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MICHEL AND ANGELE

[A Ladder of Swords]

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

CHAPTER XV

It seemed an unspeakable smallness in a man of such high place in the State, whose hand had tied and untied myriad knots of political and court intrigue, that he should stoop to a game which any pettifogging hanger-on might play-and reap scorn in the playing. By insidious arts, Leicester had in his day turned the Queen's mind to his own will; had foiled the diplomacy of the Spaniard, the German and the Gaul; had by subterranean means checkmated the designs of the Medici; had traced his way through plot and counter-plot, hated by most, loved by none save, maybe, his Royal mistress to whom he was now more a custom than a cherished friend. Year upon year he had built up his influence. None had championed him save himself, and even from the consequences of rashness and folly he had risen to a still higher place in the kingdom. But such as Leicester are ever at last a sacrifice to the laborious means by which they achieve their greatest ends-means contemptible and small.

To the great intriguers every little detail, every commonplace insignificance is used—and must be used by them alone—to further their dark causes. They cannot trust their projects to brave lieutenants, to faithful subordinates. They cannot say, "Here is the end; this is the work to be done; upon your shoulders be the burden!" They must "stoop to conquer." Every miserable detail becomes of moment, until by-and-by the art of intrigue and conspiracy begins to lose proportion in their minds. The detail has ever been so important, conspiracy so much second nature, that they must needs be intriguing and

conspiring when the occasion is trifling and the end negligible.

To all intriguers life has lost romance; there is no poem left in nature; no ideal, personal, public or national, detains them in its wholesome influence; no great purpose allures them; they have no causes for which to die—save themselves. They are so honeycombed with insincerity and the vice of thought, that by-and-by all colours are as one, all pathways the same; because, whichever hue of light breaks upon their world they see it through the grey-cloaked mist of falsehood; and whether the path be good or bad they would still walk in it crookedly. How many men and women Leicester had tracked or lured to their doom; over how many men and women he had stepped to his place of power, history speaks not carefully; but the traces of his deeds run through a thousand archives, and they suggest plentiful sacrifices to a subverted character.

Favourite of a Queen, he must now stoop to set a trap for the ruin of as simple a soul as ever stepped upon the soil of England; and his dark purposes had not even the excuse of necessity on the one hand, of love or passion on the other. An insane jealousy of the place the girl had won in the consideration of the Queen, of her lover who, he thought, had won a still higher place in the same influence, was his only motive for action at first. His cruelty was not redeemed even by the sensuous interest the girl might arouse in a reckless nature by her beauty and her charm.

So the great Leicester—the Gipsy, as the dead Sussex had called him—lay in wait in Greenwich Park for Angele to pass, like some orchard thief in the blossoming trees. Knowing the path by which she would come to her father's cottage from the palace, he had placed himself accordingly. He had thought he might have to wait long or come often for the perfect opportunity; but it seemed as if Fate played his game for him, and that once again the fruit he would pluck should fall into his palm. Bright-eyed, and elated from a long talk with the Duke's Daughter, who had given her a message from the Queen, Angele had abstractedly taken the wrong path in the wood. Leicester saw that it would lead her into the maze some distance off. Making a detour, he met her at the moment she discovered her mistake. The light from the royal word her friend had brought was still in her face; but it was crossed by perplexity now.

He stood still as though astonished at seeing her, a smile upon his face. So perfectly did he play his part that she thought the meeting accidental; and though in her heart she had a fear of the man and knew how bitter an enemy he was of Michel's, his urbane power, his skilful diplomacy of courtesy had its way. These complicated lives, instinct with contradiction, have the interest of forbidden knowledge. The dark experiences of life leave their mark and give such natures that touch of mystery which allures even those who have high instincts and true feelings, as one peeps over a hidden depth and wonders what lies beyond the dark. So Angele, suddenly arrested, was caught by the sense of mystery in the man, by the fascination of finesse, of dark power; and it was womanlike that all on an instant she should dream of the soul of goodness in things evil.

Thus in life we are often surprised out of long years of prejudice, and even of dislike and suspicion, by some fortuitous incident, which might have chanced to two who had every impulse towards each other, not such antagonisms as lay between Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and this Huguenot refugee. She had every cue to hate him. Each moment of her life in England had been beset with peril because of him—peril to the man she loved, therefore peril to herself. And yet, so various is the nature of woman, that, while steering straitly by one star, she levies upon the light of other stars. Faithful and sincere, yet loving power, curious and adventurous, she must needs, without intention, without purpose, stray into perilous paths.

As Leicester stepped suddenly into Angele's gaze, she was only, as it were, conscious of a presence in itself alluring by virtue of the history surrounding it. She was surprised out of an instinctive dislike, and the cue she had to loathe him was for the moment lost.

Unconsciously, unintentionally, she smiled at him now, then, realising, retreated, shrinking from him, her face averted. Man or woman had found in Leicester the delicate and intrepid gamester, exquisite in the choice of detail, masterful in the breadth of method. And now, as though his whole future depended on this interview, he brought to bear a life-long skill to influence her. He had determined to set the Queen against her. He did not know—not even he—that she had saved the Queen's life on that auspicious May Day when Harry Lee had fought the white knight Michel de la Foret and halved the honours of the lists with him. If he had but known that the Queen had hid from him this fact—this vital thing touching herself and England, he would have viewed his future with a vaster distrust. But there could be no surer sign of Elizabeth's growing coldness and intended breach than that she had hid from him the dreadful incident of the poisoned glove, and the swift execution of the would-be murderer, and had made Cecil her only confidant. But he did know that Elizabeth herself had commanded Michel de la Foret to the lists; and his mad jealousy impelled him to resort to a satanic cunning towards these two fugitives, who seemed to have mounted within a few short days as far as had he in thrice as many years to a high place in the regard of the Majesty of England.

To disgrace them both; to sow distrust of the girl in the Queen's mind; to make her seem the opposite of what she was; to drop in her own mind suspicion of her lover; to drive her to some rash act, some challenge of the Queen herself—that was his plan. He knew how little Elizabeth's imperious spirit would brook any challenge from this fearless girl concerning De la Foret. But to convince her that the Queen favoured Michel in some shadowed sense, that De la Foret was privy to a dark compact—so deep a plot was all worthy of a larger end. He had well inspired the Court of France through its ambassador to urge the Medici to press actively and bitterly for De la Foret's return to France and to the beheading sword that waited for him; and his task had been made light by international difficulties, which made the heart of Elizabeth's foreign policy friendship with France and an alliance against Philip of Spain. She had, therefore, opened up, even in the past few days, negotiations once again for the long-talked-of marriage with the Duke of Anjou, the brother of the King, son of the Medici. State policy was involved, and, if De la Foret might be a counter, the pledge of exchange in the game, as it were, the path would once more be clear.

He well believed that Elizabeth's notice of De la Foret was but a fancy that would pass, as a hundred times before such fancies had come and gone; but against that brighter prospect there lay the fact that never before had she shown himself such indifference. In the past she had raged against him, she had imprisoned him; she had driven him from her presence in her anger, but always her paroxysms of rage had been succeeded by paroxysms of tenderness. Now he saw a colder light in the sky, a greyer horizon met his eye. So at every corner of the compass he played for the breaking of the spell.

Yet as he now bowed low before Angele there seemed to show in his face a very candour of surprise, of pleasure, joined to a something friendly and protective in his glance and manner. His voice insinuated that bygones should be bygones; it suggested that she had misunderstood him. It pleaded against the injustice of her prejudice.

"So far from home!" he said with a smile.

"More miles from home," she replied, thinking of never-returning days in France, "than I shall ever count again."

"But no, methinks the palace is within a whisper," he responded.

"Lord Leicester knows well I am a prisoner; that I no longer abide in the palace," she answered.

He laughed lightly. "An imprisonment in a Queen's friendship. I bethink me, it is three hours since I saw you go to the palace. It is a few worthless seconds since you have got your freedom."

She nettled at his tone. "Lord Leicester takes great interest in my unimportant goings and comings. I cannot think it is because I go and come."

He chose to misunderstand her meaning. Drawing closer he bent over her shoulder. "Since your arrival here, my only diary is the tally of your coming and going." Suddenly, as though by an impulse of great frankness, he added in a low tone:

"And is it strange that I should follow you—that I should worship grace and virtue? Men call me this and that. You have no doubt been filled with dark tales of my misdeeds. Has there been one in the Court, even one, who, living by my bounty or my patronage, has said one good word of me? And why? For long years the Queen, who, maybe, might have been better counselled, chose me for her friend, adviser—because I was true to her. I have lived for the Queen, and living for her have lived for England. Could I keep—I ask you, could I keep myself blameless in the midst of flattery, intrigue, and conspiracy? I admit that I have played with fiery weapons in my day; and must needs still do so. The incorruptible cannot exist in the corrupted air of this Court. You have come here with the light of innocence and truth about you. At first I could scarce believe that such goodness lived, hardly understood it. The light half-blinded and embarrassed; but, at last, I saw! You of all this Court have made me see what sort of life I might have lived. You have made me dream the dreams of youth and high unsullied purpose once again. Was it strange that in the dark pathways of the Court I watched your footsteps come and go, carrying radiance with you? No—Leicester has learned how sombre, sinister, has been his past, by a presence which is the soul of beauty, of virtue, and of happy truth. Lady, my heart is yours. I worship you."

Overborne for the moment by the eager, searching eloquence of his words, she had listened bewildered to him. Now she turned upon him with panting breath and said:

"My lord, my lord, I will hear no more. You know I love Monsieur de la Foret, for whose sake I am here in England—for whose sake I still remain."

"'Tis a labour of love but ill requited," he answered with suggestion in his tone.

"What mean you, my lord?" she asked sharply, a kind of blind agony in her voice; for she felt his meaning, and though she did not believe him, and knew in her soul he slandered, there was a sting, for slander ever scorches where it touches.

"Can you not see?" he said. "May Day—why did the Queen command him to the lists? Why does she keep him here—in the palace? Why, against the will of France, her ally, does she refuse to send him forth? Why, unheeding the laughter of the Court, does she favour this unimportant stranger, brave though he be? Why should she smile upon him? . . . Can you not see, sweet lady?"

