had been arrested before he could reach Cette, and his body was at the very time lying broken to pieces and mutilated on the wheel at Aigues-Mortes. Later, but unhappily much later, the peace that was patched up between Louis and his Protestant subjects came about not by the force of arms but by the humanity of a French general, De Villars.

But neither the Comtesse de Valorme nor the Earl of Marlborough could look into the glass of Time or tell what seeds should grow and what should not, and, consequently, if the former did not set out with Sylvia with her heart thoroughly at ease, at least that heart was full of hope. Hope that those of her faith might at last be free from the miseries they had endured so long; from the burnings, the wheels and dungeons, the gallows formed by their own fruit trees, the deaths from starvation of their old parents and helpless children, the galleys and the forced exile to stranger lands.

And also, she set out with one other great, one supreme hope in her heart for the immediate future. The hope, coupled with a prayer that she and Sylvia might be in time to save Bevill from the fate that still must threaten him, if already the worst had not befallen--the prayer that, at last, he and Sylvia might be happy.

"For," she told herself again as she had done many times before, "they love each other. Let my happiness in this world be to see their happiness; my greatest hope never to lose hope that they may yet be united, since, for me, there can never be any other," and, as these thoughts passed through her mind, the tears fell from her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

As the night fell over Liége, a night sombre and dark, and with no stars beginning to twinkle above, Bevill Bracton turned away from his accustomed place at the embrasure of the room that was his prison, while wondering how many more days and nights would pass over his head ere he left this place for freedom--of one kind or another. For the days had followed each other in weary rotation--he had, indeed, lost count of them now, and, except for the continuous clanging of all

the bells on Sundays, and a question sometimes asked of the warder who brought his meals, he scarce recollected what period of each week he had arrived at. Nay, more, except that he had rigorously forced himself to scratch a mark each day with his nail on the rough, whitewashed wall, he could not have told whether he had been there a month or two months. There was nothing but the absence of the swallows that had built under the eaves, the deepening of the russet on the leaves of the trees outside, and then the fall of the leaves, the increasing chill of the room in which he had been so long incarcerated and the shortening of the days, to tell him of the progress of time.

De Violaine had come to him no more. He had been left entirely to himself, except for the visits of that one man, the soldier, who acted as his gaoler.

Nor did he see or hear aught outside that could relieve the weariness of his existence. Alone, morning after morning, he observed the soldiers driving up the mules laden with bread and vegetables for the supply of all in the Citadel, while, also, morning after morning, he perceived that the loads on the backs of the animals became more scanty and that the peasants, who came with their baskets when he was first brought here, came no more now. Whereby he knew that, gradually, the provisions of the locality were giving out, or that--and each morning and night he prayed it might be so--the Allies must be drawing closer and closer round the French lines, and that either they or his own countrymen were approaching. For a week now he had also noticed that the rations brought to him had become more and more scanty, and that, when his gaoler had placed them before him he had done so with a surly look which might have been intended for an apology for their meagreness, or, on the other hand, as one intended to suggest that, at this time, the fewer unnecessary mouths there were to feed the better for the others. Not knowing, however, what the man's looks might truly mean, he made no observation on the sparseness of the meals now supplied him, to which, in absolute fact, he was utterly indifferent.

As, however, on this dark, early autumn night Bevill turned away from the deep window to cast himself on his pallet, neither bedclothes nor light having ever been supplied him since his detention, he heard voices speaking below on the stone courtyard which was between the wall of the fortress itself and the gate known as the Porte de la Ville. And not only did he hear those voices, but, on turning his eyes back towards the window, he saw the reflection of some light cast upon the upper part of the embrasure. A moment later, and even before he could return to the window to glance below, he heard the sound of planks and boards being cast down upon the stones.

"The Allies must be near," he whispered to himself, "very near. And their presence is known. Some further protection against them is about to be undertaken, something is to be erected, perhaps to shield or obscure the defenders. Some mantlets, it may be."

Then, his heart stirred, his pulses beating at the hopes that had sprung to his breast; the hopes that even now, at the eleventh hour, the chance of escape, of rescue, was at hand, Bevill glanced towards the stone courtyard again.

The soldiers below were, he saw, undoubtedly about to raise some erection with the planks and boards they had brought into the courtyard. Yet, to the mind of the prisoner above, who, in his time, had not only taken part in sieges but had himself on more than one occasion been besieged in some strong fortress or town of the Netherlands, it did not appear that either mantlet or temporary shield against sharpshooters of the enemy was about to be erected.

Instead, four large stones, each forming the corner of a square, had been removed from the earth below, and easily removed, too, as though this was not the first time they had been subjected to the process.

