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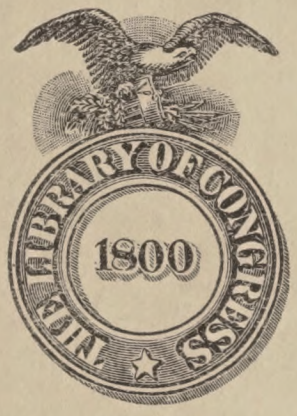

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The Shadow of the Guillotine.

CHAPTER I.

TRAVELLERS—"THE HEART AND THE DAGGER!"

IT was toward the close of a hot, sultry day of the month of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two.

France had experienced many a season of strife and turmoil, and the reign of anarchy and confusion was no new thing within her borders; many and various had been the eruptions of the volcanic spirit of her people, and the terrible besom of slaughter had more than once swept the devoted land from coast to frontier; but never before had the strife and the turmoil been so fierce and relentless; never before had the eruptions been so fearfully fatal; never before had the red demon of slaughter run such unrestrained riot, as at this present time. It was, in deed and in truth, a Reign of Terror. The Monarch of all Terrors held undisputed sway, and the Genius of Destruction ravaged the realm. Throughout the length and breadth of the land those who held rule were eager only to tear down and de-

stroy, without one effective thought of building and preserving. It was the rule of Riot—the government of the Universal Mob! Reason was utterly dethroned and cast to the winds, and wild Frenzy and Madness swayed the flaming scepter! The fair kingdom—the fairest on the face of the globe in its possibilities—was under the cruel feet of the most wretched, the most wicked, and the most law-defying of her people, and fiends incarnate held the reins and gave direction to the destiny of the nation.

We cannot tell upon how many a scene of blood the sun of that August day was going down. Of course, there was the most terror where was congregated the most terrible material; but the Jacobin and the *Sans Culotte* were terrible anywhere, and at all times, and in every nook and corner of France were they to be found. Away in the extreme North—at the Channel gates—in the Department of Artois, the sulphurous fumes arose with the cry of "*Vive la Revolution!*" and in the market-place of Arras, close by the fountain where the women washed their soiled linen, was set up a frame of timber, with a flight of steps leading upward to a platform; above the platform loomed twin posts, bound at the top, between which, running in oiled grooves, was a knife heavily weighted on top with iron or lead. And the color of the platform plainly indicated the sort of work that was done thereon. A traveller, whose movements betrayed that he was a stranger in those parts, stopped in this market-place, and near to this gaunt specter of wood and iron. He was afoot and carried a staff in his hand, and after looking around for a time he espied a boy plashing with his hands in the water of the fountain.

"*Hola!* My brave boy! What is this pile of timber?"

"Ha! hast eyes, and ask such a question! Hast ears, and need to be told who this *grande dame* is! '*Vive la Revolution! Vive la Republique!*' That is what she says. Come on the morrow and thou shalt hear her talk. Our people will be here. Oho! This is good Mother Guillotine! And her children she counts by the score. How she embraces them! She is a loving mamma."

The man looked up again to where the two posts were limned against the sky, and then turned away, and as he went the boy called after him:

"*Hola! Mon brave!* If thou wouldst see her children, go to the hall of justice. There are judges there from Paris, and they are counting off the next party for the banquet. If thou art indeed a stranger, shout: '*Vive la Revolution!*' with all thy might."

"And if I should cry: 'Live the king?'"

The boy started with quick terror, and cast his eyes around like one sorely frightened.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "let that word be heard from thy lips in France and thy head is off in a twinkling! Get thee gone, and show not thy face here again. Thou art too near the guillotine for thine own good."

The man nodded confidently. He had not spoken without care.

"I am indeed a stranger," he said, "and I but put the question for information. Be sure I am no lover of the king. But other information I much desire. Dost know where is the Chateau de Liancourt?"

"I know where it was."

"Ha! Has it been—"

"Oho! It has gone the way of all the nests that held enemies of the Republic. The citizens tore it down. Its tall towers are laid low, and its great stones are scattered upon the sward."

"And the count—where is he?"

"Which count? One count is dead, and the other is away—in America, they say."

"Then you know not of the one who has been in America?"

"I know nothing."

"Thank you. This for your information," and he threw the lad a piece of silver.

"Ah, thou art a true patriot. Come to me for information when it pleases thee."

Then grasping his staff, the man turned away and strode out from the market-place and out from the town of Arras, simply giving as a pass at the gate—"*Vive la Revolution!*" It was not now the *Nation* nor the *Republic*, but *Revolution* was the watchword. The man was a little past middle age, perhaps a year or two beyond fifty; of medium height; compact and muscular, and well-formed; his features strongly marked and regular, with a countenance neither handsome nor ugly, but manly and passable, and bearing traces of a former beauty that must have been decided. Exposure and trial, and, perhaps, the conflict of fierce passions, had darkened and corrugated the face to a degree that was almost sinister in certain lights and conditions. When at his ease, with nothing to arouse him from a purely normal condition of mind, the leading feature or characteristic was that abandon, or self-contained confidence, which renders a man reckless and defiant—bold and daring in front of physical danger, but morally a coward. He had evidently at some period of his life been in military service, though there was nothing in his present garb, save his method of wearing it, to indicate such a fact. The garb was plain and sober, of brown woolen stuff; a coat and waistcoat cut something after the American style;

breeches secured at the knees with small black buckles; long, brown stockings of cotton; and heavy, thick-soled shoes, with goodly sized buckles of silver. On his head he wore a tall-crowned hat of the Puritan style.

From Arras he went toward the west, ere long reaching a stretch of the highway that lay near to a murmuring tributary of the river Authie. For some time he had fancied he heard footsteps behind him, and as he approached a point where a dense wood swept nearly down to the bank of the stream, leaving only clear space enough for the road, he concluded that he would stop and see who or what might be on his track. Daylight was waning, and he cared not to be overhauled by a possible enemy in the wood, though how he could have an enemy there he could not tell.

Very soon the approaching steps sounded more distinctly, and ere long a man appeared coming over the same way which he himself had trodden. This newcomer, standing by the water's edge, where the very last rays of the setting sun shone upon him, passing and leaving him in the shadow while he stood there, presented a study. He was a man, once seen, not to be easily forgotten. As he stopped, he took off his hat and wiped his brow. He was rather below the medium height, with a slight, frail figure; every point of body and face sharp and angular; his limbs apparently shaky and feeble, his forehead small and projecting over the brows and over the temples; the eyes blue, but so deeply set that they often appeared jetty black; the nose straight and small, and expanding at the nostrils; a large mouth and thin lips, feebly supported by a chin slight and pointed; his complexion was yellow and livid, like that of a man worn by sorrow, suffering and, perhaps, prolonged sickness. The muscles of the

face were tense and hard, the expression harsh and severe. And yet the man could smile, though there was apt to be more of sarcasm than of sweetness in it. Of course, the man was far from handsome, and to most people of refined tastes and feelings, he must have appeared ugly and repulsive. His age could not have been more than five-and-thirty, though at times he looked much older. His garb was poor and threadbare. The coat of an olive-green color was ill-shaped and ill-fitting, seeming to have been made for a larger man; the small-clothes were of a dull red; the stockings, fitting closely to the spindle-like legs, were striped with red and white; and upon his worn shoes were soiled rosettes of red, white and blue. His hat was something like the Kossuth hat of the present day, the broad brim looped up over the left ear with a cockade, and the crown small and peaked. He looked upon the man in Puritan garb very sharply, and when he spoke, his voice was sharp and harsh, not unlike the creak of a file upon a saw-plate.

"I give thee good-day, citizen, if the day be not too far spent."

"Day or evening, it is all one," responded our first acquaintance. "If you wish me well, allow me to return the wish."

"I wish well to everything," said the angular man, eying the other sharply; "dost not thou?"

"I' faith! I don't know, stranger. I wish everything was good, certainly."

"A good *king* for instance?" queried he of the yellow visage, significantly, though he tried to speak lightly.

Had the man in brown been possessed of the genius of a Machiavel he could not have made an answer more to the purpose than that which slipped naturally and readily from his lips:

"My faith! A good king, methinks, would be something like unto a good disease. He can enjoy it who likes. As for me, I prefer health. And, my friend, thou lookest like a man of wit and judgment; wilt thou tell me, what is the use of a king where the people have no voice in giving him power?"

"Upon my life, citizen, thou art bold to speak thus freely to a stranger."

"Bold enough to tell the truth, my friend; and yet, not so bold, perhaps, as you may imagine."

At this point the small man started, and the muscles of his face twitched nervously; but as the other went on he composed himself.

"For," the man in brown continued, "thy face, though not inviting, is at least honest, and I think thy heart is in the right place. Thou wouldst not betray one who trusted thee."

"Thy hand, my brother! Thou speakest truly," cried he in olive-green, at the same time advancing, and extending his hand. "Goest thou to the westward?"

"For a spell—yes."

"Then we will walk together. Hast thou a watchword?"

"Always. I have learned it after years spent in America—the land of Washington—of Liberty and Independence."

Truly, the angular man was touched in the most effective spot and manner. That his confidence and esteem were won was evident enough.

"Good citizen, wilt thou not give me thy name?"

"Aye—thou shalt have the only name I have used for years. I am called Rupert of Redwood. And now, to repay me, wilt thou say how I may call thee?"

"Aye, with equal truth and sincerity, for I give thee

a name that has been mine from childhood—Joseph Max."

After this the twain moved on, and their conversation was quite free and fairly frank. Rupert of Redwood very soon made up his mind that Master Max was one of the political leaders of the day, and if he was not a great-hearted patriot, a sympathetic friend of the people and a devoted apostle of justice and truth, then he was a most consummate actor, for all these grand and sublime sentiments burst forth from his lips as though born and nurtured in his heart. Further, Rupert discovered that his companion was now bound upon a political work—it would appear, a meeting to be holden in some secret place during that night, and by and by it came out accidentally, all through Rupert's asking information concerning the destruction of the Chateau de Liancourt.

"Ha!" cried Max, with a start. "Art bound for that place?"

"Thither were my steps bent."

"Good! We shall be companions. You will remain here in Artois?"

"For a time, yes."

"Right. I can spend but an hour; but we will have our business well laid out."

On the other hand, of Rupert of Redwood, Joseph Max learned that he had lately returned from the United States of America, where he had spent several years, and where he had been engaged in military service. This opened up a field of broad and interesting inquiry on Joseph's part, and Rupert answered his discriminating questions readily, and with keen judgment and knowledge.

Thus they conversed until the shadows had gathered thickly, and until the thick wood had been well nigh

passed. Not far in advance was to be seen an opening, and through the vista, in the extreme distance, was to be seen a bold swell of wooded land standing revealed against the flaming sky, for beyond that hill the sun had set.

"See!" cried Joseph Max, pointing off to where a grim pile of jagged ruin was visible, outlined against the elevated horizon. "There is what is left of *monseigneur's* proud castle. That is Liancourt; or, more properly and strictly speaking, Miremont."

Before Rupert could answer, the attention of the twain was called to the sound of horses' feet upon the road over which they had come.

"Are we followed?" exclaimed Max.

"There are not many horses," said he of Redwood, bending his ear toward the ground. "Hark!"—and he knelt and laid his ear upon the sward—"I hear but two. We need not fear them, I think."

"How," cried Joseph, with an exhibition of surprise that was really childish, "do you put your ear to the earth that you may hear?"

"Aye, Monsieur Joseph. It is a trick I learned of the American Indians, and it is—"

The sentence was not finished. A quick cry from the Jacobin—for such our friend of the green coat undoubtedly was—caused Rupert of Redwood to turn his head, and with a hearty oath he sprang back against a stout tree, and brought forth a heavy pistol from a breast-pocket.

* * * * * * *

In order that we may understand what cause the travellers had for alarm, we will go back a little way in time, and look upon another road, running westward from Arras, north of that which we have been following.

Upon this northern road, which was but a by-way, winding around to reach an old mill that stood on a hill, in the edge of the wood, as the sun was sinking behind the distant hills, stood two men. They were physically powerful, and their faces plainly revealed that they were as bold and reckless and unscrupulous as they were strong of muscle. Their garbs were of the cut and quality worn by the peasantry of Artois, and scant enough to give them rightful claim to the title of *sans culottes*. In their frayed and soiled sashes they wore heavy knives, and besides these they carried each a regular war-club. In their conversation they addressed one another as Ismael and Jacques. He called Ismael was a man of forty, swart as an Indian, with low, brutish forehead, and a neck like the neck of a bull. He who answered to the name of Jacques was a few years younger, and evidently the stronger of the two. Take them all in all, as they lurked there in the gloomsome wood, and they were about the last pair an honest man, with money in his purse, would have cared to meet.

While they stood for a little time considering, they heard the sound of approaching footsteps, upon which they drew back under cover to watch.

"It cannot be that he has taken this path," said Ismael, in a whisper.

"No, of course not. And there are more than one pair of feet, too."

"Aye—but he might—"

"No, no—there they come. They are Gabriel and Raoul. Look! They have their clubs. They have work on hand. Shall we speak to them?"

"There can be no harm. They are of the *Fraternity*."

So the lurkers stalked forth from their hiding-place, and were at once recognized by the new-comers, who

saluted them gushingly. They were, as Jacques had announced, Gabriel and Raoul. The former was a man of four or five-and-twenty, and the other perhaps five years older; and in every way were they fit mates for the first twain. They were powerful animals, with the natures of the mastiff and the tiger bestowed upon them in equal proportions.

"*Of the Fraternity.*"

Aye—that told the story, for they had not conversed a full minute before the truth had become apparent. They were members of a secret organization, bound together by vows which were not to be broken. In that time, when the government was in the hands of the mob, and when human life was held so cheaply that blood ran as freely as water, the very worst and most reckless and heaven-defying of the rabble organized themselves into bands, or societies for mutual protection, for plunder, and for such mutual help as might be required. In different localities were different societies. One of the bands organized first in Paris at the commencement of the Revolution, was called "*The Brotherhood of the Heart and the Dagger.*" It was not extensive as to its membership, but it was powerful in its cohesion. During the six years of its existence not a single member of it fell by violation of his obligation. Never, to the knowledge of the chiefs, was the faith broken by one of the fraternity. The oath of initiation was one of the most terrible that could be conjured up, and the dead certainty that the infliction of the penalty would speedily follow a violation of the oath was sufficient to hold its members true to one another. And then there was safety to the individual resulting from this affiliation. The brothers were sworn to help each other, even to the destruction of life and the breaking of law. They knew no other

party. Sympathizing with the mob, they were at heart Jacobins; yet, should duty call, they would stab a Jacobin as quickly as they would a Royalist. When it had come to the necessity of secret assassinations throughout the realm, the members of "the Heart and the Dagger" were ready for the work, and for the plunder which often came with it.

And of this terrible craft were the four men thus met in that wood. Assured that no other ears were near to take in their words, they hesitated not to speak freely.

"Ah," said Gabriel, with a significant twirl of the thumb and finger, addressing the other twain, "thou art to strike the *Green Hawk*."

"Ay, even so," added Jacques, nodding.

"I' faith, it is well we met. Our man is with him. They are together on the other road."

"Hast seen them?"

"No; but our boy has tracked them. He found the man we sought by the fountain of the market-place, and he followed him until he saw him join the Hawk, when he darted across to tell us."

"Who is your man, *mon brave?*"

"He is called Rupert of Redwood."

"Ah! The man would have fallen to us but for the coming of the more important game. But tell us, good Gabriel, who and what is this victim that he should be worth so much care?"

"By my life, Jacques, I know not, nor can I imagine. The master will not enlighten us, and for the first time in the whole course of my work I am totally in the dark. I cannot imagine. It gives me real pain. But, good Jacques, are not our masters growing great? I never thought they would give us the *Green Hawk* to silence."

"It is dark to me, Gabriel—as dark as it is to thee. But—come. If our men are together, we must strike together!"

"Aye—even so."

"Then let us move on. The path by which we cross over is not far away. Our man is not strong."

"Ah, ours is a tiger!"

"Well—we are four, and we will work as one."

"Good! Let us move on. Our boy will meet us if they separate or turn aside."

Raoul, to whom the boy-scout was particularly attached, took the lead. At a short distance from the point where they had come together a path was found opening to the southward, toward the Authie highway, into which they plunged, and sped rapidly on. Ever and anon they stopped and listened, and at times they hesitated and considered; but they did not fear—that is, they feared not that which rogues in ordinary might fear—the hand of Justice—for many of the officers of justice were of their society, and the blind goddess herself was shackled and prone beneath their feet. Other justice was above and beyond the reach of their unassisted thought.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE TIDE OF BATTLE WAS CHANGED.

Had Rupert of Redwood been alone he might have been stricken unawares by the enemy that lay in ambush for him; but Joseph Max was not a man to be caught entirely off his guard. Not a moment had passed since they entered the wood during which his quick ear had not been open, and his restless eyes on the watch. The first movement in the woody cover attracted his notice, and he caught his companion by the arm and pulled him aside just in season to escape the fell stroke of one of the heavy clubs.

"Ah," he exclaimed, pulling a pistol from his bosom, "they have tracked me!"

"Aye," cried Gabriel, whose club had been aimed at Rupert's head, "it is the pair of you this time! Say your prayers in a hurry!" and he aimed a second blow at the head of his intended victim.

But Rupert warded off this second blow very easily, and then darted back and took a hasty survey of his surroundings.

Very fortunately a simple accident greatly befriended him. Standing in the road he had observed a dark recess in the bank upon his right hand, and feeling that

any retreat would be gain, he leaped backward into it, when he found it to be a gravel-pit, wider within than at the entrance, and on any easy level with the highway. From some cause he had conceived a liking for his weak-kneed companion, and with a strength of arm that was wonderful he fairly lifted Master Joseph Max from his feet and set him within the pit.

And now this Rupert of Redwood exposed a piece of deception that might justly have aroused the indignation of his opponents. His innocent-looking staff, seeming only such as a godly friar might have carried for the support of his steps, was in reality a bar of tempered steel, with a handle warranting a grasp firm and sure, and with knotty corrugations at the extremity calculated to make terrible havoc with living tissue. With such a weapon, in a place where a man could hold his enemy before him, a pair of strong arms could do wonderful work. There is something ghastly and murderous in the look of a gleaming sword, but after all, the well-balanced club, in the hands of a strong, clear-headed man, is a more deadly weapon. At all events, it is a weapon more easily handled, and your average man will use it more readily and effectively.

As for Master Joseph Max, he could not be called, physically, a brave man. The knocking of grim death at his door frightened him and made his legs weak; yet he had the nerve to draw a pistol; and he had the extreme good fortune to fire just in season, and just in the required direction, to send a bullet through the arm that was raised to plunge a knife into Rupert's neck. Rupert saw and did not forget.

"Take heart, Joseph," the latter cried. "Strike with me if you have another shot."

But he of Redwood could not finish the sentence. The man through whose right arm Joseph had sent a

bullet quickly had his knife in the other hand and had renewed the attack.

"Men! Why do ye this thing?" demanded Joseph, crouching away behind his companion. His voice was loud and shrill, like the cry of a startled eagle or hawk. "Do you know who I am?"

"Know thee!" repeated Jacques, with intense scorn. "I know thee too well, and we 'll rid Artois of the serpent! Think not to escape. Say thy prayers, if thou hast courage to lift thy voice to Heaven."

Unfortunately for the assassins, but very fortunately for their intended victims, they had followed a rule adopted for their government in certain cases, not to carry firearms. The man who has a loaded pistol with him will surely fire it when sudden danger comes, and burning powder makes a great noise, and is apt to betray the cause in which it is ignited; so the bravos had come upon their present mission armed only with their clubs and knives; and, ordinarily, those would have been sufficient—and they would have been sufficient in the present case, notwithstanding the unexpected and wonderful prowess of Rupert of Redwood, had he and his quivering companion been left to their own efforts.

Rupert had gained an excellent position, and the sweep of his ponderous staff was terrible. Twice had Jacques, the strongest of the assassins, gone down beneath the blows thereof, and the right arm of Gabriel had been disabled, if not broken; but the villains were desperate, determined men, and they meant not to give up. They had their strong-armed opponent in the *cul-de-sac* he had himself selected and sought, and they had, they thought, only to tire him out and dispatch him.

"Hold!" commanded Ismael, who was the recognized chief. "Let us not make a fatal blunder. He is

a swordsman. He is a soldier. Let poor Max stand back till we have finished his better. Jacques—Raoul —to the right and left! Watch his eye! Strike when I speak."

The light of day was almost gone, but the gravel-pit was so situated that while there was a glimmer of light in the western sky it penetrated the recess. Rupert had fought hard, and had been forced to fight rapidly, for he had had the blows of three men aimed at him, and as an inevitable result his arm had become weak and lame. There was a sharp ache at the wrist, and it did not seem that he could lift his iron club again. The man who had been shot through the arm chanced to have upon his feet a pair of wooden sabots, and with these, being agile in that respect, he was able to make a flank movement upon the quarry.

As though by mutual consent, there was a brief pause for breath and rest, and a blessed thing was it for Rupert. Still, what should he do when his assailants came on again? With a seriousness that would have been laughable had not the prospect been so darksome, Citizen Ismael gave to Gabriel (shot in the arm) directions for his part in the next attack.

"Sdeath," he exclaimed, "had I known that I was to meet the best and stoutest swordsman in France, armed with a rod of iron, be sure I should have taken either more men, or a brace of good pistols. It was a great mistake. But we'll soon finish now. Upon his left side you will plant your sabots, good Gabriel, and be sure you serve them well and smartly."

Then to the other two he said:

"If you think of your own heads, we shall never capture our man. When I give the word make but one grand onset, and all shall go well."

"Certainly, the rascals were taking it coolly. They

had seen their first mistake, and were prepared to rectify it. Rupert grasped his staff, but he felt his wrist very weak and lame. He must have given it a twist in some way that sprained it. He could not make another such defense as he had just accomplished. As he stood leaning against the gravel wall, watching the sinister-looking assassins, his thoughts were occupied in wonder at this attack upon himself. Joseph Max had whispered to him that their assailants belonged to a sworn brotherhood of assassins, who took advantage of the present lamentable condition of the country to ply their vocation to their own profit. So Rupert knew that an enemy had set these murderers upon him. Who was that enemy? Ah, if he lived beyond this meeting, he would ascertain. But—should he live? He did not see how he was to escape.

But a way was to be opened, nevertheless. Ismael had passed an order, in a whisper, to his companions, when the sound of horses' feet broke distinctly upon the air—the same sound, probably, which the two travellers had heard just before the attack of the butchers, and which they had forgotten. Now, however, hearing it again, Joseph Max took advantage of it, and raised a cry for help that made the welkin ring.

With a fierce oath Ismael raised his club, and giving the order for attack, dashed forward.

"Dog of a traitor—cease thy howling! Take that, and be still!"

Had the blow been aimed at himself, Rupert of Redwood might not have found the strength that leaped through nerve to muscle when he found the man in danger who leaned upon him. With a quick sweep of his steel bar he dealt a blow that knocked Ismael's club from its owner's grasp, and before he could regain it, and while his companions were waiting for him to

come again to their lead, the scene took on a new phase from the entrance upon it of two horsemen.

They were both comparatively young men, though one was some years younger than the other. He who at once assumed the right of leadership was not more than three-and-twenty, and upon his breast was a bit of blue ribbon, with a small jeweled star, and shield of gold. His oompanion might have been twenty-eight, or thereabouts, and his garb was of the kind usually worn by esquires, or valets, who were confidential attendants upon men of rank and title.

Joseph Max cried out with all his energy :

"For the love of Heaven, good young man, if you have a heart in your bosom, save us from these paid butchers !"

"Sdeath !" quickly exclaimed Ismael, who had regained his club, addressing the youngest of the new comers. "I do not think Monseigneur will venture to put his fingers into this fire. He had better turn his head another way and be off."

"A true French gentleman does not leave a fellow-creature in danger, and, mayhap, to death, when it is in his arm to render help. I see here four big, stout men smiting only two. It is an unfair onset ; myself and companion will just equalize things."

"Does Monseigneur really mean to lift his hand against us ?" demanded Jacques, who probably fancied that his extra bulk gave him the right to speak.

"I command that you leave these two men alone, in peace and in liberty."

"And who art thou ?"

"The owner of the land whereon we stand. Art satisfied ?"

"What !" broke from the lips of both Ismael and Gabriel ; and the former proceeded : "Thou art Louis

de Liancourt, aforetime Count de la Capelle. If thou wert not an aristocrat that bauble would not be exposed upon thy breast. Thou art doomed!"

"Insolent knave," cried the young nobleman, whisking his sword from its scabbard, "take that for those foul words!" And he struck Ismael across the face with the flat of his blade.

The assassin was furious at this, and, with a wild oath and with a wilder leap, he sprang forward and aimed a furious blow at the count's shoulder of the sword-arm.

The cry and the movement of Ismael were a signal to his companions, and they leaped to the conflict, Raoul making straight for the little man in the green coat, whom he would certainly have killed on the instant had not the sword of de Liancourt been in season to knock the blow aside. The young man had thus quickly proved himself a master of his weapon, for before saving the life of Joseph Max he had dealt Ismael a blow upon the head that had laid him senseless, but not senseless for a long time. Ah, no! Those heads of the loved ones of the *Sans Culottes* were too hard and tough to give way beneath any blow of less momentum than that of an earthquake; so Ismael and Raoul were quickly upon their feet, and when they struck again it was with a fury utterly savage and demoniac.

What could the young Lord of Liancourt do? Certainly, there was but one thing. It was the primal law of nature he obeyed, and in saving his own life he was forced to sweep away all deadly things from his path.

When Louis de Liancourt had been driven to his course—when he had the choice alone between conquest and death—be sure he made quick work of it. In the first place, his sword was one of the very best

that France ever saw, or that Spain ever suffered to depart from her borders; and, next, he wielded it wondrously well. Having made up his mind that the four men opposed to him were hired assassins; and that they had attacked these apparently inoffensive travellers for the purpose of simple butchery; and, last and most weighty of all, that they had sworn to butcher him in regular course—with this train of regular reflection in mind, the count raised himself in his stirrups, poised his keen blade with a tremendous power of tempered will, and then—struck home! His first blow, after the real battle-cry had passed his lips, clove the skull of Ismael from crown to chine; and in not more than three minutes from that time the giant Jacques, bleeding profusely, plunged into the wildwood and disappeared, leaving his three companions dead behind him.

"Now, my good friend—" Thus far spoke the count, when the work had been done, thinking to address the man called Joseph Max, but he came to an abrupt pause when he discovered that the little, yellow-faced man in green had taken himself off. He was nowhere to be seen. There were three dead men upon the sward; Rupert of Redwood stood apart, breathing heavily; and Louis de Liancourt and his follower were looking around for the man who, they believed, could give them information.

"Martin, where is the man?"

"Sure enough! Where is he?"

"He was not hurt?"

"Assuredly not."

The count then turned to the fighting man.

"Who art thou?"

"I am called Rupert of Redwood, monseigneur. He whom you look for and do not find called himself Joseph Max, though I believe he can truly answer to

another name. And yet—aye, surely—he swore to me that he had been Joseph Max from childhood. But I never saw him until this evening. We met by accident, and as we were bound in the same direction we came on together. How we were set upon you can judge."

"Aye," answered the count, "but I cannot judge the why or wherefore."

"I' faith! Neither can I, my lord. I only know that it was their purpose to butcher us both. However, be sure these miserable *canailles* were not the originators. They were hired by their masters."

"Then thou art sure they were hired assassins?"

"Aye—I know it."

"Thank Heaven for that! I shall not regret that I have removed them from their field of labor. And now what shall we do with the bodies?"

A brief discussion of the subject followed, and it was decided that they should be left as they were. Said Rupert, who had betrayed that he was thoroughly versed in the laws and customs of that far northern department:

"Whoever shall find these things in the morning will know them at once for the remains of villains feared and detested by all honest people, and they will very quickly conclude that they fell through their own wickedness."

So the bodies were left as they fell, and the count and his attendant led their horses out into the road, where the latter offered his beast to him of Redwood.

"Aye," added the count in a frank and friendly manner, "my good Martin can walk, and I see that thou art weary. If thou wilt keep on with me thou shalt have good shelter and repose, I warrant thee."

"Thou art bound to the Castle of St. Jean, I think?"

"Yes, to the home of the Marquis of St. Omer."

"Dost speak of Philip d'Artois?"

"Yes. Though he is of the family of Artois, he bears not the title. The Count d'Artois is second brother of the king. Philip is but the Marquis of St. Omer, and I am going now to his chateau. It cannot be far distant. These are my own lands of Miremont, and the lands of St. Jean join them."

In the deepening dusk the elder man looked into the face of the count, and a changeful expression was upon his countenance.

Ah, it was a handsome face upon which he looked, and a handsome man bore it! Louis de Liancourt was tall and strong, formed for strength and agility and the utmost amount of endurance. His limbs were full and gracefully outlined; his breast broad and swelling; his shoulders gracefully sloping and powerfully compact; his face frank and attractive, with the stamp of heart and truth in its every line and lineament; his brow high and full, set like a tower of intellectual strength above a pair of eyes that glowed with wondrous light—eyes of that peculiar gray color which has the quality of appearing many other colors under the change of circumstances; his hair was of a deep, rich brown, curling in pretty ringlets, and yet firm in its place. It was not a light, wayward mass of curls, but curls which, like the muscular limbs, possessed character of strength and health and reliability. His garb was not rich, though costly. The velvet was of the finest, the linen of the whitest and most delicate, the silk and satin of the most brilliant and rarest fabric, while the few ornaments, simple and chaste, were of the first water. The star and shield upon his breast, though far from glaring, contained diamonds worth a merchant's fortune.

Aye—it was a handsome face upon which Rupert of

Redwood gazed, and many were the changes that played upon his own face the while. At length he lifted his hand and laid it upon the young nobleman's shoulder, and when he spoke there was a cadence in his voice that betrayed the deepest feeling—feeling not only deep, but from the very fount of the heart's strongest emotions.

"Thou art Louis de Liancourt, Count de la Capelle. Thy father was also Louis. Thou has been in America, and have but now returned."

"Aye," returned our hero (for such we may acknowledge him), in much surprise, "thou hittest the truth very nearly."

"Near enough, I think. But enough of that. Dost know the present condition of the halls of thy fathers?"

"Thou meanest my *château* of Liancourt?"

"The same."

"Aye—I know but too well. The beasts have destroyed it."

"They have. And now—whither goes thou?"

"I may keep on."

"But thou didst offer me shelter; where was that to have been?"

"At Saint Jean. Dost thou not comprehend? With the Marquis of Saint Omer. I have not seen him for years, but I fear not to demand hospitality beneath his roof for a friend. We were warmly attached in the other years, and I think he would even now give me a father's love and consideration. At all events, he will be my friend, and grant any reasonable request. Wilt thou come with me?"

Rupert drew back and answered quickly.

"No, no—I must not—Hush! Ask me not again. "Go thou, and be sure that the first effort of thy speech is to inform the marquis of this affair. I am, in

a measure, a stranger in France, having just returned from a long absence abroad. Tell to d' Artois everything. He can advise thee ; and, if I mistake not, thou wilt stand in need of something more than advice ere long."

"Aye," said the count, casting his eyes back to where the dead bodies were just visible in the gathering gloom. "If those fellows have friends among the Jacobin leaders, it may be bad for me."

"Bad enough, be sure, *monseigneur*. But trust the marquis. He will help thee, and he can judge of the danger, which I cannot."

"But, my dear sir, there seems to be already danger to yourself. Were not two of those rascals lurking for your life ?"

"Yes. I am evidently a marked man. I doubt if you will ever see me again. This section of the country cannot be healthy for me, and I think I shall leave it. However, that is my affair. It cannot matter to you. *My Lord of Liancourt, look to yourself !* As sure as the sun will rise again on the morrow, just so sure will the hounds of the guillotine be upon your track! Make haste and confer with d'Artois. Tell him everything. He may help you."

"Rupert—one word. Who was the man with you when I came up—the poor, frightened wretch, whose life I saved from two separate strokes ?"

"Upon my word, Sir Louis, I do not know. He called himself Joseph Max, but that is nonsense. But I will know if I can. He slipped from us adroitly."

"A very fox by nature, without doubt. Be sure he is bound upon some political intrigue. But we must not remain here. If thou wilt not come with me, myself and Martin must ride on alone. Adieu ! And may you come forth safely from the troubles that seem to be gathering about you."

Rupert caught the count's hand. His eye was strangely glowing, and his nether lip quivered perceptibly when he spoke.

"Louis de Liancourt, I shall not forget that I owe to thee my life. But for thy coming I should now be lying in the place of those who attacked me. I shall not forget. Adieu! If we ever meet again, it may be mine to make some return of favor. Aye—the time may be when Rupert of Redwood shall come to thee with the power of life and death in his hand. Remember!"

And with this the strange man struck his ponderous staff upon the ground and strode away. The count watched him until he had disappeared in the gathering gloom, and then sprang into his saddle.

"Come, Martin, we have no time to lose. My soul! Here is a work to leave behind us we little thought of when we started. How it shall end Heaven only knows."

"May Heaven see it ending for good, my lord."

"Amen!"

An hour later men came to that spot in the wood with horses and lifted the dead bodies to bear them away. They were of the Brotherhood of the Heart and the Dagger, and their murmurings were of vengeance, swift and dire.

LOUIS DE LIANCOURT'S ESCAPE.—*See Chapter* 8.

CHAPTER III.

A FATAL BOND.

Throughout the length and breadth of Artois there was not a fairer estate than was that of St. Jean. Northward from a branch of the Authie River spread a beautiful tract of richly diversified land, with hill and dale and sloping meadow, and grand old forest of oak and beech and maple, all serving as a background of support, in the picture, to the picturesque old Norman Castle, where, in former times, the Counts d'Artois had held almost regal court, but where, of late, the Marquis of St. Omer and Baron of St. Jean had made it his home, the property having come to him partly by marriage, and partly by gift of Louis XV. That is—the estate had belonged to the king, having been his from childhood, but a certain fair cousin held a reversionary claim, and when this cousin became wife of the Marquis St. Omer, Louis surrendered his right to the husband. He could not, however, transfer with it the title of count, but he made the new possessor a baron of St. Jean, which was deemed an honor of great worth; and he allowed him, or required him, to assume his wife's family name—"d'Artois."

The present marquis was Philip d'Artois. At the time of which we write he was fifty years of age, and

physically strong and well. He was of medium height and size, faultlessly proportioned; and, taken all in all, he could but be called a handsome man. Certainly, his years should not have bent him, and yet he was bent. Trouble had been his, though none could clearly define it. He had lost his wife several years before, and had also laid away the mortal remains of an only son in the tomb; but this should not have broken him as he had been broken, for he had left to him, to love and to cherish, and to give back to him rich return of love and devotion, the bright, young being whom he called daughter; and surely it would be difficult to understand how gloom and disquiet could come within the sphere made bright and promising by the winsome, brilliant beauty—Ninon d'Artois.

But, suppose a lurking danger threatened this very fount of joy and sunshine! Suppose a serpent was on the track, whose fatal folds might not be warded off. And suppose Philip d'Artois saw, but dared not speak. Ah, then, indeed, there might have been cause of unrest, deep and harrowing. We shall see.

On the sultry August evening that witnessed the conflict upon the highway, of which we have written, as the sun was sinking behind the distant forest, Philip d'Artois sat in his library, with papers of various descriptions, some open, and some folded—some tied neatly into bundles, and others lying scattered loosely—upon the table before him. It was a grand old library, with a rare wealth of books, and pictures, and *bric-á-brac*—and it was a grand old *château* of which this library formed a part. Built—its main keep and principal walls—in the time of Philip Augustus, it was stern and strong, and fashioned for the maintenance of an army; and during the reigns of the more fastidious of the Valois monarchs many additions and adorn-

ments had been made, so that now, in the days when luxury had become among the nobles a seeming necessity of life, it combined with a strong and well-appointed fortress all that could make a dwelling attractive and luxurious.

The marquis was clad in a garb rich and somber, the upper garments, as well as the breeches, being of black velvet, and the only ornament was a star and ribbon upon his breast. There was no lace of any kind—no gold nor silver, unless we notice the small buckles at the knees and upon his shoes—and even his linen was plain, without ruffles or extra plaiting. He had been sitting at the table a long time, during which he had overhauled and examined many papers and parchments, and made many figures upon a piece of paper at his elbow.

"Oh!" he groaned, as his hands fell upon his knees. "God only knows what is to be the end! Could I have foreseen, in those other years, all that was to come, I should not have had the courage to live! And even now life is a burden most grievous to bear! These papers tell me that I am still wealthy, but how long shall it be? Oh, if that one fatal paper were blotted out from existence! Why has that man been suffered to live? He is but a blight upon the page of humanity—a fount of deadly poison in the world of life! Oh, if I could but escape the thralldom of agony which he holds upon me! Alas, the burden grows more heavy, and the chains more galling! Ha!"

A door was opened, and it was as though the setting sun had suddenly burst forth into a warm and radiant glow, touching with a pencil of gold everything in the grand old room. It was Ninon d'Artois who had entered, bringing with her an atmosphere of celestial sweetness, and a radiance of loveliness well nigh divine.

She was truly a beautiful being. Her age was nineteen, and the years of her life had brought only new charms to her person, leaving all that was bright and lovely, and bearing away with their departure all that could darken and make chill. To a form that was perfect was added a grace that might have befitted a Peri; and to a face that was the very bloom of loveliness was added a galaxy of dimples that gave almost the power of witchery to the features, without in the least detracting from their elegance and delicacy. Her eyes were large and lustrous; their color a changeful gray—changeful in its intensity, but never in its depth of soul and truthful fervor; and her hair, clustering about a head altogether womanly in its refinement of poise and outline, was of a golden brown, sweeping back from her brow and temples in a wealth of unconfined, shimmering ringlets. Her garb was a simple robe of gray silk, confined at the waist by a silken sash curiously wrought with golden thread—a light scarf of lace thrown over her shoulders and drawn close about the neck; and the superbly arching foot, where it peeped forth from beneath the sweeping robe, was shielded by a quaintly wrought Persian shoe—half moccasin and half sandal.

"Oh, my own, dear, good papa!" she cried, bursting all bond of restraint, and giving her father a hug and a kiss before suffering him to gain breath of speech. "Have you heard? Has the messenger been to you with the wondrous news?"

The marquis made a tremendous effort to put away the cloud that had been upon him. The presence of his beautiful daughter and her embrace and kiss would seem to have been sufficient to give him cheer, if anything earthly could do it; but he was not to be lifted into warmth and sunshine so easily. He held

his child away, and tried to smile as he gazed into her face.

"Darling, what is it? What new joy is yours?"

"Oh, papa? Haven't you heard—hasn't anybody told you—haven't the birds piped it at your windows—that—*Louis is come home?*"

Philip d'Artois staggered back as though he had been struck.

"Louis de Liancourt!" he gasped, putting forth the last atom of his strength to hide his feelings from Ninon.

"Oh, yes, papa," she cried, failing to detect the pain and the anguish of her father in her own great joy. "Louis has come home. One of his men has hurried on in advance to let us know, and he and Martin are to come on more slowly. You remember Martin Duval? He has served de Liancourt from childhood, as his father and his father's father did his ancestors before him. Poor Louis! The wicked ruin of his old home has driven him to seek shelter here. Oh, papa, papa, now you will drive that dreadful old man away and never let him come here any more. I do really believe that he would have been glad to know that Louis would not come home again. Oh, I cannot drive the thought away that he wishes ill to our own brave boy. We will put Louis on his guard."

"No, no, no!" cried the marquis, with startling energy. "Do not speak his name to Louis. You know not what mischief you might do."

Thus, by the merest chance had the marquis struck a note seemingly legitimate, and which at the same time gave him opportunity of hiding his real source of disquiet.

"Remember," he went on, very earnestly, "that this man belongs to the class of the Jacobins, while Louis

must be a Royalist of the most ultra kind. Leave the matter to me, my child—leave it all in my hands."

"Of course I will, papa, for I know that you will do all that is brave and good and true. Oh, how grandly the old joys come back with the coming of Louis. Do you not feel so, papa? What is it? Why do you tremble, and why are you so pale? Papa! Papa! What is it? Has anything—"

"Hush, my child! You cannot understand. I cannot explain. And—yet—you can see—you can hear the dread notes of alarm that fill the air."

He paused a moment and drew his hand across his eyes. Then he went forward and kissed his child upon her forehead, and added in a lower tone and entreatingly:

"Leave me, Ninon, for a little time. I must put away these papers before anybody comes. There is new trouble and new danger in Paris, and we know not how soon the mob may gain full power here in Artois. If it comes, we must be prepared to—to—meet it."

"Oh, papa! You were going to say—*to flee!*"

"Hush! Breathe not that word aloud. Let not the walls hear it. Aye—we may be forced to flee; but it must be kept as secret as the grave! Be careful, Ninon, and breathe not a thought in that direction before any human being. One single mistake may be fatal."

"Papa, is it so bad?"

"My dear child, I cannot tell you how bad it is; but—"

He stopped suddenly and caught his breath as though a hidden battery had been unmasked before him. Ninon followed the direction of his gaze, and saw a man approaching the keep from the main entrance to the great court. With a quick, low cry of terror, she caught her father's arm.

"Oh, it is *he !*"

Philip d' Artois made one desperate effort, and crushed back the feeling that would else have unmanned him.

"My dear child, let not your tears make you weak. The mayor comes to me on important business. I will receive him here directly. Go you forth, and look for the coming of Louis. Let him not meet with Gideon de Bar. It must not be! 'Sh! Ask me nothing. There is not a moment to lose. Away, and hang upon the boy's steps. If he arrives before De Bar departs, be sure that he is not in sight. Wilt thou attend to this?"

"But—my father—"

"I ask you," interrupted the marquis, with a furious stamp of the foot, "will you go? Will you do as I have said? Or—"

"Oh—yes, yes, papa—I will go. Do not be angry. And—oh—do not let that man ever see me to speak with me again!"

With this Ninon d' Artois turned and hastened from the apartment, and as soon as the door was safely closed behind her, the marquis pulled open a large drawer from beneath the table and hurriedly tumbled into it the letters that lay scattered around. He worked eagerly, as though life depended upon the accomplishment of the task, and before any alarm was sounded, the last scrap of paper had been brushed away, and the drawer closed. The marquis had done this, and was seeking to compose himself for the coming meeting, when a servant entered, and announced:

"*Monsieur le Maire !*"

The time had been when for no man of earth, save the king in person, would the door of that library have been open without permission from within; in these

days, however, things were different, and the nobleman was learning to submit to much that he could not direct or control; and he was wisest who submitted with the best grace.

The man who entered was worth a study. He was a few years older than the marquis, though he did not show it—probably, five-and-fifty—and the slight tendency of the back to stoop was rather an indication of the instincts of the inner man, than the result of any burden born in life. In stature he was full six feet; heavily framed and ox-like; and though the habits of life of the later years had tended to lay on extra adipose tissue, his form was still angular, and his humps all prominent. His face was not a face to be loved. It was dark and sinister; the brow low, narrow and protruding; the eyes small, glittering and deeply set beneath shaggy arches; the cheekbones prominent; the nose broad and gross; the upper lip so long as to disfigure the center of the face, and even the thick black mustache could not hide it. Take that face as a whole, and it was simply brutish in its animal part, and, in its intellectual, it was that of a tyrant and monster. His garb was plain, assumed evidently to please the *Sans Culottes*, for in other times, and not long agone at that, he had put on a vast amount of gold-lace and tinsel.

Such was Gideon de Bar, at present mayor of Arras. In former times he had been a weaver of tapestry, and in the manufacture of some of that stuff for which Arras had become famous, he had gained a modest fortune. People wondered when he was elected mayor, and they wondered still more when they found that he had powerful influence at court. A very few there were who knew that he had won these favors of fortune from the direct intercession of Lord Philip d'Artois.

How he had gained that nobleman's influence in his favor they could not divine. The rabble, however, did not think. They recognized in De Bar a man of their own stamp, and they were pleased to see him elevated to the responsible office. But another thing did not please them so well. When Gideon's son was elevated to the position of intendent to the police, they grumbled. Gaston de Bar had been himself a youth of dubious character, and the only possible recommendation he could bring for the office was his knowledge of all the rogues of that section.

Gideon de Bar advanced into the library, and after a salutation of easy assurance, he took a seat. His first act was to cast his eyes around, to see if he might discover anything from which he could derive useful information. His quick eye detected ink upon *monseigneur's* finger and thumb, and also that the pen had been recently in use ; and a close observer could not have failed to mark the sinister expression which resulted from the absence from the table of all traces of the writing he had been doing.

"D'Artois," he said, with a freedom of manner which was insulting, "you have been busy."

"I often have business on my hands, sir."

"Aye—no doubt ; but, my dear friend, you must pardon me if I claim your attention to a matter of business in which I feel an interest."

The marquis could not hide his unrest. A pallor overspread his face, and his lips quivered.

"Monsieur de Bar, I will attend to what you have to say."

The visitor lifted his right leg over the left, folded his hands upon his knee, and leaned back easily in his chair. There was a significant gleaming in the cavernous eyes, and a sinister expression upon his evil face.

"Citizen d'Artois, I will not hold you in suspense. And I could not, if I would, for I have other business that must be attended to before I sleep. I wish now that the matter of the marriage should be immediately fixed and disposed of. My son is ready and anxious, and there is no need of further delay. I would have the arrangement made this very night—now—while we sit here. Let us—"

The marquis put out his hand imploringly, and a stifled groan burst from his bloodless lips.

"Oh, in Heaven's name, spare me! Gideon de Bar, take all else—take everything—but leave to me my child!"

"*Your* child! *Bah!*"

"Hush! In the name of all that is holy, I beg you, do not say that! Breathe not the story. Oh, she is mine to love, to bless, to protect! If you have a heart—"

De Bar interrupted him with a fierce oath.

"Philip d'Artois, I have just one word to say. Listen: The hand of Ninon is given to Gaston, or *that paper* is given to the prefecture! There is no word to be spoken aside from that—not a word!"

The marquis groaned as from a breaking heart.

"Is this your courage, man? By the knife of the guillotine, you shall come to my terms, or—"

Again the miserable man put forth his hand. De Bar arose from his seat and took a turn across the room. When he came back he stopped before the host and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"I have no time to waste, and if I had much time I would not stop here much longer at this visit. Your childish folly exasperates me. You know what we have planned. It is all fixed, even to the estimate of the settlements. It only remains for us to fix the hour, and for that I am here."

At this point the man paused, but only for an instant. Directly, in a brutal, heartless manner, much as you have seen a man lift the head of a dog that he was trying to teach, he pushed back the marquis's head, thus lifting his face so that he could look into it, and then with a stamp of his foot he added :

"Philip d'Artois, you know the compact that is between us. I have told you that on the day which sees Ninon the wife of my son, I will surrender to you that paper. And now let me add just this word. If you refuse, or if you hesitate so as to perplex me, I will give that paper to the prefecture of police. I will not give it to the prefect of Arras, but it shall go to the *Palais de Justice*, where the *Hôtel de la Préfecture de Police* and the *Conciergerie* are not far apart."

The name of the prefecture in such intimate connection with that most dreadful of all the dungeon prisons of Paris was horrible, and the marquis uttered a low cry of absolute terror.

"Philip d'Artois, mark me! The king and queen are prisoners in the Temple, and they will go from there to the scaffold. Your Marquis de la Fayette has been given up to the Austrians, who have him safe in a deep dungeon at Olmutz. Oho! What will the Jacobins say to the Marquis of St. Omer—the grand Philip d'Artois—when they know that his hand took the life of—"

"Demon! Beast! Cease!"

"Hold, Citizen d'Artois," said De Bar, pressing the marquis back into his seat. "Before you arise, I desire that you will sign this paper. Do that and I will leave you."

The paper was spread out upon the table, and d'Artois found it to be a contract of marriage between Gaston de Bar, Intendent of Arras, and the Lady Ninon

d'Artois, of the chateau of St. Jean. It was in full legal form, and only wanted the signature of Philip d'Artois to render it of full and entire legal effect. And then the dark presence took from an inner pocket of his bosom another paper—a paper old and soiled, and stained with blood. This he opened, but not within the marquis's reach.

"Philip d'Artois, there is the pen, and there is the ink. Write your name and live! Refuse and—"

The marquis cried out in his agony, and in a moment more the pen was in his hand. How he wrote his name he did not know. He only knew that he wrote, and that Gideon de Bar caught up the contract and refolded it. His head sank forward upon the table, and directly afterward he felt a hand upon his shoulder.

"Monseigneur, look ye! Think not of escape! From this time until the marriage ceremony is performed, thou wilt not take a step unwatched. Remember!"

When the marquis looked up he was alone. He arose to his feet, but he was weaker than he thought. His brain reeled, and objects swam before him; but he did not fall. He regained his seat, and rang a bell, and when his valet appeared he called for wine. He had come very near to fainting, but a great need was upon him, and he had strength sufficient to collect his scattered senses, and win back tone and energy to his nerves.

That fatal paper, held by the man who, in holding it, held his life! It was the thought of that which called back his energies. The marriage contract was as nothing by its side. What could he do? Was there in the broad field of chance any way of escape?

And he lifted his face and his clasped hands to Heaven, and prayed as he never, in all his life, had prayed before.

CHAPTER IV.

NINON BECOMES PARTY TO A BOND ON HER OWN ACCOUNT.

Leaving her father in the library, the Lady Ninon went out into the great hall, and thence to a passage that led toward a small garden-spot which was cultivated for her especial benefit. The sun was disappearing when she reached the open air, and upon the small piazza overlooking the garden she found her maid whom she sought.

Blanchette Lefranc was a small, trim, bright-eyed *grisette*, eighteen years of age, the daughter of an old servitor of the household, and born and reared on the estate. She had been Ninon's companion from early childhood, and her most happifying thought in the present was of the service which she was permitted to render to one whom she loved with a love approaching to idolatry. She was a brave, true-hearted girl, and in the care of her mistress she knew no such thing as fear. Had mortal danger threatened Ninon d' Artois, here was one who would have cast her life, if necessary, into the balance without a moment's hesitation. She was a pretty girl, her eyes sparkling with changeful light, her face wreathed in infectious smiles, and her voice as tuneful as the song of the happy lark.

"Come, Blanchette, bring our mantles, and we will walk out beyond the bridge."

Away sped the girl, soon returning with the articles required. She adjusted the mantle of her mistress, and then donned her own, after which they took their way toward the drawbridge.

The river which watered the estate here ran in such a manner as to make the fosse on the southern side of the castle, and the bridge spanned that stream. Beyond the bridge they reached a graveled way which led to the great road, and here Ninon slackened her pace. The sun had gone from sight, but it would not be dark for some time to come, for the bright orb was now hidden by the trees and hills, so that the true horizon was yet to be reached. At a short distance—perhaps a hundred rods or more—from the great gates of the *château*, the path branched off into three routes, one leading to strike the main road to the eastward, toward Arras; another leading to the westward, joining the highway toward the bridge of Cressy; while the third was a direct continuation of the path to the southward. Here stood several large trees, with wooden seats arranged beneath them, and Ninon proposed that they should stop and sit down.

"Dear Blanchette, I am not tired. I do not sit to rest. Do you know why we have come out here?"

"No, my lady."

"And you have not asked me?"

"Because, lady, I had thought that what I ought to know you would tell me; and surely I would not seek to know that which you would keep to yourself."

"Dear, good Blanchette! Thou art a treasure. But I have no secret from thee. I have come out here to waylay and intercept a traveller."

The girl, who had not yet sat down, laid her hand

upon her mistress's shoulder, and the light that danced in her bright eyes was sparkling and vivacious.

"Dear lady, it is the Count Louis?"

"Yes, Blanchette."

And the eyes of the mistress sparkled likewise.

"And—Martin Duval comes with him?"

"Certainly. While those two live they will be inseparable. They are as strongly attached to one another as you and I are attached."

"I know it. Oh, it is easy to love a man like Sir Louis. I wonder not that Martin is proud to hold his stirrup."

Ninon's cheeks glowed at this and her look was grateful.

"Oh," cried the maid, when she had at length seated herself, "what does the mayor of Arras do here? Why do I dislike that man so terribly? Am I to blame?"

"Blanchette, that man is hard and wicked and—But let us not think of him. It gives me pain to see him."

"Aye," ventured the maid, with downright emphasis, "and it gives your father pain, too. I wonder what his business is. Suppose he should be pleading for his son—trying to win the hand of Ninon d'Artois for Gaston de Bar?"