"You know well why the Queen detains him here," she answered calmly now. "In the Queen's understanding with France, exiles who preach the faith are free from extradition. You heard what the Queen required of him—that on Trinity Day he should preach before her, and upon this preaching should depend his safety."

"Indeed, so her Majesty said with great humour," replied Leicester. "So indeed she said; but when we hide our faces a thin veil suffices. The man is a soldier—a soldier born. Why should he turn priest now? I pray you, think again. He was quick of wit; the Queen's meaning was clear to him; he rose with seeming innocence to the fly, and she landed him at the first toss. But what is forward bodes no good to you, dear star of heaven. I have known the Queen for half a lifetime. She has wild whims and dangerous fancies, fills her hours of leisure with experiences—an artist is the Queen. She means no good to you."

She had made as if to leave him, though her eyes searched in vain for the path which she should take; but she now broke in impatiently:

"Poor, unnoted though I am, the Queen of England is my friend," she answered. "What evil could she wish me? From me she has naught to fear. I am not an atom in her world. Did she but lift her finger I am done. But she knows that, humble though I be, I would serve her to my last breath; because I know, my Lord Leicester, how many there are who serve her foully, faithlessly; and there should be those by her who would serve her singly."

His eyes half closed, he beat his toe upon the ground. He frowned, as though he had no wish to hurt her by words which he yet must speak. With calculated thought he faltered.

"Yet do you not think it strange," he said at last, "that Monsieur de la Foret should be within the palace ever, and that you should be banished from the palace? Have you never seen the fly and the spider in the web? Do you not know that they who have the power to bless or ban, to give joy or withhold it, appear to give when they mean to withhold? God bless us all—how has your innocence involved your judgment!"

She suddenly flushed to the eyes. "I have wit enough," she said acidly, "to feel that truth which life's experience may not have taught me. It is neither age nor evil that teaches one to judge 'twixt black and white. God gives the true divination to human hearts that need."

It was a contest in which Leicester revelled—simplicity and single-mindedness against the multifarious and double-tongued. He had made many efforts in his time to conquer argument and prejudice. When he chose, none could be more insinuating or turn the flank of a proper argument by more adroit suggestion. He used his power now.

"You think she means well by you? You think that she, who has a thousand ladies of a kingdom at her call, of the best and most beautiful—and even," his voice softened, "though you are more beautiful than all, that beauty would soften her towards you? When was it Elizabeth loved beauty? When was it that her heart warmed towards those who would love or wed? Did she not imprison me, even in these palace grounds, for one whole year because I sought to marry? Has she not a hundred times sent from her presence women with faces like flowers because they were in contrast to her own? Do you see love blossoming at this Court? God's Son! but she would keep us all like babes in Eden an' she could, unmated and unloved."

He drew quickly to her and leant over her, whispering down her shoulder. "Do you think there is any reason why all at once she should change her mind and cherish lovers?"

She looked up at him fearlessly and firmly.

"In truth, I do. My Lord Leicester, you have lived in the circle of her good pleasure, near to her noble Majesty, as you say, for half a lifetime. Have you not found a reason why now or any time she should cherish love and lovers? Ah, no, you have seen her face, you have heard her voice, but you have not known her heart!"

"Ah, opportunity lacked," he said in irony and with a reminiscent smile. "I have been busy with State

affairs, I have not sat on cushions, listening to royal fingers on the virginals. Still, I ask you, do you think there is a reason why from her height she should stoop down to rescue you or give you any joy? Wherefore should the Queen do aught to serve you? Wherefore should she save your lover?"

It was on Angele's lips to answer, "Because I saved her life on May Day." It was on her lips to tell of the poisoned glove, but she only smiled, and said:

"But, yes, I think, my lord, there is a reason, and in that reason I have faith."

Leicester saw how firmly she was fixed in her idea, how rooted was her trust in the Queen's intentions towards her; and he guessed there was something hidden which gave her such supreme confidence.

"If she means to save him, why does she not save him now? Why not end the business in a day—not stretch it over these long mid-summer weeks?"

"I do not think it strange," she answered. "He is a political prisoner. Messages must come and go between England and France. Besides, who calleth for haste? Is it I who have most at stake? It is not the first time I have been at Court, my lord. In these high places things are orderly,"—a touch of sarcasm came into her tone,—"life is not a mighty rushing wind, save to those whom vexing passion drives to hasty deeds."

She made to move on once more, but paused, still not certain of her way.

"Permit me to show you," he said with a laugh and a gesture towards a path. "Not that—this is the shorter. I will take you to a turning which leads straight to your durance—and another which leads elsewhere."

She could not say no, because she had, in very truth, lost her way, and she might wander far and be in danger. Also, she had no fear of him. Steeled to danger in the past, she was not timid; but, more than all, the game of words between them had had its fascination. The man himself, by virtue of what he was, had his fascination also. The thing inherent in all her sex, to peep over the hedge, to skirt dangerous fires lightly, to feel the warmth distantly and not be scorched—that was in her, too; and she lived according to her race and the long predisposition of the ages. Most women like her—as good as she—have peeped and stretched out hands to the alluring fire and come safely through, wiser and no better. But many, too, bewildered and confused by what they see—as light from a mirror flashed into the eye half blinds—have peeped over the hedge and, miscalculating their power of self-control, have entered in, and returned no more into the quiet garden of unstraying love.

Leicester quickly put on an air of gravity. "I warn you that danger lies before you. If you cross the Queen—and you will cross the Queen when you know the truth, as I know it—you will pay a heavy price for refusing Leicester as your friend."

She made a protesting motion and seemed about to speak, but suddenly, with a passionate gesture, Leicester added: "Let them go their way. Monsieur de la Foret will be tossed aside before another winter comes. Do you think he can abide here in the midst of plot and intrigue, and hated by the people of the Court? He is doomed. But more, he is unworthy of you; while I can serve you well, and I can love you well." She shrank away from him. "No, do not turn from me, for in very truth, Leicester's heart has been pierced by the inevitable arrow. You think I mean you evil?"

He paused with a sudden impulse continued: "No! no! And if there be a saving grace in marriage, marriage it shall be, if you will but hear me. You shall be my wife—Leicester's wife. As I have mounted to power so I will hold power with you—with you, the brightest spirit that ever England saw. Worthy of a kingdom with you beside me, I shall win to greater, happier days; and at Kenilworth, where kings and queens have lodged, you shall be ruler. We will leave this Court until Elizabeth, betrayed by those who know not how to serve her, shall send for me again. Here—the power behind the throne—you and I will sway this realm through the aging, sentimental Queen. Listen, and look at me in the eyes— I speak the truth, you read my heart. You think I hated you and hated De la Foret. By all the gods, it's true I hated him, because I saw that he would come between me and the Queen. A man must have one great passion. Life itself must be a passion. Power was my passion—power, not the Queen. You have broken all that down. I yield it all to you—for your sake and my own. I would steal from life yet before my sun goes to its setting a few years of truth and honesty and clear design. At heart I am a patriot—a loyal Englishman. Your cause—the cause of Protestantism— did I not fight for it at Rochelle? Have I not ever urged the Queen to spend her revenue for your cause, to send her captains and her men to fight for it?"

She raised her head in interest, and her lips murmured: "Yes, yes, I know you did that."

He saw his advantage and pursued it. "See, I will be honest with you— honest, at last, as I have

wished in vain to be, for honesty was misunderstood. It is not so with you—you understand. Dear, light of womanhood, I speak the truth now. I have been evil in my day I admit it—evil because I was in the midst of evil. I betrayed because I was betrayed; I slew, else I should have been slain. We have had dark days in England, privy conspiracy and rebellion; and I have had to thread my way through dreadful courses by a thousand blind paths. Would it be no joy to you if I, through your influence, recast my life—remade my policy, renewed my youth—pursuing principle where I have pursued opportunity? Angele, come to Kenilworth with me. Leave De la Foret to his fate. The way to happiness is with me. Will you come?"

He had made his great effort. As he spoke he almost himself believed that he told the truth. Under the spell of his own emotional power it seemed as though he meant to marry her, as though he could find happiness in the union. He had almost persuaded himself to be what he would have her to believe he might be.

Under the warmth and convincing force of his words her pulses had beat faster, her heart had throbbled in her throat, her eyes had glistened; but not with that light which they had shed for Michel de la Foret. How different was this man's wooing—its impetuous, audacious, tender violence, with that quiet, powerful, almost sacred gravity of her Camisard lover! It is this difference—the weighty, emotional difference—between a desperate passion and a pure love which has ever been so powerful in twisting the destinies of a moiety of the world to misery, who otherwise would have stayed contented, inconspicuous and good. Angele would have been more than human if she had not felt the spell of the ablest intriguer, of the most fascinating diplomatist of his day.

Before he spoke of marriage the thrill—the unconvincing thrill though it was—of a perilous temptation was upon her; but the very thing most meant to move her only made her shudder; for in her heart of hearts she knew that he was ineradicably false. To be married to one constitutionally untrue would be more terrible a fate for her than to be linked to him in a lighter, more dissoluble a bond. So do the greatest tricksters of this world overdo their part, so play the wrong card when every past experience suggests it is the card to play. He knew by the silence that followed his words, and the slow, steady look she gave him, that she was not won nor on the way to the winning.

"My lord," she said at last, and with a courage which steadied her affrighted and perturbed innocence, "you are eloquent, you are fruitful of flattery, of those things which have, I doubt not, served you well in your day. But, if you see your way to a better life, it were well you should choose one of nobler mould than I. I am not made for sacrifice, to play the missionary and snatch brands from the burning. I have enough to do to keep my own feet in the ribbon-path of right. You must look elsewhere for that guardian influence which is to make of you a paragon."

"No, no," he answered sharply, "you think the game not worth the candle—you doubt me and what I can do for you; my sincerity, my power you doubt."

"Indeed, yes, I doubt both," she answered gravely, "for you would have me believe that I have power to lead you. With how small a mind you credit me! You think, too, that you sway this kingdom; but I know that you stand upon a cliff's edge, and that the earth is fraying 'neath your tread. You dare to think that you have power to drag down with you the man who honours me with—"

"With his love, you'd say. Yet he will leave you fretting out your soul until the sharp-edged truth cuts your heart in twain. Have you no pride? I care not what you say of me—say your worst, and I will not resent it, for I will still prove that your way lies with me."