A moment later, in the spots those stones had occupied four short posts had taken their place, while, next, two other stones were removed in the middle of the square space. A second later a platform, itself a square of about eight feet, had been lifted on to the top of those posts and was being nailed down to them at each corner.

"I misdoubt me of what it is they do," Bevill murmured to himself as he saw this, while now the warm glow, the throb, the tremor of happy anticipation that had sprung to his heart but a few moments ago ebbed from it, leaving in its place a chill as of ice, one that he thought must be as the chill of death.

"Ah!" he gasped now. "Ah! It is so. That tells all."

For the soldiers, still working steadily below, had lifted first one piece of framework and then another--two long posts that, in their way, resembled signal posts at crossroads--on to the wooden platform, had thrust the lower ends through it into the two holes last left empty, and had gradually fitted them into the vacant spaces.

As now those things stood there towering some eight feet above the platform, he almost reeled back into the embrasure. For it needed nothing more, it needed no rope thrown over the cross-beams that, illumined alone in the dusky light by the flare of the torches which burnt flickeringly in the night air, seemed like some ghastly hands pointing the sombre road to death--to tell him that they were gibbets awaiting their victims.

"The hour is at hand," he whispered. "At dawn to-morrow if not now, I--" then suddenly he paused. "No, no," he exclaimed a moment later. "Not I! Neither of them is for me. My hour is not yet. They are for those others--Francbois, Stuven. My death is to be more noble or, at least, less ignominious. 'Tis true. There is still a chance for me--a chance for life. For her. For our love and happiness together."

Yet in an instant Bevill knew that he had spoken too soon.

As still he gazed below, fascinated by the sight of those awful, hideous things, he saw the man who was in command of this party, a sergeant of the dragoons of Risbourg, look round the courtyard as though in search of something. Next, he saw him advance towards the farther wall, while evidently counting his footsteps as he did so. Then, having touched the wall, he recounted them backwards, stopped two paces short of the spot whence he had before started, and, taking a chisel out of the hand of one of the others, stooped down and scratched a long line on the stones. After which he returned to the wall, made some other rough scratchings on it at about the height of a man's head, and, pointing his hand at the mark on the stones and afterwards at that on the wall, said something to the soldier which, naturally, Bevill could not hear.

Not hear! Nay, what hearing was necessary--to him, a soldier; to him who had ere now seen the place marked out where a condemned man was to stand while, at another place, the spot was marked where the platoon that should despatch him was to be drawn up! A million words uttered trumpet-tongued could have told him no more than those significant actions of the dragoon had done.

Now that Bevill knew the worst all tremors, all trepidations were gone, even as every warm glow of hope was gone too. The end was close at hand, and he knew it. Therefore, all bitterness was past. He was a soldier, he told himself, an Englishman who had faced thousands of bullets: a dozen could not fright him now.

Calmly, as though watching curiously the actions of strangers who interested him but disturbed him not at all, he leant against the window frame looking down at the preparations for his death and that of the others. Counting indifferently, too, the distance between the scratches on the stones and those on the wall, and endeavouring to decide whether the muzzles of the muskets would be fourteen or sixteen paces from his heart as the soldiers presented them!

Then, suddenly, he saw the men below draw themselves up stiffly to an attitude of attention, and perceived that De Violaine, enveloped in a long blue cavalry cloak, had entered the courtyard, and was regarding the scaffold. Also, he appeared to be giving some directions about one of the gallows supports, judging by the manner in which he pointed with his gloved hand to it and by the fact that, a moment later, one of the men mounted the scaffold and began to make the post more firm in the socket below it. Next, De Violaine gazed at the marks on the stones and on the wall, after which he shrugged his shoulders, said a word to the sergeant, and turned away and left the place. The moment he was gone Bevill saw that the soldiers had gathered round the sergeant and seemed to be asking him questions, and that they all gesticulated earnestly.

"It will be to-morrow, at dawn," he said to himself as he saw the men retiring with the almost burnt-out torches in their hands, leaving the courtyard in darkness. "To-morrow. Ah! I have still six hours or so left," as now he heard the clock of St. Lambert boom out ten over the city--the clock he had grown so accustomed to listening to--and listening for--during his long period of imprisonment. "Six hours in which to make my peace with God, to humbly fit myself to go before Him. Hours in which to pray for her who sits at home wondering what may have befallen me and whether I live or am dead and gone before her."

For now, as his hour of death drew near, his thoughts turned not to the girl whom he had but lately known and learnt to love, but to his grey-haired mother whose love had been his from the moment of his birth; at whose knees he had learned to lisp his first prayer.

Yet still there was not absent from his mind the stately form, the beautiful face of Sylvia--the latter ever present to him as he had seen it last--bedashed with tears and piteous in its sorrow. Of her he could think, too, and would think as the order to the platoon was given, as the flints fell, and, a second later, the bullets found his heart.