"Blanchette!"

"Dear lady. Oh, mercy on me! Have I hurt you?"

"No, no, dear girl; but your speech touches a more serious matter than you may think. Gaston de Bar, or his father for him, has had the effrontery to make a proposal for my hand."

"Oh, no, no, no! Don't say that, dear Ninon. It is not possible."

"It is not only possible, dear child, but it is abso-

lutely true. Aye—the mayor of Arras thinks himself a grand man in the realm, and he thinks the intendent of police great, also."

"But, Ninon, I do not understand. I should think the marquis—the highest noble, save one, in Artois—would cause Gideon de Bar to be whipped out from the town. I see not how he can endure it. Is his old spirit growing weak within him?"

"Alas! My poor child, you do not know what wicked things are being done in France. The mob rules in Paris. Have you not heard tell of Robespierre and Marat and Danton?"

"Yes."

"Well, those men are above the king now."

"Oh, no, no! Dear Ninon, you do not mean that!"

"It is true, Blanchette."

"*They*—those men—*above the king?*"

"Even so. But I cannot explain. I tremble for my father. I know he fears Gideon de Bar. The Jacobins hate the nobles, and the Jacobins rule France. They have full power and authority in the National Assembly—ah! Hark!"

It was the sound of horses' feet in the distance, borne far upon the evening air; for it was some minutes before the riders reached the forks of the road, and when they came up, the light of day had gone, and the glimmer of twilight was growing dim and shadowy. The girls arose and went out into the path, causing the horse of the foremost rider to leap aside with a force that came near unseating the occupant of the saddle.

"Hallo! Whom have we here?"

Oh, how well Ninon knew the voice—so rich and full and musical! She took another step forward and spoke, and as she did so, the horse, as though recognizing the character of the intruder, came to a quiet

stand, with his ears pricked and his nostrils distended.

"My Lord de Liancourt, I have come to give you safe conduct to the castle."

Louis de Liancourt leaped from his saddle in an instant, and in a moment more he held both the lady's hands.

"Ninon!"

"Yes, Louis."

By the last glimmer of the fading twilight he could see her face, that it was the face of one who had been the subject of his waking and sleeping dreams through passing years and in lands beyond the ocean. Had it been lighter than it was—had there been light enough to clearly reveal the woman that had grown up to meet him on his return to the old *château*—he might have been startled; but as it was, in the half-light, the shadowy, softening haze, he saw only the girl he had left when he went away, for he saw with his memory rather than with the outer sense. So he called her name again, and then—it seemed to come of itself, as though the creature of a double consciousness—he took her in his arms and held her to his bosom and kissed her upon the lips just as he had kissed her in the other years, when they were laughing happy children together.

"Ninon! Ninon! My own—my blessed! Oh, Ninon, this is joy celestial!"

And she rested there as though it were her sacred right; and she returned the lover's kiss with the fervor of a love as deep and strong as life itself. The whole story was told without the speaking of a word, and in that kiss they both felt that their vows had been plighted beyond recall.

"Martin!"

The stout esquire heard the flute-like call, and he, too, came down from his saddle in a twinkling.

"My little woodland fairy!" he cried, catching the girl's hand. "It is my true Blanchette!"

"But is this my true Martin?"

"Aye! In all my wanderings, little one, not a lass has banished you from my thoughts. So I claim my right."

And Blanchette was as happy as happy could be. True heart! She loved this man, and she had faith to believe that he loved her in return, truly and well, and her kiss was frank and loyal.

Louis de Liancourt put one arm through the loop of his bridle-rein, and the other he gave to Ninon, who took it with both her hands, pressing it eagerly to her bosom, and holding it there as though she feared to let it go.

"Little one," said Martin, chucking the *grisette* under the chin, "do you see that? That is the proper way. Wait. Now—you have my arm. Do not bite it?"

And thus copying the master and the mistress, those two followed on, oblivious to all earthly care, and thoughtful only of the grand things which were permitted to their lot once in many years. And they were not an ill-looking pair. There was a startling difference in size of body, Blanchette seeming little more than a child as she reached up to lay her finger-tips upon Martin's arm. She was considerably shorter than her mistress, and Martin was taller than his master; but that made no difference to them. He was content with a precious jewel in small compass, and she was perfectly willing to lean upon the protection of one strong enough to guard her from all ordinary danger.

And, further than this, those two were not selfish enough to think alone of themselves; and as we have

no thought of following them in their way of loving and wooing, we can do no less than make clear the path laid out before them. We ought to do this, that they be not harshly judged by and by, and again, the scene was pleasant enough to transcribe.

"*Ma belle*," said Martin, after he had marked the girl's grasp of his arm until he had satisfied himself that there was heart and fervor in it, "do you love your mistress?"

"What a question!"

"Give me an answer. Do you love her?"

"I do not love myself at all by her side. Ah, I would give my life for Ninon?"

Had there been light enough, the girl might have read Martin's jubilant gratitude in his look, but she was not wholly in the dark.

"Now look ye, little one: I love Louis de Liancourt with all the love of my heart and soul; and I do not think I shall ever leave him."

"Nor shall I ever leave my mistress."

"And, *ma belle*, you see how they love one another?"

"Ah, I know that she loves him; but does he love her as well? Is his heart as true?"

"Blanchette, it is wrong for you to express a possible doubt. His love is a part of himself. For years I have known his every thought, and the image of Ninon d'Artois he has carried in his heart all the time."

"I am glad of that. Ninon will be very happy."

"Yes, my little bird, and she will become his wife. Now, when that event comes to pass, what shall you and I do. Shall we separate? Shall you leave your mistress—because, you know, I shall never leave my master."

"Ah, traitor, you are seeking to entrap me!"

"Not at all, little one. The way is open before you.

You have my arm now to lean upon. I offer it to you for a lifetime. If the Lady Ninon becomes the wife of De Liancourt, will you let me call you by the same sweet title?"

And that was the end of their downright courtship. When they entered the rear court of the *château*, all was settled between them for the future, and they were ready to go on serving the master and the mistress of their hearts, with the understanding that the marriage of Louis and Ninon should be supplemented by their own union.

And during that walk to the *château*, Louis de Liancourt had told his eager listener a running story of his experience in the United States of America. He had been eighteen years of age when he left France for America, in company with several noblemen of distinction who had thought of making that country their home. As for himself, he had been commissioned by the Marquis de La Fayette to act for him in matters of business, and, furthermore, he has been moved by a desire to study the workings of the new Republic. He had been absent five years, and had now returned at the earnest solicitation of his patron and friend, La Fayette.

"Dear girl," he said, pressing the hand that lay so confidingly upon his arm close against his bosom, "the memory of your sweet self would have called me back, sooner or later, if I could not have persuaded you to cross the ocean to me; but this summons of the marquis was imperative. He wrote to me that there was earnest work for every true and loyal heart. He would save France! Ah! I fear there is great danger. I have learned much since I landed at Calais. Do you know where La Fayette is at this present time?"

"You know that the allied forces of Austria and Prussia are marching against the French capital?"

"Yes—I have been told so."

"It is true. La Fayette has command of the French army, under control of the Assembly, and is now at Sedan."

"Then there I must join him."

A faint, half-stifled cry broke from Ninon's lips, and had sounded upon the still air before she could recall it. It was full of heartfelt anxiety and solicitude—just such a cry as might have dropped from the lips of a young wife whose husband had told her for the first time that he was going into deadly strife.

"Ninon!" cried the count, stopping short and gazing down upon the upturned face, "would you care if evil befell me?"

She clung to him convulsively. In an instant the whole prospect of life was before her, and in all the future, from horizon to zenith, there appeared but one star of promise. Things were in her knowledge, making bitter and gloomsome many a meditative hour, which she could not speak to another—which she dared not even speak to him—but oh, how could she keep back her heart from this direct appeal? She could not do it.

"Oh, Louis! Dear Louis! Darling! Where in all the world could I turn if thou wert taken from me?"

He would have been oblivious, indeed, had he asked for more free and frank confession than that. He took the dear girl again to his bosom, and did not let her go until they were aroused by the tramp of a horse on the castle bridge.

"Mercy!" cried Ninon, with a start. "It is the mayor of Arras, Gideon de Bar! He must not see us. My father sent me forth to meet you on purpose that I might lead you clear of that man."

"Gideon de Bar! Mayor of Arras!"

"Yes. Ah, Louis, strange things have happened since you went away! But—here! We have no time to lose. Let your horses be got out of the way. We can take this path."

It was a narrow by-path, branching off toward an old mill-tower not far distant, and when they had entered upon it they were completely hidden from the view of one passing on the main road. Presently the horseman was in sight, distinctly outlined against a spot of blue sky, and as he approached he muttered to himself. By a wondrous chance, the first word distinguished from his lips was the name of one who was near by to hear.

Plainly he was heard to mutter a bitter imprecation, and then:

"Of all living men, he was the last I could have desired to see. But—Sir Count, be not too sure of fair weather in France. Aha! If I can find a plea—if I can find ground for a complaint—bah! I have it already. The very name of *de Liancourt* is sufficient. I have thee on the hip, Master Louis!"

Ninon quivered from head to foot, but she had presence of mind enough to cling to her hold upon Louis. Once he would certainly have confronted the Jacobin hound had not her hand been firmly and resolutely upon his arm.

"Ah!" ejaculated our hero after the man had passed on, which he did without making any discovery, "what has that man on his mind? What has he been doing with your father? Say—is he not a villain?"

"Yes, Louis. I believe him to be all that is bad."

"Sdeath! Can he have—"

These few words were spoken impetuously, and the count stopped suddenly and grasped Ninon by the

arm and gazed into her face. He could not see very plainly, but so near he could see sufficiently. And so could the lady. She could see that Louis's face was wrought upon by a powerful emotion, and that a great dread was at his heart. After a little time he said :

"Ninon, I recall to mind a circumstance that gives me trouble. Gideon de Bar, in the other years, contrived in some manner to gain a power over your father. I never could understand its nature or extent, but I know that it was effective, and it gave your father much unrest. Then, however, De Bar always appeared very friendly—too much so, in fact. At times he was really patronizing. Can he have that power now? And can he exert it for evil?"

A great light, bewildering and painful, burst upon Ninon. She could understand now things that had before appeared only dark and incomprehensible. The man held her father in his power.

"Oh, Louis, let us hasten to my father. I know that he fears that man. The coming of Gideon de Bar is to him like the coming of a thunder-cloud. But he has never explained to me. I know he needs help. I can see it plainly in a hundred events of the past few months. And, dear love"—she caught him by the arm convulsively and her voice sank to a horrified whisper as she went on—"you remember Gaston—Gideon's son?"

"Aye—the darkly-born boy he was obliged to own. I remember him well. I horsewhipped him once for insulting our little Blanchette. My faith, if Martin had known, he would have killed him. But what of him?"

She whispered it in broken, choking gasps :

"He has proposed to my father that my hand shall be given in marriage to Gaston."

"No—no! Oh, Great Father of all mercies, it cannot be!"

"And yet, it is even so!"

"He! The base-born! The dog! The dreg of the pool of iniquity! Oh, my soul! And this man—the manipulator—is mayor of Arras; and his son is intendent of police! The mob holds rule in France, and they are powerful with the mob! Look at my own *château!* Oh, I dare not think! Let us hasten to your father. He shall tell us all. We must know the intent of this bad man."

They had reached the bridge, when Ninon stopped and took her lover's free hand.

"Louis, we will go in and see my father; I will fulfill the mission he gave me; and then I will withdraw and leave you with him alone. He will speak to you as he would not speak to me; and to yourself alone he will speak as he would not speak in my presence."

"It is well, my love, and it shall be as you say."

"One word more, Louis: If there is danger, you will not go on to Sedan?"

"Hush, Ninon! Oh, do not raise an unnecessary calamity in my path. Remember my duty to France."

"But—if—if—Gideon de Bar should have power, and my father should be forced to give my hand to—"

A wild cry broke from the count's lips.

"Hush, in Heaven's name! It cannot—cannot be. But, if that pass should come, then not all the power of all the world should call me from your side!"

"She suffered him to imprint a token of good faith upon her lips, and then they moved on toward the *château.*

CHAPTER V.

THE UNLOCKING OF A DARK SECRET.

The marquis heard approaching footsteps, and with one final effort he put back the terrible perturbation, and was much like himself when Ninon entered. She did not fly to him, as she might have done, if no cloud had come to dim the glorious sunbeam of the new arrival, but her face was joyous, notwithstanding, and she threw her arms around her father's neck, and kissed him upon the cheek.

"Papa, he has come—our Louis. Oh, are you not glad?"

For a single instant it was as though a knife had been plunged into the man's body. He could not mistake the joy-beams upon his daughter's face nor the warm, soft tremor of her voice. As though it had been written in characters of living light before him, he read the story of her love. But he was used to efforts of self-control, and he very quickly advanced and greeted the count with a smile, and with words of heartfelt welcome.

"My dear boy! Ah"—holding the count's hand, and

looking into the manly, healthily embrowned face—"you will be my boy no more. Bless me! How the years have flown. You left me a fair-faced youth, more fit for the salon than for the field, and you return to me a grand-looking man, inured to toil and danger and hardship. Louis, I bid you welcome. now for all time—a thousand times, if you please."

Her father's greeting gave Ninon much comfort. Surely, Gideon de Bar could not have left him with any painful load upon his mind, or he would have shown something of it.

Ah, little did she think of the truth—of the fact of the human constitution—that those calamities which come nearest to making death a welcome guest are the ones which can be most surely put entirely out of sight. They are so terrible that they admit of no particle of thought without the presence of the whole great horror; so, from mere force of necessity, the whole is crushed under foot and out of sight. Had it been a lesser evil—had Gideon de Bar left the marquis with some simple matter of perplexing business on his mind—some tangle of the law that was calculated to fret and chafe him, he might not have hidden it so easily. As it was, however, as soon as the ice was broken, Philip d'Artois was all smiles and good-humor, the sharp pangs that ever and anon touched him to the heart not being allowed to appear upon the surface.

Louis told the story of his adventures in America, and he could tell them very briefly. He had gone to that country, upon the urgent recommendation of the Marquis de La Fayette, to complete his education at Princeton College, in New Jersey. That college had been especially recommended by Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Henry Lee, and he had found it all he had been led to expect. Concerning the call that had

brought him home, it had not come entirely unexpectedly. Said he :

"I had been thinking very strongly of coming when I received La Fayette's letter. I felt that every true Frenchman should be at his post of duty. Yet," he went on, with a change of tone to grave sadness, "now that I am here, the path of duty is not so plain. I find my paternal estate in ruins, the grand old *château* of twenty generations of Liancourts a pile of charred and blackened *débris*. And who have done it? The men who rule France to-day. The Assembly is the seat of power, and the Jacobin club rules the Assembly. Is it not so, my lord?"

"It is, Louis ; and more, too ; but we will talk of that by and by. I want you now to tell me of those good men on the other side of the ocean whom I have learned to love and revere. Tell me of Doctor Benjamin Rush. You made his acquaintance?"

"Most assuredly, and prized it highly."

And Louis went on and told of his friends in America, until they were summoned to the banquet-room. The meal passed pleasantly, the marquis exerting himself to the utmost, and at its conclusion, Sir Philip laid his hand upon his daughter's head, and said, with a pleasant smile :

"My blessing, you must let me have Louis a little while to myself. There are some matters of business —of politics and of the army--that we must discuss in private. You will not be jealous?"

"Just the opposite, papa. I think you ought to talk with Louis. You ought to—but you know better than I do. I shall speak to him good-night before he retires?"

"Really, my child, I do not know. But you shall, if you are up when we come out, though you must not

wait for us. I think, on the whole, that you had better leave the count till morning. He will be rested then."

Ninon took it all in good part, but she watched her opportunity, and had a grandly-occupied spell of whispering with her lover before the library door had been shut and bolted between them.

Aye—shut and bolted ; for no sooner had the marquis pointed Sir Louis to a seat than he returned to the door by which they had entered and slipped the bolt, and then secured another door communicating with a retiring-room, after which he was careful to draw the curtains over the Gothic windows. When he finally came to his seat—a great easy-chair by the side of the table on which candles were burning—the smile had faded from his face, and it was plain to be seen that he was the victim of a deeply-fixed terror.

" Be not surprised, my dear Louis, at these precautions. We have much to talk about this evening that must not be heard by other ears. I know not yet how much, or how little, I may have to communicate. There have been times when I have felt that if I could not find a sympathizing spirit to which I could pour out the burden of my bursting bosom, I should die. Oh, Louis, these are dark days ! And they come upon me a thousand times more darkly than they come upon others. In the time long gone by there was—but never mind that now. Tell me what you have seen and heard since you crossed the channel. I saw that there was something upon your mind which you cared not to speak in Ninon's presence. Was I not right?"

" Yes," said the count.

And thereupon he went on to tell the story of his adventure in the gravel-pit of the wood. He had landed at Calais on the morning of the previous day, and was making the best of his way to St. Jean when he fell

upon the assassins, and when every principle of chivalry and right, as well as of humanity, demanded that he should draw his sword in defense of the weak and the honest against the stronger villains and cutthroats.

The marquis listened attentively and strove hard to gain such knowledge of the parties engaged as might enable him to recognize them. Of the two travellers he could make nothing. Evidently, he said, the smaller man, in olive green, was a Jacobin spy ; but he could form no opinion of the other, though he would have given much to see him. As for the four assassins, there could be no doubt that they were of the Brotherhood of the Heart and the Dagger.

" My dear Louis," he said, his look and tone revealing that he was greatly moved, " I cannot blame you for what you have done, but oh, I would have given half my fortune if you had been anywhere else just then. You say one of the villains escaped with life, and that you heard him called Jacques. Was he a large-framed man ?"

" A very giant in size, my lord."

" Ah ! I know the man. If you are found here at the end of four-and-twenty hours, your head is doomed to fall."

" Sir Philip !"

" It is as I have said, Louis. Base and low and wretched as were these four assassins, they were but the agents of men high in social position and authority, and the avenger will be upon your track. Do not look incredulous. If you think they can find it impossible to convict a nobleman in France upon the evidence you are mistaken."

" But, my dear marquis, where is the crime ?"

" Alas, dear boy, you have yet to learn the condition of your country. That you are a nobleman, of the

blood of Liancourt and Miremont, is crime enough. But the mob hold rule. The order of the day is massacre! You must flee while there is time."

"I will go at once to Sedan, and there join La Fayette. With him I shall be safe."

The marquis groaned aloud.

"Ah, now, Louis, I can make you understand! You will not find La Fayette at Sedan, though the French army is there. First, let me tell you: The king and queen are prisoners! Aye—*prisoners!* They are confined in the old fortress of the Knights Templars, and guards are stationed over them. The same power—the Revolutionary mob—that imprisoned the king and queen sent commissioners to the army to preach their incendiary doctrines to the soldiers. La Fayette, as soon as he knew what those commissioners were doing, had them arrested and imprisoned. That was the end of his military rule. He had won the deadly enmity of the murderous mob, and they cried out boldly for his life. His crime was, that he would support the Constitution against anarchy and ruin. He was forced to flee from France to save his life. The treacherous Austrians caught him, and he is now a prisoner in a noisome dungeon in Olmutz. There is the noble La Fayette—the man who would give his life to-day for the good of his beloved France. Louis, you must flee."

Our hero sat for some moments in silence. His thoughts were in a bewildering whirl. By and by he suddenly caught his breath, and carried his hand to his brow.

"Sir Philip," he said, speaking in a low tone, but very distinctly. "Gideon de Bar has been with you to-day. What have we to fear from him?"

The marquis uttered a quick, low cry of pain, as though a dagger had pierced his bosom, and a wild,

haggard look overspread his face. A few moments so, and then he started up and paced to and fro across the room, his head bent, and his hands clasped convulsively.

The count saw how terribly he was affected, and, if he could prevent it, he did not mean that d'Artois should regain sufficient composure to close his lips, so he gave another turn to the winding of the rack.

"My dear Marquis, I have not been blind. Do not think that the years have passed and left me ignorant of the fact that Gideon de Bar holds a terrible power over your peace of mind. Oh, if you would confide in me—if you would let me help you—"

"Louis!" cried the agonized man, stopping before the youth, and gazing upon him with a wild, dazed expression, "there is no help for me! Oh, if I could die—if I could, by dying, wipe out the past, I could lay me down to the sacrifice with joy supreme. Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful!"

Louis de Liancourt found his worst fears realized. He was now sure that De Bar held the fatal power. The youth's next thought was: How was the heartless tyrant using his power? To what end? Enough had been told him, and he had seen enough else, to give direction to his suspicions. He arose to his feet and laid his hand upon the marquis's shoulder.

"Philip d' Artois, answer me the question I shall ask frankly and truly. Answer me, I beg—aye, I command! Gideon de Bar has used the power he possesses to extort from you money?"

"Yes," said Sir Philip, eagerly.

"And he has compelled you to lend your political influence to elevate him to office?"

"Yes, yes," but not quite so eagerly as before. Then he had evidently hoped that that was to be the only question, but now it appeared otherwise.

Aye—for presently De Liancourt went on, with an earnestness that was not to be slighted :

"And now—now, Sir Philip, the man demands the hand of your daughter for his son? He asks you to give Ninon d' Artois to be the wife of Gaston? Is it not so?"

"Oh, Heaven have mercy! Yes."

And the wretched man sank down into his seat, and buried his face in his hands. His groans were heart-rending, and his agony terrible.

Louis sat down and took the marquis's hand, and he spoke with kindness and with infinite tenderness :

"Sir Philip, you are all that is left to me of earth in whom I can repose the love and the trustfulness of a son. Will you not be a father to me? Oh, I will love you with my whole soul, and my whole strength, and I will serve you as I would serve an own, dearly loved parent. Let us help one another. Let us work together. If you will trust me with the story of this most unfortunate situation, I will bind myself by the word of a man that never broke the faith to keep your secret while you will have it so. I know there could have been no intentional evil—no willing crime—on your part, no matter what the hold may be. Aye—I am not afraid, at this moment, knowing alone what I do know, to solemnly avouch for the truth and honor of Philip d'Artois!"

"God bless you, my son! God bless you!" cried the marquis, catching Louis's hand and pressing it to his bosom. "As true as there is a heaven above us, you might give your word of avouchment without fear."

"Then why not unbosom yourself to me and let me help you to bear the burden? Oh, you know that I have loved that dear girl well and truly! I love her now with the whole strength of my being, and I have

"MY LORD DE LIANCOURT, I HAVE COME TO GIVE YOU SAFE CONDUCT TO THE CASTLE."—*See Page*

told her so. The declaration burst from my lips as though of its own accord."

"And she—Ninon?" whispered the marquis, gaspingly, seeming to have his gaze fixed on some object far beyond the then present surroundings.

"My dear Sir Philip, I do not need to tell you where Ninon's heart is. I do not flatter myself when I say it, but I speak the words of soberness and solemnity—Ninon's whole hope of life is bound up in her love for me. It is a love with her as it is with me, she has frankly told me this very night. Ah, meeting, as we did, in the dusky shadows of fading twilight, it was not apparent to sight how we had grown. We saw not with the eyes, but with our hearts. We gathered our feelings, not from reason, but from the awakened voice of the old love. Oh, it was as natural as the opening of the withering rose-leaf to the dews of heaven! She rested upon my bosom, as she had never before, and, as never before, I kissed her upon the lips. It was the instinctive sanctification of the love that had possessed our hearts through the years of our growing maturity—the pledge of the faith which those hearts yielded between the man and the woman. What can I say more? Surely, my lord, you have anticipated this relation. In those other years, if you did not directly give me encouragement by spoken word, you did not dash the cup from my lips, which you surely would have done had you seen that I was quaffing of the erotic cup only to my own unhappiness."

When the marquis spoke again his words were sad almost to weeping.

"Never, never, Louis, did I give you a spoken word of encouragement. I had no right."

"No right! In mercy's name what does that mean?"

"Hush! Oh, let me think. Give me a few brief moments, Louis, and I will try if I can see my way. Oh, what agony is this!"

He started again across the room, and so continued for several minutes, pacing to and fro, wringing his hands at times as though he could tear out his poor life with right good will, while incoherent murmurings fell from his lips. At length he stopped, stood for a little time irresolute, and then resumed his seat.

"Louis," he said, his voice husky and tremulous, "since I have been upon the floor I have lived over the agony of a lifetime, and in one direction I have resolved to suffer no more. I will no longer bear the killing burden alone. Should anything happen to cut short my days unexpectedly, one man, at least, shall know the very truth of a circumstance that may be given to the world against me. When I have told the story you will know why I could never have given you verbal promise of Ninon's hand. You shall listen, and you shall then decide whether you will persist in your suit. If you should so persist, we must contrive some way of flight from France. We will succeed or fall together."

"My father," said the count, reaching forth and grasping the marquis's hand, "let me give you one assurance in advance. Nothing that you can tell me, I care not what its nature, can swerve me from my faith of love and devotion to Ninon."

"Ah, my boy, be not too sure. And yet," the old nobleman added, with a change in his manner, a subdued and softened expression, "she is as true and pure as the angels in heaven."

"Thank God! Now go on, Sir Philip. Let me hear the story. You know you can trust me. I pledge you my faith in advance; and I furthermore pledge myself

that I will stand by you to the end. Your dangers shall be my dangers, and we will succeed or fail together. But we will not fail. If the worst comes, I have dear friends in England, and from England we can go to that glorious land of liberty and independence, the United States of America, where we shall find open arms and warm hearts on every hand."

This last speech seemed to touch the marquis in the right spot. It reached down and found the very hope that needed to be lifted up.

"America!" he repeated, solemnly. "Oh, I think in that fair land, with you and Ninon for my support, I could find a peace and joy which have been strange to me for many, many years. Listen to me, Louis, for I must tell the story before the courage fails me."

But an interruption came. Before Sir Philip could speak further there came a knock upon the door, and in answer to the demand of who was there, the old warder responded that it was he. The marquis arose with an exclamation of impatience, and went to the door and withdrew the bolt. And these were the circumstances:

Of late the warder of the *château* had had orders that no stranger was to be admitted within the gates after nightfall, except by permission of the master; and now there were two Franciscan friars without who earnestly begged food and shelter.

"Tell me, good Nicolas, what do they look like?"

The old warrior shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, my lord, much like their fellows in general. They are dirty rascals, gray as a pair of badgers, though not so fat. I don't think they would steal anything which they could not reach, and we should be careful not to set temptation in their way."

It was a wonder that the lord of the great castle

should hesitate in such a case, but he did, and he did it from an inner prompting which he could not put away. But he overcame the feeling, and gave directions that the mendicants should be admitted and fed, and a place of rest given them for the night.

After the warder had gone, he said to the count :

"There, Louis, if any evil follows in the tracks of those friars I shall have faith in presentiments. I don't know why it is, but they came in a cloud. However, let them rest. I cannot turn them away. And yet, I could have wished that we had been left alone for to-night. And now, my dear boy, I am going to startle you ; but let me tell my story ; don't interrupt me. I shall require all my strength of nerve and resolution."

He shot the bolt back into its fastening, and then returned to his seat. Before he sat down, however, he looked off into the shadowy distance, as though trying to see something that lay beyond. Was he thinking again of the two Franciscans ? Oh, if he could have known them then, as he was to know them afterward, he would not have sat down while they were within his walls. But he did not know !

CHAPTER VI.

BRINGING FORTH THE SECRET.

Philip d'Artois took one turn across the library, and a student of human nature, well-versed in those finer subtleties of facial expression, watching him as he slowly and thoughtfully moved to and fro, could not have doubted that a subject of wondrous weight and moment burdened his mind. It might be said that he was literally bent beneath the weight. So heavily did the burden bear that he stooped and his breathing was labored. A few moments after, crossing the room, he stopped, and then went to the sideboard, and took a silver flagon in his hand.

"Louis, will you drink a glass of wine? It is the pure Cote d' Or Burgundy, thirty years in my cellar."

"Excuse me, Sir Philip; I do not need it."

"And you will excuse me my son, for I *do* need it."

He poured out a large measure and slowly drank it, after which he took his seat, in the great easy-chair by the table, being careful to sit so that the light of the candles should not shine full in his face. For a little time he sat much like a man about to submit to a painful surgical operation. His effort at self-control was apparent, and a mighty effort at that. The silence was becoming oppressive. The count's heart was throbbing tumultuously, for he knew that he was to hear something

that would move him deeply, and the suspense was painful. At length the silence was broken. The voice was low and tremulous, and the words seemed forced up from a cavernous depth.

"Louis, I can hardly realize that I am about to give to mortal ear the secret I have so long carried in my bosom; but so it is. Circumstances have arisen which render the revealment almost imperative. Form no opinion until you have heard me through, for you cannot rightly judge until you know all."

He changed his position, took a long breath, and then commenced his story:

"Now, my dear boy, listen to me, and allow me to tell my story in my own way, only believe me when I assure you that I will tell you the whole, without curtailment of any kind, and without the concealing of a single important particular. You remember my wife. She was the daughter of Colonel Jovin de Lusange, a veteran of Louis XV.'s grand army. I may truthfully say that Pauline de Lusange was one of the fairest women in France, and when I won her for my wife, be sure there were plenty to envy me. Two men in particular, however, I have to notice. One was a tapestry weaver of Arras, a sordid, low-lived, unprincipled man, named Gideon de Bar—I see you start. Yes, he was the same who visited me this evening. He had money, and he had assurance, and he professed to love Pauline. My soul! What a man for her hand! She despised and loathed him, and when she had fairly kicked the knowledge of her true feelings into his perverse head he professed to believe that I had prejudiced her against him. He saw that I was her accepted lover, and it made him angry, and I have no doubt that he swore vengeance. At all events, when Pauline had become my wife, he showed to us both that he consid-

ered himself ill-used, though he professed to care nothing for it. That is, he proclaimed that he was well rid of a woman who could not appreciate him. The fact that many people laughed at him did not make him at all friendly in his feelings toward me. Gideon de Bar never married, though he would have the world believe that he made poor Rachel Tigny his wife.

"The other man of whom I must speak was Colonel Juan de Saint Denis. He was an officer of artillery, and commanded the citadel of Arras. He was a brave man, and handsome, but loose and abandoned. He had won the love of a bright-eyed, beautiful *grisette*, of Arras, named Alice Marmont, and I discovered that he had been secretly married to her. Colonel Saint Denis's official rank and position brought him into friendly and close relations with Pauline's father, and when he saw Pauline he fell desperately in love off-hand. He not only fell in love with her, but he told his love and urged his suit; and so well did he prosper therein that she began to feel an interest in him. She only knew him as she saw him at her father's house, and it must be borne in mind that he possessed those qualities most attractive to a vivacious, imaginative woman. He was every inch a soldier, brave and dashing, and as I have already said, handsome. Colonel de Lusange knew him only as the commandant of the defenses of the town, and he thought a man intrusted by his king with so important a trust must be worthy, and he did not forbid his visits.

"At that time I had never spoken to Pauline of love, but I loved her, nevertheless, though it was without selfishness that I warned her of Saint Denis's true character, and of the fact that he was already married, that he had a wife beautiful and good, a wife as true to him as wife could be. Of course from that moment

Pauline would listen no more to Juan's suit, and when he found that she knew of his marriage he ceased his visits. By some means he learned that it was I who had furnished Pauline and her father with knowledge of his true character and standing, and his wrath was without bounds. He was a vastly different man from Gideon de Bar. What he felt he spoke, and if he had enmity in his bosom he did not seek to hide it. When, in course of time, Pauline became my wife, Juan de Saint Denis swore vengeance—swore it to my face and bade me beware.

"Thus, my son, we come to my married life. My wife bore me two children, a son and a daughter. The son died at the age of six years. The birth of the daughter cost Pauline her life, and the child did not long survive her mother. I see you start. Ah, Louis! Louis! You here have a part of my terrible secret. Hold your breath, and be not cast down—Ninon *is not my child!* No blood of mine is in her veins. I do not wonder that you turn pale. But listen: I am now coming to that fearful burden which, for so many years, has rested like an incubus of death upon me:

"Pauline became my wife, and there were two men who had sworn vengeance against me. In the circumstances that befell, there was so much that was marvelous—such a working together of different forces, and such a perfect adaptation of certain parts toward the end reached, that I must believe the whole was a carefully elaborated plot for my destruction. No mere play of chance could have brought about the result that was reached. As well as anything may be known which my own senses did not directly see, or feel, or hear, do I know that there was a prepared plot, thoroughly arranged in all its parts, and calculated to the end of my destruction; and though I was not the only

victim, yet he who shared with me the result, was villain enough to lend himself to the plot in the outset, little dreaming that he was going to his own destruction, though I fancy De Bar had it in mind from the first. Thus it was :

"One day—it was the day that the news reached us that Louis XV. was dead—as I was passing through the forest toward the Bridge of Cressy, in that part where the path is narrow and uneven, I was met by Colonel Juan de Saint Denis. He had evidently been drinking, but was by no means intoxicated. He had lately been drinking a great deal, so I had heard ; and had been gambling, and I had heard it said that he had spent a great deal of money which had been left in his hands by government for the garrison. He met me, there in the forest, and stopped me. I cannot tell you what he said ; I can only tell you that the vials of his wrath were uncorked, and his rage let loose upon me in a furious, profane, fiery, vindictive and murderous flood. He swore that I had blasted his character ; that I had destroyed his peace of mind forever ; that I had traduced him ; and he even had the heart to accuse me of having broken the heart of his Alice, the mother of his child. Oh, I cannot tell you what terrible things he said ; but worse than all else, he swore that he had never sought to gain Pauline's affection ; that my efforts in that direction had been wholly gratuitous, and that the only thing I had accomplished had been the death of his true wife. He said he was a ruined man, and that I had ruined him ; and he then demanded satisfaction. He would attack me, and I might defend myself, or be cut down like a dog, as I pleased. With that he drew his sword, and I saw that he was in earnest. I had no choice. He would not let me speak. I drew my own blade, and in a moment

more the clashing of steel rang through the forest. He was the best swordsman in Artois—a far better swordsman than I, and much stronger; but fortune was against him, and in a moment when I least expected it, my point entered his bosom. His foot had slipped upon a rolling stone, and in his efforts to regain his eqnilibrium he pitched forward directly upon the point of my sword, for I had held it suspended in mid-air when the accident happened. The point entered his bosom, and he fell.

"I had started forward for the purpose of lifting his head, when I heard footsteps approaching, and a moment afterward Gideon de Bar came upon the scene. He said he had heard the clashing of swords, and had come to see what was the matter. And then, in a startled manner, having seen the fallen man, he caught me by the arm, and bade me to hide myself in the wood. Said he—Oh, I remember his every word and look and tone:

"'Sir Philip, I hear people coming. This man was their idol. Remember he was related to that Robert le Diable who was executed for attempting to assassinate the king who is just dead. If they find Saint Denis dead and you here with his blood upon your hands, they will tear you limb from limb. Flee you to the cover of the wood, and I will care for him. If he has life in him I will revive him.'

"Thus spoke to me Gideon de Bar. I was beyond the power of calm reflection. Touching Saint Denis's relationship to Robert François Damiens, the man who gained such notoriety from his attempt to assassinate Louis XV., he was related only by marriage, but that was sufficient in the eyes of the *Sans Culottes* to canonize him. Without consideration, with my brain in a whirl, I plunged into the wood, where I remained for

half an hour, as near as I could judge. At the end of that time I crept back. As I came to an opening where I could look upon the scene of our conflict, I saw de Bar upon his knees, supporting Saint Denis in his arms. He had been writing upon a sheet of paper. He had had pen and ink and paper with him. He said his business required that he should carry them when away from home. He had been taking down the man's dying statement, and as I came up he had put the pen into Saint Denis's hand, and he was signing his name. He had strength to do that, with De Bar to guide his hand, and after that he sank back. I rushed to the spot and Gideon de Bar arose to his feet and showed me the the paper with a great stain of blood upon it, where Saint Denis's hand had rested upon it. At that moment I heard not only the sound of approaching feet, but the voices of the multitude. De Bar cried out to me again to flee. Said he: 'Flee for your life and I will turn suspicion away from you. They are his friends coming.' And he took me by the arm to lead me away. I asked if Saint Denis was dead. 'Yes,' said De Bar. 'Look for yourself. His last effort of life was the signing of this document. His bitter enmity sustained him till that was done, and then the last breath was drawn. But I will save you. Flee at once, and they shall never know.'

"I gave one look at the man I had accidentally slain, saw that he was really dead, and then fled. I reached my home, though I know not how, that night at a late hour. Gideon de Bar came to me and showed me the paper, but would not trust it in my hands. It was entitled, '*The Dying Declaration, under Oath, of Col. Juan de Saint Denis, commanding French Forces at Arras.*' And then it went on in direct and absolute statement, that he had failen by the hand of the Mar-

quis Sir Philip d'Artois of Saint Omer—that Philip d'Artois had murdered him—that I—*I*—had first ruined his character and blasted his every earthly prospect, and had ended my work of enmity by killing him !

"Oh, Louis, it was terrible ! I asked De Bar if he meant to hold that paper—I asked him if he did not know it was false. I told him the solemn truth—how Juan de Saint Denis had first drawn upon me, and how I had drawn in absolute self-defense, and how, even after that, his death was the result of a most unfortunate accident, and not from a blow aimed by me. But De Bar only smiled grimly, and shook his head.

"But I need not tell you more of that. You can see the whole for yourself. That man had me in his power, and he knew it ; aye—and I knew it ! What would my declaration amount to by the side of that bloody sign-manual of a dying man ? I knew that a howl of indignation would go up when it was known that Saint Denis had been slain in the forest. And so it was. The excitement was intense. You must remember it. You were five years old then, or nearly that."

"I remember," said Louis. "Aye, I remember very well how my father came in and told us at the table ; and how he said that doubtless the man had been slain in a drunken quarrel ; or, if such had not been the case, that he might have taken his own life ; for I think he was, at the time of his death, a defaulter to a large amount."

"He was," pursued the marquis, "and the minister, Turgot, had sent a commission to examine into his affairs. It was while that commission was in Arras that he met me in the forest. What a tempest there was ! The mob believed that it had been a plot of the aristocrats to get him out of the way. He became

apotheosized at once, and his memory was held in veneration as an enemy of the nobility and a champion of the people. Good heavens! Had it been whispered then that the Marquis of Saint Omer did the deed, I should have been literally torn to pieces. The *Sans Culottes* of Paris would have come to see it done!

"And so I was tied. Perhaps— But no—I could not have done differently. That man held in his hand an instrument as fatal to me, when he pleased to make it so, as a *lettre de cachet*. He promised that he would not be severe, but I could take that for what it was worth. I could not calmly and deliberately give myself up to an ignominious death, and my name to universal execration, and I bowed my neck to the yoke. My wife had been dead several months at that time, and my infant daughter was dying. I discovered that Colonel Saint Denis had left a daughter, motherless and totally unprovided for. I asked De Bar to bring the child to me, and he did so—brought it, and swore to me that he would never, while I kept faith with him, tell to a human being that the little one was not my own offspring. The least, and the most, I could do was to care for that child; and I think I have been all that a father could have been.

"Louis, our blessed Ninon—she whom you love—is that child! She must not know it yet. There is no need. Or, at any rate, we will keep it from her as long we can. Now, my boy, you can comprehend the power of Gideon de Bar. Think of the present condition of France. Look at the nation's real, responsible rulers. Now, just picture to yourself this proclamation made in the market-place to-morrow. We can imagine it. Gideon de Bar, mayor of Arras, standing before the people, will cry aloud to them something like this—listen:

"'My dear citizens and citizenesses, you remember

the brave and gallant patriot and soldier, that friend of the people, Colonel Juan de Saint Denis? You remember him as the near and dear relative of the king-killer, *Robert le Diable!* You remember how he was assassinated in the forest of Saint Jean just after the death of the human fiend and monster, Louis Capet, called *King*—the Fifteenth of that name? Well—I can tell you whose hand shed that precious blood!'"

At this point the marquis trembled so convulsively that he spoke with difficulty, and Louis put out his hand and stopped him.

"Enough, father! I can see it all. I can see it as plainly and as surely as though the scene were actually transpiring before my very eyes."

"And, my son, you can see what the result would be?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then what remains for us to do? Gideon de Bar has been to me, and held that bloody paper before me, and demanded Ninon's hand. If I do not give it on the morrow—"

"How!" cried Louis, interrupting. "Give Ninon's hand—*to-morrow?*"

"If I do not to-morrow sign the marriage contract, which, you are aware, is legally a marriage. The priestly ceremony is necessary to a full consummation, but the signed contract is legally binding. What shall we do?"

"Whatever we do must be done quickly, father."

"Yes."

"You would not sign that contract if you could avoid it?"

"No!"

"Would you leave your wealth behind you if flight were possible?"

"Ah, my son, I fear me there would be but little sacrifice in that. I do firmly believe that it is Gideon de Bar's purpose to strip me entirely. If he were to publish that paper, property and life would both go in a twinkling. I know the fiend thoroughly. He has no heart—no conscience. He would glory in the deed of working my utter ruin, and the Jacobins would elevate him upon my downfall."

Louis de Liancourt arose from his seat and walked slowly to and fro across the room. When he came back, he laid his hand upon the marquis's shoulder.

"Sir Philip, think of Ninon. Would she live long if she were sacrificed to—"

"Speak not the word. It shall not be!"

"Then our course is clear. We have not an hour—not a moment—to spare The morrow's sun must not find us here. I am satisfied, upon reflection, that search will be made for the nobleman who slew the three—or helped to slay—the three Jacobin butchers. There is nothing to prevent our being upon the road before midnight. You have some money and some jewels?"

"Yes—thank Heaven! I have enough for all possible need, at least for the present. My jewels are valuable."

"And I, also, have a goodly store. Ninon, too, has jewels which her—the marchioness left. My attendant, Martin, is a treasure. You have one or two servants whom you can trust; or, we may think it best to take a goodly force well armed. From here to Saint-Jean-sur-Mer is not more than thirteen leagues. The road is mostly your own, and horses may be taken on the way anywhere. At that port I know we shall find a vessel. We will purchase one, if necessary. Once on the sea, and we are safe!"

Philip d' Artois started to his feet with a cry of hopeful joy.

"Louis," he exclaimed, seizing the young man's hand, "it shall be done as you have said. It is our only hope, and it is safe."

"Aye," added Louis, "and we may consider it sure. What shall hinder us? We can be upon the sea before the breaking of another day."

"If we are speedy now."

"Yes."

"Then let us be moving."

And then they started forth to the work of preparation. Death was sure to them if they remained till another day in Artois. In England they would find safety.

And Louis de Liancourt echoed Sir Philip's fervent prayer as he went forth to summon his faithful attendant. The marquis was to call Ninon, and prepare her for the sudden undertaking.

CHAPTER VII.

AN EMPTY BED-CHAMBER, AND WHAT RESULTED.

Ninon had not retired. Perhaps the hope of seeing and speaking with Louis before she slept had kept her up later than usual. Of course she was startled when informed of the resolution which had been taken, but she was not greatly surprised. Her mind was quick to perceive, and she had a deeper and clearer insight into her father's true situation than he imagined. She thought of him as of her father, for upon that relationship never a doubt had cast its cloud. She had long seen that those nobles of France whose names were of ancient and loyal lineage were hated and distrusted by the people ; that a spirit of revolution was abroad ; that the masses were inspired or infatuated with the idea of a universal Commune, in which the wealth of the wealthy should be confiscated to the use of the poor and the portionless ; and that the very government was surely passing into the hands of the ignorant, dissolute and irresponsible mob. She knew how the fatal guillotine was daily, and almost hourly, at work—that men and women, old and young, high and low, were beheaded without just trial, and how dire Vengeance had usurped the place of Justice. Touching the relations between her father and Gideon de Bar she knew

more than she had ever told, and suspected much that she did not know. Of one thing, however, she was positively certain. De Bar held the life of Sir Philip in his hand, to let the ax fall when he pleased. This was sufficient to decide her, and when it had been told her that they would flee to the coast and take ship for England, and that Louis de Liancourt would bear them company, she was happier than she had been before for long, long months.

"Gather all your money and all your jewels," said the marquis, "and let your maid look to the packing-up of your clothing. You will not be long."

Ninon promised so make all possible haste, and with the promise upon her lips she turned away; but when her father had gone she came back and waited until Louis appeared. She could not move until she had heard his dear word of encouragement.

"Fear not, my beloved," cried the count, pressing Ninon to his bosom and kissing her upon the brow. "Surely there can be nothing to bind us to France while this demon of anarchy and destruction is loose. Here there is danger at every step—danger to every one of us—while in another land we may find safety and sweet repose. You will trust me, dear girl?"

"Yes! Oh, yes!"

"Then make all possible haste. Forget not a thing which you need."

With another kiss Ninon hastened away, and, with Blanchette to assist, made rapid progress in her preparations, of which it is only necessary to state that she found herself possessed of more wealth in small bulk than she had thought. All the jewels which the marchioness had left were hers—jewels, some of them, which had been in the families of the Counts d'Artois for many generations—and she knew they were worth

a fortune. She gathered them carefully up, with what gold she could find, and then made judicious selection of other things.

Below, the marquis and the count had held a council, Martin Duval participating, in which it had been determined that ten men of the retainers of the house should be taken. Of these, six were stout, faithful and well-tried soldiers, brave and true ; two were grooms, and two common servants. Old Nicolas, the warder, had been called in, and had promised to remain and look to the castle, and also to make such explanation to the other servants as he might deem proper and necessary. Of course, it could not be long before inquiries would be made by the mayor of Arras, and to him, and to others in authority who might demand information, Nicolas was to tell the simple truth of all he knew. The direction which the fugitives were to take was not made known to him.

It was a little after midnight when all the preparations had been made. It had taken longer than they had thought, and yet they had been expeditious. The marquis had given to his valet a morocco case containing his jewels, and such important papers as he thought best to take away with him, and his gold was in his own saddle-bags, to be carried by himself.

Both the Count de Liancourt and Martin were becoming anxious. They had commenced to make ready before ten o'clock, and considerably more than two hours had been consumed. The esquire, eager in his beloved master's behalf, had been gathering information from the servants and the outside tenants, from whom he had gathered much concerning the Jacobite doings which was not known to the marquis.

" Ah !" he exclaimed, as the last faint reverberations of the great clock-bell in the tower were dying away

upon the midnight air. "There is more danger than our lord the marquis knows. The spirit of blood is loose, and is making its way to the north. The streets of Paris have been filled with carnage, and the mad butchers are tramping up and down the highways and the byways, crying: '*Kill! Kill!*' The heads of the nobles are falling. With regard to the head of the king, its fall is only a question of time!"

"Martin, you do not mean that they will dare to publicly execute him?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Oh, that would be monstrous!"

"My faith, not more monstrous than many other things that are done. And, my master," pursued the man, after a moment's pause, and in a lower key, "just cast your thoughts back upon the last twenty years of the reign of the king who died to give this one the throne. Was there a crime against any law, human or divine—civil, moral, or social—that he was not guilty of? Did he not, truly and in fact, hold France by the throat and rob her of honor, truth and virtue? Did he not— But what have we here?"

It was one of the grooms from the stables, who had just come in from beyond the outer walls, where he had been to get a powerful pack-horse which the miller had had in use.

"Is this you, my lord?" he asked eagerly, as he came up.

"I am the Count de Liancourt. What have you to communicate?"

"I think you had better ascertain if the two Capuchins that sought shelter here are in their beds."

"Ha! What is it? What of them? Speak, in mercy's name!"

"Only this, my lord: The old miller was out just

after the castle clock struck ten, coming down from his mill, where he had been with his wife to mend some of the wind-sails. Near the foot of the hill, where the path branches off toward the eastern bridge, he saw two men who looked like monks, and he was sure they must have come from the castle."

Louis waited to hear no more. He remembered how reluctantly the marquis had given the order for admitting the two Franciscans, and his fears were aroused. As quickly as possible he dashed into the keep, and found the chamberlain, who took a lamp and conducted him to the chamber where he had quartered the mendicants. It was in a wing, or projection, at the back part of the old building, which had been originally intended for a dormitory in times when the garrison was filled. The *château* could give home to an army of two thousand men, if necessary. This wing overlooked the rear court, beyond which, within the main wall of enclosure, was a garden of shrubs and flowers. The chamberlain tried the door of the apartment, and found it locked upon the inside. Louis did not wait for ceremony. With a powerful kick, he forced the door from its fastenings, and then hurried in. The Capuchins were not there ! An open window, with a rope of sheets and blankets hanging out over the sill, told the whole story. Louis looked out at the window, and saw that the friars had had no difficulty in reaching the ground, and then, as swiftly as the flame of the lamp would permit, he hurried down.

Two old woodmen, with a lantern, went to the point beneath the open window, from the sill of which fluttered the rope of bedding, and there they found the prints of two pairs of sandaled feet, fresh and distinct. Without difficulty they traced them through the garden to the rear wall, where an enormous grape-vine had

been suffered to grow to the coping. There was no need of looking further. The junction of the two paths, of which the miller had spoken, was not far away, and the monks had been gone full two hours!

In the great hall, where the party were gathering, the horses having been brought to the landing, and the packs and saddle-bags put on, stood the marquis, wondering what kept the count; but when the count had come, and had told what he had found, Sir Philip was frightened.

"Oh!" he groaned, clinching his hands. "I feared those men when they came. The Franciscan convent is not a league away, and if they were able to walk, there was no ordinary reason for their seeking shelter here. They are spies—set on by Gideon de Bar."

"Then," cried Louis, in trumpet tones, "we must make all possible haste. All is ready. We need not wait another moment. To horse! To horse! Ninon, come! Take heart, dear girl. We will look to it that no possible effort is spared. Once on the road, we will quickly put a distance between us and our enemies that they shall find it difficult to overcome."

He led her out and helped her to her saddle, and very shortly afterward the whole party was mounted. The warder had thrown open the great gate and lowered the draw-bridge, and three of the men-at-arms rode in advance and crossed over. Then came Sir Philip and Sir Louis, with Ninon between them. Next rode Martin Duval and Blanchette Lefranc; behind them came the pack-horses in charge of the grooms and servants; and, bringing up the rear were the three other troopers, heavily armed; and, for that matter, all were armed as thoroughly as could be.

It will be remembered that the draw-bridge spanned the river which ran beneath the castle wall; or, the

draw was a part of the spanning bridge, and beyond this, at the distance of a hundred yards or more, ran the highway, very nearly east and west. When the three troopers in advance reached this broad road, the chief of the squad, a commissioned lieutenant, rode on ahead of his companions, according to the plan of march which had been laid down. The last of the column had filed into the highway, and the order had been given for striking into a gallop, when the horse of the lieutenant suddenly shied, coming very near to unseating him. Upon his left was a wood, extending several miles, being part of an old park in which deer had been kept in former years, and as his beast sprang aside, away from this thick, dark cover, he looked sharply to see if he could discover anything unusual. But nothing appeared. It must have been a hare or a fox, he thought; and he was gathering his rein to guard against another movement of like description, when one of his companions spurred to his side, and pointed to a clear space ahead, where the road passed over a gentle eminence, affording a background of clear sky to the vista.

"Marius," spoke the soldier who had ridden up, thus addressing his superior, "have you observed anything?"

"Not by sight," returned the lieutenant. "You saw my horse shy. Something must have startled him—something in the wood."

"But I saw something ahead—where the road on the hill touches the sky—something like the heads of men, which disappeared the moment we came in sight from the angle behind us."

Marius looked sharply but saw nothing, and he was debating with himself whether he should push on until he saw something positive, or go back with the intelli-

gence in hand, when he was startled by the sharp neighing of a horse close at hand, followed by a sound which seemed to him very much like a smothered oath from human lips. He whispered to his companion, and then turned his horse and rode back.

"My lord," he said, as he drew up before the marquis, "I fear we are waylaid. I have heard the neighing of a horse close at hand, and Conrad is sure he saw several men upon the hill before us."

"Heaven have mercy if we are pursued," ejaculated d'Artois.

"My lord," said Louis, who saw that the marquis was trembling in every joint, "let us not look upon the side of failure. Look! A little in advance is a more open space. Let us gain that, at any rate, and if we are attacked we will find of what stuff our assailants are made. Will you order the arrangement?"

"My dear Louis, you are young and fresh. I wish you would take command."

"As you will, my lord. And you will remain by Ninon's side?"

"Yes."

"Martin, you will go back and hold the rear. Look well about you, and then come up with the three troopers and stand ready to answer my call. Do not pass the marquis till I bid you. Ninon, dear girl, take courage. It may be nothing, after all, but a night-bound straggler. We shall soon see."