She gave a bitter sigh, and touched her forehead with trembling fingers. "If words could prove it, I had been convinced but now, for they are well devised, and they have music too; but such a music, my lord, as would drown the truth in the soul of a woman. Your words allure, but you have learned the art of words. You yourself—oh, my lord, you who have tasted all the pleasures of this world, could you then have the heart to steal from one who has so little that little which gives her happiness?"

"You know not what can make you happy—I can teach you that. By God's Son! but you have wit and intellect and are a match for a prince, not for a cast off Camisard. I shall ere long be Lord—Lieutenant of these Isles-of England and Ireland. Come to my nest. We will fly far—ah, your eye brightens, your heart leaps to mine—I feel it now, I—"

"Oh, have done, have done," she passionately broke in; "I would rather die, be torn upon the rack, burnt at the stake, than put my hand in yours! And you do not wish it—you speak but to destroy, not to cherish. While you speak to me I see all those"—she made a gesture as though to put something from her "all those to whom you have spoken as you have done to me. I hear the myriad falsehoods you have told—one whelming confusion. I feel the blindness which has crept upon them—those poor women—as you have sown the air with the dust of the passion which you call love. Oh, you never knew what love

meant, my lord! I doubt if, when you lay in your mother's arms, you turned to her with love. You never did one kindly act for love, no generous thought was ever born in you by love. Sir, I know it as though it were written in a book; your life has been one long calculation—your sympathy or kindness a calculated thing. Good-nature, emotion you may have had, but never the divine thing by which the world is saved. Were there but one little place where that Eden flower might bloom within your heart, you could not seek to ruin that love which lives in mine and fills it, conquering all the lesser part of me. I never knew of how much love I was capable until I heard you speak today. Out of your life's experience, out of all that you have learned of women good and evil, you—for a selfish, miserable purpose—would put the gyves upon my wrists, make me a pawn in your dark game; a pawn which you would lose without a thought as the game went on.

"If you must fight, my lord, if you must ruin Monsieur de la Foret and a poor Huguenot girl, do it by greater means than this. You have power, you say. Use it then; destroy us, if you will. Send us to the Medici: bring us to the block, murder us—that were no new thing to Lord Leicester. But do not stoop to treachery and falsehood to thrust us down. Oh, you have made me see the depths of shame to-day! But yet," her voice suddenly changed, a note of plaintive force filled it—"I have learned much this hour—more than I ever knew. Perhaps it is that we come to knowledge only through fire and tears." She smiled sadly. "I suppose that sometime some day, this page of life would have scorched my sight. Oh, my lord, what was there in me that you dared speak so to me? Was there naught to have stayed your tongue and stemmed the tide in which you would engulf me?" He had listened as in a dream at first. She had read him as he might read himself, had revealed him with the certain truth, as none other had done in all his days. He was silent for a long moment, then raised his hand in protest.

"You have a strange idea of what makes offence and shame. I offered you marriage," he said complacently. "And when I come to think upon it, after all that you have said, fair Huguenot, I see no cause for railing. You call me this and that; to you I am a liar, a rogue, a cut-throat, what you will; and yet, and yet, I will have my way—I will have my way in the end."

"You offered me marriage—and meant it not. Do I not know? Did you rely so little on your compelling powers, my lord, that you must needs resort to that bait? Do you think that you will have your way to-morrow if you have failed to-day?"

With a quick change of tone and a cold, scornful laugh he rejoined: "Do you intend to measure swords with me?"

"No, no, my lord," she answered quietly; "what should one poor unfriended girl do in contest with the Earl of Leicester? But yet, in very truth, I have friends, and in my hour of greatest need I shall go seeking."

She was thinking of the Queen. He guessed her thought.

"You will not be so mad," he said urbanely again. "Of what can you complain to the Queen? Tut, tut, you must seek other friends than the Majesty of England!"

"Then, my lord, I will," she answered bravely. "I will seek the help of such a Friend as fails not when all fails, even He who putteth down the mighty from their seats and exalteth the humble."

"Well, well, if I have not touched your heart," he answered gallantly, "I at least have touched your wit and intellect. Once more I offer you alliance. Think well before you decline."

He had no thought that he would succeed, but it was ever his way to return to the charge. It had been the secret of his life's success so far. He had never taken a refusal. He had never believed that when man or woman said no that no was meant; and, if it were meant, he still believed that constant dropping would wear away the stone. He still held that persistence was the greatest lever in the world, that unswerving persistence was the master of opportunity.

They had now come to two paths in the park leading different ways.

"This road leads to Kenilworth, this to your prison," he said with a slow gesture, his eyes fixed upon hers. "I will go to my prison, then," she said, stepping forward, "and alone, by your leave."

Leicester was a good sportsman. Though he had been beaten all along the line, he hid his deep chagrin, choked down the rage that was in him. Smiling, he bowed low.

"I will do myself the honour to visit your prison to-morrow," he said.

"My father will welcome you, my lord," she answered, and, gathering up her skirt, ran down the pathway.

He stood unmoving, and watched her disappear. "But I shall have my way with them both," he said aloud.

The voice of a singer sounded in the green wood. Half consciously Leicester listened. The words came shrilling through the trees:

"Oh, love, it is a lily flower,
(Sing, my captain, sing, my lady!)
The sword shall cleave it,
Life shall leave it
Who shall know the hour?
(Sing, my lady, still!)"

Presently the jingling of bells mingled with the song, then a figure in motley burst upon him. It was the Queen's fool.

"Brother, well met—most happily met!" he cried. "And why well met, fool?" asked Leicester. "Prithee, my work grows heavy, brother. I seek another fool for the yoke. Here are my bells for you. I will keep my cap. And so we will work together, fool: you for the morning, I for the afternoon, and the devil take the night-time! So God be with you, Obligato!"

With a laugh he leaped into the undergrowth, and left Leicester standing with the bells in his hand.

CHAPTER XVI

Angele had come to know, as others in like case have ever done, how wretched indeed is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours. She had saved the Queen's life upon May Day, and on the evening of that day the Queen had sent for her, had made such high and tender acknowledgment of her debt as would seem to justify for her perpetual honour. And what Elizabeth said she meant; but in a life set in forests of complications and opposing interests the political overlapped the personal in her nature. Thus it was that she had kept the princes of the world dangling, advancing towards marriage with them, retreating suddenly, setting off one house against the other, allying herself to one European power to-day, with another to-morrow, her own person and her crown the pawn with which she played. It was not a beautiful thing in a woman, but it was what a woman could do; and, denied other powers given to men—as to her father—she resorted to astute but doubtful devices to advance her diplomacy. Over all was self-infatuation, the bane of princes, the curse of greatness, the source of wide injustice. It was not to be expected, as Leicester had said, that Elizabeth, save for the whim of the moment, would turn aside to confer benefit upon Angele or to keep her in mind, unless constrained to do so for some political reason.

The girl had charmed the Queen, had, by saving her life, made England her long debtor; but Leicester had judged rightly in believing that the Queen might find the debt irksome; that her gratitude would be corroded by other destructive emotions. It was true that Angele had saved her life, but Michel had charmed her eye. He had proved himself a more gallant fighter than any in her kingdom; and had done it, as he had said, in her honour. So, as her admiration for Michel grew, her debt to Angele became burdensome; and, despite her will, there stole into her mind the old petulance and smothered anger against beauty and love and marriage. She could ill bear that one near her person should not be content to flourish in the light and warmth of her own favour, setting aside all other small affections. So it was that she had sent Angele to her father and kept De la Foret in the palace. Perplexed, troubled by new developments, the birth of a son to Mary Queen of Scots, the demand of her Parliament that she should marry, the pressure of foreign policy which compelled her to open up again negotiations for marriage with the Duke of Anjou—all these combined to detach her from the interest she had suddenly felt in Angele. But, by instinct, she knew also that Leicester, through jealousy, had increased the complication; and, fretful under the long influence he had had upon her, she steadily lessened intercourse with him. The duel he fought with Lempriere on May Day came to her ears through the Duke's Daughter, and she seized upon it with sharp petulance. First she ostentatiously gave housing and care to Lempriere, and went to visit him; then, having refused Leicester audience, wrote to him.

"What is this I hear," she scrawled upon the paper, "that you have forced a quarrel with the Lord of Rozel, and have well-ny ta'en his life! Is swording then your dearest vice that you must urge it on a harmless gentle man, and my visitor? Do you think you hold a charter of freedom for your self-will?"

Have a care, Leicester, or, by God! you shall know another sword surer than your own."

The rage of Leicester on receiving this knew no bounds; for though he had received from Elizabeth stormy letters before, none had had in it the cold irony of this missive. The cause of it? Desperation seized him. With a mad disloyalty he read in every word of Elizabeth's letter, Michel de la Foret, refugee. With madder fury he determined to strike for the immediate ruin of De la Foret, and Angele with him—for had she not thrice repulsed him as though he had been some village captain? After the meeting in the maze he had kept his promise of visiting her "prison." By every art, and without avail, he had through patient days sought to gain an influence over her; for he saw that if he could but show the Queen that the girl was open to his advances, accepted his protection, her ruin would be certain—in anger Elizabeth would take revenge upon both refugees. But however much he succeeded with Monsieur Aubert, he failed wholly with Angele. She repulsed him still with the most certain courtesy, with the greatest outward composure; but she had to make her fight alone, for the Queen forbade intercourse with Michel, and she must have despaired but for the messages sent now and then by the Duke's Daughter.

Through M. Aubert, to whom Leicester was diligently courteous, and whom he sought daily, discussing piously the question of religion so dear to the old man's heart, he strove to foster in Angele's mind the suspicion he had ventured at their meeting in the maze, that the Queen, through personal interest in Michel, was saving his life to keep him in her household. So well did he work on the old man's feelings that when he offered his own protection to M. Aubert and Angele, whatever the issue with De la Foret might be, he was met with an almost tearful response of gratitude. It was the moment to convey a deep distrust of De la Foret to the mind of the old refugee, and it was subtly done.