"Sylvia! Mother!" he murmured. "The two I had in the world to love me and to love; the two who will mourn my end. The one but for a short time, since now she is grown old and feeble; but the other--ah! God, it may be for years."

In the darkness he had reached his pallet, intent on casting himself on his knees by it and so passing his last few hours--later, there would be a long sleep!--when he heard a sound he had grown well accustomed to in the last few weeks--the sound of a soldier's tread, of the keys jangling in his hand as he came on.

"Is it now?" Bevill whispered. "Now? At once? If so, be brave. A soldier. And--remember. Their names the last upon your lips, their memories the last in your thoughts."

A moment later the key grated in the lock, the door was opened, and a soldier bearing a flambeau came in accompanied by De Violaine.

"Set down the light," the latter said, "place it in the socket and leave us." After which, and when the man was gone, De Violaine advanced towards where Bevill stood and said quietly, yet while seeming to brace himself to speak:

"Means were found to communicate with M. Tallard."

"Ah!"

"To summon him to our assistance. He has not come, but----"

"I understand," Bevill said, instantly, divining the remainder of what the other would say; "I have seen the preparations made below. The warrants are signed. Is it?" he asked calmly, "to be now or at dawn?"

"It had to be done, no matter what pity, what sympathy you aroused. In the position that all who judged you stood, they had to be inflexible in their honour, in their duty."

"I need hear no more. Yet, my time is short. I would spend it alone."

"Do not misunderstand me. The warrants are signed but a message has come from--from De Boufflers--that overrides those warrants. A message has been brought by a swift, a willing messenger--one who would speak with you."

Utterly bewildered, yet with once more that mad rush of joy to his heart as he comprehended that the Marshal's message nullified the signed warrant of his subordinate; that, for a time at least, his life was safe, Bevill could scarcely understand clearly De Violaine's latter words, nor, as a matter of fact, his halting manner and strange agitation. Yet one thing alone he did understand, namely, that De Violaine seemed to suppose some self-extenuation to be necessary in regard to the inflexibility of which he had spoken--an extenuation for which, in truth, Bevill himself saw no occasion, remembering De Violaine's position and the position in which he, by his own actions, had placed himself.

But now he found his voice; his words fell pell-mell over each other as he said:

"I am bewildered. I--I--the suddenness of this reprieve, even though it be no more, has dulled my senses. I cannot understand. A messenger here from Le Maréchal de Boufflers--to me--a condemned spy! Brought by a swift, a willing messenger."

"A messenger, now a prisoner like yourself!"

"In mercy, I beseech you explain--" But he stopped. For, even as De Violaine uttered these last words, he went towards the door and returned a moment later, leading a woman by the hand--a woman who was wrapped in a long *houppelande*, or lady's riding cloak, but who, since the furred hood was thrown back from her face, was a moment later clasped to Bevill's heart.

* * * * * * *

"I am in time. Thank God, thank God," Sylvia had said again and again after that fond embrace, and when now they were alone, or comparatively alone, since De Violaine had departed as those two met, though leaving the turnkey outside in the corridor and also leaving the door open--open because, it may be, of what he knew was now going on outside the city. Because, if all happened as he feared, those locked within the cells or rooms of that Citadel would soon have very little chance of leaving them alive. Marlborough was within three miles of Liége; already the magistracy and the commissioners of the Cathedral chapter were arranging to deliver up the city to him, and St. Walburgh had been set on fire by the French garrison. Already, too, De Violaine had been summoned by the advance portion of Marlborough's army to surrender, but had replied that "it would be time enough to consider that when their provisions were exhausted, six weeks hence."

"My love, my love," Sylvia murmured. "I have saved you--you who would have died to save me--you who strove so valiantly."

"And failed! Yet did not fail either, since are not you, my sweet, the gain of a loss?"

"Also another reward is yours. Lord Marlborough restores you to the life you covet, the life that I would have you lead, except only for one thing."

"One thing. What, Sylvia?"

"That, following this life, I must part from you; must let you go from my side. You whom I would have ever near to me, you from whom I would never part more, you whom I love with my whole heart and soul."

CHAPTER XXXV.

The suburb of St. Walburgh was in flames, the French soldiers, consisting of twelve battalions who had been stationed there, had come into the Citadel and the Chartreuse. A hundred houses had been set on fire by them, and, ere dawn came, all that part of Liége was as light as day. The magistracy and the chapter against whom no orders, even if they had been issued, could have had any effect since now the gates were neglected by the French, had visited Marlborough in his camp outside, and had signed articles as to the disposition of the city and all in it, while three English battalions under Lord Cutts, and three Dutch, held the North gate and endeavoured to keep order in the streets. It only remained now that the artillery should arrive, the fascines be cut and the trenches opened for the Citadel and Chartreuse to be attacked, unless those within them surrendered.