Thus speaking he beckoned to Marius to join him, and rode on to the front, where, finding that all was quiet, he pushed on, believing that the arrangement he had made was good. In case of an alarm in the rear, he could trust Martin's judgment, and if an attack should occur in front he could call up his whole force very quickly. The broader space of which he had

spoken was close at hand, and as he came to its verge he instinctively drew in his rein. It was where at some time a cot had stood, and around it a clearing had been made, probably to accommodate a woodman of a former lord. The trees had been cut away upon both sides of the road, and the clearing extended to the foot of the little hill of which we have spoken, distant, perhaps, three hundred yards. He had a feeling that he had better wait here for the others to come up, so as to guard the flanks of the party as they crossed this open space.

As soon as those in the rear had come up, the marquis, with Ninon and Blanchette, kept the middle of the road, with the pack-horses and two grooms directly behind them. Martin, with three troopers, took the left, while our hero himself, with the other three, took the right, the two remaining servants being placed beside the pack-horses.

"Now," said Louis, without the least show of excitement, "we are to use the spur and dash forward. If we cross the space before us, at the foot of yonder eminence I will take the lead; his lordship and the ladies next; then the pack-horses; and then Martin. Now, forward!"

They had gained half the distance across the open space, and were going at a rattling gallop, when the horse of the lieutenant shied again, this time so smartly and so suddenly as to hurl him from his saddle. Naturally, Louis pulled up, and upon this the others did likewise, but in such manner that the line was broken, and the horses widely separated.

Marius was not hurt, and he had placed a foot in the stirrup, prepared to remount, when a loud shout sounded from the edge of the wood upon the right, and as the lieutenant regained his seat, full a score of mounted

men burst forth into the glade, some upon one hand and some upon the other. In the darkness the number could not be clearly told, but the shadowy masses were fearfully plenty.

"On—on!" shouted the count, drawing his sword, and wheeling his horse to face his company. "Sir Philip, do you and the two women spur on with all possible speed—over the hill, and away. We will cover your retreat. The *Sans Culottes* shall find that they have not children to deal with."

"They are not *Sans Culottes!*" cried the marquis, in fear-stricken tones. "See! Here comes a man with torch-bearers, and he carries a white flag."

Louis turned, and saw that it was as Sir Philip had said. A man was approaching on horseback, with a white flag in his hand, waving it above his head, and upon either side of him, on foot, were men bearing flambeaux.

"Philip d' Artois, master of Saint Jean," called the horseman, "in the name of the constitution of France, I demand speech with you!"

"It is Gideon de Bar," said Louis, recognizing the man as he came nearer.

"Yes," returned the marquis. "I must speak with him."

Louis de Liancourt's heart sank within him. He could not offer to oppose Sir Philip's desire, and he knew there could be but one result. Oh, if he could have called upon some kind power to set Ninon beyond danger, how quickly would he have cut his way through the opposition now presented! But, if he forced on the battle, who should tell what might be the result to the loved one?

"Philip d' Artois, what is your answer?"

"Louis," cried the broken man, beseechingly, "I must speak with him."

"As you will, Sir Philip. I will move back and give you passage."

And with this the count wheeled his horse and rode to Ninon's side.

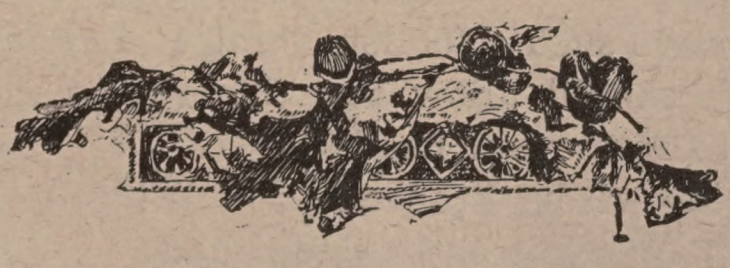
"Ninon, I must speak a word in your ear. Will you withdraw a pace? Do not turn your horse, for eager eyes may be upon you. Back away from the light—draw back until you are in the shadow, and I will be by your side."

At that moment Martin drew up at the count's stirrup.

"Sir Louis, do not, in mercy's name, deliberately do an act of suicide. If the marquis makes terms with these men, it means arrest for you. The lady will be safe. I will trust Blanchette. You must trust Ninon. The present moment may be ours; and, perhaps, never another."

"One moment, Martin. I must speak with Ninon. I have promised. Ha! Listen to what that man proposes."

The marquis had ridden forth, and Gideon de Bar was coming to meet him; and the light of the flaring flambeaux was sufficient to reveal that other men had come forth from the wood, all stout and well armed.



CHAPTER VIII.

A RACE AND A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

Evidently Gideon de Bar knew his man thoroughly, and knew just how to deal with him. Naturally, Philip d'Artois was brave and true, and would have sooner sacrificed his life than his honor; but in the presence of this man he was a coward. Once he had suffered the Mephistopheles to gain control of him, and never since had he had the stern courage to assert his whole manhood when that man's thumb was upon him.

On the present occasion, as soon as the marquis had turned his face from the man who had inspired within him hope and courage, and had faced the man whom he feared, his whole aspect changed. He felt the edge of the knife upon his neck in anticipation, and he heard the howlings of the mob as he went from the hall of justice to the guillotine.

"My dear Sir Philip! Dear, good friend! How could you do such a foolish thing? I cannot conceive why you should allow the thought of fleeing from France to enter your head!"

"Fleeing—from France! *I?*" uttered the marquis, trying to appear greatly astonished.

"Oh, now, my dear Philip, do not make matters worse than they really are by telling a falsehood.

Know that your directions to your servants have been all repeated to me."

"Ah!" exclaimed d'Artois, involuntarily. "Those monks!"

De Bar smiled with a grim malevolence.

"Yes, Sir Philip. The next time a pair of Capuchins come, claiming shelter in the name of Saint Francis, be you sure they are not true followers of Saint Gideon. Ha! Ha! Ha! Yes, yes—the seeming Capuchins are with me now, but their garbs of Saint Francis are laid aside. I have fifty stout troopers with me, and you can imagine whether I will turn back empty-handed from the mission I have undertaken. Now, Philip d'Artois, listen to me, and judge whether I am your friend or not. I have gained the directing of this whole business, and what I promise will be made good. If you will call off the men who are of your immediate household, and surrender promptly, and with outward good grace, I will warrant you your liberty and your safe return, with your fair *charge*, to your *château*. What say you?"

"But," pleaded the poor man, quivering with more than mortal dread, "what of Louis de Liancourt? Will you extend to him the same terms?"

"My very dear friend, if you feel that you can take upon your shoulders the affairs of a man against whom the Assembly of Justice has issued its edict, I will leave you to your fate. I have no time to waste. If I return to my followers, and bid them go on with their work, you will escape if you can. If you do not, you—*know the result!* In a word—what is your answer?"

While this had been transpiring between Gideon de Bar and the marquis, Louis de Liancourt had found the side of his dear love, and no other ear was near to overhear their words. Said the count;

"Ninon, you see how we are surrounded. I know that your father is completely within that bad man's power. It is a wretched story, which you will some time know; but for the present rest satisfied with the assurance that, let De Bar say what he will, Philip d'Artois is guiltless of crime. Hush! Let that pass. Now look: Your father will surrender. I cannot bear you away from him. The bare attempt might be fatal. You will return home, and I shall not be there. I shall escape if I can; but, let happen what will, tell me that you will not let them drag you into marriage with another while I live. Will you promise me that?"

"Oh, yes! With my whole heart, yes! No power shall make me do it!"

"Then let us live and hope. We can trust in God, and put forth our every energy beside. Be you firm, and I will come to you when I can. Dear girl—" he spoke with terrible earnestness—"be sure that every art, every outrageous plot, every lying, wicked scheme which the most abandoned fiendishness can invent and put in motion will be brought to bear upon you. In such a position you have a sacred right—aye, it is your duty—to use every means in your power, even to deceiving the villain for your own preservation. Let no false estimate of right and wrong sink you to destruction. If the need and the opportunity should come to you, you must turn the weapon of the enemy against himself. Will you do it?"

"Dear Louis! My own true love! My darling, in such a cause I will not hesitate."

"Bless you, Ninon, bless you! God keep and guard you, and may the good angels—"

The sentence was cut short by Martin Duval, who came dashing up, and reining in with his lips close to his master's ear.

"My lord, the marquis will surrender and leave you to your fate. He has no choice. De Bar has full fifty dragoons surrounding us. Our point of meeting, if we both escape, is at the Point of Saint Paul, five leagues north of Saint-Jean-Sur-Mer. We must not struggle together. You are the man they seek. I would die for you if it would serve you, but if you are captured I can serve you far better from the outside of the prison than from the inside with you. Do you comprehend?"

"Perfectly, Martin; and you are right. Away with you! Away, and God be with you!"

Without another word Martin backed his horse away from the neighborhood of his master, and at a proper distance he wheeled and gave the beast the spur.

De Liancourt saw Gideon de Bar turn and heard him call to the officer who was nearest to him. He spoke one more word to Ninon, and then, with her sweet voice sounding in his ears, bidding him for Heaven's sake flee, he turned his horse's head and plunged toward the hill to the westward, over which the road lay. He could not see Martin anywhere. He swept the whole circle with his eye, but the familiar horseman was not to be seen.

"Fire! Fire!" shouted De Bar, in tones full as eager and exultant as they were imperative. "Shoot him down! He is the man who slew Gabriel and Raoul!"

A howl of rage and indignation broke the midnight air. It was as though high carnival were being held in Pluto's capital, and a new species of infernal sport had been unexpectedly opened to the actors.

"Fire! Fire! Don't let the murderer of Ismael escape!"

They were generous in their award of honor, thus to bestow upon our hero the credit of having killed all

three of the dead assassins ; but he did not care for that just then. He had other things to occupy his mind. Instinctively he stooped low upon his horse's neck, thus offering the least possible space to the chance flying of the enemy's bullets, and sped away like the wind. Of Ninon he thought, and he murmured her name as he was borne onward. He knew her life was secure, and he believed she would firmly keep the faith she had pledged. Somehow, the belief settled calmly down upon his inner consciousness without an effort of argument, and it gave him a great joy in the midst of the enveloping tempest.

I cannot account for it, and I think I never saw the thing attempted—how so many bullets, directed by men experienced in the work, can be sent flying after a man—flying all around him—and not one of them hit him. It would sometimes appear that every other point within the range of the firing—every other conceivable atom of space—is traversed by the deadly missiles, save that occupied by the object aimed at. The Jacobin soldiers had light enough to afford them sight for aim, for the fugitive was starting from their very midst, and had to pass points occupied by many of them, and the glare of at least a dozen flambeaux shone over the glade. The men of De Bar fired as soon as the order was given, and their bullets whistled around the count's head with a music anything but inviting ; but he was not touched. A ball passed through his hat, and another was buried in the pommel of his saddle, and other parts of his clothing were touched, but not a scratch upon his flesh. His horse was a powerful beast, of pure Granada breed, fleet as the wind and as enduring. The foot of the eminence was gained before the pieces of the enemy had been emptied, and as he started up the ascent he heard the

order given for pursuit. Thus far the thought of riding after him had not occurred to them, they probably thinking their bullets must bring him down.

Half way up the rise the count slackened his pace for a moment and cast a glance behind him. The scene was picturesque and vivid, the light of the flambeaux, which were scattered about over the whole space occupied by man and horse, illuminating the glade very clearly. He saw where the marquis sat upon his horse with Ninon and Blanchette by his side, and his servants drawn up behind him. Close by was the mayor of Arras, swinging his sword in the air and shouting to his troopers, and from that point to the foot of the hill were scattered those who had started in pursuit. One sweeping glance over the varied scene, and then his gaze was fixed upon Ninon. He fancied that he could see upon her face the look of prayer, and almost persuaded himself that he could hear her sweet voice in supplication to the throne of grace.

"Dear girl," he murmured, while a gathering moisture dimmed his sight, "be firm—be strong—oh, keep the faith that is between us, and all shall yet be well!"

And then he turned and spurred on. One more glance behind him from the top of the hill, and in a moment more the scene in the glade was shut out from his view.

The road before him was an old highway, and though broken and uneven in places, yet easy to be followed by a sure-footed horse, even in the night. There was no moon, and many of the stars were obscured by passing clouds; but the count's eyes were strong and sharp, and serviceable in a gloom where many might have failed. At points where the thick wood flanked the way it became so dark that the fugitive was forced to slacken his speed; and he did it willingly, for he not

only thus gave his beast opportunity to breathe, but he avoided the danger of going down in some of the many sinks and gullies that broke the surface of the track.

Was he pursued? Aye, and that right hotly. At one time he would have given anything for more light, but the thought that light would serve the enemy as well as himself reconciled him a measure to the gloom. More than once his horse came near losing his footing and plunging headlong, and twice, at least, he had come near being hurled from his saddle by coming in contact with low-hanging branches of the flanking trees.

De Liancourt could not tell how far he had ridden, nor how long. Where he had expected he should feel at home amid old scenes of the boyhood days, the darkness had made him as a stranger, and the road which he fancied he knew perfectly he was forced to give almost entirely to his horse for directive judgment. As to the lapse of time, it might have been half an hour—not more than that, certainly—when he became painfully aware of the fact that horses were gaining upon him. The tramp of their iron shoes was distinct, and ever and anon the shouts of the riders broke the air. Louis asked himself if he could have possibly gained anything by turning from the highway into the wood, but he could not make himself believe that such a movement would have been politic or judicious. Even had he been able to make the movement without being detected by his pursuers, the utter blackness of desolation in the deep forest would not only have stopped his progress, but there were chances of being bewildered and lost. No, he was doing the best he could do, and with another inward struggle and a murmured prayer, he urged his horse forward.

Certainly the pursuers were coming nearer, and in a

very important particular they had an advantage over him which was to them invaluable. The road had been for a considerable distance of an upward grade toward the westward, and promised to be so for two or three leagues further. Thus, those in pursuit were enabled to catch sight of the fugitive, as, being below him, they looked up and saw him outlined against the sky ; while he, looking down, could only gaze into a dense wood the shadows of which swallowed up every object within its confines.

Could it be that his horse was failing? It would surely seem so, and yet it ought not so to be. Ah! By and by the beast began to limp perceptibly, and then the count remembered something which had entirely escaped his mind. He remembered that the animal, while under fire, had once reared suddenly, and stood for a moment upon three legs when he came down. He must have been hit by a bullet at that time, hit and wounded, but so slightly as not to show it at the time. But now there could be no doubt. In a little while longer the horse fairly staggered, and one of his forelegs was failing.

The pursuers had seen him, for their exultant shouts plainly revealed it. The road was direct for a considerable distance in advance, and slightly rising, so that a good part of the time his outlines must have been visible to those behind.

Hark! When fully assured that his horse must very soon give out entirely, the count stopped and bent his ear to listen. There were three, at least, in pursuit, and close upon him, though one of them seemed to be nearer than the others. His thoughts worked swiftly. It was to him a matter of life and death. Capture by those who were so near upon him could mean only death by the guillotine, sure and speedy. If he would

defend himself to the best advantage, he must leave his seat upon a horse that was failing him. Should he venture to sustain a charge in his saddle, the chances were that he would go down at the first onset, in which event he might meet harm from the fall. He had not yet discharged a pistol, and he had two of them, well and faithfully loaded, with flints fine and sure. These he took from the holster and pushed beneath his sword-belt, and then dismounted.

A moment's glance at the situation told him that his movement had been discovered. The foremost of the pursuers instantly pulled up, and shouted for his comrades to hurry and join him. This was not what the count had wanted. He had hoped that the enemy would allow him to meet them in detail. However, if they were to come upon him in force, he must be prepared accordingly. There were three of the Jacobins coming—three to be met in the outset—and there were more in the distance, as, now that he stood upon the earth, and could catch the impression upon his senses, he heard them plainly. He could hear, ever and anon, a distant shout, and the tramp of the iron-shod feet was borne upon the air to his ears. Very likely the greater part of the mayor's force had joined in the chase, making of it a sport. At all events, the shoutings and the howlings and the hootings which came from the lips of the distant riders had more the spice of the riotous mob than of a well-disposed legal posse.

The young nobleman had not long to wait in uncertainty. Placing the horse so that he could make him serve the purpose of a protection against being ridden down, he drew his sword, which he held hanging from the left hand, while in the right he held a cocked pistol. The second pistol, also cocked, he held in the left

hand with the sword, so that when he had discharged the first, he could grasp either sword or pistol, as might be desired.

"What ho! Citizen Louis de Liancourt! In the name of the constitution, I command you to deliver up your sword and to surrender!"

Our hero could see that the man was large and powerful, of middle age, dressed in the garb of the Commune, with the cap of liberty upon his head. This was a cap of red cloth, without a vizor, tall and conical, with the top drooping and upon the side a white cockade, and was the distinctive mark of the Jacobin Club. Its wearer was evidently a man of distinction with the mob and low-bred ruffian.

Louis's resolution was quickly taken, and he meant to act instantly. It was his only hope. The other two pursuers stopped when this man stopped, being slightly behind him, and all the count could see of them in the darkness was that they were large, heavy-shouldered men. This he could see by their outlines against the sky, they being elevated upon their saddles; and he also saw that they wore the Jacobin cap.

"Look ye!" replied Louis, as soon as he had studied the situation: "Let it not be said that you had not fair warning. Leave me this instant—turn your horse now—immediately—or I shall kill you if it is in my power. I must protect myself at all hazards."

The man laughed a loud, brutal laugh, and then, with an oath, drew his sword. Our hero's quick eye detected that this was taken as a signal by the others, and that they were coming up, with their swords out. With a quick movement, but with sure aim, he raised his pistol and fired. The Jacobin sent forth a sharp

cry, like the roar of a stricken beast, and, throwing up his hands, fell backward from his horse.

With tremendous oaths, the other two pressed their horses forward, swearing vengeance deep and dire. Fortunate for Louis was it that he had the second pistol ready for use, for otherwise he could not, on foot as he was, have escaped the blows of both the heavy swords. Though his movements were quick as thought, they were as deliberate as though squared by methodical rule, and as sure. His second pistol was as effective as had been the first, and in firing on foot, while his object was thrown upward against the sky, he had a great advantage.

The second man was shot directly through the brain, falling instantly; and our hero's next movement was to leap to the far side of the horse from which the first Jacobin had fallen, and vault into the saddle; and this he accomplished before the remaining pursuer had fairly recovered from the bewilderment into which he had been thrown by the death, so sudden, and so utterly unlooked-for, of his two companions.

"Now, my friend!" shouted the count, gathering the rein, and raising his sword, "I will give you a lesson in the use of this beautiful weapon. If you are a true Frenchman you should love it."

He felt jubilant and strong in that saddle, for he knew that he had a powerful and enduring beast beneath him, and his words rang out like the notes of a trumpet: "Come on, *mon brave!*"

"Think not to escape, proud aristocrat. You have made fine business for yourself. I do not claim that I alone could carry you off against your will; I shall go for help. Ha—hear it! It is not far away!"

The count smiled at the man's honest admission, and

then his lips tightened. He knew that this fellow would not pursue him, and his true course was to move on with all possible speed ; and to this end he believed he had the proper horse.

"Oho!" shouted the Jacobin, as he saw the young nobleman turn, "that will not help you. I shall very quickly be after you with—"

That was the last our hero heard. The rest of the Jacobin's brave assurance was swallowed up in the increasing distance as he sped away once more to the coast.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAYSIDE COT.

De Liancourt was not deceived in the estimate he had made of the Jacobin trooper's horse. The beast was fleet and strong, and also willing; and from the character of the saddle and the quality of the reins, he judged that they and their wearer had been impressed for the occasion from some gentleman of the country better able to own good horseflesh than was the man who had brought this speciman upon the field. There was no faltering and no manifestation of unwillingness, and by careful management in allowing the horse proper breathing spells, he sped on as swiftly as his rider could desire. For a little time after leaving the scene of his conflict the count heard the occasional shouts of the man who was waiting to lead his companions on the pursuit; but they soon died away, and were heard no more.

It lacked a full hour of daylight when our hero reached Saint-Jean-Sur-Mer. It was an old walled place, a notorious haunt of the contrabandists of the English Channel, and, at present, he feared, given up to the spirit of the Revolution. The gates were closed, and he would not be able to gain admittance at that hour without answering a great many questions which

he did not care to answer ; and, at best, he would be subject to a scrutiny which might work him much harm if his pursuers should chance to be close upon his track. Martin Duval had appointed their place of meeting at the Point of St. Paul, which was a small fishing and wrecking hamlet, five leagues north from St. Jean, upon the sea. There might have been a more direct route from the point of his departure to St. Paul's Point, but he knew nothing of it, and had not dared to attempt an uncertain search in the dark ; and, furthermore, by no possible route could he have gained much in distance, if any.

He was satisfied thus far as it was, but what should he do now ? He had thought of making inquiries to ascertain if Martin had arrived at this point before him, but there were the same objections to this that rested against inspection at the gate. There could be no doubt that his Jacobin pursuers would come to St. Jean. Their informants—the false friars—had overheard the discussion, in which this place was fixed upon as the objective point, and here they would surely come. His horse sadly needed rest and refreshment, but he dared not stop there to gain it ; so, after a brief pause, during which the animal drank, and cropped a little grass, he resumed the saddle and pushed on.

And now, upon a new route—a route which his enemies might not strike, and with pursuit for the present evaded, our hero naturally thought of what should be the next movement ; and with thoughts of the future were strangely and dreamily mingled thoughts of the varied past. The road lay along upon the coast, at times almost washed by the insetting waves of the flood tide, at others winding around huge masses of rugged rock, and at a point here and there crowded in by marshy indentations. But the roar of the great

ocean was continuous and unchanging, like a grand anthem of creation, the deep diapason of the swelling, rolling billows, in sweet accord with the whispered murmurings of the breeze, the whole upraising the majestic theme of praise to the Infinite. The spirit of Louis de Liancourt was freely open to such impressions, and for a time, while the inspiration of worship uplifted his soul, he could not think of the evil that cursed the world. It was terrible to come back from the enrapturing emotion to the dark and dismal facts that surrounded him on every hand.

But he could not dwell in dreams continuously. Dark and threatening as was the situation of the hour, he was forced to shut out all else and give that consideration. He knew that he desired to reach St. Paul's Point, and he hoped that he might there meet Martin. If he should be so fortunate as to be joined by that long-tried and trusty attendant, he would feel that much was gained. For keen judgment and reliable determination Martin had no superior, and his advice would be valuable. In many directions and upon many themes did the count's thoughts run, until at length, weary with planning and re-planning, he resolved to let the subject of his future course rest until he had his friend and companion to advise with. Until then he must look to his own personal safety, and in that he found matter for serious reflection. However, let come what would, he must find rest and repose before he could endure much more of labor. He had not slept for many hours, and his mind had been on the stretch continuously, and, as a natural result, he was worn and weary in both flesh and spirit.

The day broke while he was about midway between St. Jean and St. Paul's, and just as the sun was lifting its glowing disk above the distant line of wooded hills

he came to a wayside cot, standing a short distance from the road, upon an arm of the sea, over which was thrown a floating bridge of withed logs, passable for men and beasts, but of no avail to a vehicle on wheels. Two well-built boats moored near the cot, and nets hanging upon poles evidently rigged for that purpose, would seem to indicate that the master of the household was a fisherman, as the only signs of agricultural pursuit in sight was a tiny kitchen garden, in which were ripening a few early summer vegetables.

The adventurer drove his horse down to the quaintly constructed bridge, not quite sure that the animal could be urged across, but he was happily disappointed; for the horse, having given a sniff and a snort, and daintily pawed the nearest log, finally tossed his head with a sort of defiant, self-confident air, and started across. Some of the logs sank lower than others, but the withes were firmly bound, and the structure gave the horse and rider safe transit. Arrived upon the opposite bank of the inlet, Louis turned up to the cot, where he dismounted and rapped upon the door-post with the pommel of his whip. The summons was quickly answered by a man in his night-cap and drawers—a middle-aged, medium-sized, weather-beaten, grizzled and muscular man, with the air of the sea and the coast in every line and lineament.

The count stated his situation of fatigue and hunger, and also the needs of his horse, and he begged the man, if it lay in his power, to give him relief.

The man stepped out upon the broad stone before the door, and as his eyes fell upon the horse his countenance changed. He stamped his foot furiously, and uttered an oath.

"*Eh bien!* There are not ten horses in France will

cross that bridge. This is one that knows the pass. Where did you find him?"

For a moment the count hesitated. He saw that the man was deeply moved, and the sight of the horse had done it. In fact, as the cotter ran his eyes over the beast a second time, his wrath became terrible and beyond his power to control.

"See here," he cried upon receiving no immediate answer, "how came you by that horse?"

We may here remark that the full light of day revealed that the horse was a superb Andalusian, and and that the caparison was ornate and costly, bearing upon the flaps of the saddle and upon the head-piece a knightly crest.

Louis thought very quickly now, and a glimmer of the truth flashed upon him. Very likely the horse had belonged to some man whom the wrecker had known and revered. If such were the case the simple truth would serve him best; so he said, in a frank but guarded manner:

"My good friend, these are troublous times, and no man knows what the hand of a stranger may do; but since I ask you to befriend me, I will trust you. During the night just passed I was pursued by men seeking my life. One of them rode this horse. My own horse had been shot in the leg and had become unserviceable, so I made the exchange."

"Ah! And he who rode this horse—what of him?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I care not to guess. What company was he in?"

"A company commanded by the Mayor of Arras—Gideon de Bar."

"Why did you not shoot Gideon de Bar himself?"

"Because he kept himself out of the way and set on his hounds."

"Oho! I see. And you shot the man who rode this horse?"

"Yes."

The man's face cleared and a glow of triumph replaced the look of wrath upon it. He put forth his hand, saying as he did so:

"It is well, *mon brave!* I' faith, thou art a hero! Thou art one grand friend of all honest men. Dost know how the man was called who rode this horse?"

"No. I only know that he was a large, strong, dark-visaged man, wearing the garb of the Arras Commune and leader of some sort among the rascals who sought to capture me."

"And whom did these rascals seek to capture?"

"My good man," said Louis, with a smile at the other's quaint persistence, "you must remember that you are a stranger to me."

"I am a friend to France, young man. Art thou?"

"I call myself so."

"Then you would gladly cut the throat of a Jacobin?"

"I can truthfully swear to you, my friend, and I am bold to do so, that I would, if it lay in my power, stop the onward course of the Jacobin Club."

"Very well. That is enough. Thou shalt have food and rest to thy heart's content, for know that Pierre Lefranc never yet turned away a true man from his humble door."

"Pierre Lefranc!" repeated the count, in glad surprise. "Then you are Blanchette's uncle."

"Oho, who art thou that knows Blanchette? Hold! I know thee! I thought that face had something in it wonderfully familiar. If thou art not the son of Louis de Liancourt, then my eyes are false."

"Louis de Liancourt was my father; and I am, also, called Louis."

"Aye—I remember; but enough of that for now. Let us look to thy horse, and then find a seat for thyself; and after that I shall ask thee for intelligence. As we go to give this honest beast repose I may inform thee that he was the property of a dear friend of mine, Sir Richard de Vernoil."

"De Vernoil," repeated Louis. "I remember him well. He was a friend of my father's and an unswerving supporter of the king."

"Yes," said Lefranc, "and his loyalty cost him his head. It fell not a week ago—one of the grandest in France, and the beatings of a grand heart were stopped! The Jacobins of Arras did it."

"And what had Sir Richard done," asked our hero, "that they found complaint against him so grave?"

"'Grave!'" echoed the cotter, with bitter contempt. "Do those demons want for cause when they seek a man's life? No! It was enough that he would not put on the red cap, and cry: '*Vive la Revolution!*' He, brave and true, shouted: '*Vive le Roi!*' and they cut off his head. He was my friend. He gave me this cot and the bit of land around it. Oh, when I saw his horse, and not himself, and remembered what had been done, my heart was pained. But you can judge, Sir Count."

At this juncture they had reached a little thatched shed, where comfortable quarters were found for the beast, and plenty of provender; and when this had been attended to, they repaired to the cot, where Dame Lefranc was found stirring. She was a small, bustling woman, bright and pleasant, and when she knew who was the guest her joy was exuberant.

While the dame prepared breakfast—and it required

time—Louis de Liancourt told his story; and as his hearers had known his father of old, he had to tell of him. The elder De Liancourt had gone to America with his son, leaving his estates of Capelle and Miremont in charge of a faithful steward, with the Marquis of St. Omer to overlook more important matters. In America, at Philadelphia, the old count had died, leaving his son to wear his title and possess his property.

Then Louis told of his completing his college course at Princeton and of his return. He told how he had found his grand old *château* of Miremont in ruins, destroyed by the Jacobin mob for the purpose of plunder. He also told of his adventure upon the highway, when he had fallen in with the Jacobin assassins about to kill two appointed victims, then of his arrival at St. Jean, and the events following, which brought him to the present time.

Pierre Lefranc listened with undivided interest, and having asked a very few questions upon points about which he wanted further light, he bent his head upon his hand, and remained in silent thought until his wife announced that the meal was prepared.

Louis jumped up at the sound of her voice, and gazed, for an instant, wildly about him. He had fallen soundly asleep. The event caused a laugh, and the following of a few jocose remarks, under the healthful influence of which they drew up to the table, and partook of the meal. At its conclusion the guest was shown at once to a comfortable bed, in a little room away in a far corner, where he was very soon lost to all earthly things, not even a dream coming to break his slumber.

De Liancourt slept until he was aroused by a hand upon his shoulder, and, on starting up, he found Pierre Lefranc by his bedside.

"I am sorry to break your rest, Sir Count, for you were sleeping grandly, but the minutes just now may be valuable. You have slept five hours—"

"So long?" cried Louis, springing to the floor.

"Yes. It is now almost ten o'clock in the forenoon. There you will find a ewer and basin with water and a towel. When your toilet is complete you will find me in the other room."

It required but a short time for the guest to wash and dress, and upon entering the living-room, he found a repast upon the table. There were fresh fish, nicely cooked; warm cakes direct from the oven; with early grapes and melons. The host saw the look of surprise with which his guest regarded the spread, and, as he moved a chair to the table, he said:

"You will excuse me, sir, for the liberty I take; but when you have left my cot you may not find food again for several hours; and your stay here ought not to be long. I know it is soon to eat again, but you will stand fatigue better for a good meal."

The good dame said a word of cheer, and expressed the hope that the count had an appetite. His reply was smiling and gallant. The man must be senseless, indeed, who, arising from a good sleep, could not find his appetite quickened by such display, and such tempting aroma, as now greeted his senses.

And, in good truth, our hero did find an appetite. Anxious to enjoy sound sleep, he had not eaten heartily of the previous meal, so that now he was in perfect tune for what seemed to him a breakfast, and he did a justice to the viands that amply repaid the benevolent dame for all her care and trouble. As he arose from the table he put his hand into his pocket and drew forth his purse, but he was told to put it back.

"You have not done with me yet, Sir Count, and I

have to ask your pardon for a great liberty that I have taken. As for taking your money, we would not do it under any circumstances ; but wait until we see the end. In the first place I have taken away your horse, and put him beyond your reach. Wait, here me through. Pursuers are on your track, and they will be very sure to come this way. Should you leave here in the saddle, they would follow you without difficulty, for that horse is a sure mark, quickly impressed on the mind of such as see him, and not to be forgotten. The hamlet of St. Paul is filled with Jacobins of the most violent kind. If you were to go there upon that horse, your arrest would be certain. You must go by water. I have a good boat—one safe to cross the channel in, if necessary. We will put off in her, and thus give the hounds the slip ; and when they come this way, and stop here to inquire, they will not find the horse to betray both you and me. I have taken him away to a safe place, where, if you ever want him, and can come for him, you will find him. Ha ! Hark ! Hark !"

It was the tramp of horses which had caused the wrecker's exclamation, and upon going to the window he saw a number of horsemen dashing up from the direction of Saint-Jean-Sur-Mer. They came to the bridge of logs, but the horses would not take it, so they started to ford, the tide being out sufficiently to admit of passage in that way.

"My faith ! Did I not do well ?" cried Lefranc, as he turned back into the cot. "Here are six stout Jacobins, and I 'll warrant they are thinking of the color of your blood. If they stop here we 'll bless our stars that Sir Richard's horse is out of the way."

"Aye," said Louis, making a motion toward the room were he had left his sword and pistols, "but it looks

as though they would find something that might please them better."

"Stop! Not that way. If Monsieur le Comte thinks the dogs can find him here, he is greatly mistaken; but," the host went on, in a more serious key, "I must trust you with a secret which you shall never reveal. Swear to me upon your honor, that you will never speak of the place to which I shall lead you!"

"Pierre, I would die sooner than betray you to harm!"

"I believe you. Now bring your sword and portmanteau. Quick!"

Louis sprang into the bedroom and caught up the articles belonging to him, and when he came back he found that his host had lifted a trap-door in the floor—a trap so adroitly fitted with its companion tiles that the eye of no stranger could detect it—and below the aperture thus opened appeared the head of a ladder.

"Down, monsieur! I will give you light enough to find the bottom, and there you will sit down and remain quiet."

The count needed no urging. The horses had forded the inlet, and were approaching the cot. He sprang to the ladder and descended swiftly, thanking Heaven as he did so for the sturdy friendship which had thus befallen him. What must have been his fate had not his host had the will and the forethought to remove the horse and provide this retreat? As he came to the bottom of the ladder he comprehended the reason for the pledge he had been required to give. The vault was spacious enough to contain a great many boxes, looking wonderfully like boxes of tobacco, and of sugar, besides barrels and kegs of spirits—the *hide* of a contrabandist! The adventurer had made this discovery and gained an easy seat when, the trap closing, he was

left in total darkness. He could not see, but he could hear very distinctly. He heard the tramp of the horses as they came to the door of the cot, and presently he heard the tread of feet and the jingling of spurs upon the floor over his head, and then the sounds of loud voices demanding intelligence of a fugitive whom they were eager to secure. The most the count could do at that moment was to sit with clasped hands and bated breath and pray that fortune might befriend him. And his prayer was not without the breathing of gratitude ; for, as he realized the deadly errand of the swearing troopers, he more keenly realized and appreciated the wonderful chance of the unexpected friendship that had been vouchsafed.

CHAPTER X.

"OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE!"

With movements as rapid and effective as could have been made under the circumstances, Dame Lefranc removed the food and the dishes from the table and cleared away every vestige of the meal. She had been subject to danger from over-inquisitive visitors for so long and so often, that she had come to consider every point the very moment the alarm was given. Where a thousand and one women would have grown faint and screamed for help, she looked instantly around to see what should first be done, and what should be done next after that. She had been too often upon the verge of detection—too often very near to arrest by the officers of the customs—not to realize and call instantly to mind that the most important discoveries are often the result of accident, and that so simple a thing as the appearance of the dining-table, set out with full show for a regular meal at that unseemly hour, might suggest to the coming visitors questions which she would not answer for her life. She had made a clean sweep and had taken her seat at a window with a pan of turnips in her lap, when the troopers, six of them, rode up and hailed the house; but without

waiting for a response, three of the horsemen dismounted and entered the room where Pierre and his wife sat.

The foremost of the trio Pierre recognized as a man who had formerly heen guilty of about all the capital crimes known to the law. He had been a smuggler, both by sea and by land; he had been also a robber upon the sea and upon the land—a pirate and a highwayman—he had been a killer of men for hire, and from his youth up to middle age he had been a knave and a scoundrel. He was called Simon of Werwood—a dark-browed, broad-shouldered man, brutish in look and brutish of voice; and the moment our hero in his hiding-place heard that voice, he recognized it as the same which had been last in his ears as he rode away upon the horse of the man who had fallen beneath his hand.

"Ho, Master Lefranc, I find thee in good time. Thou hast sharp eyes and observing. Who has ridden by thy place since early morning?"

"I have seen only one man," answered the host, promptly, "and he, I think, was fleeing from the officers of the law. At all events, he was upon a horse I can swear had been stolen."

"Ha! What horse was it?"

"One that formerly belonged to Sir Richard de Vernoil."

"Aye—the aristocrat has met his reward! And this man rode by on his horse?"

"Yes—I can swear it."

"Did he stop here?"

"Yes—long enough to swallow a cup of sour wine, and to ask the way to Montreuil."

"Bah! He must have known little of Pierre Lefranc if he put up with wine that was not of the best. Bring

forth thy choicest vintage, man, and give us goodly measure."

"Ah, Simon," said the cotter, with a light laugh, "thou knowest my old trade, and I am bold to say to thee, that though I have no hand now in trade that is contraband, I have a few measures of the old wine left. If you will honor me, you shall have the very best."

Simon signified that he would pass judgment upon the wine; and while the host was gone to procure it, he went to the door and spoke to one of his followers, who immediately, in company with another, rode off toward the outbuildings. Pierre kept wine for use in the larder, and he brought forth the very best he had, knowing full well that his guests could not be imposed upon in that article. The chief and two of his followers drank all that the host had brought in his flagon, and more was demanded for the three men who had been sent out to investigate. The flagon had been refilled and brought back when the scouts came in with the report that a horse had been that morning stalled in one of the outhouses.

"What!" cried Simon, with a start.

"Oh!" exclaimed Pierre Lefranc, contemptuously. "I could have told you all that. And I could have told you more, which I don't believe you particularly noted—that the horse had been gone these four hours and more. If you hope to overtake that beast, you'll have to move smartly."

Simon, of Werwood, scratched his head, and having swallowed more wine, and pushed what was left over to the three last-comers, he went out to the stall, where he very soon satisfied himself that Pierre must have told the truth. The horse had been there, but had been gone several hours.

Whether it was the effects of the generous wine, or whether a remembrance of their old-time association in cheating the revenue softened him toward his host, we cannot surely say; but, contrary to what might have been expected, the chief of the Jacobin squad did not vent his spite upon the dwellers in the cot. He believed his game was ahead of him, and he was anxious to run it down, and without further delay—with not a suspicion that the man he sought was within sound of his voice—he ordered his followers to saddle again, and was shortly afterward dashing away upon the road to the north.

As soon as the troopers had got well away Pierre lifted the trap, and the count came forth into the light of day, filled with a gratitude for the service which had been rendered; but the good host did not care to listen to many words of thanks, and, besides, there was work to do.

"It is bad," said Pierre, as he ran over in his mind the chances before them, "that St. Paul's should have been appointed as the place of your meeting. As I have already told you, the place is full of Jacobins, and very likely the messengers have come across the country from the Castle of Saint Jean with intelligence of your flight. If you will go direct to the English coast I will run you there, and I will then get word to Martin Duval, if I can."

The count thanked his kind host most heartily for his disinterested devotion to his interest, but he could not pass St. Paul's without answering Martin's signal.

"Well," pursued Lefranc, after further consideration, "if you are determined to venture on shore at that point you must at least allow me to furnish you with a suit of sailor's clothes. You may be able so to disguise yourself as to be safe."

This struck the count as being reasonable, and he readily consented ; and, when he had resolved to adopt the masquerade of the sea, he thought it might be better to make the change at once, and thus he would be less liable to detection by a chance passer before the boat could put off.

Pierre brought forth his stock of clothing, a goodly quantity and varied assortment, and assisted his guest in selecting. He was himself a shorter man than Louis, and smaller in every way, but he had in charge much clothing belonging to others, or which was held for the use of others, and from this the selection was made. The change was made complete throughout—from top to toe and from jacket to under-vest—so that when the work had been done Louis de Liancourt looked as little like a nobleman of France as he did like a Hottentot chief. His face was dark enough, and the putting on of a shocky, sandy wig, and the griming of his hands with a tanning bark made the metamorphosis complete.

The count's own garments were made up into a snug bundle and carried to the boat, as were the other things which he must take with him. Dame Lefranc put up a basket of provisions, with a few bottles of wine, her husband looking to the filling of the water-breaker.

The boat was large enough to admit of a cuddy forward in which two men could sleep ; was lugger-rigged and ballasted for sea-going. When all was ready, Louis forced upon the good dame two broad gold pieces, which she took with a gratitude made manifest in unbidden tears. Pierre saw, and was not cruel enough to object, but he said, with a degree of firmness which bespoke decision :

"So be it, Monsieur le Comte, but remember that you offer nothing to me. You will hurt me if you do."

"Then, my good friend," returned Louis, feelingly, "know that you have my gratitude and my love for all time."

"It shall be so. And now let us be off. The tide floats the lugger and the wind is fair."

The distance to the Point of St. Paul was not more than three leagues, and as the breeze was fresh, and abaft the lugger's beam, she was but little more than an hour in making the run. It was very near noon when they set forth, so it was yet in the middle of the day when they ran up toward the landing.

The Point of St. Paul, so-called—or the hamlet of that name—was a sheltered nook, surrounded on three sides by high land. The main land, to the east, was a wooded hill, which hill, broken into a rugged cliff, extended into the sea, where it terminated in a high promontory bending to the south, and on this southern side, toward the main, was a deep indentation, opening a harbor half a mile in diameter, and so nearly a circle of shore that not more than twenty yards of sea-way was left for an entrance. From the edge of this basin the land sloped easily upward toward the cliffs, affording room for quite a settlement. It was, in fact, one of the snuggest and safest harbors on the whole coast, and so curiously hidden from the sea that a stranger might have passed to and fro many times, and close in shore at that, without suspecting that an inlet of any kind lay behind the bold promontory. In other years the smugglers and free-traders generally had held this place as a safe retreat, but the cruisers of the customs had found it, and at the time of which we write the vessel lying there was more apt to be armed in the service of the government than in any other calling. Let it not be supposed from this that the contrabrandists were strangers in the hamlet. No, no—there were

many landings to the northward, and secret paths among the broken rocks leading to St. Paul's, so that considerable business was still done between the traders of the settlement and the smugglers.

And few men on the coast were so well known in St. Paul's as was Pierre Lefranc. He had told to the count that the hamlet was filled with Jacobins, but the Revolutionists thus spoken of were not original denizens of the place, but rascals and malcontents who had come in from the back country to a point where they could concentrate their efforts, and whence they could issue forth to confiscate and pillage as they found opportunity.

As the lugger came near to the promontory, Pierre pointed out to the count where was the entrance to the little bay. The latter could see nothing save a slight unevenness in the coast-line, but he knew how deceptive such entrances were, and he was not surprised when informed that a very few minutes would bring them to the settlement.

"Monsieur le Comte," said the boatman, with solemn seriousness, "I can yet keep on, if you desire. The distance to the Kentish coast of England is not more than seventeen leagues, and I can promise to land you there before another morning."

"Are you so fearful of my landing here in Saint Paul's, my friend?"

"Of course I am fearful; and yet, you may do it without harm. Do not let me prevent you from doing as you wish."

"Good Pierre, I am more grateful to you than I can tell, and I know that you mean the very best in your suggestion; but I must find Martin if he be here, and that he will be here I am very sure. He is not a man to fail in his undertakings, if human strength and skill

and wit can avail. He had opportunity to say to me that if we both escaped we would meet at the Point of St. Paul. I know that he must have escaped. In fact, I doubt if much effort was made to secure him. He was not on the field when I left. Be sure he is here waiting for me; and, if he is, I would not miss him for the world. He is as necessary to me, in the work I have to do, as is my own right hand. Ah, Martin—so true, so brave and so loyal! I should be guilty if I did not seek him."

"Say no more, sir count. We will land. And you will not forget that you are a follower of the sea, and humble enough to be my servitor."

"That is my character for the present, Pierre, and be sure I will not forget it."

Very shortly after this the lugger passed a point of jagged rock, and the beautiful basin of St. Paul's, with the hamlet beyond, was exposed to view. It was a pretty sight, and even the burden of care upon our hero's mind did not prevent him from enjoying it. At a favorable point, Pierre tacked, and stood into the harbor, running directly for a landing to which he was used, and bringing up alongside in a skillful manner.

"Here we are! Look sharp, Dennis! Let go the halliard! Keep the sail out of the water! Move lively, *mon enfant!*"

Pierre nodded with great satisfaction when he saw how readily and expertly his assistant adapted himself to the situation, and probably the loungers on shore, of whom there were quite a number, had never seen a common sailor whom they thought better adapted to the place he occupied. Really, the count's sojourn of almost five years in Republican America, among a free people, and associating upon terms of perfect equality with the hard-handed sons of toil, had given him ex-

cellent education for the part he was now called upon to enact.

The man who owned the quay to which Pierre had made fast, or who had charge of it, agreed, for a very small sum, to stand guard over the lugger for two hours, and to be responsible for all damage, save such as might be done by fire or flood or the force of arms, and having made this arrangement, the old seaman led the way up into the town.

"Of course," he said, as he had said before, "if Martin has arrived he has sought one of the respectable inns. There are but two of them, at both of which I am acquainted, and I will make inquiries."

But no inquiry was needed. At the very first inn they visited, in the low, dingy hall, stood Martin Duval, habited in the garb of a common peasant of the country. He turned as he heard the tread of feet upon the door-stone, and the first glance was decisive. He was in the deep shadow, but the count, just stepping upon the stone, was in the strong light, with the sunbeams full upon his face. The watcher could not be mistaken. With his finger raised warningly, he whispered his master's family name.

Louis started quickly, and as quickly recognized his faithful follower.

"'Sh!" uttered Martin, moving so as to brush his shoulder against the count. "Speak not a word, but follow me."

He cast a quick, searching glance around, and then ascended the stairs, leading the way to a chamber, which he entered, followed by his master. As soon as the latter was in, the esquire closed the door, but as he started to lock it, Louis caught his arm.

"Hold! Where is old Pierre?"

"Is he your friend?"

"I should think so. He is Pierre Lefranc—Blanchette's uncle."

"That is good. If he is all that, my master, do not worry. Be sure he has remained behind to watch. He is wise. My soul, there is trouble for us if we do not steer clear of it. I am glad I have been able to bring you up here without attracting notice. Oh, how I have been waiting and watching. Sir Louis, you had an adventure on the road after you rode away from the mayor's posse?"

"Yes, Martin; and I shot a man who would have killed me had the power been his."

"Aye," pursued Martin, with a significant shrug of his shoulders. "I have heard about it. Do you know whom you killed?"

"No."

"It was a bloodthirsty villain called Dion of Werwood, and I must believe that his brother has gained a clue to your steps, and is following them."

"Ha! Is it the man called Simon of Werwood?"

"The same."

And thereupon our hero told the story of his combat on the road; of his arrival at the wayside cot; the finding of Pierre; the friendship of the man; the meal and the sleep; and then of the other meal, and of the coming of Simon of Werwood and his companions in pursuit, and of the manner in which Pierre had sent them on their way.

"Aye," cried Martin, who had listened with deepest interest; "and those hounds of the Jacobin Club are here, and—they have seen me. I caught their looks, and I know they recognized me. I was at the other inn, where I arrived before light this morning. I slept until the middle of the forenoon, and then made friends with the innkeeper and obtained this garb. He is a

friend, though he has to hold his tongue. A little later I heard your name spoken and found that men had arrived from across the country who had been with Gideon de Bar. An hour after that came Simon of Werwood, and through the innkeeper I discovered that they had come by the way of Saint-Jean-Sur-Mer, and had heard of you on the route. Of course it was not difficult for them to learn who of those they saw had recently arrived, and when they set their eyes upon me I know they recognized me. I found them watching me. I could guess that they suspected my business. After that I did not try to hide. It would only have proved that I feared them. I wondered if they would make any movement to arrest me. But no—they only sought to keep me in sight, to watch my movements. I guessed then that they hoped to entrap my master through me. The innkeeper befriended me. He let me know that two of those men had concealed themselves where they could see if I was joined by a friend. He told me they were sure I expected somebody to join me there. My soul! If my master comes here, said I to myself, he is lost! I must get out of this. So I went out into the street, and directly I found two of those men following me. I pretended not to notice, went hither and thither, until at length I struck a boat-house, through which several men in peasants' garbs, like myself, were passing. I dodged in behind them, and the moment I had turned the angle of the entrance I jumped into a boat and crept under a loose sail. I saw my two pursuers enter, and they thought full sure I was with the peasants whom they saw passing out at the far end of the old shed. They kept on very slowly, and as soon as they were well away I leaped from the boat and ran out by the way of my entrance and found the coast clear. I had told the innkeeper I had left

that I was going to the other inn, that he might inform any true friend who should inquire for me. As I said, I found the coast clear, and I walked very rapidly for this place. Oh, how I did want to turn my head and look over my shoulder, just to see if my movement had been detected; but I dared not. The very act might have fixed the revealing gaze upon me. I kept my eyes straight before me, and pushed on. This innkeeper I dared not seek to tempt; but I hired this room for a week, day and night, and paid in advance. I had been up here and had discovered what approaches and what means of exit my windows commanded, and had then gone below to reconnoiter, when the way was suddenly darkened before me, and I lifted my eyes to behold the face of my master.

"And there, Monsieur le Comte, you have the story. I am sorry you have come. Oh, I fear me much I have unwittingly led you into a trap from which you will not escape. Ah, if I could have foreseen, I should never have spoken to you the name of this place."

"Why do you fear such dire calamity? We are free now, and have open space before us. Let us consider."

"Open space before us? Anything but open! Have you not followed me, Louis? Look at the situation: This hamlet, like a trap—as perfect a *cul-de-sac* as could be fashioned—is filled with Jacobin spies and cutthroats. They know that I am here, and that I am an attendant upon the Count Louis de Liancourt. The count they seek with a heartiness that is deadly. Where his servant is there will they wait for him. Now mark: How long will it be before these keen-scented dogs will find you out? They know ere this that two men have arrived in the lugger, and one of them a stranger. They will trace you hither—and they will

trace me hither also! Do you not see what that means?"

Before the count could reply the sound of feet was heard upon the stairs, as though a nimble man were leaping up two steps at a bound, and in a moment more came a light significant rap upon the door.

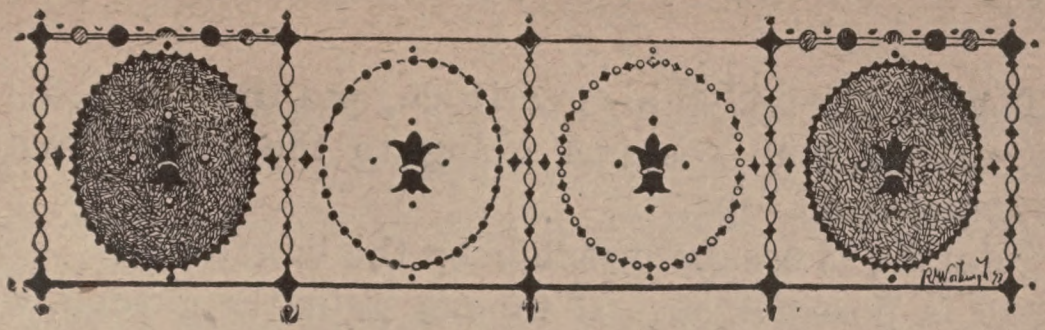
"That is not an enemy," said Martin, as he went to withdraw the bolt.

It was Pierre Lefranc with wide-open eyes and clenched hands, and his whole frame quivering with excitement.

"Good Pierre! What is it?"

"Oh, it is bad, Monsieur le Comte—horrible! If we were only dashing away across the channel, instead of this! But we must think and act. Let me in. There—shut the door and lock it! Upon what does that window look? If we can make our exit that way, we must act while we talk. There is not a moment to be lost!"

"LOUIS DE LIANCOURT, I ARREST YOU."—*See Page* 134.



CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAP.

Martin Duval comprehended the whole in a moment, and without waiting for further light he sprang to the window and noiselessly opened the shutter. It looked down into a court connected with the stable on one hand, while on the other was an open arched way, in a thick wall, leading to a garden. Having taken in this at a glance, he drew the coverlet and a sheet from the bed and knotted them together; and while he was thus engaged Pierre told what he had to tell. His speech was crisp and comprehensive.

"My lord, you are discovered; or, you are suspected, which is all the same. They believe one of the men who came in the lugger is Louis de Liancourt. They have traced your servant to this inn; and they have traced you and me hither, also. They will very soon find this room. The hall is guarded, and Simon of Werwood is only waiting for more of his men to come up, whom he has sent for. He is an arrant coward, and dares not attack save in force. He thinks he has you safely trapped, so he can afford to wait; but it will be but a very few moments."

The count nodded his gratitude, and then turned to his servant, who was just going to the window with his improvised rope.

"Martin, is escape possible by the window?"