Were it not better to leave the Court where only danger surrounded them, and find safety on Leicester's own estate, where no man living could molest them? Were it not well to leave Michel de la Foret to his fate, what ever it would be? Thrice within a week the Queen had sent for De la Foret—what reason was there for that, unless the Queen had a secret personal interest in him? Did M. Aubert think it was only a rare touch of humour which had turned De la Foret into a preacher, and set his fate upon a sermon to be preached before the Court? He himself had long held high office, had been near to her Majesty, and he could speak with more knowledge than he might use—it grieved him that Mademoiselle Aubert should be placed in so painful a position.

Sometimes as the two talked Angele would join them; and then there was a sudden silence, which made her flush with embarrassment, anxiety or anger. In vain did she assume a cold composure, in vain school herself to treat Leicester with a precise courtesy; in vain her heart protested the goodness of De la Foret and high uprightness of the Queen; the persistent suggestions of the dark Earl worked upon her mind in spite of all. Why had the Queen forbidden her to meet Michel, or write to him, or to receive letters from him? Why had the Queen, who had spoken such gratitude, deserted her? And now even the Duke's Daughter wrote to her no more, sent her no further messages. She felt herself a prisoner, and that the Queen had forgotten her debt. She took to wandering to that part of the palace-grounds where she could see the windows of the tower her lover inhabited. Her old habit of cheerful talk deserted her, and she brooded. It was long before she heard of the duel between the Seigneur and Lord Leicester—the Duke's Daughter had kept this from her, lest she should be unduly troubled—and when, in anxiety, she went to the house where Lempriere had been quartered, he had gone, none could tell her whither. Buonespoir was now in close confinement, by secret orders of Leicester, and not allowed to walk abroad; and thus with no friend save her father, now so much under the influence of the Earl, she was bitterly solitary. Bravely she fought the growing care and suspicion in her heart; but she was being tried beyond her strength. Her father had urged her to make personal appeal to the Queen; and at times, despite her better judgment, she was on the verge of doing so. Yet what could she say? She could not go to the Queen of England and cry out, like a silly milk-maid: "You have taken my lover—give him back to me!" What proof had she that the Queen wanted her lover? And if she spoke, the impertinence of the suggestion might send back to the fierce Medici that same lover, to lose his head.

Leicester, who now was playing the game as though it were a hazard for states and kingdoms, read the increasing trouble in her face; and waited confidently for the moment when in desperation she would lose her self-control and go to the Queen.

But he did not reckon with the depth of the girl's nature and her true sense of life. Her brain told her that what she was tempted to do she should not; that her only way was to wait; to trust that the Queen of England was as much true woman as Queen, and as much Queen as true woman; and that the one was held in high equipoise by the other. Besides, Trinity Day would bring the end of it all, and that was not far off. She steeled her will to wait till then, no matter how dark the sky might be.

As time went on, Leicester became impatient. He had not been able to induce M. Aubert to compel Angele to accept a quiet refuge at Kenilworth; he saw that this plan would not work, and he deployed

his mind upon another. If he could but get Angele to seek De la Foret in his apartment in the palace, and then bring the matter to Elizabeth's knowledge with sure proof, De la Foret's doom would be sealed. At great expense, however; for, in order to make the scheme effective, Angele should visit De la Foret at night. This would mean the ruin of the girl as well. Still that could be set right; because, once De la Foret was sent to the Medici the girl's character could be cleared; and, if not, so much the surer would she come at last to his protection. What he had professed in cold deliberation had become in some sense a fact. She had roused in him an eager passion. He might even dare, when De la Foret was gone, to confess his own action in the matter to the Queen, once she was again within his influence. She had forgiven him more than that in the past, when he had made his own mad devotion to herself excuse for his rashness or misconduct.

He waited opportunity, he arranged all details carefully, he secured the passive agents of his purpose; and when the right day came he acted.

About ten o'clock one night, a half-hour before the closing of the palace gates, when no one could go in or go out save by permit of the Lord Chamberlain, a footman from a surgeon of the palace came to Angele, bearing a note which read:

"Your friend is very ill, and asks for you. Come hither alone; and now, if you would come at all."

Her father was confined to bed with some ailment of the hour, and asleep—it were no good to awaken him. Her mind was at once made up. There was no time to ask permission of the Queen. She knew the surgeon's messengers by sight, this one was in the usual livery, and his master's name was duly signed. In haste she made herself ready, and went forth into the night with the messenger, her heart beating hard, a pitiful anxiety shaking her. Her steps were fleet between the lodge and the palace. They were challenged nowhere, and the surgeon's servant, entering a side door of the palace, led her hastily through gloomy halls and passages where they met no one, though once in a dark corridor some one brushed against her. She wondered why there were no servants to show the way, why the footman carried no torch or candle; but haste and urgency seemed due excuse, and she thought only of Michel, and that she would soon see him-dying, dead perhaps before she could touch his hand! At last they emerged into a lighter and larger hallway, where her guide suddenly paused, and said to Angel, motioning towards a door: "Enter. He is there."

For a moment she stood still, scarce able to breathe, her heart hurt her so. It seemed to her as though life itself was arrested. As the servant, without further words, turned and left her, she knocked, opened the door without awaiting a reply, and stepping into semidarkness, said softly:

"Michel! Michel!"

CHAPTER XVII

At Angle's entrance a form slowly raised itself on a couch, and a voice, not Michel's, said: "Mademoiselle—by our Lady, 'tis she!"

It was the voice of the Seigneur of Rozel, and Angle started back amazed.

"You, Monsieur—you!" she gasped. "It was you that sent for me?"

"Send? Not I—I have not lost my manners yet. Rozel at Court is no greater fool than Lempriere in Jersey."

Angle wrung her hands. "I thought it De la Foret who was ill. The surgeon said to come quickly." Lempriere braced himself against the wall, for he was weak, and his fever still high. "Ill?—not he. As sound in body and soul as any man in England. That is a friend, that De la Foret lover of yours, or I'm no butler to the Queen. He gets leave and brings me here and coaxes me back to life again—with not a wink of sleep for him these five days past till now."

Angel had drawn nearer, and now stood beside the couch, trembling and fearful, for it came to her mind that she had been made the victim of some foul device. The letter had read: "Your friend is ill." True, the Seigneur was her friend, but he had not sent for her.

"Where is De la Foret?" she asked quickly. "Yonder, asleep," said the Seigneur, pointing to a curtain

which divided the room from one adjoining. Angel ran quickly towards the door, then stopped short. No, she would not waken him. She would go back at once. She would leave the palace by the way she came. Without a word she turned and went towards the door opening into the hallway. With her hand upon the latch she stopped short again; for she realised that she did not know her way through the passages and corridors, and that she must make herself known to the servants of the palace to obtain guidance and exit. As she stood helpless and confused, the Seigneur called hoarsely: "De la Foret—De la Foret!" Before Angele could decide upon her course, the curtain of the other room was thrust aside, and De la Foret entered. He was scarce awake, and he yawned contentedly. He did not see Angele, but turned towards Lempriere. For once the Seigneur had a burst of inspiration. He saw that Angele was in the shadow, and that De la Foret had not observed her. He determined that the lovers should meet alone.

"Your arm, De la Foret," he grunted. "I'll get me to the bed in yonder room—'tis easier than this couch." "Two hours ago you could not bear the bed, and must get you to the couch—and now! Seigneur, do you know the weight you are?" he added, laughing, as he stooped, and helping Lempriere gently to his feet, raised him slowly in his arms and went heavily with him to the bedroom. Angele watched him with a strange thrill of timid admiration and delight. Surely it could not be that Michel—her Michel—could be bought from his allegiance by any influence on earth. There was the same old simple laugh on his lips, as, with chaffing words, he carried the huge Seigneur to the other room. Her heart acquitted him then and there of all blame, past or to come.

"Michel!" she said aloud involuntarily—the call of her spirit which spoke on her lips against her will.

De la Foret had helped Lempriere to the bed again as he heard his name called, and he stood suddenly still, looking straight before him into space. Angele's voice seemed ghostly and unreal.

"Michel!" he heard again, and he came forward into the room where she was. Yet once again she said the word scarcely above a whisper, for the look of rapt wonder and apprehension in his manner overcame her. Now he turned towards her, where she stood in the shadow by the door. He saw her, but even yet he did not stir, for she seemed to him still an apparition.

With a little cry she came forward to him. "Michel—help me!" she murmured, and stretched out her hands. With a cry of joy he took her in his arms and pressed her to his heart. Then a realisation of danger came to him.

"Why did you come?" he asked.

She told him hastily. He heard with astonishment, and then said: "There is some foul trick here. Have you the message?" She handed it to him. "It is the surgeon's writing, verily," he said; "but it is still a trick, for the sick man here is Rozel. I see it all. You and I forbidden to meet—it was a trick to bring you here."

"Oh, let me go!" she cried. "Michel, Michel, take me hence." She turned towards the door.

"The gates are closed," he said, as a cannon boomed on the evening air.

Angele trembled violently. "Oh, what will come of this?" she cried, in tearful despair.

"Be patient, sweet, and let me think," he answered. At that moment there came a knocking at the door, then it was thrown open, and there stepped inside the Earl of Leicester, preceded by a page bearing a torch.

"Is Michel de la Foret within?" he called; then stopped short, as though astonished, seeing Angele. "So! so!" he said, with a contemptuous laugh. Michel de la Foret's fingers twitched. He quickly stepped in front of Angele, and answered: "What is your business here, my lord?"

Leicester languorously took off a glove, and seemed to stifle a yawn in it; then said: "I came to take you into my service, to urge upon you for your own sake to join my troops, going upon duty in the North; for I fear that if you stay here the Queen Mother of France will have her way. But I fear I am too late. A man who has sworn himself into service d'amour has no time for service de la guerre."

"I will gladly give an hour from any service I may follow to teach the Earl of Leicester that he is less a swordsman than a trickster."