Inside that room in which Bevill had passed so many weary days, waiting to meet the doom that had been pronounced on him, there were now three prisoners, namely, he who had so long occupied it, the woman he loved so tenderly, and the Comtesse de Valorme. For she, too, had been detained by De Violaine in consequence of her having escaped with Sylvia out of Liége, and placed herself in communication with the enemy. Inflexible to the last, strong in his duty towards the interests of the country he loved and the King whom he despised, he had done that which honour demanded and made prisoners of both women.

"Yet," he said bitterly to the Comtesse, as he informed her of what must be done, "be cheered. Our positions must soon be reversed. The old walls of this Citadel and of the Chartreuse will not long resist the battering pieces and mortars, or the double grenades, that the Earl of Marlborough is known to have with him, and then--well, then!--you will be free. I shall be the prisoner."

"At least," Sylvia, who had heard his words, said, "you will be a noble one--noble as I shall ever esteem you, though now I know that your hand signed the condemnation of my lover; that in your stern, rigid sense of honour you found the means of communicating with M. Tallard, of obtaining his confirmation of the sentence. Ah!" she continued, "that one so loyal as you should serve so evil a master."

"Duty before all, mademoiselle," De Violaine answered. "When Louis gave me my first brevet, when I vowed fidelity to him and France, there was no more noble king in Europe, in the whole world. There was no master less cruel to his subjects, no matter what their faith was."

Now, on this night, however, De Violaine was not there, but, instead, on the battlement of the Citadel directing all preparations to be made for resisting the siege. For already the English artillery which had come up the Meuse was disembarked and most of it dragged up the hill upon which the Citadel stood, as were also forty-eight huge mortars invented by the great engineer Cœhorn (who was now present with the force), as well as several Seville mortars, the bombs from which could blow to pieces the walls and doors of fortresses. And, ominous sign for those within the Citadel! the fuses were all lighted.

Behind these lay the troops of General Ingoldsby and Brigadier Stanley, as well as four companies of the Grenadiers, while, to protect them from being taken in the rear, were the dragoons and Bevill's old regiment, the Cuirassiers.

Afar off the autumn dawn was coming now; away towards where the Rhine lay, the eyes of those three watchers could see the darkness of the night changing to grey, and, swiftly, the grey to a pale daffodil that told of the dayspring which was at hand; then, next, a fleck of flame shot like a barbed arrow above the daffodil that was changing to pink and opal; the rim of the sun was seen to be swiftly mounting behind. At this moment, clearly on the still, cold morning air a trumpet rang out beneath the Citadel; another answered from below the Chartreuse across the river; a moment later the Cœhorns had belched forth their bombs and the six and twelve pounders of the artillery had made their first discharge.

"Oh! to be there!" Bevill cried. "There behind them, with the old regiment, instead of a helpless man, a waster, here. Yet, no, no! My place is here by you, my heart, my very own, to save and help you even as you have saved me."

But from Sylvia there came no response, or, at least, none in answer to his words. Instead, from the lips of both these women, brave as each was, there came a cry, a gasp that was in actual fact a suppressed shriek. Already against the wall of the Citadel more than one bomb had struck and exploded with an awful crash; they saw falling swiftly before the window huge masses of detached masonry that thundered a moment later on to the stones of the courtyard below; they saw, through the grime and smoke that rolled suddenly away on the breathless, unstirred morning air, that slowly the English infantry was creeping up nearer the great guns in preparation for a rush. For already a breach was made below; it was not only the side of the Citadel that was now being battered by the attackers.

Still, a little later, the mouth of the embrasure was closed by the explosion of a bomb, that, while shattering the window into a million pieces, burst in the stone framework and also dislodged the stones above. Those in the room were therefore in darkness once more, a darkness as profound as that of the night now passed away, and, with an anxious cry, Bevill demanded if either of his companions had been struck by the dislodged masonry.

"Ah! heaven be praised," he cried, finding both were safe. "But now, now, the time has come to leave this. The door is still open; even were it not so, none would keep us confined here at such a moment. Come! Come At least let us make our way below."

Then, hurriedly escorting Sylvia and the Comtesse through the corridors in which--though they passed now and again French soldiers hurrying either up or down the staircase--they met with no molestation, they reached the *salle d'armes* on the lower floor.

Yet, as they did so, they saw also the terrible devastation that the bombardment had already wrought. One side of a corridor, the outer one formed by the great front of the Citadel, was entirely blown away; a room or large cell that presented the appearance of having been recently occupied--since they saw within it the *débris* of a shattered pallet and a table--was a mass of ruins; the three remaining sides were open to the morning air. Also, more than once, the women had to raise their dresses to step over wounded men lying in the passages, who had doubtless been shot while themselves firing from the windows.