"It is possible, sir. If we can gain the garden, we may easily give them the slip."

De Liancourt gave a glance toward the garden which was pointed out, and then turned to Lefranc:

"My good, true-hearted friend, I want you to listen to me. If you go quietly out from this room, as though all business between you and me were at an end, they may not touch you. You must not entangle yourself in my affairs further. You could do us no good. Should you raise your hand against these men in my behalf, it would be your death. Think of your wife, Pierre, and leave me. It is my command. I will make it my prayer, if you insist."

"His lordship speaks well," put in Martin. "And further than he has said, two men can escape more easily than three."

"My faith!" exclaimed the old sea-dog, with an impatient stamp of the foot, "we hope to give the hounds the slip. Do you not want my lugger? Mercy on me, there is but one way. I know the path. Down into the garden—over the wall where you see the vines growing—down a narrow pass, and our landing is before you. Death of my life! I should never look up again if I let you leave me here like a timid rat! My wife would not know me! Out with the rope, Martin, and let us descend. Hark! Hear ye those coming feet? Quick! This minute is ours. The next may be as an eternity, either of good or ill!"

What could the count do? In fact, his situation admitted of but very little planning. He found himself in one of those positions in relation to surrounding

influences in which a man can only shut his teeth and meet his fate, simply resolved that the man who may rob him shall do so at the greatest possible cost to himself.

Martin was inclined to approve the smuggler's course. The lugger was their best objective point. If they could reach that, and cast off the shore-fast, they might laugh at their enemies ; so, without giving his master time for long consideration, he hurried him to the window, and gave the rope of bedding into his hands.

The count heard the tread of heavy feet upon the stairs, and was willing to go out ; and when once he had given his energies in that direction, he went down with the agility of a cat, Martin following next, and landing by his side. The moment the esquire had touched *terra firma* Pierre quickly drew up the bedding and separated it, and threw it back upon the bed. Louis thought full sure he had concluded to stay behind, but in this he was mistaken. No sooner had the bed been restored than the old sailor leaped upon the stool of the window, and swinging himself down from the ledge by his hands, he dropped to the ground without injury. He was a light, sinewy man, every part and particle tough and enduring, and he did not feel the shock at all as a shock.

All this had been done much quicker than it could be told, and the bursting open of the chamber door accompanied Pierre's fall. Martin had marked the course necessary, and with a whisper to his master he leaped to the arch of the court wall, and glided into the garden beyond. The count was close behind him, and Lefranc brought up the rear, and as no note of alarm came from the chamber they had left, they reasonably assured themselves that they had not been

seen. They could hear loud voices, however, though not the voice of Simon of Werwood; or, if they heard it, they could not recognize it from the others.

By a fortunate chance the window through which the fugitives had made their exit from the chamber was in a deep recess of the wall of the building, and shut out from possible observation by inmates of any other part of the auberge. There were windows of a neighboring dwelling commanding a view of that recess, and it might also be seen by a person in the court or in some parts of the garden; but the court and the garden had been empty, and as for the neighboring house, there did not appear to have been watchers there.

Close under the garden-wall crouched our three friends, with Pierre now in the lead, and as swiftly as possible they crept on to the far end, where a mass of grape-vines was trained to the coping.

"Here," said the sailor, as the three came to a stop at the spot where they must mount the wall, "we must go over. We must run the risk of being seen from the window we left. Are you ready?"

They were ready.

"Then remember: The moment we are upon the other side we turn to the left, and go at the top of our speed. Follow me. Our landing is not far away, and once there, we are safe. Forward!"

The stout vines were firmly fixed to the wall, and our adventurers were quickly over. Upon the coping Pierre gave one look over his shoulder to the window of the chamber they had left, but he saw no one there. An exclamation of satisfaction escaped him, and as it dropped from his lips he dropped from the wall upon the narrow walk beyond. He saw that his companions were with him, and he started upon the run. It was a

narrow passage, between the walls, running down to a cross-way perhaps twenty yards distant. At the gaining of this cross-path Pierre turned again to the left, and having cleared the low, shambling building which stood against the outlet of the passage down which they had come, they found themselves upon the open quay, with the lugger not thirty yards away.

A joyous exclamation was upon our hero's lips, and he had turned to see if Martin were following, when he beheld his faithful servitor, standing as though suddenly petrified ; his eyes and mouth opened wide ; his hands clutched with desperate energy ; and upon his face a look of deadly, paralyzing terror. A cry from Pierre Lefranc at the same time broke upon his ear.

As Louis de Liancourt came out from the narrow alley into the open space his gaze had been attracted to the basin and the narrow passage of water beyond which lay liberty, and he had seen nothing else ; but now—ah ! Now he saw that which brought a groan up from the very depths of his heart, and sent a dull, deadening, despairing sensation through every fiber of his being. Thus it was :

The quay was upon one side of a parallelogram, to the south ; on the opposite side, to the north, extended a long, low, rambling store-house of red stone, the same spoken of as having terminated the narrow passage between the two walls down which our friends had come from the garden of the inn. They had come down upon its rear side. These were the longest sides of the parallelogram, and about fifty yards in extent. The ends were perhaps half as long, and abutted by store-houses; Into this square led five passes—one at each of the corners next to the water, also one at each of the upper corners, besides an arched way through one of the store-houses. On the appearance of Pierre

Lefranc at the mouth of the pass in the northeast corner, a single man, in the garb of the sea, who had stood upon the quay near to the lugger, waved his cap in the air and gave a note of alarm. Martin had seen that ; and on the next instant he had seen every pass leading from the square filled with armed men, as though they had sprung up bodily from the ground. Even the pass by which they had entered was thus occupied, six or eight Jacobin soldiers having dodged out from some cover in their rear. All told, there were at least fifty well-armed guardsmen, and very nearly that number of muskets were leveled at the fugitives.

"*Holà ! Holà ho !*"

So shouted Simon of Werwood, advancing from the pass on the quay toward the town, and our friends now understood why they had not heard his voice in the chamber.

"Louis de Liancourt, in the name of the Constitution and the Assembly of France, I arrest you. If you make but a single sign of resistance, if one of your party makes a sign, be it never so slight, I shall give the order to fire. Extend to me the hilt of your sword. If you do not you die. We will have few words now. I should like very much to carry you alive to Arras, and thence to Paris ; but I can take you dead if you prefer. The hilt of your sword, Citizen de Liancourt."

The Jacobin chief had been slowly advancing while thus speaking, and as he spoke the last words he stopped and stamped his foot imperatively.

Whatever the count might have done had he been alone, he was not inclined to subject his two friends to sure and instant death. Had there been a shadow of a chance in giving battle, he would have done so without hesitation. Could he have seen opportunity for conflict, had his opponents been armed only with

swords, he would have dashed in and sought to cut his way; but no such chance was his. It was as though his own hand held a doubly-loaded pistol, with the muzzle pressed against his temple. A movement of any kind, save that commanded, would discharge the fatal missile. Simple suicide was not the part of bravery, and he would not take it upon his hands. With a mighty effort he put back the bitter, burning words that leaped to his lips for utterance, feeling how childish and ridiculous is impotent rage, and drew his sword from its scabbard and turned it in his hand, holding it by the blade.

"Monsieur Simon," he said, "I cannot deliver up this sword without speaking a word in behalf of a man who has befriended me simply out of feelings of love and gratitude in memory of my father. Pierre Lefranc has thought nothing but to give help and succor to the son of a man who had been his true friend. May I not hope that you will deal gently with Pierre?"

"We will see. It is not for me to say. I can only promise for now that our good Pierre is my prisoner. I will take your sword, monsieur."

The count surrendered his weapon, and very shortly thereafter he was surrounded, and a bond put upon his arms. He protested against the indignity, but no attention was paid to his protests. He quickly saw that his entreaties would be treated with scorn, and that his suffering gave real joy to his captors, and so seeing, he submitted in silence. After he had been bound, and while the Jacobin chief was consulting with some of his principal followers upon the subject of the lugger, Pierre Lefranc, who had been watching for the opportunity, glided up and whispered into his ear:

"My lord, borrow not one atom of trouble on my account. Whatever may be the will of Simon of

Werwood, the most of his followers are my friends. I have given them cheap tobacco and sugar, and have given them good coffee to drink with their brandy. Ah, I have friends that I am not proud of, but I may thank God for them in this strait! I have caught a glance here and there which tells me that I shall be set free. 'Sh, keep your eyes and ears open! I will help you if I—"

The smuggler's speech was cut short by the return of Simon, who had agreed with his companions that the lugger should, for the present, be left where it was, the master of the quay having promised to take good care of it.

And then they set forth toward the town, going to the inn where Martin had first stopped, and where most of their horses had been left. Simon of Werwood, who was chief of the party, two-and-fifty in number —for he had taken command of those who had come across the country—made no secret of his plans. It was his intention to set forth at once for Arras, going by the way of Agincourt and St. Pol, and the first-mentioned place they meant to reach that evening. The whole distance was over twenty leagues, and Agincourt was a little over a third of the way.

While Simon was giving orders for bringing up the horses and for bringing forth wine, Martin found opportunity to speak with his master. In fact, the care of the captors did not extend to preventing their prisoners from speaking together; so the esquire had not much trouble in finding his opportunity, though he was very careful how he improved it.

"Hark, my lord!" he whispered, speaking in English, which tongue they both used almost like their own, and giving to his tones a musical cadence, as though humming a ballad. "I shall try hard to escape. If I

can help you to freedom, be sure I will do it, but I shall go myself, if I can, even though I should be forced to go without you. I can help you a great deal better from the outside of the prison than I can upon the inside. Do you comprehend that?"

"Certainly, Martin."

"And you would not think hard of me—you would not deem me unfeeling, or wanting in respect or devotion—if I should go off and leave you?"

"My dear Martin," replied our hero, with simple earnestness, "I should feel a thousand times relieved to know that you were free. With you at liberty I should know that I had a true and devoted friend at work in my behalf. Truly, Martin, you could not do a more cruel deed to me than to remain in durance beyond the opportunity to escape."

"Good! We understand one another now. I think I shall escape. They will not watch over me as they will watch over you. Oh, would to heaven I could set you; but—"

"Hush! I understand it all, Martin. You will do for me what you can. Plague! Here is the hound!"

"Now, *mon enfant!*" said Simon, addressing the count with impudent jocularity, "we will move. When you come to your horse, if you will give me your word of honor that you will not try to escape, the bond shall be taken from your arms. Would it hurt your tongue to speak the word to Simon of Werwood?"

"I can speak it, sir, at any rate. Let me hope that will suffice."

"Oh, well, what care I? It will answer. Come."

In the court the horses were ready—eight-and-twenty of them, there being five-and-twenty of the guardsmen told off for the expedition, the remainder of the Jacobin force having further work in that

region. The horses selected for the prisoners were well-worn beasts, evidently from the plough and cart of the farm, and not such as would be likely to run away with their precious burden.

As sorry as the beast looked which the count was to ride, he found him more sorry still in gait, acting as though he had never before, in the many and hard-working years of his life, worn a saddle ; but the rider was an expert, and all the virtues possible to the equine antique he contrived to develop. His bonds were cast off, as had been promised, and, after a time, and a great deal of patient and well-directed endeavor, he succeeded in persuading the animal to trot quite respectably.

It had been well into the afternoon when the cavalcade set forth from St. Paul's, and night had fallen before they reached their stopping-place. The sky was clear, and though there was no moon, yet the starry host, united with a soft radiance that seemed to have been retained from the departed day, so far relieved the gloom as to render the way plain and easy and the travelling pleasant.

Contrary to his expectations, the count's captors did not seek in the least to add to the burden of his grief by any sort of harsh usuage. He had expected that they would treat him more like a dog than like a human being, and vent upon him their spleen for having led them such a chase, and for having slain more than one of their trusted friends ; but they did nothing of the kind. In fact, so entirely did they leave him to freedom of conversation with his two companions in captivity, merely riding where they could overhear if they chose to listen, and so politely and properly did the chieftain speak when addressing him, that he wondered if they were not now giving to him a period of

repose, with possible hope of ultimate good, in order that the ordeal sure to come might be the more severe. However, he did not seek to borrow trouble. He knew that the future was dark before him, and that his only hope of life lay in the chance of sheer accident.

Once or twice on the way, after the evening had fallen, Martin found opportunity to speak with his master unheard by others ; and as he spoke in a foreign tongue, the overhearing by the Jacobins could not have mattered, even had they been near. The last occasion of his speaking was important. De Liancourt had observed that Pierre Lefranc had been manifestly uneasy for some time. The old sea-dog had been in conversation with two of the Jacobins, and had left them in wrath. He, on his part, swore to the guardsmen that for a stiver he would throw the pair of them to the sharks, and rid the earth of a foul burden ; while they on their part, with equal heat of wrath and indignation, called all the powers above and below to witness that it would afford them the greatest possible joy to cut off his head and give his carcass to the dogs.

Simon of Werwood commanded silence.

"Oh," cried one of the irate troopers, "I 'll tear his tongue out by the roots. He says my father was a pirate !"

"Ho, ho !" laughed a stout corporal of the troop. "Why, bless thee, Ernest, thou must not be angry with the man for enlightening thee. He must have known thy father well."

"Aye," growled the man called Ernest, "but he has no business to flaunt my family secrets in that way. My father is dead—"

"Aye," broke in Pierre Lefranc, "and he owed me a hundred and fifty francs, which I would like for you to pay."

"Thou 'lt get pay quickly enough, thou monster of the sea! The guillotine makes quick settlements."

"Stop!" thundered the chief.

And under his wrathful word and look of command the two seemingly mad troopers fell back to the rear.

Now in all this our hero had fancied that he could detect a piece of acting. He caught the impression from a look which he saw upon Martin's face. And there was another source of knowledge. His perceptive faculties were quick and strong, the reflectives working in perfect tune, and his interpenetration deep, searching and reliable. Add this to a keen and comprehensive knowledge of human nature, and we have a mind not easily to be deceived, and never to be wholly lost. He had been with Pierre Lefranc in his home, and had there studied his character, and he could simply swear that, of his own free will and accord, the old sailor would never be guilty of such vulgar, aimless, impotent rage as he had just now appeared to exhibit. As for the chief of the troop and his immediate associates, the slough of just such rage and cursing was natural to them, and the fact that the prisoner wallowed in it might serve to bring him nearer to their regard, and remove unfavorable suspicion further from him.

But the count was not long to be left to his mere surmises in this respect. The two cursing troopers had fallen to the rear, and the old seaman had given himself to his mutterings of righteous indignation, when Martin Duval touched his master upon the arm and pronounced his name. He had something of importance to communicate, and the moments at their command might be very few.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW OF THE GUILLOTINE!

Simon of Werwood and two or three boon companions who had been imbibing with him from a certain leathern bottle of goodly proportions borne upon one of the pack-saddles were particularly jolly over what they deemed the ridiculous wrath of their man Ernest, and the chief was really not sorry that the little play of spiteful words had occurred to relieve the monotony that had come with the eventide.

Pierre Lefranc, after his two disputants had fallen to the rear, contrived to gain Martin's side, and to hold with him a conversation which lasted for several minutes undisturbed. They conversed in two keys, and in two directions; one was meant to be overheard, while the other was private and sacred.

It was after this latter conversation that Martin passed the signal to his master, and gained opportunity to whisper into his ear. Their words were apparently light, and in English. Said Martin:

"Did you not guess, my master, that the passage between Pierre and those two men was a farce, with a more serious matter behind it?"

"Yes, Martin; I thought so."

"And so it was. Those two are Pierre's friends.

They have sailed with him, and braved many a danger with him, and now they will help him if they can ; and he, in turn, will help us. If it lies in his power he will set us free under cover of the night. It is curious how the mass of the people revere the man who has so long and so persistently braved the laws of the realm, and all, as they feel, for the purpose of furnishing them with cheap luxuries. But, Sir Louis, it may be that he cannot reach us. It may be that he can reach one of us, and not the other. If it should happen so to be, the one set free must go. He must go, and devote his every energy after that to the liberation of his friend. But of this be sure : Pierre will do for us all that lies in his power. 'Sh, here is a guard ! You have warning. Keep eyes and ears open."

It might have been half an hour after this—perhaps nine o'clock, or thereabout—when Pierre Lefranc, riding by the count's side, reached over and touched him upon the arm.

" Does Monseigneur see yonder hill with the ragged top standing out against the sky like the part of an old broken wall ?"

The night was clear and calm, and the stars were glittering in all their glory. There was no moon and there were no clouds, and where the sky afforded a background the outlines of distant objects could be distinctly seen. Louis looked in the direction pointed out, and saw the hill.

" Aye," he said ; " I see, and what you liken to an old broken wall looks like an ancient ruin."

" So it is, my lord. Do you know that we are riding over one of the grandly historic spots of France ? If it were daylight you could see, off here to the right, the spread of soft marsh where the hosts of Burgundy once upon a time were pushed to the death by the blind

folly of their own leaders. Yonder old ruin is all that is left of the once famed Castle of Agincourt, and the spot over which we are now riding is a part of the field whereon was fought that celebrated battle—about the only battle, I think, in which a French force that should have been overwhelming was overcome and routed by a force very much smaller. This is the field of Agincourt."

Instinctively the count raised his cap, and when he spoke his voice told how deeply he felt.

"The Field of Agincourt! It was a wonderful battle, Pierre. Henry of England inspired his men with the spirit of heroism until every man was a champion, while poor Charles of France, trusting his interests in the hands of rival chieftains, led on a huge mass that became but as a mob! And yonder is the castle that gave that battle its name! There is grandeur about it yet. And of course the village of Agincourt cannot be far distant."

"It must be close at hand, my lord. Ha! There are the lights of its cottages now."

The village was soon reached, and its best tavern was selected by the Jacobin chief for the use of himself and troop. His first care was to make provision for supper, and his next for the safe-keeping of his prisoners. His arrangements in this latter respect plainly revealed his estimate of the relative value of the captives. Simple heads for the guillotine were plenty enough in France. They could be gathered in by the dozen—by the score—by the hundred—as they were wanted to fire the hearts of the Revolutionists and satisfy the craving for blood; but the head of a count was not to be found every day, and, when found, the condemnation was not sure unless a direct act could be proved. In the present case enough could be

proved against Louis de Liancourt to condemn a whole family to death. If he were to escape, there was not another prisoner in the department of Artois who could fill the place ; so Simon of Werwood simply determined that he should be held fast, and to this end he selected a chamber of the tavern that answered well his purpose. In it he lodged the count, and set two troopers whom he could trust to stand guard over him. He told off six men for this work, two of them to be on duty together, and to be relieved every two hours.

Pierre Lefranc and Martin Duval were suffered to occupy a room together, but with a sentinel posted at their door.

The two men who held the first watch over the count treated him respectfully, save that they did not allow him to pass from their sight. They offered to help him undress, and gave him to understand that he might look to them for any service which strict obedience to their duty would allow them to render ; but the one favor which he most desired—to be left alone with his own thoughts—they could not grant ; and he very soon assured himself that his guards were not to be tempted.

And so passed the night. But little sleep visited the count's pillow, and even that was troubled and unrefreshing. He had not only to think of his own dangerous situation, but he had to think what might be the situation of Ninon d' Artois. She was in the power of Gideon de Bar, and his purposes were known. But youth and health, where truth and a good heart govern the life, are not to be entirely cast down while there is a glimmer of light ; despair does not utterly chain the spirit while life and strength remain. There is always a space in the future which may be filled by merest chance ; and while the soul can find a lingering

hope, it may pray that that chance may be fortunate, and the soul that can lift itself in earnest prayer is not entirely in the slough of despond. Louis de Liancourt could see no possible way of escape; but he had not yet been condemned, and he would not believe that acquittal was impossible.

With the first peep of the day the troop was astir, and the count was called to arise and make ready for his breakfast. He had turned out from the cot whereon he had slept, and was bathing his face over a basin of fresh water, when he heard a loud outcry in the court below, and very soon words reached his ear which gave him to know that there had been an escape. He had no difficulty in guessing what had come to pass. One of his guards, with the ready permission of his companion, went out to see what was the matter, and on his return he reported.

Pierre Lefranc and Martin Duval had escaped! But that was not what had caused the loudest outcry. Two men of the troop—men who had been of the detail told off for guarding those same prisoners—had gone with them.

"Who are they?" our hero heard Simon of Werwood demand.

"The two brothers of Saint Paul's—Ernest and Adolphe de Costar," replied an officer.

"Ha! Were not those the very men who had the quarrel on the road with the old smuggler?"

"The very same, *mon capitaine*."

It would be useless to attempt to tell how the Jacobin chief cursed and swore. Not more was he moved by the escape of his prisoners than by the manner in which two men in whom he had trusted had deceived him. He told himself that he should have remembered that those brothers of St. Paul were notorious smugglers,

and that he should have known that they were not the men to put on guard over one who had been their commander in former times.

However, after he had cursed himself hoarse, and could think of no more oaths to utter, he turned to the one source of consolation : His principal prisoner was safe. The man for whom he had set forth upon his mission, and the only man that had been appointed for him to capture, was safe within his care. He would keep this one, and if the opportunity should ever come to him of putting his hand upon Pierre Lefranc or Martin Duval—on one, or on both--he would do it most cheerfully and most effectually.

Toward mending the mishap of the night Simon put forth every endeavor that occurred to him, but not a trace of the fugitives could he find ; but he was able to guess pretty reliably what had become of them. The two brothers had so contrived it that they should cover with their watch the hours from midnight to four o'clock in the morning. The officer of the guard had originally arranged for Ernest to stand from two o'clock until four, and for Adolphe to follow him ; but the latter had professed that he had rather stand his two hours in the middle of the night, and sleep in the cool of the morning, so his comrade of the detail had gladly exchanged with him, expecting to have been called at four o'clock. The officer who should have looked to the calling of the relief had drank drugged wine, for he was awakened with difficulty after the escape was discovered, and his head was sadly shaken ; so when four o'clock came Ernest's relief was not called, and as the sentinels in the count's apartment, being doubled, had been left to call their own relief, the absence of the sleeping officer was not dscovered.

From all this it was evident that the flight had been

taken very shortly after midnight. The fugitives had selected four of the best horses, which they had probably led away upon the soft sward beyond hearing distance, and there could be no doubt that they had returned direct upon the road they had come.

"Be sure they made for the lugger," said Simon, "and very likely at this moment they are on board."

Still he sent two men back to investigate, giving them authority to summon a posse wherever and whenever they might need it—to summon in the name of the French Assembly, and if any man refused to obey, to take his name.

Little fear that men would refuse their aid when so called. They could refuse if they would, but refusal meant death by the guillotine just as sure as their names were given to the Jacobin Prefect.

Deducting the deserters and the twain sent back upon track of the fugitives, and Simon had yet a full score of lusty men, which was all-sufficient for his purpose. As soon as he had regained something of his wonted composure, and had seen the messengers off for the coast, he hurried up breakfast, taking the best of care that no possible effort should be overlooked by which the count's bonds were to be held intact.

It was after breakfast, and while de Liancourt stood in the hall next to the stable-yard, that a boy of the inn approached him with a clothes-brush in his hand. He was a bright-eyed little fellow, not more than eight years of age, and came up with a deferential flourish.

"If Monsieur le Comte will pardon me—there is dirt upon the skirt of his coat. Will he suffer me to remove it?"

Louis caught an expression in the bright eyes which had a deeper meaning than that of the clothes-brush,

and with a simple nod and a smile he bade the boy proceed with his brushing.

The brush was plied dexterously, the lad humming a nursery ballad as he proceeded, and pretty soon, as he came in front of the count, where he could move his lips without being detected by the guards, he lifted his eyes, and whispered :

"In monsieur's pocket—in the coat-skirt—I have put a paper !"

The count nodded, and when the brushing had been completed he gave the boy a piece of silver. While they were bringing up the horses Louis muttered to himself of the breaking away of a button from the wristband of his shirt, and he turned to a corner window to examine it. It was a safe corner, where he could do no possible harm, and his guards did not trouble themselves further than to see that he went not away. At a favorable moment he opened the paper and cast his eyes upon it. There was writing, in Martin's hand, and in English, as follows :

"MY MASTER : The opportunity is mine, but not yours. I need not tell you why it is utterly impossible for us to make a move in your direction. We shall be off shortly after midnight, and make for Lefranc's lugger. Until I see you free, and while I live, I will not have a leading thought that is not of your deliverance. And be sure I shall find friends. If my escape is a success, I shall very soon be upon your track, and then you may be watchful, for, be Louis de Liancourt where he may, very near to that place will be MARTIN."

The count crumpled the paper, and put it into his mouth, and then he attended to his button.

The distance from Agincourt to Arras was but little more than ten leagues, so there was no need of haste. As the cavalcade rode out from the village, and were winding around the foot of the eminence upon which

stood the castle, Simon of Werwood rode up by his prisoner's side. He had caught some of the words which had been spoken on the previous evening concerning the great battle which had once been fought near that place, and he was curious to know more about it.

"Citizen de Liancourt," he said, with something in his manner very much like respect, "I have heard a great deal about the battle of Agincourt, and am hardly willing to believe the story told in the old accounts. If you know about it, I wish you would tell me."

"With pleasure," answered the count; and he spoke sincerely, for he felt that any favor thus rendered to the chief of his captors would result in making his term of captivity under Simon's immediate care less severe.

And then he went on with the story, assuring his hearer that it was true in every particular; and, as he spoke, others of the troop drew near, and Louis raised his voice so that all might hear. It is not our province to follow the narrator in his thrilling, vivid account of the battle. The salient points he presented were these:

In October, of the year 1415, Henry V. of England, with an army consisting of thirteen thousand foot-soldiers, of all arms, and two thousand horse, invaded France. That little army was harassed in every possible way, the country through which they passed being stripped of provisions before they came up, the bridges torn down, and the fords obstructed. At Agincourt this mere handful of men, almost famished, and worn with ceaseless toil, was met by one of the most magnificent armies France ever sent into the field. Of belted knights and esquires, all used to arms, and most of them veterans, there were very nearly as many in number as there were men of the English all told. During almost the whole of the night preceding the battle the French were gathered around their camp-

fires, drinking and carousing, and making merry in every way, being fully assured that they had but to go forth in the morning and ride the presumptuous adventurers down at pleasure. The sorry condition of the English was, with them, a subject of ribald jest, for their scouts came in, ever and anon, with report that the enemy had nothing to eat or drink, and that those who were not at work upon their arms, or asleep, were upon their knees praying. It was a fact that when the events which led to this battle were in course of development, Henry of England was looking for a way of escape out of the country. He was driven to battle against his desire ; but when the need came, and the French herald appeared with a haughty summons from the monarch of France, he flung back defiance, and prepared for battle.

Greater disparity between the two contending forces could hardly be conceived. It is not unfair to say that the French were to the English as six to one. In direct, absolute numbers, counting every living biped as a soldier, the French were five to one ; and when we consider the other circumstances—every possible circumstance, in fact, which can rest in and around a host for sustaining and inspiring—when all this is considered, it would appear that the host of France had but to ride forth and trample the insignificant invader to death and destruction by mere weight of numbers and material. And really, this is what the army of France expected to do on that St. Crispin's morning ; and this very confidence, so impudent and so overweening, was the first great mistake. The main part of the English army occupied a gentle slope, along the foot of which ran a straggling hedge. Under cover of this hedge they built or set up a *cheval de frise* of iron-shod and iron-pointed stakes in such a manner that no pos-

sible force of cavalry could pass it. Extending before this slope, and spreading over many acres, was a soft, miry meadow or marsh, into the treacherous bosom of which the French horses sank to their knees, and in some places to their haunches.

On rushed the French, pell-mell, to be broken at the very first charge, for the cumbersome mass advanced more like a mob than like a body of trained soldiers, evidently expecting to see the enemy flee before them like frightened sheep.

In the end that extensive bog became the scene of a horror that baffles description. Men and horses went down in inextricable confusion, the dead, the dying, the wounded, and the fainting being trampled alike by the madly flying squadrons, for the mire had become a solid pass, pontooned with human bodies. Confusion worse confounded fell upon the French at every point, and in a few short hours the proud host, which had advanced in grand and confident array, resplendent in heraldic pomp and chivalric glory, was a broken and shattered mass, its best part laid low in death. The nobles and the knights had done the fighting on that side, for upon the field, when they gathered up the dead for burial, were found a hundred and twenty-five princes of the blood and high nobles, with eight thousand and four hundred knights and gentlemen of rank, while of the lower ranks there had fallen only sixteen hundred! That showed how terror and confusion had reigned among the common soldiers, and how the prouder men of distinction had borne the brunt of the contest.

Simon of Werwood listened to the recital with deep interest, and, at its conclusion, he vouchsafed the opinion that when the Republic of France had become firmly established, and the leaders of public

affairs were of the people's own choosing, France would be a nation invincible.

A stop for rest and refreshment was made at St. Pol, and while the sun was yet an hour high the cavalcade reached Arras, and proceeded direct to the office of the mayor. Gideon de Bar came forth, and, when he saw the count, a look of malignant triumph beamed upon his coarse face; but he did not then address the prisoner. He sent for his son, who held the office of intendent of police, and consigned the charge to him.

Gaston de Bar was not so large as his father, but he was cast in a similar mold, and was compact and muscular—a medium-sized man, with low and lowering brow, features sensual and wolfish, hair coarse and black, and eyes like the eyes of a toad.

"You know your man, my son," said the mayor, "and you will post your guards accordingly."

"Leave him to me," was the intendent's reply. "He will not escape!"

Simon of Werwood was dismissed, and the intendent's own guard took their prisoner away. It was a strong, dark prison, and Louis de Liancourt was consigned to one of the strongest and darkest dungeons. The sun had been shining in the western sky when the count passed out from the sight of earthly things, but no light of the sun penetrated to that abode wherein he had been lodged. The iron door was closed, shutting out the last beam of the turnkey's torch, and total darkness reigned.

Louis found the low pallet, and sat down upon it, and with his head bent upon his hand he gave himself up to thought. What should be the end?

Ah, what? He had heard it spoken on the way—it had been flung at him with coarse, malevolent spite—and he saw no way of escape from it—the guillotine!

CHAPTER XIII.

"HEAVEN HAVE MERCY!"

It had been on the night of Tuesday and the morning of Wednesday that the marquis and Ninon had attempted to make their escape with Louis. We left them as Gideon de Bar and his force had arrested them on their way, and it will be remembered that the marquis had surrendered to the man whom he dared not arouse to vengeful wrath. De Bar, on that occasion promised d' Artois that he should return in safety to his *château*, and the promise was kept. While a part of the force went on in pursuit of Louis de Liancourt, the rest conducted the marquis and his household back to St. Jean, where the mayor stopped for the purpose of coming to an understanding with regard to the business that rested between them.

And we may here understand the prime consideration which influenced Gideon de Bar in forcing the union between Ninon and his son. The estates of Artois and St. Omer were by far the most valuable in the department, and if they were once confiscated by the Assembly the property would be lost to him beyond his power to regain it; but if his son were the husband of the apparent heiress there would be no

danger of confiscation. So, in addition to the wealth which Ninon would bring in her own right to her husband, De Bar looked to see the whole vast estates of the marquisate and the barony come in time to his family if this marriage was consummated.

He put the case a little differently to the marquis, however, as we shall see.

Without regard to the hour, and with no care for Sir Philip's fatigue and chagrin, De Bar demanded an audience, as soon as they reached the *château*. Ninon, with her attendant, was suffered to go to her own apartments, after which the marquis and mayor repaired to the library, where wine and refreshments were served.

Philip d' Artois was certainly to be pitied. It was a terrible ordeal in which his life was being passed, for it might be truly said that there was no relief to his painful and wearing anxiety. This hard, unrelenting, cruel man held him in a grasp which was like a death-clamp. Though the yoke galled beyond measure, yet a movement to escape would be fatal. And yet, had France been quiet, had the king been firm upon his throne, and the nobles of the realm, who were worthy, strong in their places and possessions, the marquis might have braved the vampire, and dared him do his worst. Feeling in his own heart that he was innocent—knowing that he had never wittingly committed a crime—and being well assured that even his would-be accuser knew him to be innocent—he would have acknowledged the deed done in the forest against Juan de St. Denis, and thrown himself upon the judgment of the court, hoping to convince them that in all he had done on that melancholy occasion he had but acted in self-defense.

But he dared not do it now. In the present situation

of national affairs, the simple announcement that his was the hand that had taken the life of St. Denis would have been his death-warrant. In the hearts of the people the memory of Juan de St. Denis had been treasured by the side of that of Robert François Damiens. In those days of deadly hatred of royalty the man who had attempted to assassinate Louis XV. was sainted by the mob. The story of *Robert le Diable's* martyrdom, as it was termed by the *Sans Culottes*, was told in the wine-shops and upon the street-corners, and the name of Juan de St. Denis was often spoken in connection. It was known that he had been slain in the forest, and that the martyr Damiens had been his grand-uncle ; and how easy it was to imagine that the colonel had been killed because he was a relation of the regicide.

So the marquis dared not brave the situation which must follow a revealment of the deed of blood. He was not as strong as he had once been. He had often told himself that if he were ever pushed, he would arise in the majesty of his manhood and speak out. But he had not yet arisen.

How many a man is seen surely on the road to the inebriate's estate of misery, want and shame, who will tell you that he shall put the tempter behind him if he finds himself in danger. Poor man! He does not know that every additional draught of the liquid fire does only so much toward disarming him of the very strength of will which is necessary to his self-preservation ; so that when finally, in the great need, the power of self-denial is summoned to the rescue, lo and behold —the power is dead and gone!

Just so it was with Philip d'Artois. The years of bondage—the position of serf—the constant smothering and putting away out of sight of his own manly spirit,

had so far unmanned him that when he would now call up the peer of France to the contest, no peer was found, but in his place a poor, broken, sorrow-stricken man who had served a master too long to declare his independence while that master was alive and commanding.

We can now see the marquis as he stood before Gideon de Bar in the library, after the return from the short jaunt toward the coast. Gideon waved the old noble to a seat, and then, with a bottle and glasses between them, he sat down himself.

"My dear Philip," he said, resting his right hand upon the table, with the forefinger pressed upon the board as though the objective point were there pinned down for consideration, "since the events of this night it is necessary that you and I come to an understanding. You will see that I have already suspected you. Had my faith in your honor been unshaken, my spies would not have been lurking near the *château*. And henceforth, monseigneur, you will take no steps beyond your own walls unknown to me. In fact, my dear marquis, you shall be wholly on your guard, so that the occasion of another shameful failure shall not occur, I have ventured to put men of my own upon your force of servitors. Do not take it unkindly, for I mean it for your ultimate good. And now, sir, having seen all this I want your solemn promise that you will not again seek to throw any impediment in the way of a union by marriage between the Lady Ninon and my son. When I am ready for the final act and scene, I wish the work completed. Can I have your promise?"

The marquis started to present the painful situation which Gaston would occupy in wedding with one who never could love him; but the mayor cut him short

with an oath. The painful situation if she would not love would be Ninon's.

"Look to it, monseigneur, that you do not encourage her in her obstinacy. And now let that pass. Consider it settled. Gaston will be prepared to treat his wife as she shall give him occasion. So we have only the one final settlement of preliminaries to make. Here is the dying confession and accusation of Juan de Saint Denis! I show it to you for the last time. The next time I take it from its secure place of hiding, it will be either to give it into your hands forever or to give it into the hands of our minister of justice! Take one look at it, Philip d'Artois, and remember the dark and bloody hour in which it came into my possession!"

"Gideon de Bar!" almost shrieked the marquis, in his despairing energy, "you know I was not guilty! You know—"

The vampire stopped him with a stamp of the foot upon the floor, and a smiting of his fist upon the table.

"Why do you prate of that again? If you think you will try the experiment, I will withdraw and give you every opportunity. You shall explain to the minister to-morrow! You shall not be delayed. I have borne enough. I see plainly that I am to have no rest. Nothing is to remain settled. I am to be harassed continually. I shall endure it no longer. Go your way, Philip d'Artois, and when you find your bed hard to lie upon, do not say I made it for you. You had better sleep to-night, for you know not when you may sleep again!"

With this, spoken in tones that were stern, hard and malignant, Gideon de Bar took up his hat and made a low bow, and then turned and strode toward the door.

Once again was the broken man's fabric of pride and hope demolished, and his brief essay of power at

an end. With a wailing cry he sprang forward and caught De Bar by the arm, and begged of him that he would not go.

Such a glow as might have come upon the face of Mephistopheles when his sorely tempted victim acknowledged his power came upon the face of Gideon de Bar as he turned back into the library and resumed his seat. He had conquered, and his victim was at his feet. He had now but to make known his will and dictate his terms; and when, half an hour later, he called his attendants together for departure, it had been arranged that the marriage between Gaston and Ninon should take place immediately upon the return of the father and son from Paris, whither they were going to attend at the *Palais de Justice*. The marquis had ventured to ask concerning Louis de Liancourt. At the mention of his mission to the court his heart had sunk still lower with the thought that his brave young friend, who had been as a son to him in these later years, might be going to his trial, and that these men were going as witnesses against him. The end he could not doubt.

But Gideon gave him a very brief and comprehensive answer—an answer that left room for no more question in the same direction. Thus it was:

"If monseigneur is wise, he will not borrow trouble in considering the fate of Louis de Liancourt; he will only think of his own condition, and thank the good fortune which has shielded him, and the power which can hold him harmless while he keeps faith with his true friends."

It was well on toward the dawning of another day when the Mayor of Arras and his attendants rode away, and when the marquis was left alone, and had heard the last of the departing cavalcade, he sank down into

his seat and clasped his hands over his brow; but he could not think. He could only murmur the name of the gentle being whom he had that night doomed to lifelong woe and wretchedness, and cry out to God for mercy. He finally started up from his chair, like one suddenly aroused from a frightful dream and staggered to the sideboard. He poured out a measure of wine and drank it, and was upon the point of taking up a candle to light him to his chamber, when his lieutenant, Marius, entered. The officer was breathing hard, like one who had been battling with deep emotion.

"My lord, was it with your consent that Gideon de Bar left ten of his Jacobin troopers to be quartered here?"

"Ha! Ten of them, did you say?"

"Yes, my lord. Ten uncouth fellows, who swear that they are here on duty."

A happy thought struck the harassed noble.

"Good Marius," he said, as though putting forth all his power of self-control, "I doubt if you can realize the full danger that surrounds us on every hand. The mob have imprisoned the king, and every noble of France whose estate is worth confiscating is marked out for arrest and trial; and trial means death! I know that the evil eye is upon me. Gideon de Bar is not my friend—oh, he is far from it. But I would rather it should be he for an enemy than one over whom I could wield no influence. I can influence him. If he were to withdraw we know not who might come in his place—perhaps a cutthroat of the mob, who would have no shadow of mercy. Yes, Marius, I have consented to the stopping of those men. I could not help it. You know who and what they are, and the power that is behind them. Do not provoke them. Any false step might result in evil to me."

The lieutenant hesitated, and was for a little time ill at ease, but at length, with an effort, he said :

" My lord, I can hardly satisfy our people with the information you have vouchsafed. They know what is taking place in France. Heavens ! What things to know of one's own country ! It is known in the court, in the barracks and in the stables, how whole families and even whole hamlets have been swept off like so many hives of wealthy bees whose honey the husbandman covets. Our people ask me why these men are here. They ask me why their lord is stopped upon the highway by Gideon de Bar, and turned back from his purpose as though he were a nobody. They ask—is there danger in which they must share ? My lord, you can understand their anxiety. What can I tell them ? How can I explain to them the meaning of what they see ?"

At first the marquis had been inclined to be angry at this seeming meddling of his servants, but he thought better of it as he reflected, and finally he resolved to tell as near to the truth as he had the courage. He could stretch the truth a very little more easily than he could confess his own shame and sorrow.

" Marius, I will confess to you the truth, and you may tell to our people just as much, or just as little, as you please. In my political record there is a chapter which, if brought to light, would consign me to the guillotine beyond the power of earthly influence to save me. The chapter is one that I, thank God, am not ashamed of, but the *Sans Culottes* would find treason to the republic in it instanter. This thing Gideon de Bar knows. In short, that man thus holds a secret of my life, the revealment of which would be death to me. He uses his knowledge as a means to his own aggrandizement. It was in that way he commanded

my influence to help him to the office he now holds. And now he seeks to obtain from me a portion of my wealth. Do you not see his power? If he were so disposed, he could strip me of every centime, and I could not help myself. If I flee from the country, my property may be confiscated by the government, and then De Bar would lose the golden egg. It is hard, Marius—very hard; but I can better afford to bear up under De Bar's grasping tyranny than I can to tempt the Jacobin court. My people have nothing to fear. It is for De Bar's interest that all should go well here, for only so long as the estate is intact can he hope to profit by his knowledge of my secret.

"There, my friend, I have been frank with you. Now go, and tell our people what you think proper and best; and as for the Jacobins quartered upon us, let them alone—that is all. *Let them alone.*"

The officer, with show of heartfelt sympathy, thanked his lord for his frankness, and promised to do all in his power to preserve peace and harmony in the courts and offices of the castle.

As soon as Marius had gone, the marquis took up his candle and went to his chamber. He sought his pillow, but not to sleep. The thoughts that crowded upon his mind brought pictures and reflections that were harrowing and agonizing. First, he thought of the mission of Gideon de Bar and his son to Paris. Oh, too well did he know why they went! He saw Louis de Liancourt in a close dungeon; saw him dragged forth to a mere outward form of trial; and then saw him in the horrible cart, with a white-faced, death-marked crew, trundled away to the guillotine!

From this picture he turned away only to see Ninon in her agony. We know that which Ninon did not yet know—that she was not the child of the marquis; yet,

had such a thing as comparison of the paternal relation by blood been possible, and had Ninon been a thousand times his child, he could not have loved her better than he did. Really, she was all that he had left on earth to love, and, from the very first, she had been held close in his heart of heart. It had so happened that the first time he ever saw the child—when she was but an infant in the arms of her nurse—she had put out her little dimpled hands to him, and laughed and prattled upon his knee. In that hour his heart went out to her with its whole wealth of love; she had come to fill a void that had been dark and dismal, and as she filled it completely she had filled and possessed the heart of a father.

Then how could he contemplate the fate that awaited her? How should he break to her the terrible truth? He knew that she had given plight to Louis de Liancourt, and that she loved him with all her soul. Would not her heart break under the blow of the separation? But that was not all. Separation from the true, the gallant and the brave—the Christian knight and noble gentleman—to be wed to—*what?* He groaned in fierce agony, and tried to forget.

The morning dawned, and the marquis arose, unrefreshed by sleep. He bathed his fevered brow, and dressed without calling assistance. As he went forth into the court he saw two strangers walking together toward the barbican. His first impulse was to hail them, and demand to know who they were, and why they were there; but the truth came to him as soon as he had time for reflection. They were of the Jacobin squad which the Mayor of Arras had left, and very likely they were now on duty as spies. It was not a pleasant circumstance, nor was the scene inspiring, and as quickly as possible he got away from it.

Without appearing to have noticed the two men, Sir Philip pursued his way around the keep, and entered the flower-garden in the rear, where he was soon joined by Ninon. She had seen him first from her window, and had made all haste to speak with him. Her toilet had been thorough—the work of Blanchette—but her face was pale, and her eyes bore signs of weeping.

"Oh, papa!" she cried, grasping his arm, and clinging to him convulsively, "what terrible things have come to pass!"

"My dear child," he said, bending and kissing her upon the brow, "I fear you have not slept. You should have sought longer rest."

"Oh," she exclaimed, clinging to him with renewed energy of woe, "I could not sleep; I dared not close my eyes! Oh, such dreadful dreams! I never, in all my life, dreamed such dreams before! They were more horrible than I can tell. I cried out in sharp agony many times, so that Blanchette was frightened."

"Poor child! I am sorry you have suffered; but be not utterly cast down. We know that Louis has escaped."

A glad cry broke from the maiden's lips.

"Papa! Papa! Oh, do you know?"

"I know this much, Ninon: Not one of the bullets that were fired at him hit him. His horse was far superior to any that went in pursuit, and he had a good start in advance. Martin Duval escaped also, and I know that they had an understanding concerning the place where they would meet. Yes, I feel that I can give you sweet assurance that Louis is safe."

"Oh, thank God!" She reached up and kissed him, and then, in the exuberance of her gratitude, she added: "Dear papa, you are so worn and so weary, and the subject is so painful, that I will not harass you

with questions now. We are alive and unharmed, and Louis is safe! Oh, Heaven be praised for so much good! When you are rested you must tell me of that dark, wicked man who forced us to come back. I suppose he came out on purpose after Louis?"

"Yes, yes—oh, yes!" cried Philip d'Artois, eagerly. "And of course we could not go on without Louis."

"Of course not. Poor Louis! So good, and true, and noble, and loyal, and so brave and generous. But he is free. Oh, we will find him some time, will we not, papa?"

"I should be very sorry indeed, my child, if I could think otherwise."

And with this he suffered the deluded girl to depart from him. He could not tell her the whole truth until he was forced to it. He had not the heart—he had not the courage. His tongue was paralyzed, and clung to the roof of his mouth at the thought.

He stood and watched her as she went toward the keep, and as she disappeared a pent-up groan burst from his bosom.

"Alas, poor Ninon, Heaven have mercy upon thee!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A CLOSE CARRIAGE.

Among the reforms introduced into France by the Assembly in the morning of its power, when something like patriotism ruled in the councils of the nation, was the abolishment of the system of issuing the famous, or infamous, *lettres de cachet.* During the reign of Louis XV. an abandoned, shameless woman,* from the lower walks of life, who by her great personal beauty captivated the king, and held him her slave for twenty years, received thousands of these *lettres* every year, so that, by a simple stroke of her pen across the blank space in the terrible missive, she could consign to the dungeons of the Bastile whomsoever she pleased. These *lettres* were simply blank warrants signed by the king, commanding the arrest and imprisonment of the person whose name might afterward be filled in by the recipient. During his reign Louis XV. gave away one hundred and fifty thousand of these terrible missives,

* Jeannette Poisson, created by the king—and so best known—Marchioness de Pompadour.

most of them to favorites and courtiers for purposes of private spite and vengeance.

Can we wonder that the French people had grown restive under such glaring and wicked cruelty of tyrranny in high places?

The Assembly had abolished the *lettre de cachet*, thereby winning the gratitude of humanity everywhere, but when the revolutionary spirits of that Assembly had gained the power so to do, they introduced a system fully as bad, and far more fatal while it endured. Persons irresponsible could no longer fill up a *lettre de cachet* against an enemy, but they could, by a mere breath of suspicion—by a whisper—consign the best and the purest of the people to the prison and the guillotine. Let a man identified with the Jacobin Club point his finger at an enemy, and that enemy was sure to fall.

During that month of August, of which we are writing, Paris was as a seething pandemonium. Men, women and children, who had been known as friendly to the king, or as belonging to families sympathizing with the king, were denounced to the commissioners of justice, and ordered to be arrested and cast into prison. The frightened creatures tried in every possible way to escape, but only a very few succeeded. The allied army of Austria and Prussia was advancing toward Paris in behalf of the monarchy, and the Jacobins were rampant. A list of all those who were suspected of being unfriendly to the revolution was made out, and their arrest ordered. In the search for these suspected citizens chimneys were smoked out, cellars ransacked, closets and presses turned inside out, and every wall was sounded to prove whether it were hollow and fit for hiding purposes. In one night of that month, five thousand suspected persons in the capital

were torn from their homes and dragged away to the already crowded prisons.

The guillotine was busy night and day. Blood literally flowed in streams. To the prison at night—to the court of trial on the morrow—and then away in the reeking tumbrel. Had a man or a woman, or even a tender child, been heard to express sympathy for the king, death was as sure as fate. Nor did the killers always wait for condemnation. Hundreds in a single night were butchered upon mere suspicion, and the assembly sought not to stay the gory flood. Even the begging of mercy for a doomed friend was deemed a crime against the revolution, and there were wives and children and sisters actually condemned to the guillotine because they had dared to plead in behalf of husband, parent or brother.

The king and the queen were prisoners in the temple ; La Fayette, for having dared oppose the fatal assumptions of the Jacobin triumvirate, had been forced to flee from his country, and was now in an Austrian prison ; and even the liberal and liberty-loving Girondists, who were in deed and in truth sustainers of the true republic, were doomed to the guillotine because they would not bow the knee to the demon of anarchy and slaughter.

We spoke of the triumvirate. There were three men in whose hands, for the time, were the destinies of France. They were the responsible rulers. Marat, Danton and Robespierre.

Marat was President of the Jacobin Club, and under the soothing influence of the bath, while sitting in the tub, he wrote down the names of fresh victims for the slaughter. He was thus engaged when the avenging steel of Charlotte Corday reached his heart. Danton was Minister of Justice, from whose fiat of condemna-

tion there was no appeal; while Robespierre, ever active, ever restless, eager and aspiring, was as the leaven of the Revolutionary mass, imparting his own spirit of dire destruction to everything he touched. He wanted no office; he would take none; he only wanted to tear down and drag from the light of day everything appertaining to the old system of government. The building of anything new in its place he never proposed. If it be asked what was Robespierre's real position during the darkest days of the Terror, it might be truthfully answered, that for a time—for the time that saw the devoted and liberty-loving Girondists consigned to the guillotine—he was Dictator! And that was the power at which he aimed.

Such was the condition of affairs when Louis de Liancourt was cast into the prison of Arras. He remained there a day and a night, and on the morning of the second day he was taken there before a tribunal, over which the mayor presided, with the officers of the police in attendance, where he found a score of other prisoners arraigned. The place was literally reeking. It was a large, vaulted hall, with a rough stone pavement, walls unhewn, and windows barred with iron. In the center, and extending to a raised platform against the rear wall, was a space divided off by a railing of iron, within which was the court, while outside were assembled the scum and scourings of the gutters, as they had been day after day, until the air was loaded with a stench that was dreadful. Poor, sunken, degraded creatures, steeped in vice and crime, and never known to work when they could steal—they were safe to go where they pleased. Justice had nothing to demand of them. What an array of faces was that upon which our hero gazed as he looked over the crowd! Bloated and coarse and scarred, eyes bleared and blood-

shot, literally and truly *Sans Culottes*, gathered there to witness the trial and condemnation of the victims of the Revolution, and shouting with joy and satisfaction as name after name was read off for the fate of the guillotine.

Notwithstanding the horror of the situation, with death at his side waiting only the signal to strike, Louis could not help philosophizing upon what he saw. What was it in human nature that could plant in the bosoms of those poor, joyless, plague-stricken creatures such desire for the death of their fellows? Really it seemed as though they only regarded the ghastly work of the headsman as an exhibition for their entertainment, and when—though it seldom happened—a prisonor was set free, these miserable creatures cursed and swore as though they had been robbed of a rightful pleasure. And yet these very men and women would quickly and cheerfully put forth any exertion of labor or deprivation to help a dog that was in suffering. How could it be explained?

He was aroused from his reflections by the calling of his name, and a murmur of expectation ran through the unwashed crowd as the title of the aristocrat fell upon their ears; for the mayor, with a malevolent chuckle, and in a sneering manner, after he had read the name of the citizen, superadded the titles by which he had been known.

Louis de Liancourt arose to this feet and slightly inclined his head.

The mayor pronounced his name again, and then went on:

"By orders from the Department of Justice, I am directed to deliver you into the hands of the commissioners appointed to take you in charge. Messieurs," he added, turning to two officers who stood near him,

habited in the garb of the National Guard, "behold your prisoner. To you I now deliver him, and henceforth you will be answerable."

The two officers thus addressed simply nodded in response to the presiding functionary, and then advanced and took the count by the arms. He was upon the point of demanding to know what was meant by this proceeding, when he was saved the trouble by a stout, heavily-bearded Jacobin, wearing the red cap, with the garb of a butcher, who pressed forward to the iron rail, and shouted above the murmurs of the multitude :

"How, now, *Monsieur le Maire!* What do you with the aristocrat whose hands are red with the blood of our brothers? Where are Gabriel and Raoul? Shall they not be avenged?"

"Indeed they shall," answered the mayor.

"Aye—but how? Why do you give him to the National Guard? They go to Paris. Have we not a guillotine in Arras? And will it not make sure work?"

And then another cried out; and then another. They demanded that the aristocrat should be tried then and there; and Louis de Liancourt felt a sadness and a sinking of the heart such as he had never felt before. What had he ever done to those men, or against them, that they should thus seek his life? Had not the lords of Liancourt always been kind and generous, and sought in every way to bless the poor and the needy of the people? And this was his reward! What had he done? As to the death of the men whose names had been mentioned, he doubted if half a dozen of those who cried out against him had ever known them.