Leicester flushed, but answered coolly: "I can understand your chagrin. You should have locked your door. It is the safer custom." He bowed lightly towards Angele. "You have not learned our English habits of discretion, Monsieur de la Foret. I would only do you service. I appreciate your choler. I should be no less indignant. So, in the circumstances, I will see that the gates are opened, of course

you did not realise the flight of time,—and I will take Mademoiselle to her lodgings. You may rely on my discretion. I am wholly at your service —tout a vous, as who should say in your charming language."

The insolence was so veiled in perfect outward courtesy that it must have seemed impossible for De la Foret to reply in terms equal to the moment. He had, however, no need to reply, for the door of the room suddenly opened, and two pages stepped inside with torches.

They were followed by a gentleman in scarlet and gold, who said, "The Queen!" and stepped aside.

An instant afterwards Elizabeth, with the Duke's Daughter, entered.

The three dropped upon their knees, and Elizabeth waved without the pages and the gentleman-in-waiting. When the doors closed, the Queen eyed the three kneeling figures, and as her glance fell on Leicester a strange glitter came into her eyes. She motioned all to rise, and with a hand upon the arm of the Duke's Daughter, said to Leicester:

"What brings the Earl of Leicester here?"

"I came to urge upon Monsieur the wisdom of holding to the Sword and leaving the Book to the butter-fingered religious. Your Majesty needs good soldiers."

He bowed, but not low, and it was clear he was bent upon a struggle. He was confounded by the Queen's presence, he could not guess why she should have come; and that she was prepared for what she saw was clear.

"And brought an eloquent pleader with you?" She made a scornful gesture towards Angele.

"Nay, your Majesty; the lady's zeal outran my own, and crossed the threshold first."

The Queen's face wore a look that Leicester had never seen on it before, and he had observed it in many moods.

"You found the lady here, then?"

"With Monsieur alone. Seeing she was placed unfortunately, I offered to escort her hence to her father. But your Majesty came upon the moment."

There was a ring of triumph in Leicester's voice. No doubt, by some chance, the Queen had become aware of Angele's presence, he thought. Fate had forestalled the letter he had already written on this matter and meant to send her within the hour. Chance had played into his hands with perfect suavity. The Queen, less woman now than Queen, enraged by the information got he knew not how, had come at once to punish the gross breach of her orders and a dark misconduct—so he thought.

The Queen's look, as she turned it on Angele, apparently had in it what must have struck terror to even a braver soul than that of the helpless Huguenot girl.

"So it is thus you spend the hours of night? God's faith, but you are young to be so wanton!" she cried in a sharp voice. "Get you from my sight and out of my kingdom as fast as horse and ship may carry you—as feet may bear you." Leicester's face lighted to hear. "Your high Majesty," pleaded the girl, dropping on her knees, "I am innocent. As God lives, I am innocent."

"The man, then, only is guilty?" the Queen rejoined with scorn. "Is it innocent to be here at night, my palace gates shut, with your lover—alone?" Leicester laughed at the words.

"Your Majesty, oh, your gracious Majesty, hear me. We were not alone— not alone—"

There was a rustle of curtains, a heavy footstep, and Lempriere of Rozel staggered into the room. De la Foret ran to help him, and throwing an arm around him, almost carried him towards the couch. Lempriere, however, slipped from De la Foret's grasp to his knees on the floor before the Queen.

"Not alone, your high and sacred Majesty, I am here—I have been here through all. I was here when Mademoiselle came, brought hither by trick of some knave not fit to be your immortal Majesty's subject. I speak the truth, for I am butler to your Majesty and no liar. I am Lempriere of Rozel."

No man's self-control could meet such a surprise without wavering. Leicester was confounded, for he had not known that Lempriere was housed with De la Foret. For a moment he could do naught but gaze at Lempriere. Then, as the Seigneur suddenly swayed and would have fallen, the instinct of effective courtesy, strong in him, sent him with arms outstretched to lift him up. Together, without a word, he and De la Foret carried him to the couch and laid him down. That single act saved Leicester's life.

There was something so naturally (though, in truth, it was so hypocritically) kind in the way he sprang to his enemy's assistance that an old spirit of fondness stirred in the Queen's breast, and she looked strangely at him. When, however, they had disposed of Lempriere and Leicester had turned again towards her, she said: "Did you think I had no loyal and true gentlemen at my Court, my lord? Did you think my leech would not serve me as fair as he would serve the Earl of Leicester? You have not bought us all, Robert Dudley, who have bought and sold so long. The good leech did your bidding and sent your note to the lady; but there your bad play ended and Fate's began. A rabbit's brains, Leicester—and a rabbit's end. Fate has the brains you need."

Leicester's anger burst forth now under the lash of ridicule. "I cannot hope to win when your Majesty plays Fate in caricature."

With a little gasp of rage Elizabeth leaned over and slapped his face with her long glove. "Death of my life, but I who made you do unmake you!" she cried.

He dropped his hand on his sword. "If you were but a man, and not—" he said, then stopped short, for there was that in the Queen's face which changed his purpose. Anger was shaking her, but there were tears in her eyes. The woman in her was stronger than the Queen. It was nothing to her at this moment that she might have his life as easily as she had struck his face with her glove; this man had once shown the better part of himself to her, and the memory of it shamed her for his own sake now. She made a step towards the door, then turned and spoke:

"My Lord, I have no palace and no ground wherein your footstep will not be trespass. Pray you, remember."

She turned towards Lempriere, who lay on his couch faint and panting. "For you, my Lord of Rozel, I wish you better health, though you have lost it somewhat in a good cause."

Her glance fell on De la Foret. Her look softened. "I will hear you preach next Sunday, sir."

There was an instant's pause, and then she said to Angele, with gracious look and in a low voice: "You have heard from me that calumny which the innocent never escape. To try you I neglected you these many days; to see your nature even more truly than I knew it, I accused you but now. You might have been challenged first by one who could do you more harm than Elizabeth of England, whose office is to do good, not evil. Nets are spread for those whose hearts are simple, and your feet have been caught. Be thankful that we understand; and know that Elizabeth is your loving friend. You have had trials—I have kept you in suspense—there has been trouble for us all; but we are better now; our minds are more content; so all may be well, please God! You will rest this night with our lady-dove here, and tomorrow early you shall return in peace to your father. You have a good friend in our cousin." She made a gentle motion towards the Duke's Daughter. "She has proved it so. In my leech she has a slave. To her you owe this help in time of need. She hath wisdom, too, and we must listen to her, even as I have done this day."

She inclined her head towards the door. Leicester opened it, and as she passed out she gave him one look which told him that his game was lost, if not for ever, yet for time uncertain and remote. "You must not blame the leech, my lord," she said, suddenly turning back. "The Queen of England has first claim on the duty of her subjects. They serve me for love; you they help at need as time-servers."

She stepped on, then paused again and looked back. "Also I forbid fighting betwixt you," she said, in a loud voice, looking at De la Foret and Leicester.

Without further sign or look, she moved on. Close behind came Angele and the Duke's Daughter, and Leicester followed at some distance.

CHAPTER XVIII

Not far from the palace, in a secluded place hidden by laburnum, roses, box and rhododendrons, there was a quaint and beautiful retreat. High up on all sides of a circle of green the flowering trees and shrubs interlaced their branches, and the grass, as smooth as velvet, was of such a note as soothed the eye and quieted the senses. In one segment of the verdant circle was a sort of open bower made of poles, up which roses climbed and hung across in gay festoons; and in two other segments mossy banks made resting-places. Here, in days gone by, when Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, first drew the eyes

of his Queen upon him, Elizabeth came to listen to his vows of allegiance, which swam in floods of passionate devotion to her person. Christopher Hatton, Sir Henry Lee, the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Sussex, a race of gallants, had knelt upon this pleasant sward. Here they had declared a devotion that, historically platonic, had a personal passion which, if rewarded by no personal requital, must have been an expensive outlay of patience and emotion.

But those days had gone. Robert Dudley had advanced far past his fellows, had locked himself into the chamber of the Queen's confidence, had for long proved himself necessary to her, had mingled deference and admiration with an air of monopoly, and had then advanced to an air of possession, of suggested control. Then had begun his decline. England and England's Queen could have but one ruler, and upon an occasion in the past Elizabeth made it clear by the words she used: "God's death, my Lord, I have wished you well; but my favour is not so locked up for you that others shall not partake thereof; and, if you think to rule here, I will take a course to see you forthcoming. I will have here but one mistress and no master."

In these words she but declared what was the practice of her life, the persistent passion of her rule. The world could have but one sun, and every man or woman who sought its warmth must be a sun-worshipper. There could be no divided faith, no luminaries in the sky save those which lived by borrowed radiance.

Here in this bright theatre of green and roses poets had sung the praises of this Queen to her unblushing and approving face; here ladies thrice as beautiful as she had begged her to tell them the secret of her beauty, so much greater than that of any living woman; and she was pleased even when she knew they flattered but to gain her smile—it was the tribute that power exacts. The place was a cenotaph of past romance and pleasure. Every leaf of every tree and flower had impressions of glories, of love, ambition and intrigue, of tears and laughter, of joyousness and ruin. Never a spot in England where so much had been said and done, so far reaching in effect and influence. But its glory was departed, its day was done, it was a place of dreams and memories: the Queen came here no more. Many years had withered since she had entered this charmed spot; and that it remained so fine was but evidence of the care of those to whom she had given strict orders seven years past, that in and out of season it must be ever kept as it had erstwhile been. She had never entered the place since the day the young Marquis of Wessex, whom she had imprisoned for marrying secretly and without her consent, on his release came here, and, with a concentrated bitterness and hate, had told her such truths as she never had heard from man or woman since she was born. He had impeached her in such cold and murderous terms as must have made wince even a woman with no pride. To Elizabeth it was gall and wormwood. When he at last demanded the life of the young wife who had died in enforced seclusion, because she had married the man she loved, Elizabeth was so confounded that she hastily left the place, saying no word in response. This attack had been so violent, so deadly, that she had seemed unnerved, and forbore to command him to the Tower or to death.

"You, in whose breast love never stirred, deny the right to others whom God blessed with it," he cried. "Envious of mortal happiness that dare exist outside your will or gift, you sunder and destroy. You, in whose hands was power to give joy, gave death. What you have sown you shall reap. Here on this spot I charge you with high treason, with treachery to the people over whom you have power as a trust, which trust you have made a scourge."