But still they were in the *salle d'armes*: here, since it was not quite so exposed to the fire of the besiegers, they might hope to remain in comparative safety.

"Come," Bevill said to his companions. "Come to this corner. At this spot you are farthest removed from the outer wall which is alone likely to be struck. Meanwhile, since one knows not what violence these soldiers may attempt in the bitterness of their defeat, it is as well I should be armed." Saying which he moved towards the trophies of ancient weapons that decorated all the inner side of the great *salle*, and let his eyes rove over the swords that hung upon the wall.

"This should serve," he said to himself, reaching out his hand towards a great Schiavona or Venetian broadsword; one with a long bi-convex blade that, in the hands of an expert and powerful swordsman, might do terrible execution.

Returning now to where Sylvia and Madame de Valorme were, Bevill seated himself by the former's side while telling both that the Citadel must soon surrender before such an attack as this now being made, and that, doubtless, the Chartreuse must be in the same position. Yet his words fell almost unheard upon their ears, so awful was the din around. From the roof of this old fortress discharge followed discharge unceasingly; from the windows the crack of muskets went on, and still against the walls the artillery balls and the bombs of the besiegers thundered and crashed.

"It must cease ere long," Bevill said. "Ah! do not look. Avert your glances. They are already bringing down the wounded from above," while he added beneath his breath, "and the slain."

As he spoke, what was evidently either a powder magazine or one for grenades blew up with an awful roar, while the concussion caused even that old solid hall to rock. And now Sylvia and the Comtesse threw themselves on their knees by the bench on which they had been sitting, and prayed that further slaughter and devastation might be spared.

Also, each prayed for him who, by their side, was keeping watch and ward over them; for him who, entering but a few months earlier into their lives, had now become so dear to them.

Unwilling to disturb them even by the closeness of his presence, Bevill softly withdrew towards the other end of the *salle d'armes*; towards that spot where he had stood to hear his fate pronounced, the spot where Stuven had denounced Francbois as a liar and himself as the executioner of the renegade, Sparmann. Towards, also, that spot where the doomsman had stood above the awful instruments of his calling. He stood there, looking on the scene where all these things had happened, when, suddenly, there rang through the hall the shriek of a woman, and, next, a cry from Sylvia's lips. "Bevill! Look, look! Beware. Look behind you!"

In an instant he saw that which had so much terrified the girl he loved. Creeping from behind a pillar there came towards him a man with a weapon in his hand that had, doubtless, also been taken earlier from the collection of arms--a man whom at first he did not recognise, so ghastly was his face, so wildly staring his eyes, so dishevelled his whole appearance. But in a moment he knew him. He knew that this was Francbois, Francbois who should have died this morning, but who, in the confusion of the siege, had escaped from wherever he had been confined.

"Wretch!" he exclaimed, as, turning, he recognised him. "Doubly treacherous wretch! Again you seek my life, again attempt it behind my back."

"I love her," the other hissed. "Her, her! And she loves you. So be it. She shall have nought but your memory left to love," and he sprang full at Bevill, while brandishing the sword he held. For a moment--only a moment--it was in Bevill's mind to run the craven through from breast to back, as he came on. Yet, in a second moment the thought was gone. If Francbois were not mad he was still beneath his vengeance. Whatever his doom might be, now or in the future, he should not find

it at his hands; those hands should not be stained by the blood of such as he.

"A moment later Bevill's foot was on the blade."

"A moment later Bevill's foot
was on the blade."

Stepping back, therefore, as the other came full at him, one turn of the Schiavona, as it met the blade wielded by the other, was enough. That blade fell with a clang from Francbois' hand to the stone floor; a moment later Bevill's foot was on it.

"Go, hangdog," he said. "Seek another executioner than I."

With a cry--almost pitiful in its tone of misery, vile as the creature was--with a howl of wild despair, Francbois rushed now across the *salle d'armes* to the other side of it; the side against which the English bombs and cannon balls were being hurled, and there endeavoured to snatch a huge mace out of another trophy of arms. But, suddenly, not only he but Bevill, and also the two affrighted women, started with terror at that which they saw now.

From another door than the one by which they had entered they saw a second figure approaching, creeping towards Francbois; a figure in whose eyes there was a more awful light than even those of Francbois possessed; one whose lips gibbered as the lips of the raving maniac gibber; whose face was flecked with the foam from them. It was the form of Stuven, also free, of Stuven, now an absolute demoniac, that they saw; the form of the man whose thirst for the blood of spies and traitors was at its height. Armed also with an ancient weapon, a thing pointed and sharp like the shell-dag of mediæval days, he crept as swiftly towards Francbois as the panther creeps towards its prey, while uttering incoherent sounds yet telling plainly all that was in his distraught brain by the look that shone from out those awful, scintillating eyes, and by the hideous twitching of that mouth. And Francbois, paralysed with fear, shrieked aloud and turned to flee. At this moment the madman flew with a bound at him, the great two-handled knife was raised--yet it was never fated to be buried in the unhappy wretch's breast.