"Death to the aristocrat!" was the cry; and the

mob pressed forward until it seemed as though they meant to take the administration of justice into their own hands.

With all his might the mayor commanded silence, and at length he succeeded in persuading the excited mass to listen.

"Fellow-citizens," he said, from his high rostrum, "justice shall be done. The offenses of this man have been great, and the minister demands that he shall be sent to Paris for trial. Will you not trust Danton? Will you not trust Marat?"

At the mention of those two names the tide turned.

"Yes, we will trust Marat!" shouted the butcher.

"And you may trust me also," added Gideon de Bar, with a grandiloquent flourish. "I shall accompany the prisoner; and be sure he shall not escape."

Without waiting for a counter current in the tide of popular feeling, the two guardsmen led their prisoner out by a rear way, and conducted him back to prison. One of these officers appeared to be a gentleman, though stern and unrelenting in the performance of his duty, and him, after they had gained the dungeon, the count ventured to address:

"*Monsieur le Capitaine*, may I ask you what is to be done with me?"

"Did you not hear? The mayor spoke plainly."

"He quelled the mob, I know. Is it to be done as he said? Has Danton ordered my appearance before the court in Paris?"

"Not yours particularly, monsieur, but yours with the rest of those who have borne titles, or have been in authority. It is the act of the Assembly that all such shall be tried in Paris, unless a commission shall be appointed to try them where they are; and under

that act the Minister of Justice has sent us to Arras to conduct monsieur to the capital."

"And is Gideon de Bar to bear me company?"

"Does monsieur speak of the mayor?"

"Yes."

"Certainly. He is to bear witness against you. He spoke truly in that."

They had entered the dungeon, and the second guardsman had stepped back, when the captain, with a slight change of tone, as though a grain of sympathy had found its way to his heart, said:

"Citizen Louis, if you have allowed a thought of escape to rest in your mind, you had better put it away. You are going on a road from which none ever return. Your fate is written. The hours that are left to you had better be devoted to such things as belong to the closing scene of life. If you have a stout heart, you will need all its strength. If your heart is weak, you will be miserable."

"When shall we start on our way?"

"Ah, you may thank the mayor for his care in this respect. We shall not set forth until the day is gone. He fears that the excited mob might lay violent hands upon you. Do you know what that means? Do you know how the mob treats its victims?"

The prisoner's answer was a groan, and without further question he suffered the officer to depart, and close upon him once more the heavy iron door.

Alone with himself! Alas, it was a melancholy companionship! It is doubtful if he could have been left in the society of one who in that hour was more utterly joyless, hopeless and wretched than was the Count Louis of Liancourt and la Capelle. And his most biting agony—that which unnerved and prostrated him—was from thoughts of Ninon. No amount of danger to

himself, no heaping up of mere physical disabilities or pains, could have so moved him. In his heart of steel true, loyal and brave, there was manliness enough and faith enough to bear him triumphantly through ordeals that the unlettered savage endures without flinching; the agony that rended his soul was from the fount of a sentiment that the savage does not possess—that power of loving another better than self, and suffering in the affliction of another to a degree which no affliction of self could produce.

That death was to be his portion Louis could not for a moment doubt. Aye—had he stood upon the gory platform, with the hand of the headsman upon his arm, he could not have felt his fate more sure. Of course, it was not utterly impossible that something now not seen—something trivial and seemingly insignificant in itself—might transpire to set him free. But it must be accident; it could be nothing in regular course of procedure by the court.

For himself alone he could find hope—the one blessed hope ever within the reach of true Christian faith. Let death come as it might, so long as his own hands were clean, it could be but the falling asleep of the worn and weary spirit—the sweet rest of the never-ending.

But, alas, for the loved one! Oh, it was thought of Ninon that gave him bitterest agony. There he could find no hope. She had promised that she would be true to him—that she would never give her hand to another—that she was his, now and forever; but what power had she over her fate? He called to mind the story which the marquis had told to him—the story of the death in the forest; of Gideon de Bar's fatal possession; and of the dear girl's true parentage; and when this was before him, with all its possible bearings

and influences impressed upon him, what ground of self-protection had Ninon to stand upon? He knew that De Bar had resolved upon his course, and that the marriage of Ninon with his son was the prime move; and now, as matters stood, what was to prevent him from the accomplishment of his purpose?

Had Philip d' Artois been a stronger man—more morally brave and fixed—there might have been a possible wielding of saving power by him; but he was weak and unstable, and the strength of the soul that might once have been his had been long since broken under the iron heel of the dread secret possessed by the enemy.

"Alas, poor Ninon!" The words burst from his lips in tones of agony, for the whole field of thought had been explored, and not a possible saving power had he found.

The day passed, he knew not how, and with the coming of night came the officers of the Assembly's commission. Louis de Liancourt was led from his cell to the court of the prison, where four other prisoners, strangers to him, were standing. He could only judge, from their garbs and their general appearance, that they were gentlemen. Two of them were much older than he; one was of about his own age; and one younger. They were pale and worn, with the story of their fate plainly stamped upon their pain-marked faces.

No word was spoken aloud until the great gate of the court had been opened, and a lumbering carriage, with four horses attached, had been driven in. The light of the flambeaux plainly revealed its character, and also revealed a dozen stout guardsmen who bore it company. They were cavalrymen, with enormous spurs and heavy, iron-sheathed cutlasses. The coach

was a near approach in general outline to the common stage-coach of the present day. Its wheels were very small in diameter, thick and cumbersome; the lower part of the body was a box-like structure, with square corners, flaring toward the top; while the upper part was a covering of painted cloth supported upon a framework of wood. The door—there was but one—was in the side, and within were two seats, each long enough to give room for three persons. This body rested directly upon two strong beams bolted to the axle-trees, so that there was no spring to relieve the jolts and jars of the passage.

As this cumbersome vehicle was admitted to the court, full a score of boys, who had apparently been attracted by its oddity into following it, came crowding in with it, and at once the jailer and his assistants set to the work of driving them out; but the ragged little rascals were not so easily disposed of.

"Let us see the *citadine!*" a few of the leaders cried. "Let us see it start with its brave load."

"Ho, ho! Master Jailer, is not the grand thing a *Dame Blanche?*" shouted one of the very smallest of the tow-headed mob.

The tiny tatterdemalion had the impudence to grasp the jailer by the sleeve of his blouse as he spoke, and that functionary, in the heat of his wrath and indignation, gave the lad a blow upon the side of the head that sent him howling away. A little distance he went at a bound, and then he stopped and cast his eyes around. It was not a frightened look upon the boyish face, but a look of keenest, quickest cunning.

The two officers whom we have already seen stood holding our hero by the arms when the gate was opened, and when it appeared that there might be diffi-

culty in getting the boys out, the one called *capitaine* became uneasy.

"Beware!" he cried; "we shall have the mob in here if that gate be not shut. Look to our charge, Ernest, and I will lend a hand."

It was at this moment that the jailor had administered the blow to the obtrusive boy, and that same boy, having leaped away from the irate officer of the prison, let his quick eye rest upon Louis de Liancourt. In an instant he saw the opportunity afforded by the going away of the captain, and bounding forward he caught the prisoner by the free arm—caught him with one hand upon his elbow and the other close down over his palm.

"Ho! Monsieur will tell me, I know. Is it not a *Dame Blanche*—the grand carriage?"

Louis felt the boy's touch upon his hand and caught a gleaming of the bright eye which meant more than appeared upon the surface. The light of the flambeaux illumined the little fellow's face, while his hands were in the shadow.

Aye—it did mean something. Louis felt a paper in his palm, pressed there by the boyish hand.

"Sh!"—[then aloud]—"Is it not a *Dame Blanche?*"

"Yes, my brave boy."

"God bless you, gentle sir. I will be your friend for this."

The guardsman who held the prisoner's other arm aimed a smart kick at the boy, but it fell short, and in a moment more the diminutive bundle of rags and impudence had disappeared toward the gate.

Very shortly after this the shouting rabble was driven out and the gates closed. Then the prisoners were led to the coach—five of them.

"How shall we sit?" asked one, when three had

entered, the first two having taken the back seat, and the third seated himself alone upon the front. It was the third man who asked. The youngest man of the party made answer :

" I care not so that Monsieur le Comte and *le Corps de Médicins* have one seat." He had been the first to enter, and had taken the rear seat, but he arose and went over upon the front, and his companion did likewise.

This left De Liancourt and the oldest man of the party—a man of seventy, at least—to occupy the back seat. Louis would have urged the youth to retain what he had honestly gained, but the latter would not listen ; so, with expressions of heartfelt gratitude, the two remaining prisoners took the seat thus kindly offered, and in a moment more the door was slammed to and locked upon the outside."

Louis de Liancourt had thus far held the paper which the boy had so mysteriously thrust upon him closely clutched in his hand, but now that the gaze of his guard was withdrawn, he put it carefully away into an inner pocket until such time as he could read it by himself. What it was he could not imagine—a slight affair—but a scrap of paper—but it became the foundation of most wonderful castles in the dim and murky atmosphere of distant possibilities.

CHAPTER XV.

A STILL DARKER SHADOW OF THE GUILLOTINE.

The night was moonless, but the stars were clear, and a man with good eyes had no difficulty in picking his way, nor in discerning objects in his immediate neighborhood. There were glazed apertures in the sides of the coach, through which it was easy for the inmates to see that a score of stout guardsmen, in the saddle, rode in company—ten upon a side—together with four grooms, or postilions, with the horses. A few loungers on the way stopped to gaze at the lumbering coach, but offered no obstruction. If they mistrusted whom the vehicle contained, and were eager for his execution, they seemed to rest satisfied with the belief that all *must* go well with such a guard.

In a small, open square, at the end of one of the avenues leading to the citadel, the cavalcade stopped, but only for a few moments; for hardly had the draught horses become quiet, when down from the citadel rode four horsemen to join the party. They were Gideon de Bar, the mayor; Gaston, his son, and intendent of police, with two personal attendants. Notwithstanding their bitter howling against the customs

of the aristocracy, they were not willing to go to Paris without the attendance of a servant.

With this addition to its force the cavalcade again moved on, leaving the city by the southern gate, and making as much speed as was possible with the heavy tumbrel in tow.

By the light of the flaming flambeaux in the court of the prison the prisoners had been enabled to see one another's faces, so that when on the road, though there was no light in the close carriage, its inmates, strangers one to the other—or, at least, strangers in part—had in mind the form and features that belonged with the respective voices. Louis had quickly determined, upon hearing mention made of *M. le Corps des Médecins*, that the old man thus designated was no other than the celebrated army physician and surgeon, Adolphe de la Tremblade. The other three had been also connected with the army, one as an assistant surgeon; one as a steward of the hospital; and the other an officer in the subsistence department. And the four of them were under arrest for the same offense: They had bitterly denounced the spirit that had brought harm to the noble and patriotic La Fayette, and had openly declared that they would bear no part in a revolution which could bring such wickedness to pass.

"We spoke boldly," said the old man, in answer to questions of the count, "and sought not to disguise our true sentiments. We did not know—we had not dreamed—how extensively the spies of the Jacobin Club of Paris were distributed through the country, nor what powers had been given into their hands. Look: I, who have given a long life of service to my country, and have stood ready to serve to the end, have been cast down and marked for destruction by one of the very meanest and most abandoned wretches of the gutter.

For myself I care not so much, but for these brave men who have been my comrades, and who are younger! And, for France! Ah, where shall be the end? Is it not dreadful?"

Louis told his story, and when it was discovered by his companions that he had been in America, they demanded of him much information concerning that grand republic. As the count grew to warmth of heart in memory of the old scenes in the land of liberty, his language became eloquent and inspiring, and through long hours of the darkness, jolting and bumping in the hard-seated coach, the prisoners forgot their misery in the charm of the traveller's story.

The mayor of Arras had taken the precaution of leaving town by night to avoid interruption by the mob, and the same consideration led him to avoid the large and populous places on the way to the capital. The nearest and most convenient route would have been by the way of Amiens, but that place was left to the westward, it being contrived that their stops for rest and refreshment should be made at small, out-of-the-way hamlets, where the rank and character of the prisoners would not be likely to excite trouble.

The first stop was made, two hours after midnight, at the little village of Astreville, where was found a tavern large enough to accommodate the party. The stable-room was scant, but the weather was fine, and there was no objection to tethering some of the horses out-of-doors.

A chamber was found, into which were put all five of the prisoners, the physician and the count occupying one bed; the assistant-surgeon and the officer of subsistence in another; while the hospital steward had a cot improvised upon the floor. Thus the prisoners were well enough cared for so far as their own comfort

was concerned, and the task of holding them under safe guard was rendered easy.

A hundred times during the five hours upon the road had de Liancourt felt of the scrap of paper in his pocket, now to be assured of its safety, and again with the instinctive clutching at the only thing within reach that could connect him with possible friendship. He believed it to be from one of his friends, perhaps from the Château d' Artois ; but he hoped from Martin, unless, indeed, it could be from Ninon, which he dared not hope. And now, arrived at the inn, and in their chamber, with a candle burning, the paper fairly burned in his fingers. Should he find opportunity to read it? He could not hope that they would be left without a guard in the apartment, nor were they. Two of his companions had got into bed, when a plan presented itself to his mind.

In his pocket he had a note-book, in which were jotted down scraps of business, and little items to aid his memory, and he asked the guard if he might sit by the light and frame a brief petition to be presented to the Minister of Justice.

The guard looked at him curiously.

"Bah! Thinkest thou Danton will read what you write?"

"Man," replied Louis, with great dignity, "Georges Jacques Danton and I have been friends. Be sure he will read what I write."

The man seemed to be struck by this. A friend of Danton was not to be slighted, even though he were under arrest. Had our hero known how seriously his hastily cogitated assertion would be taken, he might not have ventured quite so far. After a little thought the guardsman said that if he might be allowed to read all that he wrote, he might write. To this the

count consented, and sitting down near the candle, he took out his note-book and pencil, and, when opportunity offered, he opened the folded paper, and laid it into the book. After this he had but to watch the chances, and read the following, which was written in English, and, of course, from Martin :

"DEAR MASTER: I have just this moment arrived in Arras, and find you are to be sent to Paris. I have had a grand adventure, but I cut the net and broke away. I have found a friend who says he will be a friend to you, and he tells to me a most wonderful story. If it be true, I have hopes of saving you. At all events, I shall not cease to labor. I shall be in Paris as soon as you are; but if you were to see me you would not know me—neither me nor the friend who is with me. So you will take a little heart in knowing that you have devoted friends close at hand—friends who will risk much in your behalf. Keep your eyes open, and be not surprised at anything you may hear or see. A boy, whose life I saved from going out by drowning, will give you this if he can. MARTIN."

Louis thrust the missive into his pocket when he had read it, and its first effects were to be seen in the freedom with which he went at the work of writing the petition. He wrote rapidly—wrote grandiloquently—wrote of old and long close friendship—and when he had written enough, he called the sentinel and gave the book into his hands. It happened that the man could really read, and, naturally, no man would have been left in that responsible position who possessed not that accomplishment. He took the book, and read what the count had written.

"My faith!" he cried. "It is not impossible that the man of blood may be moved by that. Certainly, Danton can save you, if he will. But you will have to send him the book as it is; I doubt if they will allow you pen and ink and paper at the Conciergerie."

The count remarked that he could send the book if need be, and opportunity were afforded, and then he went to his bed, to get in by the side of De la Tremblade. The note from Martin had given him hope, and it had given to him, furthermore, and what was, perhaps, better still, a puzzling thought to occupy his mind.

Who was the strange friend who had told to Martin the wonderful story? Martin would never have written those words without good cause, and, moreover, he was not a man to be elated without reason. He had reason to put faith in this new-found friend, that was evident, and if the man had reason, might not the master have the same? Really, there seemed to be ground for hope. There was room for fancy to find pleasant roaming space. When he slept he dreamed, and the central figure of his dream was a man whom Martin had led forward as the Friend; and the mystic presence loomed up into gigantic proportions, with power to save whom he would, and to crush whom he would.

It was a wonderful dream. Chaos had come again! Darkness was once more upon the face of the deep, and the world was without form and void. And distinctly the dreamer heard the sound of a Mighty Voice, and it said: "Let there be light!"

And he saw the face of the majestic presence that had come with power to save, and it was a face familiar to him, though he could not locate it. By one of those wide transitions which the dreamer always accepts without question, never recognizing the incongruity, the scene had changed to the Deluge, and on every hand arose the cry of distress and the wail of despair. Men, women and children, and beasts of every kind, were being swept away into the vortex of destruction,

and close to where he stood, rooted and unable to move, surged the all-devouring flood. Suddenly a bright light appeared, and the same saving power, this time wearing a face he well remembered, was seen in the bow of a boat, reaching forth to lift him out of danger. The genius pronounced his name and caught him by the arm :

"Citizen Louis ! Awake !"

He started up and rubbed his eyes. The light of day had broken into the chamber, and a guardsman stood over him, with a hand upon his arm.

" If Monsieur would eat before he sets forth, he has no time to waste."

And coming back to things of reality, the count arose and performed his scant toilet, after which he was conducted, with his companions in bonds, down to the eating-room, where a very respectable meal was served.

Two more days and two more nights were occupied in the journey, and not once on the way had an opportunity for escape presented itself. The guards were sleepless in their watching, and left no unguarded points. In fact, from the time of setting forth from Arras to the entrance into Paris, the prisoners had not passed a single moment without a watchful eye upon them.

It was early in the day when they reached the capital. The Intendent Gaston de Bar had ridden on in advance the previous night, and on this morning he was at the Gate, or *Barrière*, of St. Denis, where his father had arranged to make his entrance. Very near to the entrance to the old city the prisoners were called from the great lumbering vehicle in which they had come thus far and transferred to a *citadine* of the common hackney class, to which were attached two horses.

As they went further into the city the presence of the guards attracted the attention of the mob, and the cries were loud and hideous. From the little square windows of the coach Louis could look out, and the sight that met his gaze was sickening. There were no signs of labor, no notes of healthy merriment arising upon the morning air, but armed men paraded the streets and crowded the sidewalks, and the voices that broke the air were coarse and ribald and profane. The better class of shops were all closed, and their windows darkened, but the wine-shops were busy enough.

On they went, by the Faubourg to the Rue St. Denis —on and on to the river, and across to the *Ile de la Cité*. The towers of Notre Dame cast their shadows down upon them, and directly they stopped where other towers cast a shadow—the *Tour de César* and the *Tour Bombée*. A deep groan burst from the bosom of De la Tremblade when he saw the dark entrance between these two towers. It was a passage in one way to the *Palais de Justice*, and in another, to the prison of the *Conciergerie*. There was a brief space in which the five men stood in the gloomy, vaulted pass, waiting for the officer of the prison. The aged surgeon laid his hand upon our hero's shoulder. His eyes were moist, and his lips quivered with unusual emotion as he spoke :

" Louis, I think you know what this means. Oh, I could be happy if they would take me for all ! I am old, and a few short days, at best, are all that I could claim ; but you, so young and hopeful and fair, with the bright promises of life all in the future, and never to be fulfilled. And they are *men* who do these things. God made them as He made other men. Have they hearts ? I cannot understand it. I suppose we shall be separated. We shall be tried and condemned. Oh,

what mockery! Trial? Oh, that is the most cruel thing of all! But, my son, there is another world and another life. I can find comfort in the thought that the wicked cannot flourish always. It is in such an hour as this that many men cry out: 'There is no God!' But, oh, for me, in such an hour, the faith in the loving God comes with peace to the soul and healing to the bruised heart!"

"*Amen!*" fervently ejaculated the count.

"Louis, you believe it?"

"Yes, devoutly."

"It is well. Then let us bid each other adieu. I doubt if we meet again on earth. Those who enter here leave hope behind."

By a mutual impulse they fell each upon the other's bosom, twined in a mutual embrace, breathing words of blessing and cheer—not cheer of hope in earthly life, but a hope that should find its fruition in the world of the Beyond.

And so the keeper of the prison found them, and with a coarse, vulgar jest he bade them be separated.

Louis de Liancourt was taken by the arm and led away—led down into the dark, damp, noisome series of dungeons that were below the water of the Seine, where he was cast into a narrow cell, with floor and walls of unhewn stone, and a door of bolted iron, to which light and air were admitted through a small opening close under the arched roof.

And this was the Prison of the Conciergerie, famous even then as the tomb of the hopes of all that entered it as prisoners. From Doctor de la Tremblade, during their journey, the count had learned so much that he knew the history of the place thoroughly; and he also knew more than he had before known—aye, more than he had ever before believed possible—of the awful

work of the Jacobins in this season of death and terror.

We will not dwell upon the scene. There is no need. No pen could tell the horrors of the hour, and the story would not be fit to read if it could be told.

The youthful count was not to remain long in prison. Those were times when they were forced to keep matters in constant motion. A few days of stagnation in the transaction of the routine business would have found the Conciergerie overcrowded. Those brought in to-day must make room for others on the morrow.

It was near the middle of the forenoon when Louis de Liancourt was consigned to his dungeon, with heavy irons upon his wrists and upon his ankles. Before the day had closed—while perhaps an hour of daylight was left—the door of his cell was opened, and the keeper of the prison, with four attendants, appeared, all armed at every point. They had had desperate men to deal with in that place, and hence they went prepared. At a sign from their chief two of the men advanced and took off the prisoner's irons, and then the other two took him by the arms, one upon each side, and led him out. They led him up into the hall above, and thence through various windings, to the Palace of Justice. In the great chamber of trial, the court of the Revolutionary Commission was in session, with Danton in the chair.

As the count entered his name was called.

"The Citizen Louis de Liancourt will listen to the accusation against him."

The clerk of the commission read the indictment, framed by a commission of the National Assembly in session at Arras. The instrument was not loaded down with legal verbiage. It was short, crisp and directly to the point. It denounced said Louis de Liancourt as

an enemy of France. He had by force of arms, wickedly and maliciously, obstructed officers of the government in the performance of their duties ; he had stricken to death three true and loyal servants of the Assembly, and set free two dangerous conspirators who had been denounced to the department of justice, and against whom the arm of the law was operating. Thus Louis de Liancourt was guilty of Treason and Murder.

Gideon de Bar, the mayor of Arras, was summoned to testify. His testimony was a simple recounting of the story of the conflict upon the highway, in which three of his most valued officers had fallen. The lies he told were glaring. Louis knew that the two men in whose behalf he had raised his sword had never been denounced to the department of justice, but that they were set upon by hired assassins, and that one of those men—he called Rupert of Redwood—had been marked out for private slaughter by the mayor himself. Rupert had so assured him. And Rupert had known something of the case of the man called Joseph Max, and had declared that he also had been set upon through personal hate and private vengeance. Our hero knew, as well as he knew anything that had not come to him directly through his senses of sight and hearing, that those who had planned the death of Rupert and Joseph would no more have dared whisper of their business in public than they would have dared the knife of the guillotine itself. But what could he say ? What could he do ?

Gaston de Bar, the Intendent of Police of Arras, followed his father and invented new lies at pleasure. He swore that he had overheard the prisoner in the market-place of Arras denounce the National Assembly as a mob of bloodthirsty butchers, and to then and there declare that he would wield his sword against

them if the opportunity were ever given him. And the lying wretch further swore that he heard the prisoner call Danton and Robespierre by name, and declare he would like nothing better than to put his steel into their wicked and cruel hearts.

A howl of indignation went up from the surging throng of crazed and drunken miscreants that crowded the outer space and the corridors.

"Away with the aristocrat!" shouted a score in concert. "To the guillotine!" shouted others. And the epithets bestowed upon him, and the curses were frightful to hear.

At this point the prisoner was informed that he might speak. He arose to his feet. But—mercy! He might as well have thought to speak in Bedlam. The mob would not have it. The cries and the howls and the shrieks grew louder and louder, until the prisoner bowed his head upon his hands and sank back into his seat.

And then the sentence of the court was pronounced.

Louis de Liancourt was found guilty of murder and treason, and was sentenced to die by the guillotine between the hours of eight and nine of the clock on the forenoon of the morrow.

And then he was led back to his dungeon. Not to the one from which he had just come, but to another, nearer to the gate whence the guillotine tumbrel took its hourly loads—to a dungeon from which, since the Reign of Terror had set in, not a single human being had gone forth to live—not one!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN IN THE OLIVE-GREEN COAT.

A piece of cardboard, or thick paper, with a number printed upon it, was given into De Liancourt's hand as the jailer was about to consign him to the new dungeon ; he had observed similar pieces tacked upon the outer faces of some of the doors before which they had passed, and a piece was upon the door that stood open for his benefit. He had just time and opportunity to see that the sign upon his door and that upon the bit of pasteboard in his hand were the same, when a push upon the shoulder reminded him that time was no more his. Upon the paper in his hand, as upon his door, he found "X. 476."

Very likely that was all that would ever be recorded of him in the annals of the Conciergerie. His true name was to be known among men no more forever ! Like the beasts of the crowded pen, the only name by which he should ever again be designated among his fellows was the number he bore in the column of the condemned ; and as the numbers had grown cumbersome from bulk, they had returned to the unit, and superadded a letter.

Only a single man went with the prisoner after the narrow passage was reached which led to his cell—a

gigantic Cyclop, so wondrously above the ordinary stature of man that our hero would not have been more surprised had he found the towering guardian with but one eye, and that in the center of his forehead. This was the famed Butcher of Nôtre Dame, at the sound of whose name even stout men trembled. But he was not harsh or impatient, like smaller villains; conscious of his own power, he could afford to be moderate. As he pushed the count into his cell, he said, in tones not unlike the muttering of distant thunder:

"Number four seventy-six, series X, forget not your designation. You will not be ironed. If you would like pen and ink and paper they are at your call. The night is before you."

"Can I have a candle?"

"Monsieur can have now all that he pays for, provided it is not against the rules of the prison."

The count was not surprised. The seeming privileges thus extended were, after all, but parts of a system of refined cruelty. They thus sought to lighten the last hours of the condemned that he might give less trouble; he could spend his money for the benefit of the keepers, and whatever he might write would be in the hands of the minister of justice, for him to use as he pleased. Still, he asked for good candles of wax; for some fine bread and meat, and a bottle of old wine; and for writing materials; and he gave into the giant's hand two pieces of gold, though he knew that one would much more than purchase all he had called for.

The Cyclop went away, and in the course of half an hour returned with the articles designated, all of which were found to be of excellent quality.

The prisoner wanted nothing more, and the keeper left him.

Louis drank a small measure of wine, and eat some of the bread and meat, after which he brushed the crumbs from the little stand and laid out the writing materials. He looked at his watch, and found it to be almost ten o'clock. Ten hours more of life!

He arose, and paced several times to and fro across the dungeon. But that would not do. It was only agony thus to reflect. He had better employ himself in writing. He could not sleep, and he dared not trust himself alone with untrammeled thought. He would write to Ninon. He would, on paper, tell to her the story of his life in America. That would occupy his time, and if thoughts occurred to him of any directions he wished to leave behind him, he could incorporate them into the text of his story. He would write nothing that the spies of the Revolution could wish to suppress.

It was half-past ten when Louis de Liancourt began to write. He had written a full hour—it was half-past eleven—when he heard a hand upon the fastenings of his door. He had heard no approaching footstep. Presently the door was opened, and a man with a small lantern in his hand entered. The light of the candles illumined the cell brightly, and the visitor stood plainly revealed.

It was the slight, angular figure, with cadaverous face, with the deep-set, steel-blue eyes, the wide nostrils below a small, straight nose, with the thin-lipped, capacious mouth, the muscles of all the features at a painful tension, and, not to be forgotten, the threadbare, olive-green coat, probably his only one—the same man, in short, whom Louis had once met in the forest of Artois, and for rescuing whom from the steel of assassins he had been brought to trial and condemned to death.

Only as Joseph Max had our hero known the man, but now a new light burst upon him, and its revelation took away his breath and caused his heart to stand still. He had arisen upon the man's entrance, but as the astounding probability presented itself he sank back into his seat from utter weakness.

The visitor noiselessly closed the door behind him, and having set his lantern upon the pavement, he sat down upon the edge of the low pallet. He breathed hard and pressed his hand over his heart as though he felt pain there.

"Well, *mon brave*, did you think you should ever see me again?" And over the sunken countenance, usually so severe and so sarcastic, to which smiles, as a general thing with him, only gave new force of sarcasm, came a smile of charming sweetness, and altogether winning. In that smile was seen the good part of the man which the world was never to know or remember. It was there—all the sweetness and the sympathy and the capacity to love, which might, under other circumstances, have made of François Joseph Maximilien Isidore Robespierre a healthful reformer and a philanthropist. But he seemed to be a duality. There were in his nature—in his spirit essence—two distinct, antagonistic personalities. Circumstances threw him into the revolution, and other circumstances made him a leader. He struggled hard, in the establishment of the republic, to abolish the death penalty, and his name was affixed to but very few death sentences; and yet, when high in power, where his voice might have worked much saving, he let the work of slaughter go on, and called it glorious. Like a giant rocket fatally balanced, he possessed brilliant qualities, and was a reservoir of wondrous power—a bold and dangerous man—dangerous alike to friends and foes.

Yes, our hero now knew the man. He could not be mistaken. There was not another man in France who could answer his description. The event, bursting upon him so suddenly and so unexpectedly, for the moment completely upset his mental part, and left him to gaze in vacant wonder and awe upon the intruder. There was struggling in his mind a vague sense of incredulity—a sort of instinctive battling of reason against apparent facts—as, for instance, how could the man—the public accuser—have been away in Artois when nobody knew that he had been a day and a night away from Paris? But his landlady might have told an inquirer, had she been so inclined, that there had been three days when she had sworn to everybody who called that Robespierre was sick nigh unto death, and was just then sleeping; and yet, during all that time, she had known of him only that he was gone. But she was a woman to be trusted, and she held her revolutionary lodger as a being but little, if any, below the estate of the saints and angels. She literally worshiped him.

Perhaps two minutes passed after the newcomer entered the cell before a word was spoken. He took a seat upon the low pallet, and regarded the youth before him with a look of interest, and finally came the nodding, smiling question:

"Well, *mon brave*, did you think you should ever see me again?"

And then the whole truth had burst upon the prisoner beyond the reach of a doubt, and wonder paralyzed his tongue. Pretty soon the visitor spoke again:

"Monsieur le Comte, let us drop the slang of the day, and talk after the fashion of our fathers. I think you know me?"

"If you are Robespierre—yes."

"I am that most unfortunate man; and I have no doubt, if you had known me in the wood of Miremont, you would not have drawn your sword and risked your life to save me."

"You judge me wrongfully, sir. When I can see a weak man at the mercy of a villain who is physically stronger, and not render my assistance, I should despise myself. If you ask me: Does your name inspire me with horror, I frankly tell you, yes; and yet I would help you again, were you again in trouble, and the opportunity were mine, as it was then."

"But you did not then know me?"

"No."

"You had no suspicion?"

"Not the least."

"Yet, I did not tell you falsely in regard to my name. It is mine, as I gave it, though I gave but a fraction. And now, perhaps, you wonder why I am here?"

"I certainly cannot imagine."

"Then I will tell you. You have a servant named Martin Duval?"

"Yes," answered Louis, with a slight start, "and you owe to him something of your life, for his hand struck right stoutly in your behalf."

"I know it, Sir Count. Well, yesterday, before noon, Martin sought me in my private room. I recognized him, and admitted him. He is a reader of human character. He looked into my face, and felt that he might safely trust me. He had a friend with him whom he would like to bring in. He had, of his own accord, suspected who I was, and his friend had assured him. I sent him for his friend, and when his friend came, I found him to be none other than my chance companion of that night, Rupert of Redwood. Be sure they were

both disguised. Your man you might not have recognized at sight. Rupert had been in disguise since the murderous assault in the forest, for he had discovered that a deadly enemy was upon his track. He revealed himself to Martin. Did you get a secret letter from your servant ?"

"Yes."

"Well, when we had found Rupert of Redwood, and had heard something of a very wonderful story which that strange man had to tell, and after he had made sure that Robespierre was really the man whom his master had succored, he had resolved to hasten to Paris and demand from Robespierre the assistance which, as a human being, to say nothing of being a Christian, he ought to render. He wrote that note, and sent it to you, and then watched for your departure. He saw you set forth with your guard, and then he and Rupert dashed on in advance. Arrived in Paris they sought me alone. They cared not to speak to another. Martin Duval confessed that he had been under arrest, and had escaped— Hold ! He must tell you the story himself. And Rupert of Redwood felt no assurance of keeping his head on his shoulders a day after his presence in Artois was known. Of course, they were anxious to save themselves, and the way was open before them ; but, Sir Louis, they would not go and leave you behind. Martin had come to Paris either to save you or to die with you ; and for the saving he came to me. He dared his own fate in taking the bold step, and he was bolder still in telling me what was my duty under the circumstances. Louis de Liancourt, since the dawn of the Revolution, and the establishment of the present system not a human being—not one—has gone forth from this place save to death ! The sentence of the judge is final and absolute,

and there can be no appeal. Do you realize this? Have you thought of it?"

"Yes," said the count, in a hoarse whisper, clutching his fingers as he spoke. "I have realized it most fully."

"Ah, my friend, how little do we regard the events of to-day in their bearing upon things to come! Little did you think when, from the promptings of a generous heart, you drew your sword to afford protection to a suffering stranger, that you were building the bridge that should bear you over the darkest gulf that ever yawned at the foot of mortal man. Aye, Louis de Liancourt, I am come to prove to you that Robespierre can be grateful; and I swear to you that in coming here upon this errand I take my life in my hand. Were Marat or Danton to know that I did this thing, they would give me to the guillotine to-morrow. They are jealous of me now. They fear and hate me. So, you see, I must demand of you the most profound and entire secrecy."

The prisoner could hardly credit the evidence of his senses; but a look into the tensely drawn face of the man before him so strong and firm in its resolution, gave him assurance. He started forward and caught his visitor by the hand.

"My friend! My brother! Oh, Heaven bless you for this! I do not so much fear death; but to die such a death, and to feel that my young life is sworn away by a lying wretch, to whose tongue truth is a stranger—oh, it is terrible! And I had so much of promise in the future—so much to love and to prize—and even this the abandoned miscreant would steal from me and take to himself. Oh, if you can give me back my life, I will bless you to my dying day!"

Men of the French Assembly would not have known

Robespierre had they seen him at that moment. Never in the great chamber had such a look been upon his countenance. The better part of him was in active being, and his heart swelled to the size of the great and the true.

"Louis," he said, holding the youth's hand, "I will save you. Time is short, and but a few brief moments can we call our own. I shall go out and come back again. At midnight friends of my own selection will be posted as sentinels at the points you must pass in escape. There are but two of them, for the dungeons of the condemned are very near to the gate of the guillotine, where the death-carts take their loads. You will bless me if you can; but, at least, in the time to come, when you shall hear men denouncing the monster Robespierre, you will tell to them that he could be grateful, and that he could make a sacrifice for friendship. Tell them that he was what the times made him; and—and—ere that time shall come—the time when you can mention my name again in France—the head of Maximilien Robespierre will have fallen!"

"My friend—"

"Hold!" commanded the Jacobin chief, putting out his hand. "Let us say no more. I only know that I am doomed. Marat will be assassinated. He is a monster, and will fall by the hand of an enemy. I am feared more by my associates than by others, and shall fall by the hands of those who call themselves my friends.

"Now, Monsieur le Comte, you will be prepared. I shall return in half an hour. You will not be ashamed to wear a blouse and a red cap?"

"No. Since you offer me life and liberty, I should be ungrateful, indeed, did I allow a prejudice to lead me to dispute or oppose you."

"It is well. I will come in half an hour."

And thus speaking the man went out. Louis looked at his watch, and found that it lacked only ten minutes of midnight.

How that half-hour next succeeding was passed he could never tell. From the day, or the night, of his going-forth from that dreadful prison, he could never call to mind the events of those thirty minutes. His brain was in a whirl, and it was with the utmost exertion that he could restrain himself from wild and insane antics. He knew that the great bell in the tower of Nôtre Dame pealed forth the note of midnight, and like an echo of the bell sounded the cry of the sentinels through the vast structure, of: "All's well!" The only clear thought of the whole time was: "Have I dreamed all this?"

He paced the floor of his dungeon in agony as the dreadful possibility came to his mind. He had experienced things in dreams full as wonderful as that would be. Oh, was it, after all, only a dream?

He had asked himself this question for the twentieth time, when the door of his cell was opened, and Robespierre reappeared, and as his eyes rested upon the veritable man, a devout ejaculation of gratitude burst from his lips.

"Have you allowed yourself to fear that I would not keep my promise?" asked the Jacobin, as he marked the fervor of the ejaculation.

"Oh, no, no—not that!" cried Louis, quickly. "If you can believe it, I have really asked myself if I might not have dreamed this great event of good. I could hardly realize it."

"Well, well, you shall realize it very soon. And now let me say: What we do we must do quickly and must do boldly. There must be no hesitation—no faltering,

no fearing. Here are the clothes. You can put on the blouse over your coat, and your own cap you can hide in your bosom."

The count very soon donned the blouse, which was large enough to go on easily over his own garments, and though a sense of something like degradation came over him as he took the soiled red cap in his hand, he put it upon his head with a feeling of lively gratitude.

"There," pursued Robespierre, when the metamorphosis had been made, "now prepare yourself for further surprise. Call up all your resolution, and let not a thing which may occur move you to any outward demonstration. The two sentinels whom we are to pass will probably join you. Do not speak to them. Should you recognize them, make no sign. I have put those men upon post for a purpose. It has cost me an effort, be sure. To accomplish it I had to plan an expedition into the country for the regular prison guard, and then I had to plan still further to get these two upon the proper posts during these two hours. But thank fortune I have done it, and all is well. Only an accident unforeseen and extraordinary can mar my plot. Are you ready?"

"I am ready."

"Then here we speak our word of farewell. If you are wise you will make the best of your way from France. Stop for nothing, only to provide yourself with disguise, and that, I think, your friend has ready for you. Hush! If you were about to speak of the people at the Chateau d' Artois, I can relieve you. You may go that way, and I think the Lady Ninon will go with you to England. There, no more. Do not burden me. I can understand your gratitude, and I believe it is deep and true."

"It is—it is! Oh, God and the good angels bless you, now and evermore!"

"Amen! Now, monsieur, let us move on."

The candles were extinguished, and then taking up his lantern, the Jacobin chief led the way out from the dungeon, closing the door and shooting the bolts into their deep sockets.

As we have already said, the distance to the stand of the guillotine carts was not far; only through the narrow, vaulted passage to a circular hall, across that to another passage, at the end of which was a heavy door, massive almost beyond description, and guarded by a sentinel. The sentinel was a man of medium size, apparently a little past the middle age, and every inch a soldier. As he saw the lantern approaching and saw who bore it, he commenced at once to withdraw the bolts of the door, and by the time the prisoner and his conductor came up all was clear. A whisper from Robespierre, and the ponderous door swung slowly open, care having been taken to oil its hinges, and the two adventurers passed through, the sentinel reclosing the door behind him and following the others.

A little farther and they came to the outer gate, the wicket of which stood ajar. Here was another sentinel, and as the light of the lantern fell upon his face our hero recognized the well-known features of Martin.

But no word was spoken, only, upon this discovery, Louis turned and looked into the face of the first sentinel, whom he now recognized. There could be no mistake. It was the second man of the forest conflict, Rupert of Redwood! And now the count could understand what Martin had meant by what he had written of the friends he had found.

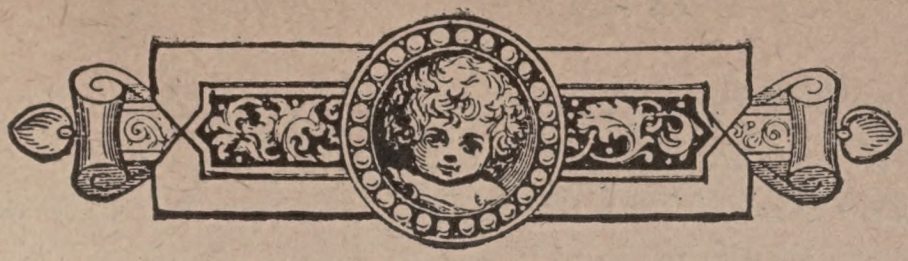
As the wicket was pushed open, Robespierre caught the count's hand.

"Adieu, Louis de Liancourt. When you hear of the death of Robespierre, remember him kindly. Hush! Not a word! *Adieu!*"

Louis could not resist the impulse. With a spasmodic motion he raised the hand of Robespierre to his lips, and, in a moment more, Martin Duval and Rupert of Redwood led him away. In the dark or the lighted streets, crowded or empty, two men wearing the uniform of the National Guard, and a man in a blue blouse and red cap, might go where they pleased.

On the following morning there was consternation at the Prison of the Conciergerie. A prisoner had escaped, and two sentinels had gone off with him. But no noise was made. It was not policy. How the thing had been done was a profound mystery, to the solving of which no possible clue could be obtained. Those in authority dared not let the mishap be known; and where there were hundreds being carted away daily from the death-gate to the guillotine, the absence of one—and one hardly known by name in Paris—would not be discovered by the multitude.

Meantime, three men, deeply and adroitly disguised, were making the best of their way toward the northern departments, and be sure they had strange and interesting stories to tell to one another as they pursued their earnest course.



CHAPTER XVII.

GLEAM OF LIGHT INTO A DARK PLACE.

Gideon de Bar and his son had returned from Paris, jubilant. They had heard the fiat of the court pronounced, with Danton himself presiding, and had seen Louis de Liancourt led away to the prison of the condemned.

Gideon de Bar, with all his ugliness and grossness, and possible cruelty, did not care to see the youthful count beheaded. He thought to himself that in the time to come, as he grew older, and cares weighed upon him, the memory of the scene might haunt him. And yet he desired to be absolutely and entirely assured, and to this end he ventured to address the majesty of the law itself—the Minister Danton. He asked him, was there, or could there be, any possible way by which Louis de Liancourt's life could be spared.

The minister looked at him in surprise; and he answered, with the grand emphasis peculiar to him:

"When the sun stops in his daily course, then will the judgment of my court be reversed! When you behold a planet blotted out from existence by sudden annihilation, then you may ask if one condemned has been saved to life! But, my friend, of all who have

been this day condemned—and there have been more than a hundred—the Count de la Capelle is the very last who should be suffered to go free. He dies as sure as the morrow dawns!"

That was enough, and with such assurance the Mayor of Arras had returned to his home, prepared now to make the final move for the grand possession he had so long aimed at. A dangerous obstacle had been removed, and if there was another obstacle in existence he must strike before it could present itself. While he was hurrying to put the train in motion his son asked him why he was so anxious.

"What difference can a few weeks make?" Gaston asked. The truth was, Gaston de Bar's heart inclined strongly toward a girl of Arras with whom he had long been on intimate terms, and to whom he had given a sacred pledge of his love and his faith. This girl had heard of the proposed marriage of her lover with the Lady Ninon, and she swore terrible vengeance in the event of the consummation. This made Gaston hesitate, and he asked what difference a few weeks could make.

"What difference!" repeated the father, in a flash of passion. "My soul, it may make all the difference in the world. You may lose the prize by delay."

"But I see not how. Have you not the marquis completely under your thumb?"

The burly mayor walked across the apartment, and when he came back there was a look of strange import upon his face. He laid his hand upon his son's shoulder, and, in low, solemn tones, said:

"Gaston, there is a danger you know not of. I tried to remove it, and failed. A man lives who has power to work us great harm; but the marriage once consummated sets his power at rest. Great heavens, will

you falter at this point? Is it Rachel St. Martin you fear?"

The son bent his head upon his hand, and, for a little time, sat in profound meditation. At length he looked up and said:

"My respected parent, Rachel is the girl that makes the hitch, but she must not stand between me and fortune. I did not know there was another danger beside the meddling of the count; but since there is, and you say it is imminent, the girl must be silenced. If she will not listen to reason, we will try the effect of a complaint before our court. I think I can make her talk treason to the Revolution."

The old man was delighted. A human heart was no more to him than the dust beneath his feet. That his son should wrong poor Rachel St. Martin did not trouble him in the least; and if he could cast off the responsibility by inflicting a still greater wrong—a wrong that meant ruin, utter and terrible—he would join in the work readily, and feel thankful for success.

It was in the afternoon when this conversation took place. That evening Gaston called upon Rachael St. Martin, a bright-eyed, happy-hearted grisette of the better walks of life; an honest, truthful girl, whose only heritage was an estate of health and beauty. He spent half an hour with her, and left her in the uttermost depths of agony. He had had the heart to threaten her if she made him trouble, that he would drag her before the criminal court for the trial of political offenses. Poor girl! She knew too well what that meant. She had seen four of her own dear friends given up to the guillotine within a month for offenses of speech not one whit more contumacious than Gaston could swear against her.

She submitted with bowed head and throbbing heart.

If she thought of anything beyond, she did not speak of it.

So Gaston de Bar was enabled to report to his father that the way was clear.

"Then," said Gideon, speaking as though the last doubt had been cleared away and the last weight lifted, "on the morrow we will repair to the castle and have the business finished. I obtained all the necessary papers before we went to Paris, even to the signing of the contract of marriage and the settlement of property by the marquis. We will take our clergyman with us. Oh, my boy, what a leap upward! Can you realize it? Can you imagine that you are to be master of the grand old castle of Saint Jean?"

Gaston's eyes sparkled and his face glowed. It was truly a grand prospect, and he was ready to profit by the opportunity. Really, since titles of nobility were to be abolished throughout the kingdom, his estate would be as grand as the grandest, and his position as high as the highest.

* * * * * * *

It was toward the close of this same day—the day of the discussion and the plotting in the office of the mayor of Arras—that Ninon d' Artois, with Blanchette in company, burst into the library where the marquis sat. She was alive with intense excitement, and her breath came in labored throes.

"Oh, papa! Papa! Such a wonderful thing has happened! Oh, you shall take millions upon millions of money and go to Paris and help Louis out of trouble. It is his money, but he will not care."

Sir Philip regarded the girl with blank astonishment.

"In the name of mercy, child, what are you talking of?"

"Blanchette," cried our heroine breathlessly, at the

same time sinking into a seat, "do you tell him. Tell him the whole, from beginning to end. He knows about the papers as a whole, but not about this one in particular. Tell him ! Tell him!"

Upon that the marquis turned to the maid who, when she had comfortably seated herself, spoke clearly and promptly as follows :

"Your lordship remembers the papers which Sir Louis gave into my lady's keeping. They were all of them old, and some of them very, very old. Among them were parchments and scraps of fine white bark, on which was writing. While looking over the papers, which the count told her to do, she came across one which attracted her attention. It was a parchment, curiously folded, and proved to be a statement made by one of the old and powerful counts of la Capelle who lived in the fourteenth century—a Sir Benedict de la Capelle."

"You remember, papa," interposed Ninon at this point, "that such was the old family name of the house. The De Liancourts came in with the ascent to the throne of the Bourbons."

The marquis remembered, and Blanchette went on :

"Well, Ninon showed the parchment to me. It had been written during the terrible uprising in Picardy and Artois of the Jacquerie under the lead of the renowned and bloody Caillet. The Count Benedict had been marked for destruction, and in anticipation of that event he gathered up his gold and jewels to the amount of a million of crowns, and buried the whole beneath the stone floor of a dungeon of his castle. On the inside of that parchment we found the directions for finding the buried treasure."

At this point the marquis interrupted the narrative.

"I remember very well," he said, "to have read the

story of Sir Benedict. He was one of the bravest and stoutest knights of King John of Valois. He was killed by the Jacquerie, and his castle ransacked, but not an ounce of gold nor a jewel was found. But—go on, Blanchette."

"Well, my lord, fearing you would laugh at us if we proposed to you to go and search, Ninon persuaded old Nicholas and Marius to go, and when Marius had seen the parchment, he called two of his best and stoutest men to bear him company. We went to the ruin which the dreadful Jacobins have made. Ah! If they could have known what was beneath their feet! But they did not know. We went, and we found the dungeon. It was beneath the northern tower of the old keep—a great, square vault, away down in the darkness, where man had not rested for ages. We found the stone which was described by the old count, and Marius and his men lifted it with iron bars. And there, my lord, in four iron-bound chests, which axes easily opened, we found the gold and the jewels. Oh!"

"Oh!" broke in Ninon, starting to her feet. "Come and look! I have had the chests brought to the castle, and they are in the great hall. They belong to our dear Louis, and you must use them for him, if you can. Come, papa. Oh, such a grand sight!"

And so it proved. The marquis found that Blanchette had not overstated. Of gold and precious stones —especially of diamonds, rubies and emeralds—there was wealth more than Sir Philip had ever before seen gathered in one collection. It was wonderful; almost too wonderful for belief, and yet the whole thing was as simple as could be. By a chance seeming almost miraculous, Ninon had found the key to the vast wealth, the disappearance of which, more than four hundred years agone, had mystified the people, and which had

been a profound mystery ever since. He knew, from written and printed accounts, that months upon months of labor had been expended, first and last, in fruitless search.

And now it had been found. And it rightly belonged to Louis de Liancourt—every part and particle of it. Would it be possible to use any part of it for its owner's good? They must wait and see. On the morrow, the marquis would investigate. For the present the wealth should be carried into one of the strong store-rooms, and a trusty guard set over it.

And so it was done.

And that night, before she retired, Ninon bent upon her knees and offered up a fervent prayer for her dear lover.

And how was it with the marquis? Ah! He was beginning to understand the human capacity for suffering, and to believe that mental torture could sooner darken life than physical.

After Ninon left him to seek her pillow, a belated courier arrived from Arras, bearing papers and letters. One of the papers was a dingy, dirty sheet, the paper coarse, and the printing abominable, entitled *The Constitution.* Seeing that it was from Paris, and that the date was recent, he hurried away with it to the library. He fortified himself with a draught of wine, and then sat down with the lamp at his elbow.

No need to ask the character of the paper. Its complexion betrayed it. In it the marquis found the thing he had anticipated—the thing crushed and broke him utterly. In the very first column of the very first page of the paper were found the records of the court and the guillotine, and there, leading all the rest, he found the name—"Louis de Liancourt, formerly styled Count de la Capelle!"

He read ; and his eyes remained fixed upon the horror-weighted paragraph, until the letters ran together, and faded from his sight. So he sat for half an hour, when he arose slowly and painfully from his chair, and staggered away to his chamber. He folded the paper into as narrow a compass as possible, and hid it away under his bedding, and then cast himself upon his couch.

Through that night Ninon slept sweetly and dreamed of pleasant things.

The marquis dared not sleep. Such frightful specters visited his sleeping moments that he feared to close his eyes ; and all night long he kept the company of the great Horror that had come to him in the dingy, dirty paper from the capital.

The morning dawned, and Sir Philip was thankful for the first gray beams of light. The darkness was oppressive. He arose and performed a hasty, careless toilet, and then went down into the store-room, where he found Marius himself on duty, and the treasure safe. The lieutenant had taken the precaution of putting a seal upon the covers of the chests.

"My lord," the devoted officer cried, with enthusiasm, "do you realize what a mine of wealth is here collected? Ninon assures me that it might well and completely furnish the coffers of a king. Ah, let us hope it may help our dear young lord to liberty and life !"

"Has Ninon been here this morning?" asked the host.

"Yes, my lord. She could not rest until she had come and assured herself that all was safe."

Sir Philip said no more. He could not meet Ninon at that time. He must compose himself. So he strode away into the outer court, where he remained until

summons to the morning meal was sounded. He sent word that he was very busy, and should eat no breakfast, and then he went and shut himself up in his library.

He was in the library, pacing to and fro, battling with the horrors that were crowding upon him. From that dark and dismal hour of the long-gone years, when he had stricken down Juan de St. Denis in the forest, to this present moment, it seemed as though there had been a steady and persistent accumulation of evil upon his devoted head. And through it all there had been but one thing of brightness—but one single joy—the gentle, beautiful girl he called daughter. And now—now—the Horror was to fall upon her!

Oh, would it come? Would Gideon de Bar come and claim the prize? Was there no way of escape? Louis was dead, the last of his name! No one else—none but himself, if he could secure it in season—could claim the vast wealth that now lay stored in his castle. If he could take that, and get beyond the French border! He stopped with this thought in his mind, and buried his face in his hands.