With such words as these he had assailed her, and for the first time in her life she had been confounded. In safety he had left the place, and taken his way to Italy, from which he had never returned, though she had sent for him in kindness. Since that day Elizabeth had never come hither; and by-and-by none of her Court came save the Duke's Daughter, and her fool, who both made it their resort. Here the fool came upon the Friday before Trinity Day, bringing with him Lempriere and Buonespoir, to whom he had much attached himself.

It was a day of light and warmth, and the place was like a basket of roses. Having seen the two serving-men dispose, in a convenient place, the refreshment which Lempriere's appetite compelled, the fool took command of the occasion and made the two sit upon a bank, while he prepared the repast.

Strangest of the notable trio was the dwarfish fool with his shaggy black head, twisted mouth, and watchful, wandering eye, whose foolishness was but the flaunting cover of shrewd observation and trenchant vision. Going where he would, and saying what he listed, now in the Queen's inner chamber, then in the midst of the Council, unconsidered, and the butt of all, he paid for his bed and bounty by shooting shafts of foolery which as often made his listeners shrink as caused their laughter. The Queen he called *Delicio*, and *Leicester*, *Obligato*—as one who piped to another's dance. He had taken to Buonespoir at the first glance, and had frequented him, and Lempriere had presently been added to his favour. He had again and again been messenger between them, as also of late between Angele and Michel, whose case he viewed from a stand-point of great cheerfulness, and treated them as children

playing on the sands— as, indeed, he did the Queen and all near to her. But Buonespoir, the pirate, was to him reality and the actual, and he called him Bono Publico. At first Lempriere, ever jealous of his importance, was inclined to treat him with elephantine condescension; but he could not long hold out against the boon archness of the jester, and he collapsed suddenly into as close a friendship as that between himself and Buonespoir.

A rollicking spirt was his own fullest stock-in-trade, and it won him like a brother.

So it was that here, in the very bosom of the forest, lured by the pipe the fool played, Lempriere burst forth into song, in one hand a bottle of canary, in the other a handful of comfits:

"Duke William was a Norman
(Spread the sail to the breeze!)
That did to England ride;
At Hastings by the Channel
(Drink the wine to the lees!)
Our Harold the Saxon died.
If there be no cakes from Normandy,
There'll be more ale in England!"

"Well sung, nobility, and well said," cried Buonespoir, with a rose by the stem in his mouth, one hand beating time to the music, the other clutching a flagon of muscadella; "for the Normans are kings in England, and there's drink in plenty at the Court of our Lady Duchess."

"Delicio shall never want while I have a penny of hers to spend," quoth the fool, feeling for another tune. "Should conspirators prevail, and the damnedest be, she hath yet the Manor of Rozel and my larder," urged Lempriere, with a splutter through the canary.

"That shall be only when the Fifth wind comes—it is so ordained, Nuncio!" said the fool blinking. Buonespoir set down his flagon. "And what wind is the Fifth wind?" he asked, scratching his bullethead, his child-like, widespread eyes smiling the question.

"There be now four winds—the North wind and his sisters, the East, the West, and South. When God sends a Fifth wind, then conspirators shall wear crowns. Till then Delicio shall sow and I shall reap, as is Heaven's will."

Lempriere lay back and roared with laughter. "Before Belial, there never was such another as thou, fool. Conspirators shall die and not prevail, for a man may not marry his sister, and the North wind shall have no progeny. So there shall be no Fifth wind."

"Proved, proved," cried the fool. "The North wind shall go whistle for a mate—there shall be no Fifth wind. So, Delicio shall still sail by the compass, and shall still compass all, and yet be compassed by none; for it is written, Who compasseth Delicio existeth not."

Buonespoir watched a lark soaring, as though its flight might lead him through the fool's argument clearly. Lempriere closed his eye, and struggled with it, his lips outpursed, his head sunk on his breast. Suddenly his eyes opened, he brought the bottle of canary down with a thud on the turf. "Fore Michael and all angels, I have it, fool; I travel, I conceive. De Carteret of St. Ouen's must have gone to the block ere conceiving so. I must conceive thus of the argument. He who compasseth the Queen existeth not, for compassing, he dieth."

"So it is by the hour-glass and the fortune told in the porringer. You have conceived like a man, Nuncio."

"And conspirators, I conceive, must die, so long as there be honest men to slay them," rejoined the Seigneur.

"Must only honest men slay conspirators? Oh, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!" wheezed Buonespoir with a grin. He placed his hand upon his head in self-pity. "Buonespoir, art thou damned by muscadella?" he murmured.

"But thou art purged of the past, Bono Publico," answered the fool. "Since Delicio hath looked upon thee she hath shredded the Tyburn lien upon thee—thou art flushed like a mountain spring; and conspirators shall fall down by thee if thou, passant, dost fall by conspirators in the way. Bono Publico, thou shalt live by good company. Henceforth contraband shall be spurned and the book of grace opened."

Buonespoir's eyes laughed like a summer sky, but he scratched his head and turned over the rose-stem in his mouth reflectively. "So be it, then, if it must be; but yesterday the Devon sea-sweeper, Francis Drake, overhauled me in my cottage, coming from the Queen, who had infused him of me. 'I have heard of you from a high masthead,' said he. 'If the Spanish main allure you, come with me. There be galleons yonder still; they shall cough up doubloons.' 'It hath a sound of piracy,' said I. 'I am expurgated. My name is written on clean paper now, blessed be the name of the Queen!' 'Tut, tut, Buonesperado,' laughed he, 'you shall forget that Tyburn is not a fable if you care to have doubloons reminted at the Queen's mint. It is meet Spanish Philip's head be molted to oblivion, and Elizabeth's raised, so that good silver be purged of Popish alloy.' But that I had sworn by the little finger of St. Peter when the moon was full, never to leave the English seas, I also would have gone with Drake of Devon this day. It is a man and a master of men that Drake of Devon."

"'Tis said that when a man hath naught left but life, and hath treated his honour like a poor relation, he goes to the Spanish main with Drake and Grenville," said Lempriere.

"Then must Obligato go, for he hath such credentials," said the fool, blowing thistle-down in the air. "Yesterday was no Palm Sunday to Leicester. Delicio's head was high. 'Imperial Majesty,' quoth Obligato, his knees upon the rushes, 'take my life but send me not forth into darkness where I shall see my Queen no more. By the light of my Queen's eyes have I walked, and pains of hell are my Queen's displeasure.' 'Methinks thy humbleness is tardy,' quoth Delicio. 'No cock shall crow by my nest,' said she. 'And, by the mantle of Elijah, I am out with sour faces and men of phlegm and rheum. I will be gay once more. So get thee gone to Kenilworth, and stray not from it on thy peril. Take thy malaise with thee, and I shall laugh again.' Behold he goeth. So that was the end of Obligato, and now cometh another tune."

"She hath good cheer?" asked Lempriere eagerly. "I have never seen Delicio smile these seven years as she smiled to-day; and when she kissed Amicitia I sent for my confessor and made my will. Delicio hath come to spring-time, and the voice of the turtle is in her ear." "Amicitia—and who is Amicitia?" asked Lempriere, well flushed with wine.

"She who hath brought Obligato to the diminuendo and finale," answered the fool; "even she who hath befriended the Huguenottine of the black eyes."

"Ah, she, the Duke's Daughter—v'la, that is a flower of a lady! Did she not say that my jerkin fitted neatly when I did act as butler to her adorable Majesty three months syne? She hath no mate in the world save Mademoiselle Aubert, whom I brought hither to honour and to fame."

"To honour and fame, was it—but by the hill of desperandum, Nuncio," said the fool, prodding him with his stick of bells.

"'Desperandum'! I know not Latin; it amazes me," said Lempriere, waving a lofty hand.

"She—the Huguenottine—was a-mazed also, and from the maze was played by Obligato."

"How so! how so!" cried the Seigneur, catching at his meaning. "Did Leicester waylay and siege? 'Sblood, had I known this, I'd have broached him and swallowed him even on crutches."

"She made him raise the siege, she turned his own guns upon him, and in the end hath driven him hence." By rough questioning Lempriere got from the fool by snatches the story of the meeting in the maze, which had left Leicester standing with the jester's ribboned bells in his hand. Then the Seigneur got to his feet, and hugged the fool, bubbling with laughter.

"By all the blood of all the saints, I will give thee burial in my own grave when all's done," he spluttered; "for there never was such fooling, never such a wise fool come since Confucius and the Khan. Good be with you, fool, and thanks be for such a lady. Thanks be also for the Duke's Daughter. Ah, how she laid Leicester out! She washed him up the shore like behemoth, and left him gaping."

Buonespoir intervened. "And what shall come of it? What shall be the end? The Honeyflower lies at anchor—there be three good men in waiting, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and—"

The Seigneur interrupted. "There's little longer waiting. All's well! Her high hereditary Majesty smiled on me when she gave Leicester conge and fiery quittance. She hath me in favour, and all shall be well with Michel and Angele. O fool, fool, fantastic and flavoured fool, sing me a song of good content, for if this business ends not with crescendo and bell-ringing, I am no butler to the Queen nor keep good company!"

Seating themselves upon the mossy bank, their backs to the westward sun, the fool peered into the

green shadows and sang with a soft melancholy an ancient song that another fool had sung to the first Tudor:

"When blows the wind and drives the sleet,
And all the trees droop down;
When all the world is sad,
'tis meet Good company be known:
And in my heart good company
Sits by the fire and sings to me.

"When warriors return, and one
That went returns no more;
When dusty is the road we run,
And garners have no store;
One ingle-nook right warm shall be
Where my heart hath good company.

"When man shall flee and woman fail,
And folly mock and hope deceive,
Let cowards beat the breast and wail,
I'll homeward hie; I will not grieve:
I'll draw the blind, I'll there set free
My heart's beloved boon company.

"When kings shall favour, ladies call
My service to their side;
When roses grow upon the wall
Of life, with love inside;
I'll get me home with joy to be
In my heart's own good company!"

"Oh, fool, oh, beneficent fool, well done! 'Tis a song for a man— 'twould shame De Carteret of St. Ouen's to his knees," cried Lempriere.