There came a fresh discharge of bombs and artillery against the wall of the *salle d'armes*, that wall already so sorely tried; the trembling, half-fainting women, with Bevill now by their side, saw the whole mass bulge inwardly, even as a sail bulges when a fierce gust of wind catches it; a horrible, cracking roar was heard, a blinding dust filled the room. In front of them a fearful chasm yawned as the greater portion of that side of the hall fell in, while carrying below part of the floor, and, at the same time, exposing the whole of the besiegers to their gaze.

Francbois's would-be executioner had found him, and together they had perished.

An instant later Bevill, looking out through the great opening made by the fall of that side of the *salle d'armes*, observed that an order had been suddenly given by the English for all firing to

cease, and knew that, above the Citadel, a white flag must be flying now. Also, he saw the English flag run up upon the outer wall, he heard the soldiers huzzaing and singing the National Anthem--then so new, now known over all the world! he knew that Liége was in Marlborough's hands.

Clasping Sylvia to his heart with one hand, as with the other he held that of Madame de Valorme, he murmured: "The end of these griefs has come," while a moment later he whispered in Sylvia's ear, "Sweet love, all fears are done with. Hope shines resplendent on us at last."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Outside Mynheer Van Ryck's house, a month or so later, there stood a coach upon which was placed a small amount of baggage. By its side, held by a groom who had some considerable difficulty in restraining its restlessness, a bright bay mare emitted great gusts from her nostrils and pawed the stones impatiently--a mare on the corners of whose saddle-cloth were stamped a crown, the letters "A.R." and a pair of cross swords, as was also the case with the holsters and the bridle-plate.

After the fall of the Citadel, and before the French were allowed to march out on condition that they returned at once into France and separated, the whole place had been ransacked by the English troops, and amongst the horses found was one that, later, a mousquetaire said belonged to the English prisoner who should have been shot the day the Citadel fell. That prisoner, being now at liberty, was sent for by orders of General Ingoldsby, and, when the meeting between him and the animal was witnessed, there was no need for him to confirm the statement.

For La Rose, on hearing Bevill's voice, created such a stampede among the other horses and rushed at him with such endearments--testified by nearly knocking him down with her head and then by rubbing her soft, velvet muzzle all over him as she whinnied loudly--that there and then before the English victors and French captives he vowed that never would he part from her.

Now, therefore, she waited for him to come forth and mount her, so that he might ride by the coach that conveyed his wife to England.

For, a fortnight since, in one of those churches of the Reformed Faith that had sprung up in every part of the Netherlands since the days of William the Liberator, Sylvia and Bevill had been made man and wife, my lord Marlborough's chaplain having performed the ceremony. And, though there were not many present to witness the bridal, they were mostly those amongst whom Bevill's lot had been cast since first he made the attempt to assist Sylvia to escape from Liége--an attempt that again and again he told himself had resulted only in failure, yet a failure that brought so fair and welcome a success in its train as that which now he experienced.

From Van Ryck's hands he received his bride; close by them stood the Comtesse de Valorme, her face calm and tranquil, but revealing nothing of whatever might be within. Also there were present Captain Barringer and Sir George Saxby, as well as one or two officers of the Cuirassiers who had been junior to Bevill in the regiment but were now captains. Yet there was one other person present, clad as before in the blue coat and still wearing across his breast the blue ribbon of the Garter; still tranquil, too, as became a man able to read and forecast his destiny and the splendour of a near future. He who was now, in the space of a month or so, to attain the highest rank an English subject can hold; he who, two years hence, was to crush beyond all power of recovery the armies of the most superb despot Europe had ever known.

Bevill's kiss--the first kiss as her husband--on Sylvia's brow, her hand upon his arm, they left the altar, and, when the after formalities had been concluded, made their way from out the church. But ere they left it the Earl of Marlborough, taking from his breast a paper, said:

"For wedding-gifts there is no opportunity, yet one I would proffer to you. Mr. Bracton, I know the hopes with which you set out from England. It is in my power to gratify them, since I, as Captain-General, stand here for the Queen. Our late ruler removed you from the service you loved; I, in the name of our present one, restore you to it. Some years of opportunity, of promotion, you must lose of necessity; your brother officers of the Cuirassers who were your juniors will now be your seniors. Yet, take heart. You possess two things that should go far to spur you on to gallant efforts: a fair, a noble bride--and youth."