He was aroused by the tramp of horses' feet and the sound of carriage-wheels. He went to the window, and looked out upon the landing before the great porch, where he saw, alighting from their saddles, Gaston de Bar and a dozen stout troopers, while from a gilded coach alighted the Mayor of Arras, and a man whom the marquis recognized as a loud-mouthed dissenting clergyman, a follower of Diderot, whose doctrines were clearly infidel. Could there be any mistake as to the meaning of this? This miserable man called to mind the marriage contract which he had signed and given into De Bar's hand, and now he knew the final scene of the dreadful drama was at hand.

The visitors were ushered into the library, where the noble host, with all the strength he could command, stood and received them. When he finally sank into his seat he could not have stood longer. His limbs had grown weak and paralyzed, and his heart throbbed so violently as to interfere with his breathing.

"My son, the Intendent of Police, you know, my lord," said Gideon, bowing with disgusting familiarity. "But you will allow me to present my very dear friend, the Reverend Valentine de Tigny."

The proud man's heart sank with shame and bitter humiliation as he took the promptly proffered hand of the man thus introduced, for he recognized by the name a wretch of St. Pol, who had been a tricky lawyer under the king, but who, under the Revolutionary government, and through favor of the Jacobin Club, had been armed with sacerdotal powers and privileges. And he must take the hand of this degraded man, and accept him into fellowship, for the time, at least. It was hard; but ah, there was harder to come.

When the marquis had sunk down upon his seat, Gideon de Bar drew a seat near to him and spoke. His words were closely and slowly spoken, each one bearing its share of meaning, and together bearing a meaning not to be mistaken. He so spoke that nothing was left to conjecture:

"Philip d' Artois, after all these years of understanding between us, it would be folly for me to waste time in either offering or listening to argument of any kind. I have brought with me the contract of marriage between Gaston de Bar and Ninon d 'Artois, signed and and sealed; I have the license, procured long ago, and now countersigned by the minister of justice; and I have brought with me a clergyman who has the authority to bind the nuptial bonds. On my part all is ready,

and even on your part I have provided for all save the simple act of producing the only party wanting to fulfill the contract. Will you bring her, and have the business done with at once and forever? Mark you, we wait for the Lady Ninon. If she does not come, a certain paper which I hold comes forth to the light of day; the guardsmen here under my command will bear you back to Arras, and in four-and-twenty hours your head will fall. You know that Louis de Liancourt has paid the penalty of incurring my wrath. Will you try the same?"

Why continue the scene? The poor man was broken and crushed, and it was only a question of time as to his surrender. Gideon de Bar held him in abject bondage, body and soul, and his life was suspended by a thread, which a breath from De Bar could snap asunder.

With wild eyes and bated breath, the girl, Blanchette, flew to the presence of her mistress. She had overheard the conversation in the library, and knew that Philip d' Artois was conquered. In hurried, frenzied words she told the terrible story.

"The priest is here—a miserable, wicked infidel. Gaston de Bar is here, fresh from the pest-holes of Arras; and I saw the marriage contract, bearing *his* name and *yours*, and also bearing the seal and signiture of your father."

Here the girl paused, and, after a time, with a spasmodic burst of painful emotion, she added:

"And—oh! They have taken the life of our brave Louis de Liancourt!"

A loud cry broke from Ninon's lips, and she clutched her hands in mid-air. She was asking how her lover had died, when the lieutenant, Marius, entered, and gave to her a folded paper. There was something in

his face—something in his eloquent silence—that suddenly inspired her. She caught the paper and opened it. She read, and a cry of joy burst from her quivering lips.

"Safe—safe—safe! He is alive, and is near at hand! My own, my darling Louis! See! Marius, read it. And then make haste. Oh, gather your men as quickly as possible! Gather all the true and faithful of the castle and call in the true and the loyal from without! I know not what he will do, but I have faith. Oh, Heaven, help the right!"

The lieutenant took the missive and read it. It was from Louis de Liancourt. He had followed Gideon de Bar from Arras, and knew all about his plans. Men enough must be gathered to overcome the mayor's force. Let that be done quickly and then wait for him. He would tell all else when he had opportunity. "Marius is your man. Give the work into his hands; and God speed him!"

"It shall be done!" said Marius; and without waiting longer he dashed away. He knew his men, and knew just where to put his hand upon them; and he had no fear of the Jacobin troopers, now that a noble leader, of heart and courage, was to take the command.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEAVING THE SHADOW BEHIND—CONCLUSION.

Like a guilt-burdened, sorely frightened criminal, Philip d'Artois appeared before Ninon in her own private apartment. She could not help asking herself the question, as she looked upon him, how she had come to have so brave a heart with a father so timid and so craven ; for she knew that he cringed beneath the hand of Gideon de Bar. But she was soon to have light. The marquis had come to tell her the story that she must hear in order to understand why she was called upon to make the sacrifice now demanded. He asked her to be patient and to listen.

And then he told to her the story which he had told to Louis, and which we heard in all its details at the time. He told all save the one important fact of her true parentage. He told all the rest without telling her that she was the daughter of the man whom he had accidentally slain in the forest. Her emotions as she listened can be better imagined than described. One thing she saw clearly : she saw how, in the present condition of national affairs, the marquis was com-

pletely at the mercy of this wicked enemy. Had she not looked for the coming of Louis, it is impossible to say what she might have done. While she believed the man before her to be her father, she might make any sacrifice to save his life; for he had been very, very kind to her always.

The marquis arose from his seat and took a few turns across the floor. His frame shook, and it was plain to be seen that a mighty struggle was going on within. At length a light broke over his face, and he stopped and laid his hand upon the maiden's shoulder.

"Ninon! Dear, blessed girl! I will be coward and craven no more. All these years I have acted a miserable part, but now that the dreadful ordeal is presented, I will not ask you to suffer. You shall not. It is no part of your duty. Oh, my child! Let me call you so just this once. My child—my child! You shall know the whole truth, and I will suffer all that is to be suffered—not you! Oh, no—no! But, Ninon, oh, I do ask you to love me if you can, while I live, but I will no longer live a lie. You—you—are not my child! Hush! Hear me to the end. You are not of my blood. I found you fatherless and motherless and without a home, and I took you to my home and to my heart; and before God, the one only pure joy of my life since that hour has been your love and your dear voice. Ninon—your father was the man who fell in the forest by my hand. As true as Heaven, I meant not to harm him. He was angry and furious and fell through his own blindness. Oh, do not—do not hate me! But—you know the truth. Now let Gideon de Bar do his worst. He may crush and ruin me, but you shall not suffer. Ah, I feel prouder in this hour than I have felt for years. Ninon, you are free from the villain's wicked plot of marriage, and I will bear the conse-

quences. You will at least remember this to my credit."

Ninon's thoughts flowed rapidly and clearly. In the midst of such wondrous things as were now crowding their effects upon her, she could not give way to overpowering emotion. She must hold herself strongly up for the great event for which Marius had gone to make preparation. A brief pause, during which the blood all left her face and came back again, and then she advanced and threw her arms around Sir Philip's neck.

"Papa! Oh, I will call you so always, for I know you have loved me, and I know you did not mean to harm my father—papa, I am glad you have had the courage to do what you have done. You have won my love forever. Oh, it was brave—it was grand—for you to offer yourself when you believed you could have given me as an acceptable offering. You were brave, papa, and by that deed you have won back everything. Louis is not dead. He is close at hand, with a force sufficient, with our own, to overcome Gideon de Bar and his men. And he says he will save you. He bids me tell you that the great burden of your life shall be lifted. Perhaps you know what he means."

But the marquis could not guess; he could only press the dear girl to his bosom, and bless her for her noble heart and spirit. Truly, he had resolved to yield up his life rather than consign her to the misery of union with Gaston de Bar; but if he could be rescued, and she be saved at the same time, it would be a blessing beyond compare—a blessing he had not dared to hope for.

They stood thus, the marquis holding Ninon to his bosom, when Blanchette came in. She had been sent by the Mayor of Arras to summon them immediately to

his presence. If they did not come to him, he must find them wherever they might be.

Now that he had resolved to pursue the only manly course, Sir Philip did not so much fear his enemy. Since he had resolved to surrender his life if necessary, he did not so much prize it above his honor; and he was ready to go.

But Ninon was the bravest, after all—perhaps, because she had by far the most to hope for.

"Let us go," she said, "and beard him where he stands. They cannot make me a wife against my will, and before he can wreak vengeance upon you, he must arrest you and carry you to Arras. Come—I do not fear him. Oh, Heaven speed my true lover!"

They went down, hand in hand, to the library, Blanchette bearing them company, and there they found Gideon de Bar, his son Gaston, the Rev. Valentine de Tigny, and two officers of the National Guard, the latter to act as witnesses, either to the marriage or to any other matter which might be presented.

Gaston's eyes sparkled when he beheld the dazzling beauty. His father saw and understood.

"Ah, my boy," the latter whispered, "what say you to that?"

"It is stupendous. Let the marriage go on."

Gideon gently put the his son aside, and stepped before him, being in season to meet the marquis and his fair charge in the center of the apartment, where he bowed with one of the blandest of smiles, and then raised himself in the very grandest posture of self-sufficient dignity.

"My dear lady, it gives me the greatest, the supremest and the most heart-moving pleasure to see you. I am glad you come looking so well. Your father has told you our errand?"

Ninon cast upon the man a look of scorn so intense and so entirely possessing every feature of her mobile face, that he could not but see it.

"The marquis has told me," she said, with proud defiance in her tones, "the object of your visit; and I have now to tell you that your errand will be fruitless —that is, if you think to make me the wife of your son."

For a brief space the dark-faced man stood like one not ready to credit the evidence of his own senses. He took a step back, gasped for breath, then gazed, first upon the girl before him, and then upon the marquis.

"How?" he finally demanded, clutching his hands in the empty air. "Do you refuse to give your hand to my son?"

"Most emphatically and positively, yes, monsieur!"

"Philip d' Artois," the mayor shouted, turning upon the host a look of mingled rage and vengeance, "do you submit to this?"

"Gideon de Bar," answered the marquis, with wonderful calmness, "it was my own proposition. If you have vengeance to execute, let it fall upon me—not upon her. She objects to the match, and I shall not urge it."

De Bar literally frothed at the mouth. A few moments he stood so beside himself with rage as to be unable to speak; but at length he found his voice, and with a fierce oath and a stamp of the foot, he said:

"Poor fools! You know not what a dreadful fate you are tempting. Had it been my pleasure, I could have had you at this moment where the Count Louis de Liancourt has finished his headstrong career. Girl, do you know where that man is?"

"I can guess very nearly, sir."

The man started again, this time in simple astonishment. What did the lady mean? Certainly she had been told; and if she had loved the count, how could she speak so calmly with the shadow of his terrible death still upon her?"

"'Can guess!'" he repeated. "You know that he has ended his life upon the guillotine?"

"*Not quite, my very excellent friend!*" pronounced a voice at the entrance.

De Bar looked around, and saw—good heavens! Could he believe his eyes—*Count Louis de Liancourt!*

Ninon saw, and flew to the embrace of her dear lover.

The marquis saw, and with murmured thanks to Heaven, he extended his hand.

"Not quite, Gideon de Bar," added the unexpected presence, with an arm around Ninon, and the other still in the possession of Sir Philip. "I think you will admit that my own testimony, given in person, ought to be conclusive. No, no, my dear, good, most excellent friend; though you did your best, yet still I am able to greet you once more."

De Bar was not more astonished than were his son and the two guardsmen. They had all been to Paris, and had been present in court when the count was condemned to death. The meaning of what they saw was beyond their comprehension. They were inclined to think of necromancy and magic. They could think of nothing else.

But Gideon had the most need of self-control, and he set his thoughts at work. Here was the prisoner of the Conciergerie free, and he simply knew that no such thing as pardon or reprieve had been granted. The count could be retaken. That could be done at any time, so long as he only now took the precaution to

keep an official eye upon him. His first need was to make sure of his hold upon the marquis, and, if possible, to yet shake the resolution of the maiden. With this end in view he drew a folded paper from his pocket—a pocket against his bosom—and turned with it to the noble host. The paper was old and soiled, and one of the soiled places—a broad, dismal smooch—was evidently of blood.

"Philip d'Artois," he said, "you behold this paper. You know its contents. If the hand of the Lady Ninon be not given to my son within the next ten minutes, this paper shall be given to the minister of justice. Do you know what that means?"

"I know," said the marquis, bravely, though he could not hide the painful stab at his heart, "that in that paper is a lie, and though it may be made to weigh against me in the courts of men, I dare carry it to the eternal Tribunal, where every life must finally be judged."

"Oho, you are growing brave, Sir Philip. But do you consider? Think well what you do. Let me but whisper of the contents of the paper to the minister, and where is your head?"

The marquis gasped for breath and was about to speak, when Louis de Liancourt interposed.

"Gideon de Bar, that paper which you hold professes to be the dying declaration—the *ante-mortem* testimony—of Col. Juan de Saint Denis?"

"It *is* the dying declaration of that unfortunate man," retorted De Bar, furiously.

"And its statement," pursued Louis, very quietly, "is that the said Juan de Saint Denis fell, mortally wounded, by the hand of Philip d'Artois, Marquis of St. Omer and Baron of St. Jean?"

De Bar was surprised at the marvelous coolness with

which a friend of the marquis dragged the contents of that paper to the light, but he evidently thought it could only be bravado, and he was not to be browbeaten.

"Aye," he responded, with intense malevolence of expression, "and that the assassination was a premeditated deed, deliberately and wickedly accomplished!"

"Oh, Gideon de Bar, how can you look honest men in the face and thus swear away the character, and perhaps the life of an innocent fellow-being? You know that the whole thing is false from beginning to end. Silence! Let me tell the story in my own way."

"Go on, sir. I should be pleased to hear what you have to say."

"I have this to say," went on the count with rising voice and flashing eyes. "You had sworn that you would be revenged upon the man who had won for a wife the woman that you had dared love. Juan de Saint Denis had also loved that same woman, and he, too, was angry. About that time Saint Denis, then in command of the citadel of Arras, had appropriated to his own use large sums of money belonging to government—he had gambled the money away—and for it he was dishonorably dismissed from the service, and his knightly rank torn from him. While he was smarting under the fell stroke, well-nigh insane with passion and fury, you went to him and told him that Philip d'Artois had betrayed him to the officers of justice. Hold! Hear me through! You went to him and told him that, and you knew you were lying. You did, in truth, hate Saint Denis almost as bitterly as you hated D'Artois. You feared them both, and so hated them both. You told to the colonel that falsehood, and then, while he was beside himself with passion, you concocted the scheme which you put in operation. Knowing Saint Denis to be one of the most expert swordsmen

in the kingdom, you proposed to him that he should lie in wait for Philip d' Artois in the forest, and when he met him, that he should force him into combat. With his known skill he could hold Sir Philip at his mercy ; he could allow himself to be slightly wounded, and then pretend that the hurt was mortal. You, Gideon de Bar, were to be near at hand, but unseen. When you saw Saint Denis fall, you were to rush up, cry out that people were coming, push the marquis into hiding, and then kneel at the fallen man's side, with paper, pen and ink in your possession, and write down what you pleased, as though it came from the lips of a dying man.

"And, Gideon de Bar, it was accomplished as you proposed. Juan de Saint Denis believed that Sir Philip had meanly betrayed him to ruin and disgrace, and, filled with wine and passion, he was ready for vengeance. He had already planned to flee from his country, and you had promised, if he helped in the plot to a successful ending, that you would let him have the money. He met Philip d' Artois in the deep wood ; he forced a quarrel upon him ; and by his supreme mastery of the sword he played with his antagonist as he pleased—and he was enabled to do this more easily as Sir Philip did not seek to harm him. Saint Denis fairly fell upon Philip's point, and then sank down upon the sward. And then followed the miserable drama as you had planned. Holding the marquis in terror by pretending that many witnesses were coming, you forced him into hiding ; and in the end, when people were in truth advancing toward the spot, you told him if he would crawl away to his home and keep quiet, you would take care of the body and keep his secret.

"Oh, wretch ! Wretch ! With what demoniac man-

agement did you carry the work to its consummation! By the promise of large sums of money, to enable Saint Denis to go and live abroad, you persuaded him to put on the habiliments of the grave, and to go into a coffin with his face whitened, that a sufficient number of witnesses might see him there. Then you put a log of wood into that casket and fastened it up, and so buried it; and while the funeral services in memory of Juan de Saint Denis were being performed, he himself was on his way to Germany, leaving you to hold Sir Philip in the bondage of terror for your own base, inhuman purposes; and leaving you, also, when Sir Philip had taken his—Juan's—infant daughter to his home and his heart, and reared her, in beauty and goodness, to womanhood, to fix your evil eye upon her.

"Aye—and your sin ends not here. Oh, hear me through. I have but this single statement to make: When, at length, Juan de Saint Denis, having learned of your treachery in falsely declaring that Sir Philip had betrayed him, and of the love which that man bore to his child, and, furthermore, trusting that his misuse of the public money might be no longer laid up against him—when, under these circumstances, he ventured to return to his native country, you chanced to see him, and to know him, and fearing that his presence might interfere with your grand scheme of aggrandizement, you set hired assassins upon his track, and—"

Up to this point Gideon de Bar had been variously affected, and had allowed the narrator to hold him silent. He had been through all possible grades of fear and terror, but had not entirely lost the look of bold effrontery from his brazen face. Now, however, he burst the self-imposed bonds, and stamped

upon the floor with a force that shook the furniture.

"Liar! Trickster! Charlatan! For your own base treason you shall yet find your reward, but for the falsehoods you have here so glaringly strung together, I can only despise you. Your impudence is amazing! From beginning to ending you have lied! Lied! Lied!"

"But I say, Gideon de Bar, that from beginning to ending he has told the truth!"

At the sound of this strange voice, deep and strong and solemn, all eyes were turned to the entrance, where stood the man we have known as Rupert of Redwood.

"Aye, Gideon de Bar," he added, as he advanced into the room, "the count has spoken truth in every word, and has saved me the trouble of speaking a single word in explanation of my appearance."

"Yes," whispered Louis, in answer to a question from Ninon. "He is truly your father. I have known it since he helped to save me from the death-grasp of the guillotine."

Juan de St. Denis—for now we may so know him—heard the remark and turned to the speakers. Ninon saw the light and the warmth of a great love in his handsome, manly face—oh, a face which she thought very beautiful—and under an impulse entirely involuntary she took a step toward him and put out both her hands.

"Oh, my child—my child! You will divide your daughter's love and give to me a part?"

"My father! Oh, my father!"

And she returned his kiss and felt at home in his arms; and Sir Philip was not pained. No—as the first surge of utter astoundment at the unexpected appear-

ance of the man whom he had so long thought dead—and dead by his own hand—passed away—when he had assured himself that it was not an apparition, but a presence of flesh and blood that stood before him, with Ninon in his arms, a cry of gladness burst from his lips, and he started forward and grasped him by the hand.

"Yes, Sir Philip, it is I, alive and in the flesh. At some future time I shall claim your forgiveness, but now we have other business, if I mistake not."

"Aye!" yelled Gideon de Bar, with a jump that shook the very walls. The effect upon him of St. Denis's appearance had not been so astounding as it had been upon the marquis, for he had seen the man before, and had set upon him the two assassins from whose bludgeons Louis had rescued him. When he had heard the voice, and recognized the living man in the door-way, he had for a little time been fear-stricken and appalled; but his senses had returned to him, and he still had power, he thought.

"Aye!" he yelled, as he leaped into the air, and came down with a crashing thud, "you will find other business in plenty if *I* mistake not. Officers, behold two fugitives from the Conciergerie! They have been tried and condemned—or, one has been, and the other should have been. Also, Philip d'Artois is traitor to the government of the Assembly! They are your prisoners! Gaston, you are Intendent of Police. Go and call the guards. Oho! We shall see what manner of business we have on hand."

At this juncture Louis de Liancourt turned and whispered to Martin, who quietly slipped from the room, and on the next instant he drew his sword and put himself in the way of Gaston.

"No, no, Sir Intendent, it is not our pleasure that

you should leave just yet. Pooh! Do not draw your sword! See—here are friends whom you might force into doing you an injury."

As the count spoke the large door communicating with the main hall was thrown open, and the lieutenant of the castle appeared, leading a full score of stout men, all thoroughly armed.

"Gaston de Bar," our hero said, as his men came filing in by double column, "the guardsmen whom you left without are in safe custody, securely ironed and locked up away from harm. You and your attendants are to be treated in like manner. You can surrender quietly, or you can force us to draw the sword!"

Then to the lieutenent:

"Marius, there are your prisoners. You know your duty."

"Oh, not me—not me!" cried the reverend hypocrite, quaking with terror.

"Only for a little while, my very good friend. We do not care to have you running at liberty just yet. Be quiet, and no harm shall come to you."

It was a bitter, oh, an agonizing pass for the Mayor of Arras and for his son! Only one short hour before they had regarded themselves as lords paramount of St. Jean and St. Omer, and perhaps of Miremont and la Capelle; and now what were they? Oh, it was painful! They cursed and swore, and the father vowed vengeance sufficient, could it have been executed, to have satisfied the maws of the Revolution. But there was no help for it. Resistance would be simple suicide. They were not anxious to throw their precious lives away, so, having been assured that no bodily harm should be inflicted upon them, they suffered themselves to be disarmed and led away.

And thus, as the hammer of the great bell in the

castle tower, answering to the onward motion of the clock, struck the hour of ten in the forenoon, Gideon de Bar and his posse, together with every man in and about the *château* who was not known to be loyal to the true master, were safely locked up beyond their power to escape until a friendly hand might set them free. Bread and water in plenty was furnished, and the lieutenant, as he closed the doors upon them, bade them make themselves at home.

The next movement of Marius was destined to bring results not contemplated by him. Of course, a trustworthy man must be left behind who, at the proper time, should set the Jacobin prisoners free; and he must be one upon whom the irate rascals would not vent their spite. At first he had thought of a woman, but he chanced to remember that at the lodge of the porter was sojourning an old priest—uncle to the porter's wife. His thought was thus directed by seeing the aged churchman slowly crossing one of the inner courts, and the moment he saw him, he marked him as the man he needed. He went out and explained to Father Trajan what was wanted, and the latter, with frank and cheerful humility, agreed to do the work required; and Marius led the priest into the keep to introduce him to the company.

They found the servants just bringing, or dragging, the four great chests of treasure into the hall. Louis had been informed of the wonderful discovery which Ninon had made, and had looked upon the marvelous wealth. The old story of the concealing of the treasure was familiar to him, but he had, with others, given the subject the go-by, believing, either that the whole thing was a myth, or that the buried wealth had been found long ago, and secretly carried away. However, here it was—it was all his own—a fortune greater by

far than any count of the later centuries had possessed; and it had come to him at a time when its value was a thousand times enhanced—the one thing needful to their comfort and support in a land of strangers.

"Really," said the count, who had found tears welling up in view of this priceless blessing, "can we doubt that the Good Father in Heaven has vouchsafed to us His especial care and protection! Think of the events of the few past days. Is it not wonderful? And here is our good Father Trajan. Is it not fitting, before we depart, that we should join with him in a devout service of thanksgiving to the Giver of all good!"

"Yes," said St. Denis, who had also seen the priest; "but before that service I propose another—one which I deem not only proper, but necessary. We wish to go hence fitly prepared for all the possibilities of the journey before us. There is one of our number who now owes a divided allegiance. This dear girl is in a quandary. I see it plainly. She knows not which of the two fathers she shall obey. Let us lift her into a new and blessed life, where love and duty shall find an object single and supreme, and where the rights of paternity can no longer clash. Sir Philip, what say you?"

"With all my heart, dear Juan. Yes, yes; so let it be."

No need to ask Louis de Liancourt; no need to ask Ninon. For long years their hearts had been one, and now, very briefly, but yet formally and devoutly, the priest put their hands together, and spoke the magic words which made them one indeed, and for life.

When the marquis moved forward to salute the newly-wedded pair, he was shaken by an emotion that convulsed his whole frame. Tears rolled down his

cheeks, and his lips quivered as the words dropped from them :

"Oh, this is joy ! Thank God, we are saved, and blessed hope leads the way before us !"

There had been a busy whispering away in one corner, and when the emotions had subsided which followed the praise-offering of the marquis, Martin Duval led Blanchette forward to her mistress. His plea was simple. In the land of strangers the dear girl would need a strong protector upon whom she could always depend.

It was close upon the hour of noon when, under the direction of Marius, a score of horses were gathered in the court-yard, together with a stout tumbrel which had been used in former times for transporting munitions of war, and which was now brought into use for a purpose full as important.

Twelve hours later the aged priest, with lantern and keys, went down into the great dungeon of the main tower and set free the Mayor of Arras and his companions, who returned home, and were safely housed from sight before daylight, a miserably forlorn and dejected crew.

At about the same hour that saw Gideon de Bar lock himself into his chamber, alone with his own wretched self, a brighter and more hopeful scene might have been viewed at a point on the Channel coast, where a small arm of the sea made up, under a bridge of logs, toward a humble, solitary cot. In the offing was a heavy lugger, with her broad sails set to a favorable breeze, and our old friend, Pierre Lefranc, in command. "Dear old uncle !" How proud Blanchette was of him in that hour !

Upon the lugger's quarter-deck, with the first golden beams of the rising sun casting a halo about them,

were gathered the principal personages of our story in whose welfare we have an interest. The Shadow of the Guillotine was behind them, and before them, beyond the swelling waters of the English Channel, they knew they should find an asylum where peace and comfort and safety should be theirs. With hearts strong and true and with faith in the Eternal Goodness, what more could they ask? For themselves—nothing. For France they could but pray!

THE END.

GERTRUDE THE AMAZON

A Romance of the First Crusade.

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY WARREN B. DAVIS.

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GERTRUDE THE AMAZON.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRUSADERS AT NICE—OUR HERO.

IT was toward the close of the eleventh century that the Christian chieftains of western Europe marshaled their forces for the First Crusade to the Holy Land, their sacred purpose being to wrest the sepulcher of our Lord from the hands of the infidel Saracen. Starting from different points and at different times, it became necessary that they should fix upon some spot in the Orient where they could meet and unite, so that they might set forth together against the enemies of the risen Saviour. Constantinople, the capital of the Greek Empire, was the place selected, and there the Christian army assembled. In the emperor, Alexius Comnena, the crusaders had hoped to find a trusty friend and useful counselor ; but instead thereof they found him jealous, timid and even treacherous. With a smiling face and many fair promises, he sought to bend them to his own selfish and ambitious purposes ; and a few of them were more or less influenced by his subtle machination. He dared not openly assist the

crusaders, for fear of the Turks, who had more than once already besieged his capital ; but he would gladly have enlisted those powerful and gallant warriors into his imperial service and himself have gained the glory of conquest over the enemies of the cross. But his efforts availed nothing toward swerving the Christian knights from their purpose, though he did succeed in sowing the seed of discord and dissension among some of the very bravest of the western warriors—seed which was destined to bear bitter fruit to the noble knights for a long time thereafter.

However, the winter wore away, and the Christian forces were at length assembled, their preparations all made for advance, and the whole army eager for battle. It was a grand sight which the watchmen upon the walls of Constantinople beheld, when that army of one hundred thousand horse and five hundred thousand foot-soldiers, with banners flying, spears glittering like a silver forest in the morning's sun, bright armor flashing like ten thousand mirrors whirling sharp beams of light into the air ; the steel skull-caps stretching away like unto a broad sea, with its undulating bosom broken into half a million gleaming wavelets ; while upon the soft breeze came the stirring blast of many a brazen trumpet, blown forth with a zeal that sought to impart of itself to all who heard—a grand sight to the watchmen upon the wall, and to those who had climbed to top of rampart and tower, when that army set out upon its march for the Plain of Bithynia.

And be it remembered that the Greeks, when they gazed upon those departing columns, were reviewing the very flower of Christian chivalry ; and as it is with these noble knights that we have to do in our story, let us know a few of them in the outset.

There was Robert, Duke of Normandy, eldest son

of William the Conqueror, and with him were all the warlike knights and nobles of his Duchy. Then came another Robert, Count of Flanders, whose great wealth gained for him the title of "The Lance and Sword" of the Christians; and in his pay were five hundred horse, and full five thousand foot, besides five thousand knights and nobles of his father's realm, who joined his banner at their own expense. Next came Hugh, Prince of the Vermandois, and brother of Philip, King of France. One of the youngest of all the Christian knights, and the youngest, by some years, of the ruling chiefs, he was yet among the bravest of the brave, and never yet had he met the antagonist who had fairly overcome him.

When the chiefs of the crusaders were assembled at Rome, preparatory to starting for the East, it was into Prince Hugh's hands that the Roman Pontiff had given the Standard of the Church. It was a proud moment for the youthful crusader, when he was thus honored by Pope Urban above the other chieftains; but even then the emotion of pride may have been tinged with sadness at the thought that his brethren in arms—some of them, at least—envied him for this honorable distinction. Aye, he saw it plainly, and it cut him to the heart; for never found envy or malice a resting-place in his bosom.

Another of the chiefs was Stephen, Count of Blois and Chartres, who owned in his own right as many stout and well-armed castles as there are days in the year; andthe retinues of noble knights who followed his standard were in themselves a host. Next came Robert, Count of Paris, the knight who stood for a twelvemonth before the old church where three roads meet, waiting for an antagonist powerful enough to overthrow him, and found him not.

Of the Italians, there was the thrice noble Bohémond, Prince of Tarentum ; and there was the gallant Tancred, Prince of Otranto. Another French knight, who might have been the leader of the whole army, but for his haughty pride and his unyielding obstinacy, was Raymond, Count of Thoulouse, who brought with him a hundred thousand crusaders, and whose three-score years sat as lightly upon his massive frame as had set the years of his youthful prime. With Count Raymond went Adhémar de Montiel, the bishop and spiritual leader of the crusade.

And so we might go on to the end of the chapter with the names and estates of brave and gallant knights, whose deeds of prowess had filled gaping multitudes with wonder and delight, and who now led their esquires and men-at-arms across the plains of Bithynia ; but we will only notice three others, and we present them at this time because they are to play an important part in our story. There were three knights who kept near to the standard of Raymond of Thoulouse. Peter of Bourbon and Arnold de la Marche were brothers, and were among the best knights of the old count's retinue. They were brave and reckless, and could be true when it was for their interest so to be. A boon companion of the brothers was Guiscard de Grillon, and a stouter knight than either of them. He was captain of twenty spears and two hundred foot. These three men were much together, and many there were among the crusaders who wondered what it was that kept them so busy in secret confab, and why they so often conversed as though fearful of being overheard. It was all to be known in good time.

The city of Nice was the first place that attracted the attention of the crusaders. It was the capital of Bithynia, and the advance post of the Turks toward

the Bosphorus ; and if the Christians would keep open the way for their supplies, it would have to be reduced. Kilidge-Arslan, the Sultan of Koum, within whose dominion Nice was situated, in anticipation of the attack of the soldiers of the Cross, had caused the place to be strongly fortified ; and as nature had done much to the same end, the invaders found a difficult work before them when they had reached the Bithynian capital. High mountains defended the approach to it ; while to the west and south the waters of Lake Ascanius washed its ramparts, preserving to the inhabitants an easy communication with the sea. Ditches, deep and broad, filled with water from the mountain streams, surrounded the place on the north and east, the bridges of which could be quickly raised toward the walls. These walls were double, and were only wide enough for the passage of a chariot upon the top ; and they were protected by three hundred and seventy high towers of brick and stone. The garrison of the city was composed of the chosen men of the Turkish warriors ; while the sultan himself, with an army of a hundred thousand soldiers, occupied the neighboring mountains, ready at any time to fall upon the flanks of the besiegers.

A march of nearly one hundred miles brought the Christian army to the city of Nice ; and when it had been determined to besiege the place, the posts were selected and distributed to the care of the most trusted chiefs. The camp of the crusaders extended over a vast plain, intersected by rivulets which fell from the mountains. Fleets from Greece and Italy transported provisions, and kept the besiegers in a state of abundance. Each nation had its quarters, which they surrounded with palisades ; and a reliable historian has reckoned that of these nations there were nineteen differing in

language and in manners and customs. In each quarter magnificent tents were raised to serve as churches, in which the warriors and their followers regularly assembled for the purpose of religious ceremonials. And when we remember that hundreds of the nobles had brought their wives and children with them, in anticipation of finding homes in the Holy Land, we can understand something of the life of the Christian camp.

It was a beautiful spring morning, and the crusaders were resting from an unsuccessful attack upon the city. From all parts of the camp came the sound of clinking hammers, where the armorers were busy at their work, and the song of the careless soldier mingled with the solemn hymns of the worshipers; while ever and anon a more startling sound awoke the air as doughty knights and esquires met at full tilt, in sport and in practice.

On the outskirts of the French quarter stood an armed knight by the side of his horse. He was a gallant soldier, as his bearing gave ample token; while the contour of body, as he there stood at ease, betrayed great strength united with beauty and grace. His armor was of polished steel, the only ornaments being a few rare jewels set in the gorget, and the silver bars and tall white ostrich plumes of the helmet. His visor was raised, exposing a face of rare beauty; the lower features cast in a mold as pure as the most zealous artist could wish, while the broad, full brow and the clear blue eyes betrayed soul and intellect far superior to the inner qualifications of the majority of his peers. The glossy nut-brown curls that clustered about the temples and escaped from the back-band of the casque, together with the condition of his armor and the exquisite trappings of his noble steed, would

seem to signify that he was fond of dress and show; and so he was; but never gave he a single thought to the outer man until he was full sure that all was right within. If there were jewels in his gorget, be sure they were set in steel that no poor sword could pierce; and if he wore silver bars upon his helm, depend upon it that beneath was a metal fit to turn the point of a heavy spear. Such was the Prince Hugh de Vermandois, brother of Philip of France, and one of the best knights that ever stood beneath the standard of the Church. He was now in his five-and-twentieth year; but as he had been closely practiced in arms since earliest boyhood, his limbs were as firm, and his muscles as fully and as toughly developed, as were most warriors, in their prime.

As Hugh stood by his horse with his right elbow resting upon the saddle and the hand supporting his head, he felt some one touch him upon the shoulder, and on turning, he beheld his faithful and well-beloved esquire, Walter de St. Valery.

"How now, my lord? What means this preparation?"

The esquire spoke with freedom, for he was of gentle birth, and had been the prince's friend and companion from early youth; and, moreover, knight and esquire were very nearly of the same age.

"What preparation?" returned Hugh, seeming to exert himself to bring his mind to things present. "Oho," he continued, as he noticed the direction of Walter's gaze, "you wonder at seeing me thus accoutered."

"Aye, my lord. After the labors of yesterday, I had supposed that you would rest to-day."

"Tush! Walter, do you think I am a boy, that a flurry like that of yesterday should carry fatigue be-

yond the sleep of a night? No, no, I am as fresh as though I had not borne arms for a twelvemonth."

"And have you a tilt to ride, Sir Hugh?"

"No, good Walter. I am going out on an errand; and while I am gone you must keep an eye upon my tent."

"Going out! Alone?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Indeed, my lord, I think you are—"

"What, good Walter?"

"It is true, and I will speak it: I think you are rash and unwise. I do not wonder that you are sad and unhappy, and I blame you not for seeking solace in quiet meditation; but you should not think of venturing beyond the confines of our camp unattended. The Turks are in the mountains, and they lurk in every convenient hiding-place. And, furthermore, you know what Raymond and Bohémond have ordered."

"'Ordered,' Walter?"

"Touching the going forth of any of our knights beyond the limits of the camp until Kilidge-Arslan and his infidel host have been disposed of."

"In God's name," cried Hugh de Vermandois, setting the shaft of his lance upon the ground, and turning upon his esquire a flashing look, "who are Raymond of Thoulouse and this Italian Bohémond, of Tarentum, that they should aspire to dictate to the brother of the king of France? By my faith, it seemeth to me that good Robert of Normandy, with him of Flanders and myself, should rather say unto Raymond, thus and so. But—let it pass. Poor Raymond! Oh, Walter, God knows I pity him; aye, pity him, even though I suffer more than he."

"My lord," said Walter, his voice broken with love and sympathy, "I know your heart; and I wish others

knew it as well; but, alas, they do not, and you must beware."

"Beware, Walter?"

"Aye, Sir Hugh. You have enemies; and if they can find anything against you in appearance, be assured they will make the most of it. You can see for yourself how things are going on. There are six, at least, who aspire to lead the army, and you have spoken your mind so freely that two of the number have been set aside in consequence thereof; and yet they remain leaders of heavy forces."

"Who leads a better force than do I?"

"Not one, my lord."

"Then let each lead his own, and let God lead us all. As for myself, I bow not to mortal mandate while I am that mortal's equal. But, good Walter, I will say to thee that when a leader is finally acknowledged, the the stout duke, Godfrey de Bouillon, will be that man."

The knight saw the troubled look of his well-tried friend, and, after a little reflection, he added, at the same time grasping his companion's hand:

"Walter, I will tell you what I had thought never to speak to another—or, at least, not yet; but I must have your promise that you will not repeat a syllable of what you now shall hear."

"You have my solemn promise, my lord; and I hold myself bound until you shall release me from the pledge."

"Then," pursued Hugh, "listen: Yesterday, when I had gained the top of the outer wall, by the Tower of the Dragon, I saw our men dragging a female along upon the inner wall. I wondered much what it could mean. First, why a woman should have been in that exposed situation at all; and second, why it should require four men to drag her away. As I stood there

and gazed, all other thoughts for the moment suspended by this strange scene, it suddenly flashed upon me that I never knew but one woman of so fair a form who could bear herself so stoutly. With this flash of thought upon my mind I cried out, and the woman turned her head. It was but a single instant, for they were descending as I shouted the note of alarm; but in that instant I am sure I recognized the features of one whom we had thought dead—dead, and buried beneath the waters of Epirus."

"In God's name, my master, say you so?"

"Even so, Walter. When I beheld that beautiful face I was as one entirely separated from the battle, and I had started to find a place where I might o'erleap the space betwixt the walls, when a score of stout Saracens came pouring out from the tower, and I was forced to give them the attention I had meant for another."

"Aye," cried Walter, with kindling eye, "and I thank God that thousands of our soldiers beheld the feats of prowess you then and there performed. By my faith, 'twas the most gallant thing that ever was. We all saw it—saw you stand alone against one-and-twenty of the enemy, for they were counted—saw you stand and beat down twelve of them with your double-bladed axe before Tancred came to your succor."

The knight could not be otherwise than pleased as his esquire thus recounted the deed of the previous day, and having thanked him for his honest sympathy, he set his lance, and gathered up the reins preparatory to mounting.

"Walter," he said, "should any ask you where is the Prince of Vermandois, you can answer them that you do not know, and that you may be forced to speak no falsehood, I will hold my course a secret even from you.

But this much I will say: whither I go, only a single armed man may be permitted to set his foot at the same time. So, should I take a companion, my expedition must needs be bootless. I go to seek tidings of her whom we have long mourned as dead."

"Will you seek entrance to the city, my lord?"

"No. I shall seek in the mountains one who hath power to send his messengers whither it pleaseth him."

"Ha! The old man—"

"Hush! Beware, Walter, how you breathe that name. Should mine enemies discover that I had used secret confab with Hashishin, their jealousy might find food for a meal that would burst them. I will return this day. Adieu, my brother; and look well to my affairs while I am gone."

And with this, Hugh of Vermandois vaulted to his saddle and cantered away at an easy pace over the plain.

CHAPTER II.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE MOUNTAIN.

Prince Hugh had not ridden far before he was aware that two knights were following him, and from their movements he decided that their purpose was nothing more nor less than to keep an eye upon his outgoing. More than once our hero drew in his rein with the thought that he would face the hounds and demand their business, and if they gave him an evasive answer he would give them the lie in their faces, and fight them then and there. But this impulse was not long entertained.

"The curs!" he muttered to himself. "I should but disgrace my sword to bedaub it with their blood."

And after a time he determined that he would try a stratagem against them, for, curs as they were, they must not be permitted to follow him.

The mountains were now close at hand, the dark, dense line of forest casting its shadow across the way not twenty paces ahead of the horse and rider. Hugh turned in his saddle and saw that the pursuers were hurrying up, and without further hesitation he applied the spurs, and was quickly dashing away from view into one of the few passes that led through the forest

to the mountain fastnesses. That this was not the path which he had originally intended to take was very evident, as he had changed his course materially after he discovered the pursuing knights. However, he seemed well content with the change, if one might judge from the manner in which he plunged into the thick wood. He urged his horse on at the top of his speed, until he had reached a point where the path led around a projecting spur of rock, and here he pulled up and dismounted.

"Now, good Dominic!" said the prince, patting the beast upon the neck, "let us see how quiet we can be. Not a word, now—mind!" And the intelligent animal nodded his head, seeming to understand exactly what his master required.

As quickly as possible Hugh made his way through the thick wildwood, his horse following close behind him, until he had reached a point where he would not be likely to be discovered by any one in the path.

"Hush!"

This again to the horse, who gave another sign of assent, and who appeared to watch the path as eagerly as did his master, and they had not to wait a great while. Very soon they heard the tramp of coming horses, and presently the two knights who had followed our hero, came dashing up the path.

"We must get him in sight before he reaches the mountain," said Peter of Bourbon, as they brought their horses to a walk at the spur.

"Aye," answered Arnold de la Marche. "God send that we may be able to fasten upon him a visit to the Turks!"

It was with an effort that the brave and gallant prince refrained from exposing himself and casting the villainy of the two false knights into their faces; but

a cooler judgment prevailed, and he allowed them to pass on.

Peter of Bourbon and Arnold de la Marche were the brothers of whom we have before spoken. They were stout warriors, and young, the elder being not more than five-and-thirty; and Raymond of Thoulouse counted them among his best knights; and there were others of the Christian chieftains who held them in high esteem. And, in truth, they had already won for themselves much fame beneath the walls of Nice, where they had displayed prodigies of valor. That they bore enmity to the youthful prince none of the crusaders knew save the parties interested, together with one or two particular friends. Peculiar circumstances laid upon Hugh the necessity of making no public show of his discovery of the treachery of these knights; but he did not mean that it should long be so. A certain work he had to do, and then it would be time to call his enemies to an account. One reason why he could not, with propriety, take present notice of this matter was, that Guiscard de Grillon, Raymond's chief captain, was leagued against him; and just now he could not bring himself into contact with the old count.

Hugh waited until the two knights had gained a goodly distance, when he led his horse back into the path, and having remounted, he rode out from the wood, and sought another entrance half a league to the northward—the entrance toward which his steps had been directed when he discovered his pursuers. Once in the true path he pushed on without fear of the Bourbon brothers, for his present course lay toward a different mountain from that to be reached by the former pass.

While the path was level and free the prince rode on at a round gallop; but as he began to ascend the

mountain, he took a more moderate pace, until finally his beast came to a walk. It was a path he had never before travelled; but one who knew it well had mapped it out for him upon the floor of his tent, and thus far he had found it almost as familiar as though he had known it from actual sight.

"Courage, my Dominic," he said, patting his horse upon the neck. "The table cannot be far away. If our guide told us truly, we must be almost there. Ha, what now? By my faith that smacks of battle!"

He had turned at an abrupt angle around a huge mass of rock while talking with his horse, and as he entered upon a wider track the sound of clashing steel and voices pitched to fierce invective fell upon his ear. For an instant he drew in his rein, partly to listen and partly to consider.

"'Fore God!" he muttered to himself, "I hear the cry of the infidel Turk, and his enemy must be a friend to me; and who knows that it may not be a friend in need? God help the right!"

And thus speaking he lifted his spear from its socket, and having brought it to a charge, he put spurs to his horse and dashed up the rough acclivity. A few sweeping bounds of his powerful charger brought the prince to the table of which he had been told. It was a broad, level surface of rock, broken here and there by gentle undulations, affording ample room for the maneuvering of ten thousand men. To the right, close by where a prodigious wall of granite arose, like the solid battlement of a castle, our hero beheld the combatants, and it required but a very few seconds for his practiced eye to take in the situation of the battle.

Upon the rocky ground lay nearly a score of dead and dying, while nearly as many more were on foot and engaged in the fray. The chief figure of the

group, and that which sent a thrill to our hero's heart when he discovered it, was an old man, whose hair and beard, white as the driven snow, fell low down over his shoulders and breast. He was habited in a long purple robe, confined at the waist by a belt of pure gold, in which was stuck a small dagger. In his hands he bore a stout staff, upon which he leaned heavily, as though his strength were failing. Gathered around him were six youthful warriors, clad in leathern armor, each armed with a heavy sword, and fighting with a zeal and fury which was wonderful, considering that they had fought a long time, and that they were bleeding from many wounds. Opposed to this little band of devoted life guardsmen were fourteen stout Turks, most of them as yet unwounded. Of the dead there were two Turks for each one of the Ismaelians, for Hugh had very quickly determined that the white-haired patriarch was the Old Man of the Mountain, whom he sought, and that those who so bravely defended him were his Ismaelian guards, or *Fédaïs*. He knew that the Seljoucide Turks hated the Old Man (Hashishin), and feared his influence. He was, like them, a follower of Mahomet, but of a different sect; and as he was now multiplying the number of his converts, the Seljoucides trembled lest he should, in time, entirely overcome them.

Not more than a dozen times did the heart of the crusader beat its heavy throbs after he had come into full view of this affair, before he had decided that he would go to the help of those brave and bleeding guardsmen, who were thus covering with their lives the body of their beloved master. Slipping from his saddle, he cast down the lance and drew forth his ponderous ax from its beckets, and shouting aloud his battle-cry, he hastened forward.

For a few moments the appearance of the Christian knight upon the scene caused a suspension of hostilities; but when it was found he had come to mingle in the fray, the Turks made a disposition of their forces which they thought would meet the emergency. Six of their number turned their attention to the newcomer, while the other eight again set upon the fainting *Fédaïs*. But this did not suit the crusader, for he saw that while he was dealing with these six, their companions might reach the old man, and he felt, for a time, a remarkable interest in the fate of that renowned individual.

"God save the right!" shouted the prince, as with a blow of his ax he felled the man immediately before him, and then leaped to the van of the guardsmen and gave himself as a cover for Hashishin. With the small circular buckler firmly fixed upon his left forearm, he raised his ponderous axe and waited for the onset.

And he had not to wait a great while. The crusader's last movement had taken the Turks so by surprise, that for half a minute or so they had drawn back, as though to assure themselves that he was really alone—that they did not gaze upon an enchanted armor, which, like the wooden horse, might open and set free a full company of armed men. But they were soon satisfied that only a single weapon had been added against them, and with a confident shout they advanced.

"*Allah! Il Allah! Hu-hu-u!*" was the war-cry, and while yet the last syllable, much prolonged in utterance, hung upon their lips, at least a dozen of them had raised their sharp scimiters against the Christian; but they had quickly to find that the work they had undertaken was neither an easy nor a safe one. Nearly all parts of the knight's body were protected by his

finely-tempered armor, and those few necessarily exposed places, where a sword-point might have been thrust home, were covered by the buckler. And that gleaming buckler seemed to be endowed with thought of its own. Let the blows come never so thick, and in succession like flashes of light, the buckler was sure to be where the blow was to fall; and yet, all the while, the mind of the knight gave direction to the ponderous axe, which the right arm swayed as though it had been a mere toy.

Those unsophisticated sons of Islam had never before met a Frankish knight in full armor, and when they beheld that trenchant ax, now dripping with gore, flashing to and fro with an impetus which no weapon they ever wielded could check or overcome, they began to lose their ardor and show signs of falling back. One, two, three, four of their number fell with the first four sweeps of the terrible weapon. Here once more upon the right; and next, a stout Turk who had thought to leap around upon the left and thus reach the Old Man of the Mountain, fell with his head cloven from crown to chine.

"*God for the right!*" shouted the crusader, dashing on to the second charge.

"*Allah, il Allah, hu-hu-u!*" answered one of the seven remaining Turks.

"Saint Michael to the rescue!" cried Hugh, as he split the head of the foremost of his enemies.

In some respects the conflict was a one-sided affair from the first; and the advantage upon the side of the single man at that. The Turks were armed only with light scimiters, having cast away all their javelins in another part of the field before the Christian knight came upon the scene; and opposed thus to the iron-handed prince of France, they were as so many men of

straw—not much better, at all events. With a might that knew no fatigue, the right arm bore death upon the blade of the sweeping ax ; while the left arm, with thought of its own, held the invulnerable buckler ever ready to take the blows of the opposing blades.

"Fools," muttered Hugh, when he had thinned the enemy down to five able men, "do you think to stand against a knight who has held his own with six axes showering their blows upon him ? Take to your heels and fly while your legs have strength to carry you !"

Three of the Ismaelians were now by Hugh's side, and together they pressed the remaining Turks back toward the perpendicular wall of rock which arose to the right of the way by which the crusader had come up. Had these fellows turned to flee, they might have got off with their lives ; but they fought as they retreated, and when they reached the face of the precipice only two of the number were left. The prince had lowered his ax for the purpose of giving the panting Moslems an opportunity to surrender, when a loud cry from one of the *Fédaïs* behind him attracted his attention ; and, upon turning, he saw the fellow rushing toward him, and at the same time making a wild gesticulation, as though to call his attention to something above him.

A sense of danger flashed upon the knight, and as he started back for the purpose of looking upward, the two Turks darted toward him with their scimiters raised.

"Fools !" said Hugh, derisively, "if you are so anxious to die, I 'll help you to your choice."

He had stricken down the Turk nearest to him and had caught the blade of the second upon his buckler, when a dull, whirring sound struck his ear, and on the next instant the Moslem before him fell to the earth, crushed by an enormous fragment of rock !

The truth was quickly apparent to our hero's mind. That rock had been meant for him. One or more of the Turks who had been wounded by the Ismaëlians had crawled up to the brow of the precipice for the purpose of hurling down destruction upon the head of the enemy, and to that end the crusader had been led to advance in that direction. He saw it all, and though this first missile had crushed a friend instead of a foe, yet there was no telling how quickly another deadly messenger might come crashing down.

It was but a moment—only a brief moment—from the coming of the rock to the conclusion at which the prince had arrived, but that moment was freighted with wondrous consequence. Another cry from the guards, loud, quick and full of alarm, caused him to look upward. And that cry, meant to save him, was the means of his fall. At the very moment when it broke the air, Hugh had lifted his left foot for the purpose of stepping backward, and had he done so he would have been safe, but the cry, as we have said, caused him to look up, and in doing so he stopped. Again that whirring sound—a blur came before his eyes—an instinct of mortal danger—and as he lowered his head with the idea of crouching away from the evil thing, the crash came. He knew that something fell upon him—something that touched him as with a bolt from the thunder of heaven, crushing him down without pain, and bending him to the earth. He knew that some one spoke in his ear, and that strong hands lifted his head and worked upon the lashings of his casque. Then came a bright gleaming, as of a thousand flashing tapers—a whirl of the brain—the light drawn into circles, revolving with blinding brilliancy—and then came darkness and—that was all. He knew no more.

CHAPTER III.

A MOUNTAIN PARADISE.

The Prince de Vermandois dreamed. Gertrude of Thoulouse had given him her hand, and the day for marriage had been fixed. All their enemies had been conquered, and only friends were left to bend the knee before them. Philip of France and the old Count Raymond, the bride's father, had united their purses and bought for the happy pair a castle whose surroundings made it a fit type of paradise. Amid flowers of rarest beauty and most ravishing perfume the lovers wandered hand in hand, while the feathered songsters warbled forth in answer to their words of love, such music as the devout believer fancies shall bless the ears of the redeemed in heaven. They were walking thus one bright and lovely day, conversing of the bliss in store for them, when, as they turned at the angle of an elaborately adorned fountain, the earth opened before them, and a genie of horrible aspect arose and stopped them.

"What now?" demanded the prince, laying his hand upon the hilt of his sword. "Wherefore this unseemly intrusion?"

"I have come," answered the immortal, "to bid you

beware of your enemies. They are not crushed, as you think. Many a dark and dreary day shall cast its burden of sorrows upon you ere your hands can be united as you have planned. Beware of the Bourbon !"

The prince started forward to detain the genie, and in so doing he awoke. He opened his eyes and gazed upward, and he beheld what he supposed was the vault of heaven, with bright stars gleaming softly upon him. Where was he? What had happened? Without moving he reclosed his eyes, and called his thoughts to his aid.