"Oh, benignant fool, well done! 'twould draw me from my meals," said a voice behind the three; and, turning hastily about, they saw, smiling and applaudive, the Duke's Daughter. Beside her was Angele.

The three got to their feet, and each made obeisance after his kind- Buonespoir ducking awkwardly, his blue eyes bulging with pleasure, Lempriere swelling with vanity and spreading wide acknowledgment of their presence, the fool condescending a wave of welcome. "Oh! abundant Amicitia!" cried the fool to the Duke's Daughter, "thou art saved by so doing. So get thee to thanksgiving and God's mercy."

"Wherefore am I saved by being drawn from my meals by thy music, fool?" she asked, linking her arm in Angele's.

"Because thou art more enamoured of lampreys than of man; and it is written that thou shalt love thy fellow man, and he that loveth not is lost: therefore thou art lost if thou lingerest at meals."

"Is it so, then? And this lady—what thinkest thou? Must she also abstain and seek good company?"

"No, verily, Amicitia, for she is good company itself, and so she may sleep in the larder and have no fear."

"And what think you—shall she be happy? Shall she have gifts of fate?"

"Discriminately so, Amicitia. She shall have souvenirs and no suspicions of Fate. But she shall not linger here, for all lingerers in Delicio's Court are spied upon—not for their soul's good. She shall go hence, and—"

"Ay, princely lady, she shall go hence," interposed Lempriere, who had panted to speak, and could bear silence no longer. "Her high Majesty will kiss her on the brow, and in Jersey Isle she shall blossom and bloom and know bounty—or never more shall I have privilege and perquage."

He lumbered forward and kissed Angele's hand as though conferring distinction, but with great generosity. "I said that all should go well, and so it shall. Rozel shall prevail. The Queen knows on what rock to build, as I made warrant for her, and will still do so."

His vanity was incorrigible, but through it ran so child-like a spirit that it bred friendship and

repulsed not. The Duke's Daughter pressed the arm of Angele, who replied:

"Indeed it has been so according to your word, and we are—I am—shall ever be beholden. In storm you have been with us, so true a pilot and so brave a sailor; and if we come to port and the quiet shore, there shall be spread a feast of remembrance which shall never grow cold, Seigneur."

"One ingle-nook right warm shall be
Where my heart hath good company,"

sang the fool, and catching by the arm Buonespoir, who ducked his head in farewell, ran him into the greenwood. Angele came forward as if to stay Buonespoir, but stopped short reflectively. As she did so, the Duke's Daughter whispered quickly into Lempriere's ear.

Swelling with pride he nodded, and said: "I will reach him and discover myself to him, and bring him, if he stray, most undoubted and infallible lady," and with an air of mystery he made a heavily respectful exit.

Left alone, the two ladies seated themselves in the bower of roses, and for a moment were silent. Presently the Duke's Daughter laughed aloud.

"In what seas of dear conceit swims your leviathan Seigneur, heart's- ease?"

Angele stole a hand into the cool palm of the other. "He was builded for some lonely sea all his own. Creation cheated him. But God give me ever such friends as he, and I shall indeed 'have good company' and fear no issue." She sighed.

"Remains there still a fear? Did you not have good promise in the Queen's words that night?"

"Ay, so it seemed, and so it seemed before—on May Day, and yet—"

"And yet she banished you, and tried you, and kept you heart-sick? Sweet, know you not how bitter a thing it is to owe a debt of love to one whom we have injured? So it was with her. The Queen is not a saint, but very woman. Marriage she hath ever contemned and hated; men she hath desired to keep her faithful and impassioned servitors. So does power blind us. And the braver the man, the more she would have him in her service, at her feet, the centre of the world."

"I had served her in a crisis, an hour of peril. Was naught due me?"

The Duke's Daughter drew her close. "She never meant but that all should be well. And because you had fastened on her feelings as never I have seen another of your sex, so for the moment she resented it; and because De la Foret was yours—ah, if you had each been naught to the other, how easy it would have run! Do you not understand?"

"Nay, then, and yea, then—and I put it from me. See, am I not happy now? Upon your friendship I build."

"Sweet, I did what I could. Leicester filled her ears with poison every day, mixed up your business and great affairs with France, sought to convey that you both were not what you are; until at last I countermarched him." She laughed merrily. "Ay, I can laugh now, but it was all hanging by a thread, when my leech sent his letter that brought you to the palace. It had grieved me that I might not seek you, or write to you in all those sad days; but the only way to save you was by keeping the Queen's command; for she had known of Leicester's visits to you, of your meeting in the maze, and she was set upon it that alone, all alone, you should be tried to the last vestige of your strength. If you had failed—"

"If I had failed—" Angele closed her eyes and shuddered. "I had not cared for myself, but Michel—" "If you had failed, there had been no need to grieve for Michel. He then had not grieved for thee. But see, the wind blows fair, and in my heart I have no fear of the end. You shall go hence in peace. This morning the Queen was happier than I have seen her these many years: a light was in her eye brighter than showeth to the Court. She talked of this place, recalled the hours spent here, spoke even softly of Leicester. And that gives me warrant for the future. She has relief in his banishment, and only recalls older and happier days when, if her cares were no greater, they were borne by the buoyancy of girlhood and youth. Of days spent here she talked until mine own eyes went blind. She said it was a place for lovers, and if she knew any two lovers who were true lovers, and had been long parted, she would send them here."

"There be two true lovers, and they have been long parted," murmured Angele.

"But she commanded these lovers not to meet till Trinity Day, and she brooks not disobedience even in herself. How could she disobey her own commands? But"—her eyes were on the greenwood and the path that led into the circle—"but she would shut her eyes to-day, and let the world move on without her, let lovers thrive, and birds be nesting without heed or hap. Disobedience shall thrive when the Queen connives at it—and so I leave you to your disobedience, sweet."

With a laugh she sprang to her feet, and ran. Amazed and bewildered Angele gazed after her. As she stood looking she heard her name called softly.

Turning, she saw Michel. They were alone.

CHAPTER XIX

When De la Foret and Angele saw the Queen again it was in the royal chapel.

Perhaps the longest five minutes of M. de la Foret's life were those in which he waited the coming of the Queen on that Trinity Sunday which was to decide his fate. When he saw Elizabeth enter the chapel his eyes swam, till the sight of them was lost in the blur of colour made by the motions of gorgeously apparelled courtiers and the people of the household. When the Queen had taken her seat and all was quiet, he struggled with himself to put on such a front of simple boldness as he would wear upon day of battle. The sword the Queen had given him was at his side, and his garb was still that of a gentleman, not of a Huguenot minister such as Elizabeth in her grim humour, and to satisfy her bond with France, would make of him this day.

The brown of his face had paled in the weeks spent in the palace and in waiting for this hour; anxiety had toned the ruddy vigour of his bearing; but his figure was the figure of a soldier, and his hand that of a strong man. He shook a little as he bowed to her Majesty, but that passed, and when at last his eye met that of the Duke's Daughter he grew steady; for she gave him as plainly as though her tongue spoke, a message from Angele. Angele herself he did not see—she was kneeling in an obscure corner, her father's hand in hers, all the passion of her life pouring out in prayer.

De la Foret drew himself up with an iron will. No nobler figure of a man ever essayed to preach the Word, and so Elizabeth thought; and she repented of the bitter humour which had set this trial as his chance of life in England and his freedom from the hand of Catherine. The man bulked larger in her eyes than he had ever done, and she struggled with herself to keep the vow she had made to the Duke's Daughter the night that Angele had been found in De la Foret's rooms. He had been the immediate cause, fated or accidental, of the destined breach between Leicester and herself; he had played a significant part in her own life. Glancing at her courtiers, she saw that none might compare with him, the form and being of calm boldness and courage. She sighed she knew scarce why.

When De la Foret first opened his mouth and essayed to call the worshippers to prayer, no words came forth—only a dry whisper. Some ladies simpered, and more than one courtier laughed silently. Michel saw, and his face flamed up. But he laid a hand on himself, and a moment afterwards his voice came forth, clear, musical, and resonant, speaking simple words, direct and unacquered sentences, passionately earnest withal. He stilled the people to a unison of sentiment, none the less interested and absorbed because it was known that he had been the cause of the great breach between the Queen and the favourite. Ere he had spoken far, flippant gallants had ceased to flutter handkerchiefs, to move their swords idly upon the floor.

He took for his text: "Stand and search for the old paths." The beginning of all systems of religion, the coming of the Nazarene, the rise and growth of Christianity, the martyrdoms of the early church, the invasion of the truth by false doctrine, the abuses of the Church, the Reformation, the martyrdom of the Huguenots for the return to the early principles of Christianity, the "search for the old paths," he set forth in a tone generous but not fiery, presently powerful and searching, yet not declamatory. At the last he raised the sword that hung by his side, and the Book that lay before him, and said:

"And what matter which it is we wield—this steel that strikes for God, or this Book which speaks of Him? For the Book is the sword of the Spirit, and the sword is the life of humanity; for all faith must be fought for, and all that is has been won by strife. But the paths wherein ye go to battle must be the old paths; your sword shall be your staff by day, and the Book your lantern by night. That which ye love ye shall teach, and that which ye teach ye shall defend; and if your love be a true love your teaching shall be a great teaching, and your sword a strong sword which none may withstand. It shall be the pride of

sovereign and of people; and so neither 'height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.'"

Ere he had ended, some of the ladies were overcome, the eyes of the Duke's Daughter were full of tears, and Elizabeth said audibly, when he ceased speaking: "On my soul, I have no bishop with a tongue like his. Would that my Lord of Ely were here to learn how truth should be spoke. Henceforth my bishops shall first be Camisards."

Of that hour's joyful business the Queen wrote thus to the Medici before the day was done:

Cancelling all other letters on the matter, this M. de la Foret shall stay in my kingdom. I may not be the headsman of one of my faith—as eloquent a preacher as he was a brave soldier. Abiding by the strict terms of our treaty with my brother of France, he shall stay with us in peace, and in our own care. He hath not the eloquence of a Knox, but he hath the true thing in him, and that speaks.

To the Duke's Daughter the Queen said: "On my soul, he shall be married instantly, or my ladies will carry him off and murder him for love."