Then, without giving Bevill time to utter the thanks that, though his breast was full of them, his lips might have found difficulty in uttering, the Earl left the church, after kissing the hands of Sylvia and the Comtesse, and giving his own to Bevill.

The absence of that one whom Bevill would fain have seen present in the church, his late custodian, the gallant De Violaine, was felt regretfully by him. Yet it was not to be. As the breach was made soon after the siege began, De Violaine, rushing from the roof to where the English grenadiers were pouring through it, received a thrust from one of the officers' swords. Later, as Bevill and Sylvia passed from the *salle d'armes*, they saw him lying in the covered way and being ministered to by one of the regimental surgeons. This sad sight produced in the tender heart of Radegonde de Valorme a feeling, a recollection of past years and of the fortitude with which this man had borne the blighting of the one great hope that had filled his heart during those years. As she saw him stretched now upon the coarse sacking on which he had been laid; as she recognised that, from first to last, he had had no companion but his duty to cheer his lonely life, her memory flew swiftly back to earlier days--the days when he, young, elated with the promise of his career, favoured by fortune, had craved only one other thing, a woman's--her own love--and had failed to obtain his heart's desire.

Swiftly she advanced now towards him; a moment later she was kneeling by his side; still a moment later she was murmuring. "André! André! Ah! say this is not the end. Ah, no! it cannot, cannot be. You are still young--oh!" And she wept.

"He may live," the surgeon who had been told off to watch by De Violaine's side said. "If the fever from his wound abates to-night he may do so."

"I pray God," the Comtesse said, then whispered again to the wounded man, "André, I will not leave Liége until I see you restored. You shall be removed to Van Ryck's house. I alone will nurse you back to recovery."

But De Violaine, understanding her words, murmured:

"As well leave me. What matters now my life or death!"

The impatience of La Rose grew greater as still the rider whom the wayward creature had loved to carry on her back, the rider for whom she had pined and fretted during their long separation, did not come. Yet soon, though she did not know it, that impatience would be at an end. Inside the old Dutch house the last partings were being made; the two who were going forth from it, never perhaps to cross its threshold again, were bidding farewell to those left behind. Even now Bevill was standing by the couch on which De Violaine lay through the long days, while from his lips fell the last words that he supposed he would ever utter to him whose prisoner he had been, to him who had been so humane a custodian.

"I pray," he was saying now, "that your recovery may be swift and assured; I pray that between your land and mine peace may exist at last. Above all, I pray that we may never meet as opposing soldiers; that, where'er the tide of war shall roll, it shall not bring us face to face. But, as friends--ah, yes! For, Monsieur de Violaine, be my life long or short as best it pleases God, I shall ever hold dear the memory of him who, when he had me in his hand, treated me neither as spy nor foreign foe, but with a gentleness such as a noble heart alone could prompt."

"Farewell. Heaven bless you!" De Violaine said. "You should be very happy. I, too, will pray for that happiness. And, should we ever meet again it shall be as brothers, an' you will. For brothers we are in our faith and in our calling. Farewell."

And now all were parted with, excepting only one--Radegonde. Madame Van Ryck could not leave her bed, so Bevill and Sylvia had gone in to her. There remained no more than the parting with that true friend and the last handshake with Van Ryck, himself true to the core.

"Ah how can I leave you!" Sylvia sobbed, as now the two women were locked in each other's arms. "You--you whom I have always loved; you without whom I could have done nought for him. Oh! Radegonde, shall we never meet again?"

"God He knows," the other answered reverently. "I pray so. Ah, Sylvia! Sweet Sylvia."

But at last they forced themselves apart; at last Bevill stood face to face with her who, from almost the first moment they met at Louvain, had been staunch and firm to him--face to face for the last time, Sylvia standing back by the door open to the great porch. Then, ere he could find his voice, which, indeed, it seemed to him was impossible, he heard her saying even as her hand held his:

"Farewell. If ever in happy days to come for you your memory should chance to wander back to that night in Louvain when first our knowledge of each other arose; to the woman who was to play some little part in your existence--for--a time, spare her a--a--one moment's thought. Think of her as--as one----" But now her voice failed her, too, and she was silent.

Neither could Bevill speak yet, and still stood there holding her hand in his even as he observed the trembling of her lips, the tears standing in her soft blue, eyes--even as he heard the word "Bevill" murmured through those lips.

But, also, he observed something else as his troubled glance fell now upon his wife. He saw

Sylvia's own lips move though no sound issued from them; he saw some suggestion, some prompting in Sylvia's own clear, grey eyes; and, seeing, grasped what they conveyed. Bending therefore to her who stood before him, he parted the hair that grew low down upon her forehead; bending still lower, he kissed her once--even as a brother might have kissed a loved sister. "Farewell, Radegonde;" he whispered, "Farewell," and saw by one swift glance at Sylvia's face that he had comprehended her meaning.