His dream gave him the starting-point, and he fancied himself in France. No, he had left his native land, and had joined with the Christian army that had set forth for the conquest of Palestine. He remembered the passage to Italy—the stop at Rome—the sailing thence in a ship, and the awful wreck upon the coast of Epirus. Then he remembered how the emissaries of the Greek Emperor had conducted him to Constantinople—how he had remained there through the wet season—how he had marched with his companions-in-arms for Nice—how they had encamped beneath the walls of that city—and how the work of battle had been already commenced. Then he went on to other incidents. He remembered the face he had seen upon the walls of the besieged city ; and then, like a flash, came a remembrance of his journey into the forest—his escape by stratagem from the knights who had followed him—his meeting with the Old Man of the Mountain—and of the conflict which had followed, together with the hurling of the rocks from the summit of the frowning precipice. He remembered that he had been stricken down by one of those ponderous fragments, and that was the last. He strained his thought to the utmost, but nothing could he call to

mind since that terrific crash, until the dream in the midst of which he had awakened.

"Am I still living on the earth," he soliloquized, in whispered words, "or have I passed over the dark gulf and landed upon the shores of the world unseen by mortal eyes?" When he remembered how the Turk had been crushed by the first rock that fell, and when he also remembered how the second had struck him full upon the head, he thought it more than doubtful if he were still left an inhabitant of earth.

Hark! There was a sound as of a gentle breeze murmuring through lightly-hanging foliage, and mingling with it, in delicious harmony, came the voices of birds tuned to music enrapturing and divine. And the other senses were delighted as well. He now realized that the air he breathed was perfumed with odors at once sweet and invigorating, and that an ethereal softness pervaded it, so that he seemed rather floating in a celestial atmosphere than resting upon a mortal couch.

Again he opened his eyes, and after gazing until his vision was under control, he discovered that what he had taken for the star-decked heavens was an azure canopy of silk, studded with stars of gold and precious stones. Yes; it was a canopy of material fabric, and he felt that he was lying upon a downy bed. But how was it that he felt no pain? He moved his limbs and he turned his body from side to side. There was a sort of dozy languor pervading his system; but no ache, no pain, no stiffness.

"Surely," he said to himself, "this cannot be earth. No, no; I should suffer were I in my natural body."

These words were the first which he had spoken aloud, and as he ceased he fancied that he heard a gentle rustling near his side. He turned over and looked

in that direction, and his gaze was met by a scene that thrilled him to the soul with enrapturing sense. Two females had just arisen from a seat by the side of his couch, and were moving away. He saw their faces, and he thought that never had earth given life to such seraphic loveliness. No eastern enthusiast, picturing the paradise of the blessed, had ever conceived an ideal half so beautiful as was this that now appeared to the prince's bewildered sense. With faces of transcendent beauty were united forms as fair and graceful as ever the most favored of the fabled Peri wore. With a quick movement, the prince started to a sitting posture, and stretched forth his hand; but the fairy forms had vanished. He made sure that the beatific vision had really faded away, and then, finding that he retained his upright posture without difficulty, he gazed around.

Our hero found himself to be in a pavilion, the furniture and the hangings of which were sumptuous beyond anything he had ever before seen—aye, his most vivid imagination had never conceived anything to compare with it. He had heard of an Oriental magnificence which he had always treated as fabulous, but it was no fable now—no fable unless this were Elysium and he had been translated to the immortal shores. Beyond an opening in the silken curtains he saw a passage, and further on were flowers and green leaves, and he now discovered that the perfumed air and the songs of the birds came in from that direction.

Finding himself alone, the prince resolved to arise and explore the mysteries beyond the door of the pavilion. As he stood upon the soft carpet that covered the floor he found his limbs not so strong as was their wont, but he moved without difficulty and without pain. The garments that covered his body were such

as he had never worn before. The underclothes were of the finest linen, soft as beaten silk ; the vest was of the rarest silk, changing from gold to green as the light played upon its varying surface. At his feet he saw a pair of velvet slippers, which he drew on, and next he discovered, thrown across the foot of his couch, a robe of purple velvet, adorned with gold and silver in patterns like unto those upon the vest. So he knew the robe was a part of his dress, and he proceeded to put it on.

Thus prepared, the prince went out through the flowery passage and his heart bounded with grateful emotion as he found that his limbs began to feel stronger the moment they were put in motion. When he had gained an open space beyond the walls of the pavilion, he found himself in a garden exactly like that of which he had dreamed. The walks were of pure white marble, the flowers were of the most fragrant and regal kind, sending forth a perfume that enchanted the senses ; the trees and the shrubs were of perfect symmetry, some bearing blossoms like pearls, with leaves of silver and gold, while others hung heavy with fruit of every conceivable kind. Hugh had gone but a short distance, gazing enraptured upon everything he saw, when he espied a tiny fountain beneath a pile of marble statuary, which attracted his attention from the golden color of the water that flowed therefrom. When he reached the place, his senses were saluted by a new perfume—an aromatic fragrance—that seemed to inspire him with new life and vigor. The fountain was a rare piece of sculptural art. A female was pouring grapes from a basket into a funnel, below which were two stout rollers, with a crank attached, at which worked a gleeful boy, with wings like Eros. The woman, the grapes, the basket, the funnel,

the rollers and the laughing boy were of finest marble, and cut with most exquisite taste and skill. But what was the tiny golden stream which flowed from the spout beneath the Cupid's rollers? And whence that invigorating aroma which so ravished the senses?

Hugh was thus wondering when he discovered a small cup of burnished gold suspended from the arm of the grape gatherer by a chain of the same precious metal; he took the cup, and having filled it at the fount, he raised it to his lips.

Eureka! If the aroma had given delight to the sense of smell, how much greater was the delight imparted to the whole inner man by the first draught! What our hero had supposed to be a golden hued water, taking its color from the earth through which it was distilled, proved to be the most delicious wine he ever tasted; and while he was wondering upon the seeming miracle, a hand was laid lightly upon his shoulder and a musical voice, said:

"Allah be praised for his goodness!"

The knight turned and beheld the same old man whom he had seen upon the table of the mountain, and whom, as he had then believed, he believed now to be none other than Hashishin, the renowned chief of the Ismaelians, or Assassins. His robe was now of black silk, secured at the waist by a belt of gold, richly studded with precious stones; and his snow-white beard and hair, floating over his breast and shoulders in graceful waves, not only gave him a most venerable look, but, combined with the stately form, the broad and massive brow and the intellectual fire of the full bright gray eyes, it inspired the beholder with awe and reverence.

"Aye," answered the Christian, to the old man's salutation; "and unless my belief plays me false, I

have reason to cry : 'Praise be to Hashishin for his care and kindness !' Am I not right !"

"I suppose I should cry in return : 'Praise be to the Christian knight for his saving will and might !' Would I be right ?"

"As for that," said the prince, with a blush, "I like not to decide upon the estimate of my own merits. And yet I must admit that, had I not reached you as I did, the Turks would have overcome your guards."

"Yes," added Hashishin, with a shudder ; "and I should have been a prisoner in the hands of Kilidge-Arslan—a fate ten thousand times worse than death. But we will not converse here. Let us return to the pavilion you have left. You have had exercise enough for this first effort."

And while they proceed to the pavilion, the reader shall learn something of the character and standing of this Old Man of the Mountain.

Hashishin, as he was called by the crusaders, but whose true name was Hassan ben Saba, was a descendant of the prophet and, having been initiated into a secret society at Bagdad, he worked his way to its head, and at length gained absolute control over the whole wondrous piece of human machinery. He was a follower of Islam, but despised the established church of the Mohammedans, claiming himself to be the repository of the only true and saving grace. In time he assembled around him a hundred thousand blind followers, becoming a power before which kings and princes trembled, and to whom the most favored rulers of the Levant were glad to pay tribute, upon the assurance of personal safety. He divided his people into three classes : The husbandmen, who cultivated the soil ; the soldiers, who not only fought for him, but who also lent their services for hire to other provinces ;

and the *Fédaïs* or guards. These last were by far the most important and favored of his followers. They were young men, trained up from childhood in the use of arms, and taught to believe that their master held the keys of Paradise, and that he could admit them to the realms of the blessed at any moment; and so all his followers were taught. But in the finishing of the education of these guards or, rather, in their final initiation, there was a ceremony as inspiring as it was strange and peculiar.

When the neophyte had been pronounced by his teachers fit to bear arms in the service required at his hands, Hashishin led him up to a dark and dreary cave upon the mountain side, where he conversed with him upon the subjects about which he had been studying. The chief was a keen and quick judge of character, and he readily decided whether the youth before him was of the right sort of stuff.

"My son," the old man would say when about to leave, "you are to spend the night here alone, and ere the morning dawns it shall be decided whether you are fit at heart for the service you seek. If Allah sees in you the faithful servant, you will this night be admitted to Paradise. If, before the morning you gain no glimpse of heaven, you may go your way, for it is known that you are not worthy. Here are provisions, and your sword is by your side, so you have nothing to fear."

And thus speaking the chief went away and the neophyte was left alone.

With both food and drink had been mixed a powerful opiate; and as the youth had been kept all day without food, he would be sure to eat. Once in a very long time it happened that Hashishin had decided not to admit the candidate to the honors of the *Fédais*, and if so, the disappointed youth simply found himself in the

morning where he had just fallen asleep, having gained no glimpse of Paradise; and with a sad and heavy heart he descended the mountain to take his place among the soldiers, never dreaming that his chief was responsible for his failure. The successful candidate, however, met with a different fate. As soon as he had fallen asleep under the influence of the opiate, he was taken by trusty slaves and borne away to a beautiful garden, where his garments were removed, his body washed with perfumed waters, and a rich garb put on in place of that which had been taken off. If, in the morning, he did not awake of his own accord, he was aroused by one or more of the beautiful maidens who presided over the place; and when he finally arose and gazed around him, he felt he was, indeed, in Paradise.

Our Christian knight was even now in one of those gardens—an earthly paradise, built in an elevated valley, and so guarded by nature and art, that no human being, unacquainted with the secret, could either make his way in or out. Here the enraptured youth was allowed to spend the day, wandering from bower to bower, his senses bewildered by the enchanting loveliness everywhere present, while virgins, more beautiful than he had ever seen on earth, hovered around him, desiring to serve him, and singing or conversing, as he might choose. At different points artificial fountains were set up, made to run with wine, milk, honey and other delicious beverages; so that, in the midst of all these wonders, the enraptured youth was as one beside himself with utter delight. When evening came another sleeping potion was administered, and as soon as it had taken effect his own garments were restored to his body, and he was borne back to the cave whence he had been taken. When the youth next awoke he found Hashishin sitting by his side.

"Allah be praised!" the old man would cry. "I came hither and found your body cold and lifeless, like a thing dead. I knew that the spirit had fled, and I wondered if it would come back. My son, what have you seen?"

And when the neophyte had described the enchanting beauties of the paradise he had visited, his chief took him by the hand, and blessed him; and from that hour the guardsman firmly believed that the moment he died in his master's service his soul would ascend again to the celestial abode, there to remain forever! If he died a natural death, he would be delayed at the bar of purgatory, perhaps for an age; but if he fell in the service of his chief the passage to the realms of bliss would be instantaneous, his name being already enrolled among the favored few who had been permitted to visit the Garden of God while yet in the flesh.

And now suppose the Old Man of the Mountains should say to one, or more, of his guards: "Go ye, and kill for me the Sultan of Roum!" What cared the servant for the consequences? If he fails to do his duty, through fear or negligence, he will never go to heaven; but if he tries to do the work and is slain, paradise is his at once.

Truly, a wonderful man was the chief of the Assassins; and his friendship was most valuable, as his enmity was dangerous and deadly.

And Hugh of Vermandois had sought this wonderful man, in the hope that he might enlist his sympathy in his behalf. Something of more than passing moment must it have been that could have called this purpose to the Christian's mind; for there was danger in the companionship, as the impulsive prince was yet to learn—aye, to learn at a most fearful cost!

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF HUGH'S LOVE.

When the Old Man of the Mountain and his guest had reached the pavilion, the former touched a small silver bell, the liquid tones of which quickly brought a black slave to answer the summons. Not a word was spoken. The slave appeared and knelt before his master, and having received an order, given by a few quick motions of the hand, he disappeared, and soon returned bearing a golden tray, upon which were such delicate refreshments as might tempt the most sluggish appetite, and which might yet be borne by the most delicate stomach. Hashishin set the example, which Hugh was not slow to follow; and when they had eaten and drunk, the tray was removed, and the host signified that he was ready to listen.

"Good father," said our hero, coming at once to the subject which was uppermost in his mind, in that it puzzled him, "I am at a loss to understand how it is that I feel no pain. You saw me when I fell?"

The old man nodded.

"And the rock struck me upon the head—a rock as large as that which crushed the Turk to death?"

The listener nodded again.

"Then whence this freedom from pain—this whole-

ness of body, as though no such accident had befallen me? By what miracle have I been saved?"

"It has been no miracle, my son," replied Hashishin, with a kindly smile. "In the first place, your stout armor broke the force of the blow; and the state of insensibility which followed was rather the result of a terrible shock to the whole system than of any serious injury to the skull. When you fell our enemies were overcome; for those two who had made their way to the top of the precipice had been seriously wounded before you came up; so all we had to do was to bring you hither as quickly as possible, which we did upon the back of your own horse. When we had gained this shelter I caused your body to be stripped, and after careful examination I found that no bones were broken, though the whole body had received a strain which would be serious if not properly attended to. Your limbs had begun already to swell, and I knew if you recovered your senses while in that situation your pain would be most excruciating. So I watched you narrowly, and when I suspected that your senses were about to open I administered a powerful but harmless opiate; and under the influence of that opiate you have been kept, while the utmost exertions of care and skill have been expended upon your body. Lotions, the virtues of which are almost magical, have been freely applied, and six black slaves have been busy, day and night, rubbing your skin. The passes of the hand have been always made in one direction—from the centers of sense outward—and thus I can assure you much of your pain has been carried away. You may smile, Sir Knight; but I assure you I have a slave—and he has been in constant attendance upon you—the touch of whose hand can cure disease; not all disease, but certain forms. However, you are well,

and you owe most of your escape from pain to the slave of whom I speak. I have seen him turn from three hours' work upon your body with his hands so pained and swollen that he could hardly move them."

"God bless the man!" cried Hugh. "How can I repay him?"

"I will tell him that you have blessed him, and that will be pay enough. But be sure he is already amply repaid in pleasing me."

"And now my lord, how long have I been here?"

"This is the sixth day."

"With a loud cry the crusader started to his feet.

"God have mercy on me!" he groaned, wringing his hands in agony.

"What moves you thus, my son?" asked the Old Man, while something like a smile played around his lips.

"What moves me, do you ask? Do you know what the Christian army is doing at Nice? Do you know what they have a right to expect at the hands of Hugh de Vermandois? And do you ask me what moves me!"

"You are not a philosopher, my son?"

"And if I were, how could philosophy serve me now?"

"It would bid you, instead of thinking of six days' absence from your camp, and of mourning thereat, to think of the eternal farewell you came so near bidding said camp, and of the gratitude due to the God of heaven for the life that is still yours."

"Forgive me!" exclaimed the warm-hearted prince, grasping the Old Man by the hand. "I will be a philosopher. God be praised that I have a life left to give to the cause of the Holy Cross!"

"And now, my son, we can proceed. But first let me say to you, I am your friend while I live, and you

may command me. But for you I should, ere this, have lost my power forever, if not my head. You were seeking me when you ascended the mountain?"

"Yes."

"And wherefore?"

"I had heard that, though a follower of the prophet, you were yet at enmity with the Seljoucides. I wished for the services of a messenger which I believed you alone could furnish—a messenger who could enter the besieged city and bring me word from a person who, I have reason to believe, is held captive there."

"Such a messenger, my son, you can have at any time," said Hashishin, cheerfully. "And I will tell you that there are four of my trusty guards who would lay down their lives for you at your bidding—the four who survived the battle on the mountain. And now, how much of your story are you at liberty to tell to me?"

"All of it, my lord. Listen, if you have patience."

The Old Man signified that he was not only willing to listen, but really curious to hear the knight's story, whereupon the latter spoke as follows:

"Among the maidens of my native land the most beautiful of them all was Gertrude, the daughter of Count Raymond of Thoulouse. Not only did she outshine the whole court in the surpassing loveliness of form and feature, but to a grace that might have become the queen of the fairies, were added a strength of arm and a greatness of soul that rendered her next to invincible in arms. I wonder not that you are surprised. But you must know that upon both her father's and her mother's sides, Gertrude came of a stock that bred only warriors. In her childhood she conceived a passion for arms; and, at first in sport, her father yielded to her whims. As she increased in years, her love of arms grew stronger, and as each successive

stage of development added to her strength of body, new charms were added to her loveliness. At the age of nineteen, she met and overcame in the lists one of the best knights of France ; and it was not the thought of doing harm to a woman that stayed his hand, for he truly believed that he was fighting against Hugh of Vermandois ; for, when mounted upon her powerful charger, with her tall plumes rising over her casque, the slight difference in stature was not observed. It was almost a year after this that she visited my brother's court ; and one day she laughingly challenged me to a joust with wooden lances. At first I thought her not serious, for she well knew that I, though one of the youngest, was yet one of the stoutest knights in France. Suffice it to say that we met, both clad in complete armor. In the beginning I did not put forth my whole strength, and she perceived it, and blamed me for it. Soon, however, I found that I had need to summon all the powers I possessed ; and under the exciting influence of the shouts of the multitude, I forgot my hesitation and threw my whole soul into the conflict. The noble lady had one important advantage over me. I called myself the best horseman at the court, and so I was acknowledged by my peers ; but Gertrude of Thoulouse was the most accomplished rider that I ever saw. She was, in fact, so much a part of the horse she bestrode that no possible break on the part of the beast, be it never so wild and sudden, could shake her from her seat. Fortunately for me, I discovered her marvelous prowess before it was too late ; and by putting forth the last effort of my power, I overcame her.

"When I beheld that steel-clad form rolling in the dust—cast there by my hand—and remembered the thing of beauty that had been thus overturned, my

heart beat with painful emotion, and a dreadful agony seized upon me. Then it was that I knew how fondly I had loved her; and the thought came to me that she must henceforth hate me. But how wrongfully had I judged! Instead of blaming me for what I had done, she praised me for a true knight and told me that her hand was mine if I would accept it; for she regarded me as a knight worthy of her love and esteem.

"And so Gertrude of Thoulouse came to be my promised bride; but her father, who was then preparing for the crusade, declared that when we were married it should be at Jerusalem, upon the site of the Holy Temple.

"When we were ready to start for the Holy Land, Gertrude was at my brother's court, and her father sent word that she should proceed to Constantinople with me; and we set forth together, little dreaming of the evil that was in store for us. Upon the coast of Epirus my ship was cast away; bnt Gertrude and I reached the shore in safety, where I left her at a fisherman's hut, while I went to look after the saving of our stores. During the first night after the wreck Gertrude was borne away from the hut. That she was dragged away by cruel force I knew full well; but by whom and whither I could not learn. I had rivals—rivals who hated both the lady and myself—rivals who had been overcome in the list by the fair Amazon, and who had never forgiven her for conquering at once their arms and their claim to her hand, nor forgiven me for having fairly won the precious jewel which they had sought in vain. That these false knights had a hand in her abduction I am sure; but since I could not bring an atom of proof, I have not dared openly to make the charge. Yet they are aware of my suspicions, and a secret dread increases their hate.

"Perhaps you have heard how the Emperor Alexius, when he heard of my mishap, sent a strong force and caused me to be conducted to his capital, where he sought to enlist me in his own service. He promised me princely rank and power, and even hinted that he would nominate me as his successor upon the throne, but I would not listen. I could not forget my vows, taken when the pope placed the standard of the church in my care; and, remembering them, I could not break them. It was at one time whispered among those knights who had arrived at Constantinople with me that I had sold myself to the Greek emperor, but they knew 'twas false when they said so. But of this I need tell you no more. The crusaders had at length all reached the shores of the Bosphorus, and thence we set forth upon our march, which brought us first to the city now under siege.

"The last of our chiefs to reach the rendezvous was Raymond of Thoulouse. I had hoped to be the first to convey to him intelligence of the loss of his daughter, but somebody had been in advance of me. I had expected that he would blame me and that he would loudly grieve in his bereavement, for I knew that he held his beautiful child in the innermost depths of his love. But he received me calmly and, I thought, coldly. I quickly saw that he wished not to converse upon the matter and I left him, and from that time to the present no word has passed between us upon the subject of our mutual loss. He has treated me with studied politeness, and I have reason to believe that my enemies have sought to poison his mind against me. But in good time, if I live, I shall know that.

"And now, my lord, I come to the end of the chapter. On the day that we attacked the city, I gained a footing upon the outer wall, and while there I saw four

stout men dragging a female along upon the inner rampart. I caught a view of her face and I am sure it was Gertrude of Thoulouse! I saw her but a single instant, and before I could gain the place where she had disappeared a heavy detachment of the enemy's forces drove me back, and I was forced to retreat for my life. I am sure that Gertrude is a prisoner in Nice, and that when we made the attack she sought to make her escape. And, good father, I must see her. But how? I asked myself this question a week ago, and my judgment said to me: 'If you would enter Nice, or if you would gain intelligence from Gertrude, you must secure the assistance of the Old Man of the Mountain. He alone, of all the world, can safely help you in this.' So I sought you, and the result you have seen."

Hashishin had listened attentively, apparently much interested in the crusader's story, and when it had been concluded, he said:

"Truly, sir knight, yours is a wonderful story. I should almost be tempted to doubt the entire truth of what you tell concerning the lady of Thoulouse, did I not know, through evidence of my own senses, that among the maidens and wives of the Christians of the West, there have been those who have taken up arms and joined their brothers and their husbands in battle. I know that when Alexius fought against Robert Guiscard, the wife of that gallant chief, the Lady Gaita, not only fought by her husband's side, but actually saved a battle by her daring and wondrous presence of mind. It was when the forces of Guiscard had broken and were fleeing from the field, that she drove her horse before them and, swaying her lance in their faces, and asking them if they would leave a woman to fight alone with her husband, she influenced them to

turn back and, following whither she led, they won the day. And she, too, was so beautiful that the emperor was smitten with her charms."

"Aye," returned Hugh, "I have seen the Lady Gaita, and I can swear that she is fair and beautiful; but her beauty is of a cold and haughty kind, willful and imperious, while the loveliness of Gertrude of Thoulouse is of the kind that melts the heart and wins love and homage at once. Oh, she is very beautiful, and she is as good and true as she is beautiful. So I declare, calling God to witness the truth!"

"Hugh de Vermandois," said the Old Man, with something of solemnity in the latter part of his speech, "I might hear many men speak as you have spoken and give little credit to their words; but you have proved to me that you are a brave, true man, and I know that no falsehood dwells in your heart. Whatever may have been your hopes when you set forth to seek me, and however I might have answered had you found me without trouble, can signify nothing now, for new relations have sprung up between us, cementing us, I trust, in a friendship that shall know no treachery. In answer to the story you have told me, I have only to say, command me, and I will serve you to the extent of my power; remembering, my son, that honor as well as opportunity may circumscribe a man's ability."

"I understand you," said the prince, with emotion, "and I should at once prove myself unworthy even of common friendship, did I not recognize and respect the obstacle to my desires which true honor imposes. And now, this is my request: I want a messenger who can come to my tent and go thence into Nice—one who will do my bidding while in the city and return to me with his answer."

"I will do more," returned Hashishin. "I will send to you the four men whose lives you saved on the mountain; and you may be assured that they will serve you with their lives, if necessary."

"Are they here?" asked Hugh, looking around as though he expected to behold them at his call.

The Old Man shook his head, and a peculiar smile flitted across his face. But gradually the smile faded away, and while a look of solomn meaning overspread his strongly marked features, he arose and placed his hand upon his guest's head.

"Hugh de Vermandois," he said, with grave solemnity, "those men of whom we speak are so true to me that, at my bidding, they would, without even the appearance of hesitation, cast themselves down from the highest precipice of these mountains, fully assured that, on the moment of their mortal dissolution, their freed spirits would be wafted to a paradise of which this is a type. And yet, were they to know that I had this retreat—could they once gain access here in their waking senses—their faith might be sadly, if not fatally, staggered. No, no. They know it not, and they must never know it. To you, who have seen so much, I will say, that the entrance to this garden is so obscure that no mortal can ever find it except through the treachery of some one whom I am forced to trust. The entrance is by a series of caverns, where art has placed obstructions and barriers which the eye of man could never detect, though he devoted a lifetime to the search. And now promise me—swear to me by that which you hold most sacred—that you will never tell to a human being—that you will never mention by so much as a syllable, even to me, when away from here—what you have seen since opening your eyes in this pavilion."

And Hugh made instant answer:

"By the hope which I hold of honor among my fellow-men I swear—by the love I bear to Gertrude I swear—and by my hope of heaven in the time to come I swear—that my lips shall be henceforth sealed touching this place. I will live and speak as though I had never seen it."

"Enough. The men whom you seek shall be with you within an hour after you reach your tent. They will give you to know their purpose, and you may then command them."

As Hashishin thus spoke, he took from a side-board, made of ivory and mother-of-pearl, a small golden salver, upon which were a crystal flask and two small goblets. He filled both the goblets, and passing one to his guest, he added:

"And now, in a draught of such cordial as only the most favored ones can ever hope to sip, I pledge you my friendship while the life you saved is left to me."

The Old Man of the Mountain raised his glass to his lips, barely touching the pale liquid; while Hugh, never noticing the abstinence of his host, drank the contents of his goblet at a single draught. It was a delicious beverage, and in a very few moments he felt a genial warmth spreading through every avenue of his body, while objects about him grew brighter and more glorious.

"Good Father, when shall I return? Am I not strong? Tell me; is this cure only seeming—induced by drugs that will leave me weak and pain-racked when their substance is used up; or is it real and substantial?"

"There is no deceit in this, my son. Your body is entirely free from disease, and all of weakness there is you can feel even now. I think this first exertion will

so weary you that you will soon wish to repose a while ere you set forth. After that, you shall depart when you please. I think I can already detect signs of fatigue. You have endured much, considering how long you have remained wholly inactive."

"I think I do feel somewhat weary, good father."

"Aye, I thought so. Seek your couch a while, and when you again arise it shall be to depart for the Christian camp."

The prince sought his couch, as his host had suggested, and in a very short time thereafter his senses were locked in a slumber so profound that a thunderbolt could not have aroused him.

CHAPTER V.

STARTLING INTELLIGENCE.

Prince Hugh felt the gentle breeze fanning his brow, and upon attempting to turn he felt that his bed was hard like iron. He opened his eyes, but closed them instantly, for the bright sunlight dazzled them painfully. He moved again, and it quickly appeared to him that he was in his armor ; and under the influence of this discovery he started to a sitting posture, and gradually opened his eyes to the light of day, and gazed around him. He was clad in full armor ; his sword was at his hip, his lance by his side, his buckler resting against his thigh, his helmet at his elbow, while his faithful horse was directly before him, busily engaged in cropping the buds from a mass of shrubbery that found root in a crevice of the rock ; for he was upon a rocky bed—upon the very mountain table where he had fought with the Turks. Could it be? He closed his eyes and opened them again. Yes ; there could be no mistake. He arose. There was a sense of languor, of weakness ; but upon moving around a little, and inhaling the fresh air, he found himself stronger.

Yes; he was upon the same table where he had fought ; but where were the bodies of the slain?

"Dominic," he cried, addressing his horse, "what is the meaning of all this? Have I been dreaming?

Have I lain here since that rock fell upon me? I' faith, it is the very spot where I fell, and here is the rock that crushed me down; and," he added, picking up his helm, "here is the terrible dent where the missile struck. Ye gods! What is the meaning of this strange event? I see—the Turks have removed the bodies of their own, and the Ismaelians have carried away the fallen of their party; while I, friendless and forsaken, have been left here to recover as best I might. But I cannot blame them. They evidently left me for dead, thinking, doubtless, that my own followers would find me in good time. And it has been all a dream—all, all, a dream. And yet, my soul, how real! I can even now hear the tones of the old man in my ears, and the taste of the nectar is upon my lips. But it was too beautiful to be real—and in such a place, too! 'Sdeath! I only wonder that the mind of man could be wild enough even to dream of such a paradise in the midst of these grim mountains!"

For some time the knight paced to and fro, ever and anon stopping, as some staggering reflection crossed his mind, and finally he came to this conclusion: When the conflict between the Ismaelians and the Turks, in which he had taken part, had ended, those living had borne away each the bodies of their friends, and he had been left for dead, the old man believing that his own people would find his body and care for it. It required considerable mental labor to bring him to this conclusion, for the events of the experience in the pavilion and in the garden were so vividly impressed upon his mind that he could with difficulty and much hesitation throw them off. But, on the side of calm reason, how could such an experience have been possible? It could not. It must have been a dream and nothing more.

And now came another consideration: What should be his next step? He looked at the sun, and found it in the east; so he knew it was morning, and hence he concluded that he had lain there upon the rock near four-and-twenty hours. The blow which had felled him must have been a severe one, and he wondered how it was that he felt no pain.

"Ah!" he said to himself, as thought entered his mind. "The pain will come soon enough. It is not time for it yet. In a very few hours, no doubt, my limbs will begin to swell, and I shall suffer enough."

And he concluded that he had better return to the camp, and take another time for visiting the Old Man of the Mountain.

"For surely," he reasoned, "he will, when he finds that I am alive and well, assist me readily. I have a claim upon his friendship now which he cannot disregard. I will return to the camp before my waking senses begin to groan with pain, and at another time I will seek Hashishin."

"Having thus spoken, the knight donned his casque, and having seen that his armor was all fast, he picked up his lance and mounted to his saddle. A few moments he sat there, with his head bowed, as though yet undecided, but presently he cried:

"No, no, my Dominic, not now. We have been long enough away from the camp. At another time we will make further search for the white-haired mountain chieftain. Up, now, and let us be going!"

With a glad neigh the horse pricked up his ears and without any direction from his master, he took the path by which he had ascended, seeming to declare by his prompt movements that he knew the way and would keep it.

It was past noon when Prince Hugh reached the

camp of the crusaders, and upon his appearance his immediate followers, to the number of five or six thousand, sent up a shout of joy that shook the air as with a thunderbolt.

"Prince Hugh is safe! God and the Vermandois!" were the cries that rent the air. And very soon he was surrounded by his friends, all eager to know where he had been, and if he was really safe and well. Bowing and waving his hand, and returning the friendly salutations as far as he was able, the prince slowly made his way toward his tent. But the anxiety of his people was so great to know where he had been that they crowded together in his path, and he was beginning to be perplexed and irritated when his faithful esquire gained his side.

"My lord," said de St. Valery, "if you can tell them where you have been, and why you have been absent so long, without injury to your own reputation, do so in God's name!"

The prince regarded his esquire with a look of blank amazement.

"Speak!" urged Walter. "Speak—and I will explain hereafter."

Upon that Hugh drew up his horse and turned toward those of his followers who had blocked up his way.

"Men of Vermandois," he said, "when I left the camp I only intended to have been gone a few hours. On the mountain, in a secluded place, I met fourteen Seljoudice Turks of the Sultan's army and gave them battle. I had slain or wounded all but two and these I had driven up against the face of a high precipice, when two of the wounded ones, who had made their way unobserved to the top of the cliff, hurled down upon me a heavy rock. They discharged two. The

first crushed one of their own men who had stood before me, and the second, just as I had slain the only remaining Moslem, struck me upon the head, felling me to the earth as one dead. I was found by a party of mountaineers, who carried me to their cavern home and cared for me, and from the moment when the rock struck me I had no return of sense until this morning—no sober, rational sense, that gave me to know where I was. That is all, my men. I am weak and fatigued now. Give me rest, I pray you, and at another time you shall have the whole story of my adventure."

The Vermandois were satisfied, and with louder cries of joy than before, they cleared the way to their chieftain's tent and allowed him to proceed without further impediment, and ere long he was alone with his esquire, having laid aside his armor and donned a silken robe.

"Walter," demanded the knight, as soon as he was sure that no other ears were near, "how long have I been absent from the camp?"

"This is the seventh day, my lord."

"Are you sure?"

"You went away on the second day of last week and this is the first day of another week."

"Oh, my soul! Then it was not a dream!"

Walter de St. Valery regarded his master with a puzzled, anxious look, and it was very plain to be seen that he had a heavy burden upon his mind.

"Walter," said Hugh, after a short silence, "you spoke to me but now as though there was trouble brewing against me here in the camp. Did you mean so?"

"I did, my lord."

"Tush! Speak out, good Walter, and speak plainly.

He is a true friend who tells the truth unsparingly when it can be of service. Now tell me what is plotting against me."

"My lord, you know that the Bourbon brothers, Peter and Arnold, are your enemies; and with them, against you, works Raymond's favorite captain, Guiscard de Grillon."

A bitter smile passed over the knight's face as he replied:

"All three of these false-hearted knights aspired, in turn, to the hand of the Lady Gertrude; and all three, in turn, were overcome by her in the list. We can easily understand why they should hate me. Aye!" the prince cried, smiting his clinched fist upon his knee, "and why they should fear me, too! Walter, as true as God lives, those dastards contrived the abduction of Gertrude of Thoulouse!"

"My lord!"

"It is even so, Walter. In my own heart, before my God, I know it; and in time the whole army shall know it. But I have not the proof that would satisfy a court of human judges. They caused that she should be taken away from the fisherman's hut, and carried to one of the cities we were likely to attack; and there they planned, either that she should be sold into slavery, out of revenge, or else she is to be held until they shall decide by lot which shall possess her. Good Walter, I saw Gertrude of Thoulouse upon the wall of Nice! I am not mistaken. And I think my enemies know that I saw her; for Guiscard de Grillon was very near to me at the time. I saw her, and I determined to find a messenger whom I could safely send it unto her; and for that purpose I sought the Old Man of the Mountain, knowing, if I could secure his friendship, I should obtain the messenger. It was

for that purpose I went to the mountains a week ago."

"And did you find the renowned chief?" asked the esquire, with much interest.

"Yes, I met him; and it was in his behalf that I engaged the Turks." And thereupon Hugh gave to his companion a detailed account of his battle, from the time when he first came in sight of the unequal conflict to the falling of the rock upon his head.

"And where were you when you recovered your senses?" asked Walter.

The knight bent his head upon his hand and reflected. He had begun to think that the vision of the pavilion and the garden might have been substantial realities, after all; and if so, he had bound himself never to speak of them.

"Good Walter," he finally answered, looking up, "I hardly know how to answer you. If the vision was real, then I came to my senses first yesterday, when I found myself in an abode far more comfortable than I had ever expected to behold in such a locality, and the Old Man of the Mountain was with me. He had caused me to be borne thither, and there I had been nursed for six days by slaves who had stood over me all the time. Gentle opiates had been administered to prevent the return of sense and the consequent realization of pain, and in that condition a cure almost miraculous had been effected. I told to Hashishin my story, and he promised to assist me. Aye, he promised to send to me the four servants whose lives I saved with his own—and he did it cheerfully, pledging an undying friendship besides. But mind you, this may have all been a dream. At the close of our interview I drank a small measure of nectar, and shortly afterward fell asleep upon my bed. So much for what

may have happened in the grotto if it was not all a dream.

"This morning I awoke and found myself lying just where I fell beneath the huge rock which the Turk hurled upon me. I was in full armor, my arms by my side and my horse feeding close by. There I was, all alone, and no signs of either living or dead men near me." And then the knight told of his meditations, and of his final resolution to return to the camp, remarking, in conclusion: "We shall ere long know if I dreamed or not. If I saw the Old Man, as I think, his guards will come."

"Of one thing, at least, you may be sure," suggested the esquire. "You could not have remained upon that rocky table on the mountain-side during the six days, for I know that I crossed it with a hundred men several times."

"That is evident enough. I think the messengers will come; and in the meantime, Walter, I would know what mine enemies have done. You were about to tell me when we branched off upon the story of my adventure. Tell me all. My ears are prepared, and the consciousness of right and honor gives me strength to bear everything that craven traitors can bring upon me."

"My lord," said De St. Valery, speaking slowly and with a solemn soberness, and with the air of a man who would mingle counsel with his revelations, "you must not despise the efforts of your enemies against you; for, believe me, they are at work with caution, feeling their way carefully as they advance, and seeking seeming evidence to sustain their charges. First, they are planning to show that you took the oath of allegiance to the Greek Emperor, and that even now you are working in his interest. It has been whispered

that should Nice finally fall, it will fall into the hands of Alexius instead of into the hands of those noble soldiers of the Cross who will have shed their blood for the prize."

"And do they insinuate that Hugh of Vermandois knows aught of this—that he will seek to bring about such a result?"

"Yes, my lord; they not only insinuate this, but they are leading many of the crusaders to believe it. The men of Vermandois denounce the thing as a vile slander; and so do the followers of the stout Duke, Robert of Normandy, together with the noble Count of Flanders and his men. But you must remember how many chiefs there are who know you not, only as they hear of you from others. It is known that you spent the winter at the emperor's court, and that he bestowed upon you more favors than were bestowed upon any other knight of Europe."

"Walter!" cried the prince, while an icy hand seemed for the moment laid upon his heart, "do *you* believe these things?"

"I!" uttered the esquire, as though the very Monarch of Tartarus had at that instant claimed him for his own.

"Do *you* believe them, Walter? Mark me," the knight added, with an emotion that set his lips as though they had been made of steel, "the man claiming to be a friend, if he hesitates and doubts when the honor of his brother is assailed, is worse than an open and loud-mouthed believer; for of the shapeless material afforded by the shy and embarrassed hesitation of an aforetime confidant and companion, the scheming enemy may build up just such evidence of crime as suits him best."

"In God's name," cried the astounded man, sinking

upon his knees and grasping his master's hands, "what mean those words ?"

"Your looks, Walter. You tremble, and your gaze seems to quail before me."

A moment the esquire remained as he was, and then, while a gleam of light fell upon his face, he arose to his feet.

"My lord," he said, in a tone of relief, "I understand it. I had turned my thoughts upon the misfortunes which had conspired to throw power into the hands of your enemies—misfortunes which commenced with the fatal wreck at Epirus, and which have been multiplied since ; and thus thinking, I shuddered with the reflection that upon the shoulders of the very noblest of all the true and gallant knights whom God had given to the work of redeeming the Holy Land the sins of the most base and vile might be laid. It was that idea, fully pictured in my mind, that gave tone and expression to my face when you looked up."

Hugh caught the hand of his friend and raised it to his lips ; and in the warmth of his impulsive nature, he cried out :

"In heaven's name, dear Walter, forgive me ! Oh, it would break my heart if I thought you could prove false ! But I ought to do penance for ever having conceived such a thing possible. You will forgive me, Walter ?"

"Oh, my God," ejaculated the faithful esquire, flinging his arms around the prince's neck, "if I can know that you love me and trust me and still hold me near to your prayers, I shall be as happy as I can ask. This poor life is yours !"

The prince gazed up through a flood of tears ; and while his lips were trembling in vain effort at speech, Walter added, with solemn earnestness :

"Aye, my lord, and more than that: I can give you assurance that ten thousand men surround you at this moment whose hearts no power of earth can alienate from you!"

"Ah, whom have we here? Roland, what now?"

"Four strangers, my lord," answered the page, "who demand to speak with Prince Hugh of Vermandois."

"What manner of men are they?"

"By their garbs, my lord, I should pronounce them fishermen of the lake."

Who could they be? Would the Ismaelians come in such garb? But the prince ordered that they should be admitted to his presence.

Ah! It was not a dream! No, no—for before him, in humble, submissive mood, knelt the promised *Fédaïs* of the Old Man of the Mountain!

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

Walter de St. Valery would have left the tent when the messengers of Hashishin entered, but his master detained him.

"No, good Walter, I will not have it so," said Hugh. "Thou art faithful, and I will henceforth, while this matter is in hand, trust thee as though thou wert a part of myself. Only I claim from thee this promise: Say unto me that no sign, word or deed which may meet thy senses in connection with this business shall pass thy lips but with my consent. Thy promise will be to me as good as an oath."

The esquire promised readily, and showed by his manner, as well as by his words, that he was greatly pleased with this mark of his master's confidence.

After this the prince made a sign to the Ismaelians that they should arise, and bade that they should tell him for what purpose they had come; whereupon one of the four again knelt, and thus spoke:

"To the noble Prince Hugh, a Christian knight, our beloved lord hath sent us with the command that our lives be given in his hands. We are here to hear and obey. Save the raising of our hands against our own

brethren, there can be nothing which we will not undertake at thy bidding."

The prince comprehended at once that he had only to make known his desire in order to set these devoted men at work. He reflected a while, and then asked his esquire what was the hour. As for himself, he had kept no reckoning of time. He was informed that it was near the tenth hour. Hugh had no idea that the day was so well-nigh spent; but there might be yet time for work—perhaps the most favorable time was yet to come.

"Friends," he said, directing his address, however, to the man who had thus far acted as spokesman of the party, "do you think you can gain entrance to this besieged city?"

"Very easily," answered the Assassin. "And in order that thy mind may be made easy upon that score, I will show thee how. Among the Turks whom you slew upon the mountain was a certain officer of the Sultan's army, named Abdul ben Achmed. He was of my own age, of my own stature, and he had many shades of resemblance in feature and look. I, Hassan, have secured Ben Achmed's entire garb, together with his arms, and in his guise I shall enter the city. My companions have also garbs which were taken from the bodies of other fallen Turks."

Hassan observed that a query had suggested itself to the Christian's mind, and, quickly divining its import, he added:

"The bodies of the four Turks, whose garbs and arms we thus appropriated, were carried away and buried by ourselves, so that we may not fear detection from the knowledge of their death. And moreover, my lord, this same Abdul ben Achmed was often a messenger from Kilidge Arslan to the forces within the

city, for you must know that even now the Sultan's wife and children are within the walls of Nice."

"Have you brought these disguises with you?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And you can enter Nice this night?"

"We can enter Nice at any time, my lord, and in any manner that suits us best. These disguises will only serve to enable us to pass certain guards without question. We have more power than you think."

"Then listen. Hassan, when I left my native land I held in charge the most lovely damsel that my eye ever rested upon. She was my promised bride. It had been planned that we should be married in Jerusalem. On the coast of Epirus our ship was wrecked, and during the following night my lady was stolen away. I had enemies among my own countrymen who must have contrived the wickedness, but they must have been Moslems who bore her away. I will not tell you how we have searched, nor how we have suffered. I will only tell you that one week ago, when I stood upon the top of the outer wall of yonder city, I beheld my beloved in the hands of four stout Saracens, being dragged away from the inner battlements. The lady is Gertrude of Thoulouse, daughter of the noble Count Raymond. I must see her. Bring her to me if you can."

Hassan shook his head.

"Do you doubt—"

The *Fédaï* stopped the knight with a motion of his hand.

"I doubt no word of yours, my lord. We will find the lady, if she is in the city; but the bringing of her forth may not be so easy. Such prisoners are not trusted under the sole security of bolts and bars. Eyes that never sleep are watching her. It is not impossible that some of our own soldiers may be guarding

her. There are many of them employed by private nobles in Nice."

"But," cried Hugh, "you will see her, and bring me word."

"We will do that."

And upon that mission the *Fédais* soon afterward went their way, Hassan having promised that he would return as early on the morrow as possible.

After the messengers had gone, Hugh de Vermandois walked forth in his own quarter, and met a large number of his own knights and trusty esquires, to whom, being earnestly pressed, he related all that had transpired during his absence, only omitting the name of Hashishin and the circumstance of the garden. He represented the truth as nearly as he could without connecting himself in any manner with the Old Man of the Mountain, feeling himself perfectly justified in withholding information which concerned no one but himself.

There had been no assault made upon the city during his absence, nor had the Turks upon the mountains showed any disposition to make an attack.

The prince could not but discover that his friends were uneasy concerning him ; but at the same time he received new proofs of their friendship and fidelity ; and he thought that in a few days he should be able to blow away the insignificant cloud which had arisen upon the horizon of his fate. It could not be long, he thought, before he should expose the perfidy of the false knights who were now so busily engaged in traducing him. But he must gain Gertrude's evidence against them—an event which would at once clear his fame and secure his lasting happiness.

At an early hour the prince retired to his couch, where he slept soundly until morning ; and when he

had arisen and performed his ablutions, he felt stronger than on the previous day. In fact, when he had eaten his breakfast, he believed himself as capable of bearing a lance as ever. He had arisen from the morning meal and was upon the point of giving some direction to his esquire, when Hassan, the *Fédaï* stood before him, having glided in like a specter, unannounced and unnoticed by those in the outer tent.

"Ha, Hassan! Is 't thou?"

"Come to bring thee this," responded the messenger, at the same time handing to the prince a tiny parcel, which might have been effectually hidden between the thumb and finger.

Hugh took it, and found it to be a bit of fine white silk, which he quickly opened and spread out, discovering a surface about the size of his palm, neatly glazed with some glutinous substance and written upon with a pen. And this is what was written and what he read with a wildly throbbing heart. How quickly he recognized those characters—bold, yet delicate, and blurred in one or two places, as though drops of moisture had fallen there:

"To the Noble and Valiant Hugh of Vermandois: I am a prisoner in the hands of the Emir Abu Hassa. Thus far I have found strength for the protection of my honor. Come to me, if you can. No stratagem can free me from these bonds; and yet the way for my deliverance is open. He who bears this says he can bring you into the city. If you can come with safety to yourself, do so, in answer to the earnest prayer of

"Gertrude."

The prince pressed the missive to his lips and then turned to the messenger.

"You saw the lady?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Is she not beautiful?"

"Beautiful and majestic," replied Hassan.

"Did she tell you of her situation—of the treatment she received at the hands of those who guard her?"

"Only that she is closely watched every moment of the time."

"And this Abu Hassa, the Emir—do you know him?"

"Yes, my lord, I know him very well."

"What is he like? Tell me, Hassan, what you know of him."

"He is one of the most powerful of the Seljoucide emirs, my lord, and is in the immediate service of the Sultan Kilidge Arslan. He has lived fifty years, and I doubt if any man ever did more iniquity in the same length of time. He is a noted warrior, and at this moment holds command in that quarter of the city where the sultan's family is housed."

"And you think I can gain entrance to the city?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"This night."

"In your company?"

"Yes."

"And you can lead me to Gertrude?"

"I can lead you to the palace of the emir, and for success beyond that we must trust to the fate which is written. I think it is written that you shall see her."

The prince had many more questions to ask—questions concerning the woman he loved; for after the long and dreary separation it seemed almost like being restored to her, thus to converse with one who had just left her. During the conversation Hugh learned that Hassan's three companions had remained in the city; and furthermore, that for himself there was a disguise in waiting which would serve him well against

discovery. It was a long time to wait—the whole day—but it passed at length, and when the shades of evening had settled upon the Christian camp, Hugh de Vermandois went forth from his tent in company with the trusty guide, having instructed his esquire to answer any who should inquire for him that he was away on business of his own.

It will be understood that Hugh de Vermandois was in no way under the command of any human being in that army. He was one of the five French chiefs who had set forth, each in command of his own army and upon his own responsibility. Yet he owed a certain allegiance to his fellow-chieftains, in that they had mutually bound themselves by a solemn oath, and that oath declared that not one of them would turn his back toward Jerusalem, either through faintness of heart or for any selfish purpose, until the holy sepulcher had been reached. Hugh realized and appreciated the full force of this solemn obligation, and he would have been one of the very first to denounce and bring to trial the chief who should have broken the faith. But in this present business he was at work toward an end as important to him as was the rescue of the holy city, and he knew that in no way was he stepping aside from his duty to his fellow-crusaders. On the contrary, he was engaged in a purpose which demanded all his energies, and to the accomplishment of which his knightly oath had been pledged before he ever dreamed of Jerusalem.

"Good Walter," he had said to his esquire, "the very first oath I took upon receiving my knightly spurs was this; I will never see an innocent woman in peril without hastening to her assistance with all possible despatch and devoting my life to her rescue if necessary."

So the prince had no hesitation in pursuing the work before him without letting others into his secret.

It was well into the evening when Hugh followed Hassan from the tent, and with quick steps they glided along upon the outskirts of the camp, keeping out of the way of the light of the watch-fires. They had come very near to the shore of the lake, when Hassan whispered to the prince that some one was following them. The latter looked back, and by the dim starlight he could distinguish two or three moving objects not far away.

"Have you enemies who could have any interest in following you?" asked the guide.

Hugh, impelled by the instinct of his own consciousness of honor and right, was upon the point of answering in the negative, when he remembered the circumstance of his being followed in the forest, and the revelation which St. Valery had subsequently made, and this led him to change his thought.

"Yes," he replied, with considerable reluctance, "I have enemies in the camp who would like to pry into my affairs, and their motives are bad."

"Then keep your eyes upon me and follow close," said Hassan.

And with this the guide walked on a few paces very quickly, and suddenly he disappeared from sight within a clump of bushes; but Hugh easily found the opening, and having submitted to a slight inconvenience from making his way through the tangled mass, where there was only a jackal-path, he discovered Hassan just turning the outer angle of an old wall, which seemed to be a part of the ruins of some ancient building; and when he had gained this point he found himself in the midst of a mass of tumble-down rocks and jagged walls, with corridors and shattered arches,

which he had never before visited, and of the existence of which, so near to the camp, he had had no previous knowledge. By and by they came to a small open space, which might have been the inner court of a common dwelling ; and here Hugh expected to see his guide step off through an open arch, beyond which the waters of the lake were visible ; but the course pursued by the *Fédaï* was somewhat different. Turning a little to the left, toward a stout wall, he seized what appeared to be a fragment of rock, accidentally fallen upon a projecting ledge of the wall, and with a smart pull he drew open a secret door, and bade the knight enter. Such was Hugh's confidence in his conductor that, if he had pulled up a trap and bade him leap into a dark abyss, he would hardly have hesitated. So through the open doorway he passed without question, and when Hassan had reclosed the door they were in impenetrable darkness.

"Your hand, my lord." The prince gave it, and presently they arrived at a place where a blazing torch was stuck into a crevice of the rock ; and as soon as Hugh could command his eyes, he saw two of Hassan's companions standing near.

"Ha !" cried Hugh, the truth flashing upon him the moment he saw the two *Fédaïs* there in waiting. "Is there a subterranean passage into the city ?"

For a few seconds Hassan was silent ; then he turned and spoke in a strange tongue with his companions, one of whom directly produced a bundle, from which Hassan took the various articles of clothing of a Seljoucide doctor, and handing them to the knight, he bade him remove his own outer garments and don these in their place. But the prince preferred to retain his hauberk, as he found the doctor's tunic ample enough to cover it. This hauberk was of pliant leather,

reaching from his throat to his hips, with close-fitting sleeves extending to the wrists, and so cunningly covered with a mail of interwoven rings of steel that no sword had ever been found trenchant enough to cut it; and it must have been a strong arm, with clean sweep and true aim, that could even have driven the point of a dagger through it.

While our hero had been changing his garb the two companions had again conferred together, and when he was ready to set forth, Hassan said unto him:

"My lord, you have guessed the truth. There is a secret underground passage from these ruins into the city, known only to our master and his guards. You are to be conducted by that passage, and it was Hashishin's command, if we had occasion to lead you that way, that you should be hoodwinked. Have you any objections to allowing yourself to be thus deprived of your sight while threading the secret passage?"

"Suppose I had objections?" suggested the prince.

"In that case," replied Hassan, "I should confer with my brothers and decide whether we would accept a solemn oath as sufficient security."

"My friends," said the Christian, frankly. "I have no reason to believe that you could wish to deceive or betray me, so I will trust myself in your hands hoodwinked. Thus you will serve your master and at the same time serve me as well."

Hassan's expression of gratitude was simple and heart-sent, and when he had bound a silken scarf securely over the prince's eyes, he took him by the hand, saying:

"Come with me and fear no danger, for you are in the hands of a friend in whose fidelity you may with perfect safety confide."

CHAPTER VII.

GERTRUDE OF THOLOUSE.

It was a long and dubious way, especially to one deprived of sight, but Hugh de Vermandois knew that his guides were his friends and he gave himself not one thought of uneasiness in connection with his passage through the secret way. If he held any uneasy thoughts, they were of the success he might meet after the *Fédaïs* had left him to his own resources. However, he borrowed no trouble. He had a stout Damascus sword upon his hip—not like his own ponderous blade, fit to sever an iron helm, but still a true one—one that Hassan had furnished him, and so nearly like those worn by Turkish gentlemen that it could not help to betray him.

At length the party stopped and the hoodwink was removed. The torch was still burning and they were still in the subterranean passage, but Hugh observed a flight of stone steps directly before him and at the head appeared to be a closed trap.

"Can you see, my lord?" asked Hassan.

"Perfectly."