And so it was that the heart of Elizabeth the Queen warmed again and dearly towards two Huguenot exiles, and showed that in doing justice she also had not so sour a heart towards her sex as was set down to her credit. Yet she made one further effort to keep De la Foret in her service. When Michel, once again, declined, dwelt earnestly on his duty towards the widow of his dead chief, and begged leave to share her exile in Jersey, Elizabeth said: "On my soul, but I did not think there was any man on earth so careless of princes' honours!"

To this De la Foret replied that he had given his heart and life to one cause, and since Montgomery had lost all, even life, the least Michel de la Foret could do was to see that the woman who loved him be not unprotected in the world. Also, since he might not at this present fight for the cause, he could speak for it; and he thanked the Queen of England for having shown him his duty. All that he desired was to be quiet for a space somewhere in "her high Majesty's good realm," till his way was clear to him.

"You would return to Jersey, then, with our friend of Rozel?" Elizabeth said, with a gesture towards Lempriere, who, now recovered from his wound, was present at the audience.

De la Foret inclined his head. "If it be your high Majesty's pleasure."

And Lempriere of Rozel said: "He would return with myself your noble Majesty's friend before all the world, and Buonespoir his ship the Honeyflower."

Elizabeth's lips parted in a smile, for she was warmed with the luxury of doing good, and she answered:

"I know not what the end of this will be, whether our loyal Lempriere will become a pirate or Buonespoir a butler to my Court; but it is too pretty a hazard to forego in a world of chance. By the rood, but I have never, since I sat on my father's throne, seen black so white as I have done this past three months. You shall have your Buonespoir, good Rozel; but if he plays pirate any more—tell him this from his Queen—upon an English ship, I will have his head, if I must needs send Drake of Devon to overhaul him."

That same hour the Queen sent for Angele, and by no leave, save her own, arranged the wedding-day, and ordained that it should take place at Southampton, whither the Comtesse de Montgomery had come on her way to Greenwich to plead for the life of Michel de la Foret, and to beg Elizabeth to relieve her poverty. Both of which things Elizabeth did, as the annals of her life record.

After Elizabeth—ever self-willed—had declared her way about the marriage ceremony, looking for no reply save that of silent obedience, she made Angele sit at her feet and tell her whole story again from first to last. They were alone, and Elizabeth showed to this young refugee more of her own heart than any other woman had ever seen. Not by words alone, for she made no long story; but once she stooped and kissed Angele upon the cheek, and once her eyes filled up with tears, and they dropped upon her lap unheeded. All the devotion shown herself as a woman had come to naught; and it may be that this thought stirred in her now. She remembered how Leicester and herself had parted, and how she was denied all those soft resources of regret which were the right of the meanest women in her realm. For, whatever she might say to her Parliament and people, she knew that all was too late—that she would never marry and that she must go childless and uncomforted to her grave. Years upon years of delusion of her people, of sacrifice to policy, had at last become a self-delusion, to which her eyes were not full opened yet—she sought to shut them tight. But these refugees, coming at the moment of her own

struggle, had changed her heart from an ever-growing bitterness to human sympathy. When Angele had ended her tale once more, the Queen said:

"God knows, ye shall not linger in my Court. Such lives have no place here. Get you back to my Isle of Jersey, where ye may live in peace. Here all is noise, self-seeking and time-service. If ye twain are not happy I will say the world should never have been made."

Before they left Greenwich Palace—M. Aubert and Angele, De la Foret, Lempriere, and Buonespoir—the Queen made Michel de la Foret the gift of a chaplaincy to the Crown. To Monsieur Aubert she gave a small pension, and in Angele's hands she placed a deed of dower worthy of a generosity greater than her own.

At Southampton, Michel and Angele were married by royal license, and with the Comtesse de Montgomery set sail in Buonespoir's boat, the Honeyflower, which brought them safe to St. Helier's, in the Isle of Jersey.

CHAPTER XX

Followed several happy years for Michel and Angele. The protection of the Queen herself, the chaplaincy she had given De la Foret, the friendship with the Governor of the island; and the boisterous tales Lempriere had told of those days at Greenwich Palace quickened the sympathy and held the interest of the people at large; while the simple lives of the two won their way into the hearts of all, even, at last, to that of De Carteret of St. Ouen's. It was Angele herself who brought the two Seigneurs together at her own good table; and it needed all her tact on that occasion to prevent the ancient foes from drinking all the wine in her cellar.

There was no parish in Jersey that did not know their goodness, but mostly in the parishes of St. Martin's and Rozel were their faithful labours done. From all parts of the island people came to hear Michel speak, though that was but seldom; and when he spoke he always wore the sword the Queen had given him, and used the Book he had studied in her palace. It was to their home that Buonespoir the pirate—faithful to his promise to the Queen that he would harry English ships no more came wounded, after an engagement with a French boat sent to capture him, carried thither by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It was there he died, after having drunk a bottle of St. Ouen's muscadella, brought secretly to him by his unchanging friend, Lempriere, so hastening the end.

The Comtesse de Montgomery, who lived in a cottage near by, came constantly to the little house on the hillside by Rozel Bay. She had never loved her own children more than she did the brown-haired child with the deep-blue eyes, which was the one pledge of the great happiness of Michel and Angele.

Soon after this child was born, M. Aubert had been put to rest in St. Martin's churchyard, and there his tombstone might be seen so late as a hundred years ago. So things went softly by for seven years, and then Madame de Montgomery journeyed to England, on invitation of the Queen and to better fortune, and Angele and De la Foret were left to their quiet life in Jersey. Sometimes this quiet was broken by bitter news from France, of fresh persecution, and fresh struggle on the part of the Huguenots. Thereafter for hours, sometimes for days, De la Foret would be lost in sorrowful and restless meditation; and then he fretted against his peaceful calling and his uneventful life. But the gracious hand of his wife and the eyes of his child led him back to cheerful ways again.

Suddenly one day came the fearful news from England that the plague had broken out, and that thousands were dying. The flight from London was like the flight of the children of Israel into the desert. The dead-carts filled with decaying bodies rattled through the foul streets, to drop their horrid burdens into the great pit at Aldgate; the bells of London tolled all day and all night for the passing of human souls. Hundreds of homes, isolated because of a victim of the plague found therein, became ghastly breeding-places of the disease, and then silent, disgusting graves. If a man shivered in fear, or staggered from weakness, or for very hunger turned sick, he was marked as a victim, and despite his protests was huddled away with the real victims to die the awful death. From every church, where clergy were left to pray, went up the cry for salvation from "plague, pestilence, and famine." Scores of ships from Holland and from France lay in the Channel, not allowed to touch the shores of England, nor permitted to return whence they came. On the very day that news of this reached Jersey, came a messenger from the Queen of England for Michel de la Foret to hasten to her Court for that she had need of him, and it was a need which would bring him honour. Even as the young officer who brought

the letter handed it to De la Foret in the little house on the hill-side above Rozel Bay, he was taken suddenly ill, and fell at the Camisard's feet.

De la Foret straightway raised him in his arms. He called to his wife, but, bidding her not come near, he bore the doomed man away to the lonely Ecrehos Rocks lying within sight of their own doorway. Suffering no one to accompany him, he carried the sick man to the boat which had brought the Queen's messenger to Rozel Bay. The sailors of the vessel fled, and alone De la Foret set sail for the Ecrehos.

There upon the black rocks the young man died, and Michel buried him in the shore-bed of the Maitre Ile. Then, after two days—for he could bear suspense no longer—he set sail for Jersey. Upon that journey there is no need to dwell. Any that hath ever loved a woman and a child must understand. A deep fear held him all the way, and when he stepped on shore at Rozel Bay he was as one who had come from the grave, haggard and old.

Hurrying up the hillside to his doorway, he called aloud to his wife, to his child. Throwing open the door, he burst in. His dead child lay upon a couch, and near by, sitting in a chair, with the sweat of the dying on her brow, was Angele. As he dropped on his knee beside her, she smiled and raised her hand as if to touch him, but the hand dropped and the head fell forward on his breast. She was gone into a greater peace.

Once more Michel made a journey-alone—to the Ecrehos, and there, under the ruins of the old Abbey of Val Richer, he buried the twain he had loved. Not once in all the terrible hours had he shed a tear; not once had his hand trembled; his face was like stone, and his eyes burned with an unearthly light.

He did not pray beside the graves; but he knelt and kissed the earth again and again. He had doffed his robes of peace, and now wore the garb of a soldier, armed at all points fully. Rising from his knees, he turned his face towards Jersey.

"Only mine! Only mine!" he said aloud in a dry, bitter voice.

In the whole island, only his loved ones had died of the plague. The holiness and charity and love of Michel and Angele had ended so!

When once more he set forth upon the Channel, he turned his back on Jersey and shaped his course towards France, having sent Elizabeth his last excuses for declining a service which would have given him honour, fame and regard. He was bent upon a higher duty.

Not long did he wait for the death he craved. Next year, in a Huguenot sortie from Anvers, he was slain. He died with these words on his lips:

"Maintenant, Angele!"

In due time the island people forgot them both, but the Seigneur of Rozel caused a stone to be set up on the highest point of land that faces France, and on the stone were carved the names of Michel and Angele. Having done much hard service for his country and for England's Queen, Lempriere at length hung up his sword and gave his years to peace. From the Manor of Rozel he was wont to repair constantly to the little white house, which remained as the two had left it,—his own by order of the Queen,—and there, as time went on, he spent most of his days. To the last he roared with laughter if ever the name of Buonespoir was mentioned in his presence; he swaggered ever before the Royal Court and De Carteret of St. Ouen's; and he spoke proudly of his friendship with the Duke's Daughter, who had admired the cut of his jerkin at the Court of Elizabeth. But in the house where Angele had lived he moved about as though in the presence of a beloved sleeper he would not awake.

Michel and Angele had had their few years of exquisite life and love, and had gone; Lempriere had longer measure of life and little love, and who shall say which had more profit of breath and being? The generations have passed away, and the Angel of Equity hath a smiling pity as she scans the scales and the weighing of the Past.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Never believed that when man or woman said no that no was meant
Slander ever scorches where it touches

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