Yet never through the long life that was to be his did he know what Sylvia's womanly heart had told her, nor understand that which she understood.

* * * * * * *

Embosomed in the woods of Surrey there stands a house once white, now grey, on the face of which the lichen and the ivy picturesquely mingle. In front of it sweeps down a lawn to where a little river bubbles over the pebbles of its bed; round it are arbours and bosquets of quaint shape over which grows clematis many-hued--white, purple, flame-coloured. Round that lawn, too, grow trees that are ancient now, and that, when young, drew their existence from other lands than ours. Against the pilasters of the great porch, which gives entrance to a vast hall and supports a balcony on to which all the windows of the first floor open, trails a passion flower, old--perhaps, indeed, oft-times renewed in memory of him who planted the first one; of him who may have whispered as he did so: "'Twas by such flowers as these you were embowered, enshrined, on that night when first we met; so long as may be shall that flower grow against our home, the White House." For if from Holland, in those far-off days, some had wandered here who had ever gazed on a white house standing on the outskirts of Liége, they must have seen, and, seeing, recognised another house so like to it that its resemblance could be no fanciful one, but, in truth, a resemblance carefully studied and wrought.

In the great hall whose vast stairs at the farther end curve up on either side, many pictures hang and tell of what the originals must have been in life. Bevill, first Lord Bracton, is there, mounted on a bay horse, his uniform that of the Cuirassiers, or 4th Horse, his ribbons and orders showing that he held general's rank. On one side of this picture the painter has placed in a vertical line the words, "Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, Malplaquet," to testify that he who looks down took part in those glorious victories.

Yet if, as in truth, he does thus look down, either the limner's art, or the light cast at certain times from the great roof above, appears to make those eyes rest on one whose full-length portrait hangs by the side of his. On her! On his wife--some few years older in the picture than when first she learnt to love him and when, through rain and mire, she rushed as fast as might be to gain the help of Marlborough. A little older, yes; but not less fair and sweet. Stately as ever in her grace of matronhood; noble in her height, beautiful in feature, and with her clear, pure eyes undimmed, though in her rich brown hair some silver threads are seen. In each hand the woman holds the hand of a child.

"Now the two were locked in each other's arms."

"Now the two were locked in
each other's arms."

On Lord Bracton's left there is another portrait, the picture of a woman no longer young, her

almost grey hair massed above her head, but her eyes clear and bright as when first they gazed on Bevill Bracton in Louvain, while over all her features there is a look of content. By her side stands a youth still in his teens, one so like this woman that none can doubt he is her son.

Facing the entrance hangs a larger picture than all-- that of a handsome man in scarlet and covered with orders and decorations; one whose tranquil features and soft lineaments bespeak calm self-reliance; confidence. On a medallion beneath this are the words: "John, first Duke of Marlborough and Marquess of Blandford, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and Prince of Mindelheim in Suabia."

Around the house are copses and thickets, and outside them the woods, in all of which have played five or six generations of children, some of them Bractons, some of them named De Violaine. Also, in the dead and gone days that Time has powdered for ever with its dust, these children have grown up and intermarried in the old church near by, the living of which has been held perpetually for over a hundred and fifty years by De Violaines, all of whom are descended from a French refugee officer who settled here. It must be, therefore--since that refugee would never have taken any but one woman for his wife--that, at last, Radegonde de Valorme was enabled to forget the sufferings of him who died at the galleys for his religion's sake, to reconcile herself to seeing Sylvia wedded to the Englishman who came once into her life and troubled her thoughts; that she was contented to eventually make happy the gallant soldier who had loved her so long.

There is one little copse to which those children of different generations have always loved to resort, and, after playing, to sit there and talk of its associations with old days--a little copse of nut-trees and red may, in which they find the earliest white violets and where, they say, the robins always build their nests and the nightingales love to sit and sing on summer nights. Yet, as they tell their little stories to each other and weave not only fancies of the past, but, it may be, of the future as well, their eyes rest upon a great stone slab that lies along the ground embedded in grass and overgrown with moss--moss that, however, many tiny hands have often scraped and brushed away so that they might once more read the two words cut into that stone by some old graver of bygone days--the words, "La Rose."

FOOTNOTES

Footnote 1: The pistole at this period was worth £3 6s. 6d.

Footnote 2: Brantôme, who lived shortly after Charles V.'s time, says all the other monarchs called him this because he never kept a treaty, and cheated everybody.

Footnote 3: Now the 1st (Royal) Dragoons.

Footnote 4: The Mousquetaires Noirs and Gris were thus described from the colour of their horses. They were the *corps d'élite* of France. The one had been established by Louis XIV., the other by Mazarin.

THE END.

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