"Then mark the nature of these steps and be prepared to follow us up. Beyond that the distance to the open highway of Nice is short, so please remember

that the Christian knight is keeping watch over the garments we have left behind us and that you are henceforth, until you find your own garb again, a Seljoucide doctor, nothing more nor less. A forgetfulness of this may cost you your life."

"I understand," returned the prince, "and I will not forget your caution."

"Should there come danger," pursued the guide, "be not too ready with your sword. If you can do so with your life, find me before resorting to it. Do you understand?"

"You mean," answered the knight, that you will be near at hand, and that in case of danger I am to seek you?"

"Yes," said Hassan. "You are to regard me as the man who alone can lead you out of harm's way. And now let us proceed. Mark the steps, my lord."

He who carried the torch had lighted the lamp of a small lantern, which was set away in a convenient niche, and as Hassan spoke his last word of caution the flame of the torch was extinguished, and for a time all was total darkness. Hugh heard some one ascend the steps; presently a grating sound struck his ear—a current of fresh air; and then, upon looking up, he saw that a trap had been opened, and a space of dim, uncertain light was visible beyond. When his turn came—next before Hassan, who remained to see that all was left properly behind them—he ascended confidently, and when he came to look around him, after stepping forth upon the landing at the head of the steps, he found himself in a spacious building supported by numerous columns and pilasters, the architure all of the heaviest and grandest order. Something arose directly before him like an altar, and as his eyes became more used to the uncertain light he could see

that the space was both spacious and magnificent. But whence came the light? Surely not from windows, for he could see none.

"Are there lamps burning near at hand?" he asked of his guide.

"Yes," said Hassan.

"And do I not hear voices?"

"Very likely. Can you guess where you are?"

Hugh shook his head.

"In about the last place that you would be suffered to visit if your presence was known to the rulers," said Hassan, with a light laugh. "You are in the Mosque of Haroun al Raschid; and the voices which you hear are of the priests and muezzins who are resting from the labors of the day, and waiting for the final prayer; for since the city has been so seriously threatened an extra muezzin is called at the third hour of the night, and the watchmen and sentinels turn their faces to the tomb of the prophet at midnight."

The speaker came to a stop, and after a short pause he made ready to answer the question which was plainly to be read in the knight's look of astonishment.

"Hugh of Vermandois, I think I have your word that nothing which you may see or hear while in my company, aside from that which is properly your own business, shall ever pass your lips while in this country?"

"Such a promise you have, my brother."

"Then know that the mosque of Haroun al Raschid is entirely under the control of priests who are sworn followers of Hashishin. Not a soul in Nice, save our own people, dreams of such a thing. So now you understand why you have been permitted to enter here. And I will add that, while I am with you, you will have no occasion to fear any one whom you may meet

here. But we will not stop to see any of the inmates now. The countersign for this night with the sentinels of the guard is '*Abu Bekr*.' Remember the uncle of the prophet, and you will not forget it. Now let us set forth."

By a side door Hassan led the way to a narrow lane, whence they emerged into a broad street, well lighted, and in which many people were passing to and fro Two only of the *Fedaïs* accompanied Hugh from the mosque, one of them having remained there to be ready to open the way in case of the need of sudden flight. A walk of fifteen minutes, through one of the most populous districts of the city, brought them to a sumptuous palace, which Hassan announced as the residence of the Emir Abu Hassa.

"Remain close by my side," said Hassan, "and fear no danger. Remember that my master has his servants in the dwelling of every officer of note in Nice, and that a word from me to any such servant is as a law unto them which may not be violated. A physician is expected here to-night to see the beautiful Frankish prisoner, and you are that physician. If I leave you, be sure I shall remain near enough to call you in case of need."

In the court of the palace Hassan's companion left them and took up his post near the portico, and beyond this the prince and his original guide proceeded alone together. It seemed a wonder to the Christian knight thus to thread the passages of the palace of the Moslem chieftain, with stern sentinels at every turn ; but he saw that before his guide every halbert was lowered, and he passed on with a bold and unquailing front. Arrived at a small hall, beyond the posts of military sentinels, they were joined by a man who spoke with Hassan in the same strange tongue which

Hugh had heard before—the same which the Old Man of the Mountain had addressed to his slave, and which the *Fédaïs* had used among themselves. A little while and Hassan turned to his follower :

"Now, my lord, everything depends upon the utmost care and circumspection. We are near to the chamber of the lady whom you seek, and my brother has contrived to have our friends on the watch ; but there is no knowing who may come unexpectedly. Be careful that the lady does not behold your face until you have given her a word of caution, for near at hand are sure to be watchers whom we cannot trust. You will find your friend upon her couch, as a pretended illness has secured this interview."

They moved on, and pretty soon they were met by a female, who also spoke with Hassan in the strange tongue, and who directly took the seeming doctor under her charge, the old guide going no further.

It was a small chamber, hung with curtains of green and crimson silk, a Turkish couch—half bed and half sofa—upon one side, and upon the other a dressing-table, upon which burned a silver lamp. Upon the couch lay a female form, with a light silken coverlet drawn up to her shoulders, one of the fair white arms resting upon the outside. In an instant Hugh recognized that arm—the only arm he had ever seen combining all the fairest color and outline belonging to the woman with the swelling of those muscles which denote masculine strength and vigor—all the fullness and laying on of firm, enduring muscle, without the abrupt turns and corrugations of the limb of the athlete. He approached carefully, yet confidently, with the collar of his tunic drawn up between his face and the light, and as he came to the bedside he whispered :

"Save my life by silence !"

And as he spoke he took her hand in his strong grasp.

There was a sudden gasping, as though to hold back the cry that had arisen for utterance, and the frame of the couch shook with the mighty emotion that thrilled its fair occupant. A little, the left hand slowly lifting itself to join its mate in its glad prison house, and then the maiden spoke in the Frankish tongue, which she knew none of her attendants could understand.

"Hugh! Dear, dear Hugh! I am not deceived!"

"No, my own Gertrude. Behold!"

She looked up and saw the noble face, and a fervent prayer of thanksgiving went up to heaven.

"Let me see your tongue?" he said, in Arabic.

She raised her lips, and he pressed upon them a fervent, silent kiss.

And now they knew that their interview must be very brief; and that what they had to say must be said in the shortest possible space of time. Hugh was the first to hint at the unfortunate fact, and yet he had many questions to ask. As for himself and for the friends with the Christian army, she probably knew already as much as he could tell, only she could not know how he had suffered in view of her loss. She could never know how his heart had ached.

"Ah!" she said, with a sad motion of the head. "You forget that I have a heart as well as you, and that my own sufferings may have been as great as yours. But enough of that. I know we have both suffered, Hugh; for I know we both have loved. I know that my father is well; and I know how it is with the army. But tell me—how is it with Peter of Bourbon and Arnold de la Marche, and with my father's captain, Guiscard de Grillon? Do they live?

Has God spared them? Are they healthy and free from pain, like other men?"

"They live, Gertrude; and they are well in body; but how they are within I cannot say. Oh, I have not done them injustice! I have not wrongfully suspected them. It was through their means that you were dragged away from the fisher's cot. Tell me how it was, my love."

"Thus it was, dear Hugh: On that dreadful night, while the storm was howling in all its fury, the two brothers of Bourbon came to me and told me that you were dead—that you had been killed in trying to save the horses from the wreck; and they asked me if I would decide between them; and if not between them, if I would give my hand to De Grillon. You know how I answered them. Then they threatened. They said there was a pirate of Tyre in the harbor of Durazzo, and that if I remained obstinate I should be given up to him. I spat upon them for an answer. I did not know then, but I learned afterward, that Guiscard de Grillon had an uncle in Nice—the Emir Abu Hassa—and he had planned that he would send me to that man. And he did so. I cannot tell you all now; but I will tell you some time; for I feel assured that I am to be delivered."

"By God's help you shall be, my love!" whispered Hugh, passionately. "Either you go free, or we die here together!"

A pressure of the hand gave token of her gratitude.

"De Grillon detached a number—six—of his men-at-arms to go with me to his uncle, sending by them a sealed letter. That letter was fatal to them, for no sooner had I been safely delivered to the emir than they were put to death that they might never bear

witness against their black-hearted commander. Yes, they were put to death, and I was left in the care of the emir; and this was the compact: If, when the Christians appeared before Nice I would consent to marry with De Grillon, he would come in and marry me and give his influence toward driving the crusaders from the siege. If, in the end, I would not marry him, he would give me up entirely to the emir."

"Did those knights promise that they would betray the Christian army?" asked Hugh.

"Not quite so terrible as that," said Gertrude. "They only promised to find, if possible, some pretext for drawing the army away from this city. But we can expose them fully in good time. Their servants brought me hither, and here have I remained almost half a year. The emir thinks I am fully his, and he hopes to subdue me. I have somewhat angered him and astonished him not a little. Three days ago I hurled him across this apartment as though he had been a child; and I have thought to put his courage and devotion to a final test. And in this, dear Hugh, I want your assistance. Now listen to me, and offer no objection. I wish for a suit of plate armor that will fit me well. Where is my jeweled hauberk?"

The knight did not immediately answer. He gazed into Gertrude's face and thought of her meeting the Arabian emir in mortal conflict, for he knew full well the meaning of the maiden's wish.

"Gertrude—"

She read his thought in his anxious look and with a quick motion of the hand she silenced him.

"Hugh, methinks thou hast tested the strength and skill of my arm and I am surprised that thou shouldst think of offering objection to my meeting this proud and lustful Arab where alone I can mold him at my

will. Oh, if you love me, listen and obey. Tell me, where is my hauberk?"

"I have it, Gertrude, sacredly treasured up in the memory of what I feared might be my lost love. I have it, together with the armor which you wore at the tournament in Paris just before we set forth for Rome."

"And will you send it to me, Hugh—send that and my lance and sword?"

"But who can I send these ponderous things?"

"Hassan will bring them to me."

"Are you sure?"

"If he will not, I will not ask for them again."

"By my life!" muttered the prince, half to himself. "I see not how these followers of Hashishin can hold such sway. Every rod and staff of office, and every spear and halbert of sentinel, falls at their approach as though they were living lords of power."

"It is wonderful," returned Gertrude; "and yet it is simple, when understood. Ayisha, one of my female attendants, relying upon my good faith, has told me much of her master's system. She is bound to him, as is Hassan. Did you know that this Old Man of the Mountain allows his soldiers to be hired by the neighboring princes?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "I have heard of that."

"Well, pursued Gertrude, "these princes and sultans and emperors know very well that Hashinin has a class of men so devoted to his will that they hold death in his service as a glorious thing; and how shall the prince, who hires the soldiers, know that the very one, perhaps, who stands nearest to his body on duty, is not one of the *Fédaïs*, whose dagger would be sure to find his heart at his master's bidding! Oh, it is a wonderful thing, Hugh, and sometimes when Ayisha has told

me of the doings of her people, it has sounded more wild and extravagant than the most fanciful of our old monkish legends of the genii and their works. Hassan is known to be a servant of Hashishin, and he is the one whom the Old Man has employed to bring him report of the condition of his soldiers, and also to collect the price of their hire of the ruler who has employed them. So you see you may trust Hassan to do anything."

"I see."

"And you will send my arms and armors?"

"Gertrude!"

"Hugh!"

"Pardon me, dearest, I will send them."

The maiden came very near starting up from the couch under the influence of the emotions born of this promise on the part of her lover.

"Oh, bless you, Hugh, bless you--bless you! Send them to me as quickly as you can."

"As soon as I can be sure that every plate is perfect, every rivet fairly headed, and every ring of the hauberk intact. You shall not wait."

After this the conversation turned upon the subject which lay nearest to their hearts, and Gertrude declared that her faith was strong enough to give her comforting assurance that they should yet be married in the Holy City.

"Hugh," she said, still resting her hand in his grasp, "I wish that you should say nothing of my presence here to any one in the Christian camp. Will you promise me that?"

Hugh promised without hesitation, and shortly afterward he arose to take his leave. It had been told to him that his affianced bride would meet the Moslem knight in mortal combat, and he had promised that he

would be present, with a few of his trusty companions in arms, to see that nothing was left undone that could be done toward preparing her for the conflict. He was to come in disguise—he and his companion knights, under the lead of Hassan. At first Hugh's heart had quaked with the thought; but when he came to remember the maiden's prowess, and reflected that he would be near, to counsel and assist, he became in a measure reconciled to the plan. He had wondered why those servants of the Assassin chieftain, who could do so much, could not conduct Gertrude away from the emir's palace, and out from the city; but she had shown him that such a thing could not be; and he had come reluctantly to acknowledge it.

At length, with a heavy heart, the prince turned away from the woman he so fondly loved, forced to give no outward sign of his passion, and obliged to talk with an attendant of medicine which he should send very shortly. He found Hassan in waiting, and together they left the palace. As they walked along the now deserted street, the prince said to his companion:

"Hassan, it has troubled me to conceive how the sultan, Kilidge Arslan, dared send men to attack a chief so powerful as is your master—a chief before whose terrible power all other powers must tremble."

"Aye," answered Hassan, readily; "and there is the very cause of the attack. My master is watched most narrowly, and seldom ventures forth without a force sufficient for his protection. But, Sir Knight, suppose you had not appeared upon the scene on the mountain-side as you did, what would have been the result?"

"I see," muttered Hugh. "Zounds! I was blind

not to recognize so simple a solution. He would have been conquered, and his power completely broken. Ah ! I little thought then how, in helping him, I was helping myself. But the ways of Providence are wonderful, and past finding out."

A pause, and then the knight spoke further :

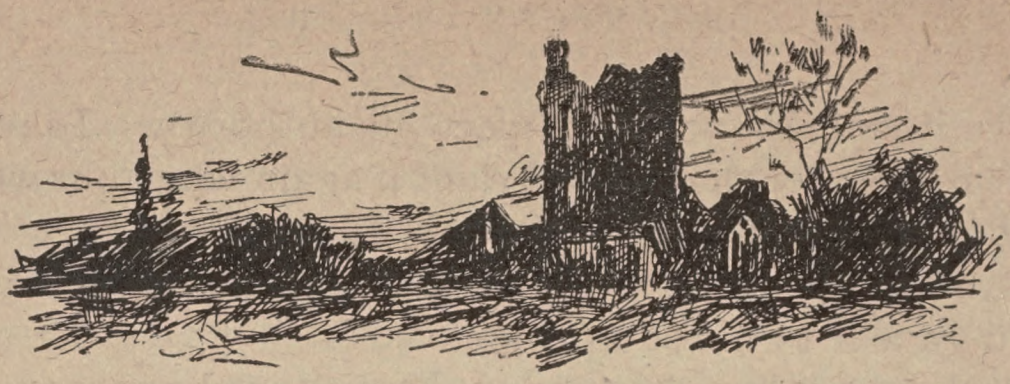
" Hassan, do you know wherefore Gertrude sent for me ?"

" Yes, my lord."

" And can we answer her demand ?"

" If we live—yes."

" Then hasten the time ; and *God help the right !*"



CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACCUSATION AND THE CHALLENGE.

It was past midnight when Hugh de Vermandois stood again in the corridor of the old ruin by the shore of the lake, and here Hassan proposed to leave him.

"You can find your way to the camp without trouble," said the guide, "and perhaps it would be as well for you to go alone. It might excite comment were I to return with you. But I will be with you when the armor is ready."

He ceased speaking, and bowed his head upon his hand; and presently he resumed:

"Sir Hugh, these are stirring times, and we know not what a day may bring forth. It may become necessary for your good that I should have free access to your most private quarters, even though you might be absent. We cannot tell what may happen, and it is well to be prepared."

"I understand," said the prince, "and I appreciate the suggestion fully. Here, take this, and it shall be a token upon which you will be admitted to my presence; or, in case of my absence, to my private apartment at any time. I will tell my servants that you

have it, and they will respect its authority. Take it, but remember that I shall want it again when our work is done."

And the prince drew from his finger his signet ring, and gave it to his companion.

"Now, my lord," returned Hassan, as he placed the signet upon the finger which it fitted, "I am at your service. You shall see me again as soon as you can possibly have need."

While Hassan waited for one of his brethren who had come with him, and who was now engaged in securing the trap, and returning the rubbish upon it, Hugh took his leave and set forth for the Christian camp. Just as he stepped from the last fragment of rock that marked the site of the old wall, he fancied that he heard a rustling sound close at hand, and as he stopped to listen, he saw a shadowy form glide past an opening in a thicket, a little to the right of his path. With the thought flashing upon him that this might be a spy set upon his motions, he sprang toward the place where the form had disappeared, but he could find nothing of it.

Hark! Yes, it was the step of a man, hurrying through the tangled shrubbery; but he did not choose to follow. He listened until he could hear the retreating step no longer, and then he started once more for the camp, which he reached without further adventure; and when he arrived at his own tent he found his esquire fast asleep, so he undressed and retired without even calling his page to his assistance.

In the morning the Prince of Vermandois was stirring betimes, and one of his first cares was to assemble his servants—those who had place immediately about his person and authority in his tent—and make them acquainted with the fact that a certain young man, a

stranger, in fact a mountaineer, who had in possession his signet, was to be admitted to the tent, and to the most private apartments, at any and at all times when it might please him. Then he told the same to De St. Valery, and when the esquire signified a curiosity to know what it meant, the prince replied :

"Dear Walter, I am under a promise not to mention the business upon which this youth will wait upon me, but when you see him you may be able to form your own opinion. His name is Hassan, and I would have him treated as though he were, for the time, as near to my confidence as you are yourself."

De St. Valery shook his head doubtingly, as he saw his master walk away, and he said to himself that no good could come of it. The prince noticed his esquire's downcast look, and he thought the faithful attendant was pained because another had been permitted to share the confidence which had been his alone for so many months.

"Never mind," he soliloquized, as he donned his silver casque* and went forth from the tent, "he will be content when he sees who it is that I have thus taken to my favor. Zounds! It seems hard to have a secret from Walter, but it shall not be for long."

Very soon a dull, dead weight seemed to settle upon the knight's heart. The morning was bright and beautiful, one of the most lovely of that lovely clime and of that blissful season in the year, and yet he found no pleasure in it. It was as though dark phantoms hovered around him, whispering of evil, as though the bright sunshine were never to be a blessing to him more. He was walking thus when the blast of a trum-

* Every warrior of the army wore a casque; those of the princes were covered with silver; of the knights and lower nobles with burnished steel; the common soldiers wearing iron.

pet broke upon his ear and, upon giving his attention thereto, he discovered that it was from the herald of Godfrey de Bouillon ; and he was not a little surprised upon discovering that it was the signal or call for the assembly of the chiefs for consultation. Why should such an appointment have been made without his knowledge? But perhaps Godfrey had done it upon his own responsibility.

Godfrey, the powerful Duke of Bouillon, and one of the best and bravest captains the world ever saw, had gradually so drawn to himself the confidence of his fellow-knights that they had come to regard him as their leader. The Count of Thoulouse had worked hard to obtain this distinction ; and his known courage and skill in handling an army, together with his wealth and the vast number of men he had led to the East—a hundred thousand—plead strongly in his favor; but his haughty and unyielding disposition, added to a temper at times entirely ungovernable, operated to bar him out. So, too, had Bohémond, the noble prince of Tarentum, sought the distinction ; and no man of them all was better fitted for the post of leader. However, no leader was directly acknowledged, though after one attack upon Nice and two or three sallies from the army of the sultan that yet lay in the mountains, it became very evident that some one controlling mind must be recognized in the hour of danger ; and with tacit consent Duke Godfrey was allowed to assume the place.

Hugh was wending his way slowly toward the quarter of de Bouillon, when he was met by a messenger, who informed him that his presence was required at Godfrey's tent.

For consultation, he supposed ; and he quickened his step somewhat, revolving in his mind the thought

of how he might put off an attack upon the city until he could communicate again with Gertrude.

When he entered the spacious pavilion of De Bouillon he found that he was the last of the chiefs—all the others were there. Godfrey sat upon the throne, and by his side sat the Bishops Adhèmar and Odo of Bayeux. Hugh would have smiled upon his old friends, but not a smile greeted him from one of their faces. Some lowered gloomily upon him ; some were marked by wonder, while others were clouded with pain and fear. But he was not to remain long in suspense.

"Hugh de Vermandois!" pronounced Godfrey, standing upon his feet, and knocking with his truncheon upon the pedestal by his side.

Hugh, who had just seated himself, started to his feet.

"Did you call my name, Sir Godfrey?"

"I called thee, Sir Hugh of Vermandois, to answer to a most grave and serious charge."

The youthful prince was as one thunderstruck. The words of warning which his esquire had spoken, the dark forms that had been lurking in his path and the gloom which had settled down upon his heart, in turn occupied his startled thoughts, and for the while his limbs shook with a nameless, shapeless dread. Observing his troubled silence, Godfrey proceeded:

"Noble prince, well we know how thou hast been beloved by our army, how thou hast displayed a valor such as few possess, and how high is the rank thou holdest even now in our midst. Hence thou wilt believe me when I tell thee that it is with pain and sorrow most deep and poignant that I enter upon the painful duty which has been imposed upon me. Hugh of Vermandois, thou art accused of treason to our holy cause!"

The prince struggled for a brief space, as with some deadly monster that had grappled him, and then he took a step forward, and folded his arms upon his breast.

"My lord of Bouillon," he demanded, in a firm, clear tone, what acts of treason doth this charge specify?"

"The main charge is, Sir Hugh, that thou art in league with the Emperor Alexius, who hath proved himself to be our enemy, to deliver into his hands the fruits of any victory we may achieve. In short, that thou art sworn to serve the Greek Emperor, instead of serving Jesus Christ, as we are all sworn to do in rescuing His holy sepulcher from the hands of the infidels. In connection with this, it is charged that thou hast had secret meetings with a Moslem chief in the mountains. It is furthermore charged, that thou hast even been admitted to the city which we are besieging—that thou canst go in and come out at pleasure. Such are the chief of the charges against thee; and God grant that thou mayest prove them false."

"*False!*" cried Hugh, with an energy that startled every man who heard his words. "They are as false as is the heart of him who conceived them!—as false as is the Father of Lies and the Enemy of God! Who makes them?"

"Let Raymond of Thoulouse answer that," said Godfrey.

The look which Hugh turned upon Count Raymond made the old man tremble.

"Thou, Raymond! Thou! O had it been any other in all Christendom!"

"The charges are not mine," exclaimed the count, eagerly. "I only present them to the court of assembled knights and nobles. And I say, as said he of Bouillon, 'God grant that thou mayest prove them false!'"

"As yet," said Hugh, "I remain unanswered. I would face my accusers. Who are they?"

Godfrey answered:

"Listen, and thou shalt hear: They are the gentle knights, Guiscard, the noble Count of Grillon; Peter, Marquis of Bourbon; and Arnold, the Count de la Marche. They are three belted knights, and must be held honorable and true until proof is shown to the contrary. They accuse thee, Hugh de Vermandois, and stand pledged by their solemn oath to make their charges good."

"An oath is an easy thing to throw upon the air," replied Prince Hugh. "Never yet did a man bear false witness who offered not his oath in support thereof. Will these gentle knights make good their charges with their lives? Ask them that, my lord."

"You forget, my Lord of Vermandois," said Godfrey, gravely shaking his head, "that we have entered into a solemn compact that no difficulty of a personal character should be settled by a resort to arms."

"My noble brother," cried the prince, his face lighted by a grand enthusiasm, "I crave your indulgence for one brief moment. No knight can respect the bonds which we have taken upon ourselves more than I do; but I beg you to believe that no gentleman here present ever willingly relinquished the sacred right to protect his own honor. I know that I look not upon a knight who would not draw his sword to protect his own life, even against a brother in arms. And what is life compared with honor? Noble knights and brothers in Christ, I ask you, each and every one, did you, when you entered into that compact, mean to set up a covert, from behind which a coward might with impunity fling abroad his dastard, slanderous falsehood, answering when brought to account: '*My oath*

will not let me meet you in the trial of arms.' Did you mean that?"

A simultaneous negative broke upon the air; and of full a hundred knights present not more than four or five failed to join therein.

After this, Hugh advanced toward the throne, and when he had reached the open space before it, he stood so that he could face both the presiding officer and the assembly.

"My lord duke and you, brothers-in-arms, hear me: It is said that I am in league with the Emperor Alexius and that I have bound myself to support his interests against those of this Christian army. In answer to that I say: It is false! You, noble Godfrey, know more of that business than any man here save myself, for 'twas you who came and set me free from the hands of Alexius. I had the misfortune to be wrecked upon a far-away coast of his dominions and was conveyed to his capital, where I found myself, to all intents and purposes, a prisoner. During my stay with him I was induced to pledge my word that I would not raise my hand against him in any conflict which might come in the future. And why should I not? He was a Christian ruler and I knew that our enemies were his enemies. I also pledged myself that our people should not levy upon his dominions, in any part, for forage or provisions. In this I was wrong, as you convinced me, noble Godfrey, and as I freely acknowledge. The Greek emperor was the first to break the faith that had been pledged between us, and when I found he had done so, I from that moment held myself absolved from the compact and have so conducted myself ever since. Godfrey de Bouillon, do I not speak truly?"

"In all that I have seen, Sir Hugh, thou hast demeaned thyself toward the Emperor Alexius since my

arrival at Constantinople as became a true soldier of the cross."

So spoke the duke, and a murmur of satisfaction was heard from a majority of those present, though some shook their heads as if in doubt.

"Next," said the prince, "it is charged that I have held secret meetings with a Moslem chief in the mountains, and, also, that I have been admitted within the city of Nice, and that I can enter said city at pleasure. Brothers, this is both true and false. It is true that I have met a Moslem chief in the mountains, but he was not a Turk, nor was he our enemy. Before God, I saved him from death at the hands of our mortal foes. I have entered the city of Nice. I have been within the walls once, and only once, and then I went in disguise. And now, in this whole matter I am alone interested, and I am so bound by an oath that I can not make such explanation as would give you to understand my motives."

At this point Raymond of Thoulouse, instigated by his chief captain, arose and asked a question. He wished to know if Hugh had explained anything of this matter to his esquire, Walter de St. Valery.

Hugh confessed that he had not.

Whereupon the old Count of Thoulouse expressed himself as gravely influenced against the accused by this circumstance. He knew that De St. Valery had been Sir Hugh's most trusty friend and companion; and he could not but doubt the propriety of an intercourse with the enemy, and that, too, in the enemy's own camp, which the prince dared not expose to his best and truest friend. He could not but believe that there was something wrong when such things appeared confessed upon the surface.

Oh, in that moment how the prince wished that he

could whisper only one single word into the old noble's ear! But this solemn promise withheld him, and he could only let the count—the father of his betrothed—remain in darkness and doubt.

"Companions in arms," said Hugh, when Raymond had resumed his seat, "I can offer you but one solution to the mystery. And now, in the name of that Saviour whose sacred banner I have had the honor to bear, I bid you hear me. I am so situated that I cannot now make known to you those things which would at once remove every doubt, and fix the crime of treason upon others than myself; for, before God, there are traitors here! As for me, I am innocent. I swear it by the God we all unite in worshiping! And if my life is spared a few short days, I may be able freely to present to you all that you could ask to know. In the meantime I will maintain my innocence with lance, sword and ax, in the saddle and on foot. And I hereby challenge my accusers to make good their accusation, as they have promised. I will meet them as they shall elect; the fight shall be to the death, unless confession is made; and a cry for mercy shall be held to be a confession in full. So cast I my case upon the issue of battle, and may God protect the right."

Thus speaking, Hugh drew off his gantlet, and cast it down upon the ground at the foot of the throne, and then moved back to his seat.

For a few seconds a silence like unto death reigned in the pavilion, for every heart seemed hushed and every breath suspended. Hugh de Vermandois was, next to Tancred of Otranto, accounted the best knight in the army; and who should dare meet him?

A little while, and then Guiscard de Grillon, followed by Peter of Bourbon and Arnold of the Marche, arose and advanced to the space which Hugh had left.

Guiscard picked up the gantlet, and then said :

"With lance and sword and ax, in the saddle or on foot, will I make good my charge against Hugh of Vermandois. And may God protect the right !"

His voice faltered, and with the call upon God on his lips he came very near breaking down ; but he got through with it and then passed the gantlet to Peter of Bourbon, who went through with the same ceremony, as did Arnold de la Marche after him ; the last knight, when he had concluded, laying the gantlet upon the pedestal by the side of the president's truncheon, whence Hugh came and took it.

It had been marked by all who had witnessed the scene that the accusers had not spoken like men who had faith in themselves. There had been a hesitancy and a trembling and a blanching of the lips, such as might be expected in those who invoked a blessing, feeling assured that a curse would come instead thereof.

But the die had been cast, and the hour fixed for the combat was the tenth hour of that self-same day ; and the heralds were instructed to make proclamation thereof throughout the camp.

Said Robert, Count of Flanders :

"Be sure our noble prince will vindicate himself right gallantly."

But the other Robert—he of Normandy—shook his head with doubt.

"God's will be done ! But I fear me the prince is not equal to the combat. He has been very ill and he is not yet strong. If he overcomes the first adversary he shall fight no more."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PAGE'S ANTECEDENTS.

Tancred, Prince of Otranto, a knight whose single arm was good against a full squadron of Turks, could not believe that the gallant Frank ever entertained a thought of treason against the interests of the Christian army. The very idea was to him preposterous; and yet he doubted if Hugh would maintain himself against the knight of Grillon.

"My dear brother," he said, holding our hero by the hand, "will you not let me take your place? If you will consent, and your enemies will consent, I will meet the three at one and the same time. Aye, I 'll meet them, and I 'll smite their perjured tongues to silence for ever after! Good Hugh, I fear me thou art not fit for this joust. Thy face shows full well that dire sickness hath been upon thee."

Hugh de Vermandois thanked the noble-hearted Italian with moistened eyes; but he could not accept the proffered assistance.

"To tell the truth, Tancred, I am weaker than I thought; but I am not so weak that Guiscard de Grillon can hold a lance firmly against me. Fear not, my brother, God will not forsake the right. But tell me,

what hast thou heard of this abominable evidence that hath been trumped up against me? Upon my soul, it was all new to me when I heard it this day. Be free, good Tancred, and tell me all thou knowest.'

And thereupon the Prince of Otranto told to Hugh the things which he had heard, many of them surprising de Vermandois beyond measure. The conversation was long and earnest, and at the close Hugh took the Italian by the hand, saying unto him:

"Tancred, would to God I were at liberty to expose this whole thing to thine understanding; but I am not. Were I alone interested, I could speak; but I am serving another—one who looks to me alone of all the world for succor and support. If I fall, I shall fall in the service of a friend; and when the truth is known, thou shalt say that Hugh de Vermandois did most sacredly maintain his knightly duty."

Hugh walked slowly and thoughtfully toward his tent, a new trouble having come upon him from the speech of Tancred. Upon entering the outer apartment of his pavilion he found no one there, and without waiting for his page he laid off his surcoat and hauberk, and passed on to the inner apartment, where he slept, and where he received his brother chiefs for private confab. The partition between the main pavilion and this sanctum was four fold, consisting of two double sets of heavy damask curtains.

As he entered the last-mentioned apartment on the present occasion, he found his page there, engaged in arranging the furniture upon the ebony sideboard. Upon this board were the knight's minor dressing implements, his metallic mirror and several flasks of wine which he had brought with him from Constantinople, and which he had ordered brought out for use on the present occasion.

"Roland, what dost thou here?"

"I came to bring the wine, as you bade me, my lord," answered the page. He was a comely lad, bright and intelligent, but possessing a sharp, restless eye which his master never quite liked. On the present occasion he trembled excessively, and dared not meet his lord's gaze, hanging his head, and casting anxious glances toward the heavy arras, as though he wished he were far away.

"And how long hast thou been engaged in that simple work, boy? Roland! By my life, thou hast been doing some evil."

As the knight thus spoke he moved toward the sideboard, and observed one of the flasks with its stopper started. The boy saw his movement and saw him place his hand upon the broken flask; whereupon he cried out beseechingly:

"Oh, pardon, my good lord! I swear to thee I drank but a single drop. I know it was wrong, very wrong; but I thought not of the evil until I had done the deed. My father used to give me wine, and I loved it; and when I saw that—"

"Never mind," broke in the knight, impatiently. "I will pardon thee this once, Roland; and hereafter, when thy thirst is strong, and thou cravest a draught of light wine, come to me boldly, and ask for it; but never play thief again. It is a small offense; but these habits are apt to grow with one's growth, if not nipped in the bud. Go, now, and send St. Valery to me."

The page hurried away, and ere long the esquire made his appearance, wearing a cloud of deep anxiety upon his brow.

"Walter, thou art gloomy."

"Aye, my lord, thou speakest truly. A deeper gloom

never found seat upon my heart. Thou art not fit for this ordeal thou hast invited."

"Pshaw! If that rests heavily upon thy mind, then I pray thee cast it off, for I do assure thee that I am strong and well. At all events I am strong enough for the work before. Let that pass, good Walter, and lend me thine ear upon another matter. Art thou ready to listen?"

"I am all attention, my lord."

"Walter, I have been conversing with Tancred, and he hath told me things that not only surprised me, but which gave me pain and unrest. I asked him to tell me what things he had heard of evidence against me; whereupon he told me of circumstances which I had supposed were known only to you and myself."

"My lord."

"I have spoken, Walter. Tancred was in possession of information which should never have been known outside of my own tent."

"Do you know where he got it, my lord?"

"I judged from the manner of his speech, that he obtained it of my enemies."

"My lord," spoke Walter, trembling with emotion, and giving token of deepest pain, "have you held a suspicion against me—against your own Walter?"

"O my God! No, no, no!" cried the prince, all his suspicions vanishing the instant he met the tearful, agonized look of his friend. "I could not suspect you, Walter; and yet, what can I think? How came Guiscard de Grillon to know so precisely my most secret movements?"

St. Valery drew a light stool near to his master's side, and having gone to see that no one lurked near the arras, he returned and sat down.

"My lord," he said, in a low and careful tone, "since

these things are known, it is very evident there has been treachery in your own quarter; and not only so, but ears have heard which had no business to hear. What think you of Roland?"

"Of my page?" returned Hugh, with a start.

"Yes."

"Walter, what of him?"

"Indeed, my lord, I cannot yet say, but I do much doubt him. Whence came he?"

The prince gazed into his esquire's face at first with a blank expression, but with light gradually breaking over his bold frank countenance.

"He was the Lady Gertrude's page," he said, after a pause, and still reflecting as he continued, half to himself—"he was Gertrude's page and came with her from Languedoc."

"I think," added Walter, "a lad of her father's selection."

"Very likely."

"Have you ever marked a resemblance between the boy and Guiscard de Grillon?"

"Ha!"

Hugh was startled. He had never thought of the thing, but it appeared to him now.

"Is not Roland of the house of Grillon?" the esquire continued, in a whisper.

"By my faith, he is," cried Hugh, smiting his fist upon his thigh. "How could I have been so forgetful? And yet there is no wonder, for it was of no particular interest to me when I heard it, and I did not lay it up in my memory. But it comes back to me now. I remember that at Philip's court one evening, when a few of us had remained quite late, this thing transpired: The king had observed Gertrude's page and had taken a liking to him, and on this evening, in a half-playful

manner, but yet willing to abide by his offer, he asked the princess if she would not give Roland up to him ; whereupon Gertrude answered that the lad was of gentle birth and had been given into her charge that he might be trained up to arms and at a proper time be admitted to the estate of an esquire. And when the king asked her of what house he came, she answered: 'De Grillon !' "

" Then," said Walter, in a tone of relief, and yet with much concern, " we may be assured that the boy is the traitor. I now can understand many things that have heretofore appeared strange to me. I can now comprehend why the lad has evinced so much interest when De Grillon's name has been mentioned, and I can swear, too, that I have not been mistaken when I have fancied that his brow lowered and his eyes snapped vindictively when I have denounced Raymond's captain as a false and treacherous knight."

The prince arose and took a few turns up and down the open space, and when he stopped there was something like a smile on his face. He laid his hand upon his esquire's arm and said :

" As yet, Walter, there may have been no great harm done, and this discovery has given me joy rather than pain ; for it has opened to my knowledge that thou, my dear brother, art true and faithful. So let us for the present pass it by, with the understanding that henceforth the young traitor is to be watched. That he is in De Grillon's service secretly, I am fully persuaded ; and when we can bring the deed home upon him, there shall be such a reckoning as is meet. So much for Roland. And now, my Walter, I would have you look to my armor. Time flies, and the trumpet of the herald will ere long call us to the lists."

While Walter went to look to the armor, Hugh sat

down at his little table, and having produced a piece of fine vellum, he brought forth pen and ink, and prepared to write. Writing was not, in those days, a necessary accomplishment for a knight; and many a brave and gallant noble, belted and spurred by the hand of royalty—aye, many a ruler over castles and cities—knew of writing barely sufficient to enable him to put his monogram to the official documents and epistolary correspondence which some monkish clerk had prepared. But Hugh de Vermandois, like Stephen of Blois and Chartres, was a man of letters, as well as a man of war. The many knights who knew nothing of reading and writing were able to point to the noble and wealthy Count de Blois, and show that the lover of letters was not a lover of battles; for it was true that Stephen was often timid in the midst of conflict, and was but a poor captain. But such could not be said of Hugh. A true lover of polite literature, he was the very bravest among the brave; and in battle his presence was worth a thousand stout men led by twenty lances.

Hugh sat down and wrote upon the vellum. He wrote carefully and slowly, ever and anon holding back his pen for reflection. Finally, the work was done; and when the prince had read what he had written, he attached his signature in full, after which the missive was folded and securely bound with a silken cord. Then he called for a candle, and when this had been brought, he melted a piece of wax, with which he sealed the packet wherever the turns of the cord crossed each other.

When Walter next entered the inner tent, the prince handed to him the sealed missive.

"Good Walter, we may not be too sure of what the Father in heaven will do; and since I realize that I

am a child in His Almighty hands and that he may do with me as seemeth to Him best, I have thought fit to put in writing those few things which at present rest alone within my knowledge, and which I am not now at liberty to divulge--the very few circumstances of all the life I have lived which are not open to the investigation of the whole world. They are written here, Walter, and into your hands I give them. If it please God to take me from the work of this holy crusade—"

"My master, in God's name, give it not to me!"

"How, Walter, would you that another should serve me in this?"

"No, no—oh, no. You mistake, Sir Hugh. I mean that you shall not go into the lists this day. This very emotion, which bids you make preparation for death, showed to me that you are not yourself. Thou art not the warrior chief, but thou art a man sick and faint from—"

"Tush! Ye gods! And thinkest thou that this good right arm hath forgotten its cunning? No! I swear to thee by the heaven above me that for a full hour I can bear myself as stoutly as ever! But, Walter, the business is of grave importance; and we know not what of accident may transpire. Who can tell that my own horse may not faint and fall and crush me to death. Take the packet and keep it sacredly. If I fall, you will retain it until my body has been consigned to its mother earth, and then you will give it to Duke Robert of Normandy, for him and Tancred to open and read it at their pleasure. You will observe that it is addressed to both; but as Robert is my countryman, let him take precedence. If you love me, speak not another word of objection. It only gives me pain."

Walter took the missive and put it away in his bosom; and it rested there a painful, heavy burden.

Had it been his master's death-warrant, he could not have shuddered more when he felt it pressing against his heart.

Hark! The herald of Godfrey de Bouillon blows a blast that startles the camp from every thought and purpose of rest; and ere long armed knights begin to gather upon the tilting ground.

A knight, armed *cap-a-pie*, and mounted upon a powerful coal-black stallion, rides up to the entrance of the tent of the Prince De Vermandois. Presently the prince came forth, and demanded to know what knight had thus come, without device upon his shield or crest upon his helm.

The knight raised his vizor, and Hugh beheld the honest face of Robert of Normandy.

"My brother," said the duke, "thou didst refuse the offer of our noble Tancred; but, I pray thee, refuse not mine. Let me take up this cause. The chiefs are all willing—every man of them."

Hugh de Vermandois took the hand of his noble friend and pressed it to his lips.

"Robert, God will bless thee for thy love in this dark hour; but I cannot accept thine offer. Hush! Say no more. Come in and pledge me in the sacramental cup, and then to the lists."

Robert of Normandy dismounted and followed the prince into the sanctum, where the latter produced the sacred cup—a silver goblet, which the Pope had blessed and dedicated to sacramental use—and having filled it from the open flask upon the board, they both drank, with benedictions upon their lips. As it chanced that the duke was somewhat athirst, and as the wine pleased him much, he set aside the sacramental cup, and filled a large goblet from the flask, which he emptied with grateful appetite.

When the northern knight had thus quenched his thirst, they passed out into the court, where Walter had led up his master's horse; and shortly afterward they were on their way to the lists.

"Tell me, Hugh—oh, tell me truly; dost thou feel equal to this work?"

"Aye; my good right arm was never stronger."

So answered the prince to Robert's earnest question; but, even as he spoke, a cold hand seemed laid upon his heart, and to himself he said: "Would to God this illness were further removed!"

CHAPTER X.

THE BATTLE.

The list of the Christian camp before Nice set apart for military exercise and sports was one hundred full yards in width, by a hundred and forty yards in length. It was surrounded on all sides by a barrier of palisades, through which were three entrances guarded by hinged gates ; one upon the side where the high platform was raised, upon which the master and his associates sat, and where also were seats for such gentle dames and maidens as chose to attend ; and one at each end, guarded by sentinels, where the the combatants entered. And at each end of the list, too, just outside the barrier, was a small shed communicating with the list by a wicket.

As the dial announced that the tenth hour of the day had arrived, the herald made proclamation of the battle and its cause. In the quaint wording of the chivalric language of the time, he announced that Hugh, Prince of Vermandois, having been accused of the high crime of treason by the noble knights, Guiscard de Grillon, Peter of Bourbon and Arnold de la Marche, and not feeling himself at liberty, in honor, to expose those circumstances which would prove his

innocence, did offer his body to the judgment of God; and he would then and there meet in battle such one of his accusers as chose to offer himself to the proof.

Then came another blast of the trumpet, and the herald proclaimed that by the laws of chivalry, made to protect the weak against the strong, the churchman against the warrior, and age against youthful vigor, either of the parties had the right of a *salvo*. A substitute would be accepted, and the knight so offering himself for the party accused, or for the party accusing, should be held in all respects as maintaining the cause as truly and justly as though the responsible knight were in the field.

A long silence followed this announcement, during which many eyes were turned anxiously toward the shed, or pavilion, occupied by the Prince of Vermandois. But no advantage was likely to be taken of the privilege, and ere long the trumpet awoke the air with another blast, and directly Hugh de Vermandois, accompanied by his esquire, rode forth from his pavilion and having reached the area in front of the master's dais, he raised his visor and bowed his head.

"My lord," he said, "I am ready for the judgment, and before God and man I proclaim my cause honorable and just. I have only one favor to crave. Make all possible haste, I beseech you. Let no needless ceremony delay the more important matter."

"By my soul!" cried the Prince of Otranto, as Hugh lowered his visor and turned away, "I like not the looks of that face. Did you mark how pale it was?"

"Yes," answered Godfrey, "I marked it well. Surely the prince is ill."

"Ill and foolish," added Tancred. "He should have accepted the *salvo*."

At this point the conversation was stopped by the

appearance of the three accusers, who made an announcement similar to that which Hugh had made.

"Guiscard de Grillon," spoke Tancred, who had been selected as one of the umpires for the occasion "thou ridest the first tilt?"

"I do, my lord prince."

"Then mark me. It is well known to us all that the Prince of Vermandois hath lately been very ill. In sorrow I declare that thine oath doth not require thee to regard that accident in the onset. But I tell thee that thou shalt take no advantage in the fall. Mark well the truncheon of the master, and strike no blow after it shall have fallen. If thou shalt so much as gripe a limb of thine adversary in temper, after a truce hath been sounded, thou shalt meet Tancred of Otranto in that hour."

With a muttering of honorable intent De Grillon and his companions rode away, the latter retiring from the list, while the former took his station at the end opposite that which Hugh had taken.

The herald then made the final proclamation. The combatants might continue the conflict on horseback until three lances had been broken, unless one of them should be unhorsed before. Then the fight should be with axes to the end, unless one of them should prefer the sword, in which case the other should throw down the heavier weapon, and take the lighter. The dagger was not to be used under any circumstances, nor should one strike a blow while the other was lower down than upon his knees.

"Herald, sound the charge! And may God protect the right."

Hugh grasped his lance, bearing the point directly between his horse's ears, and as the last blast came cracking upon the air he touched the rowel lightly, and

the eager steed, well used to the work, darted forth like a bolt. Near the center of the list the combatants met, and both lances were so shaken as to be useless, that of De Grillon having come in contact with the edge of the other's buckler, while Hugh's shaft had been shivered upon his adversary's shoulder, loosening the upper vambrace, so that it hung by only one rivet.

"By the mass!" cried Tancred, turning to Robert of Normandy, who had taken a seat by his side. "Our good Hugh rode that bout right stoutly."

"Aye, that he did," returned the duke. "He obtained his favorite stroke, and if De Grillon's vambrace had not given way the captain would have been unhorsed. I look to see the prince take his antagonist's helm the next time, and if he does the doughty captain will go to the ground. God save the right!"

Tancred had turned his gaze upon the list, when something which he had seen in his companion's face caused him to look again.

"How now, good Robert? By my soul! Thou art pale and thine eye lacks its wonted fire."

"I know not what it is, Tancred," replied Robert, shaking himself. "A sudden sickness hath come upon me—a sort of dimness of the vision and a dizziness, but I think it will soon pass away. Ha! See! Hugh raises his visor for air. I like not that."

The charge was sounded again, and this time Hugh de Vermandois, with one mighty effort, summoning every atom of strength remaining, couched his lance for the final onset, for he knew that he could not ride another. He had become so sick that his stomach rebelled, and it required almost superhuman effort to prevent his head swimming. With the first reverberation of the final call he plied the rowel more deeply.

than before, and the powerful steed bounded forth with a wild, defiant snort.

Ha ! De Grillon surely thought that his antagonist had his eye upon that exposed shoulder, and to the protection of that he gave his buckler, for he had not repaired the broken plate, and a wound there would paralyze his sword-arm. But he reckoned without his host. His own lance had touched the opposing buckler, and he had closed the fingers of his left hand more firmly upon the becket of his shield, when, like a flash, a bright point swept before his eyes. It all came in an instant—the flash, the instinct of dodging some unseen danger, and the shock of the meeting horses—a shock that shook the very earth, whirling up a cloud of dust, that for a time concealed the combatants from view.

" I' faith !" cried Tancred, leaping to his feet, " one of them is unhorsed."

" Aye," responded Robert of Normandy, also starting up. " Ha ! See ! Our noble Hugh rides forth from the cloud !" Whereupon, though forced to resume his seat on account of the dreadful nausea at his stomach, he joined in the thunders of applause that arose from every part of the surrounding throng.

According to the strict rules of the time, the Prince de Vermandois might have retained his seat in his saddle, and forced his antagonist to fight on foot, but he chose not to do it. So he got down from his horse, and having given the rein into Walter's hand, he took his ax and advanced to the center of the list, where he stood until his antagonist was ready, meanwhile raising his visor for more fresh air.

As for Guiscard de Grillon, the point of the lance had struck him upon the left side of the head, entering between the hinge of the visor and the solid wall

of the helm, lifting him bodily from his seat, and so bruising the head-piece that its owner was forced to take a new one. The shock had been considerable; and for some little time after he had gained his feet he staggered to and fro like a drunken man. But he came around at length, and with his ax in hand he hastened to meet his opponent.

When he saw Hugh de Grillon ready to advance, he let his visor fall without hooking it. Whether he forgot thus to secure it in its place, or whether he cared not, those who noticed it could not then judge. The moment the visor had fallen he closed his grasp upon his ax and raised the heavy blade from the ground. He sought to sway it as was his wont, but he could only lift it even with his crest, and when he thought to strike at the coming man it refused to advance, and fell, with a dull thud, upon his shoulder.

"Oh, give me but one more moment of power for the right!"

Under the inspiration of the prayer his arm was nerved to its work for a brief space, though he had no clear idea of what he was doing. He knew that his body was in motion—that darkness came upon his senses—that a thundering crash followed, benumbing every fiber of his system, and that he then sank—down, down, down into the death of sense.

Once, when the ax of the prince had fallen back upon his shoulder, Robert of Normandy, finding ready sympathy in his own strange dizziness, had declared that the man was powerless for further battle; but in a moment more, when he sprang forward and dealt the knight of Grillon a blow that staggered him, the feeling changed. But it changed only for a very brief space.

"Ye gods of right and justice!" cried Tancred.

"See him stagger backward without being stricken! See! See! His strength is going — going, 't is gone!"

With his ax drooping and his buckler raised to cover his body, Hugh was staggering backward, while de Grillon followed him up closely, his weapon raised for a downward stroke.

"Hugh de Vermandois, dost thou surrender?"

De Grillon repeated the demand twice; and then, receiving no answer, and seeing that the prince was evidently about ready to fall, he struck. He had determined that he would not miss the finishing stroke; and those who saw the ax descend, knew full well that his intent had been to cleave the skull from crown to chine; and so he would have done, had the blow been fairly delivered. But he had waited the quarter part of a second too long. Just at the moment when De Grillon had started the weapon, the prince's heel caught upon a stone, and he stumbled backward, and the outer corner of the descending blade struck the bars of his visor and clipped a bit of the lower edge of the gorget. As quick as thought the ax was raised again, but the cry of indignation from the multitude, joined with the command of the master, restrained his hand.

Those who were first beside the fallen prince expected to find his face severely cut, but in this they were agreeably disappointed. Save the slashing of the visor and the dent upon his gorget, not a plate, bar or rivet of his armor had been injured, and not a bruise was to be found upon his body anywhere. And yet he was so truly like one dead, that the leeches who had gathered around him were not able to decide whether he were dead or living.

The three accusers advanced to the dais, and de-

manded of the judge that their case should be given them.

"It is the finger of God upon a guilty man!" exclaimed De Grillon, with fierce energy.

Whereupon Robert of Normandy arose, and demanded that the decision be reserved.

"I, too," he cried, "see the finger of God in the work! But hath God stricken him down because of his guilt, or has He thus snatched the weak and fainting prince from the death which his enemies had hoped to inflict, even after it was known that sense had left him? My lord and gentlemen interested, if it shall please God to restore Hugh de Vermandois to life, I am sure that we shall be able to expose to you a plot so dark and so fiendish that you will stand transfixed with horror!"

Guiscard de Grillon observed how pale the Norman chieftain was, and for a little while his knees smote with fear; but rallying as quickly as possible, he regained his bold front, and again demanded that the judgment of God should be rendered in behalf of himself and his companions.

All eyes were turned upon Tancred, as he was the man who had thus far succeeded in rendering satisfactory solution to difficult problems. Seeing that Godfrey himself at length appealed to him, he arose and spoke:

"My Lord of Bouillon, and you, my brethren in arms, what have we to decide? What was the condition of this battle? Hugh de Vermandois offered his body to his accusers, swearing that by the issue would he abide. If they proved upon his body that their cause was just, he would bow to the result. And what have they proved? Nothing! There has not been delivered upon the body of the prince a blow that

could stagger a child; but on the contrary, he hath unhorsed his antagonist most gallantly, and that, too, while so weak that he could scarce hold himself erect. Our noble prince did unhorse his opponent and drive him to the ax. At this juncture a new power entered the list, and, directly seizing De Vermandois, did lay him upon the bosom of the earth as one dead. What hath his enemy done of all this? I say the combat is postponed, agreeably to the laws of chivalry, which declare that no man shall be bound by an oath when it doth sufficiently appear that the hand of God hath incapacitated him for the keeping thereof."

This simple speech settled the matter; and all wondered that they had not seen it in that light at first. So the heralds were instructed to make proclamation that the battle had been put off to some future time.

In the meantime Hugh had been taken to his tent, where the best physicians of his own army attended upon him. They shook their heads gravely when they observed the matter which the prince vomited up. They had been satisfied that, in addition to other ills, there was something unusual upon his stomach, and a powerful emetic brought it away. There were three of the doctors, and one of them, Alberic of Montrillon, had been for many years a physician in attendance upon the king of France. After conversing a while with his companions in ominous secrecy, Alberic touched Walter upon the shoulder and beckoned him to follow. He led the way to the outer pavilion, where he made sure that they were alone, and then spoke:

"Walter de St. Valery, I know that thou art warmly attached to thy master, and that on no account wouldst suffer evil to approach him, if 'twere in thy power to prevent it; but evil is a serpent of such subtle instinct

that too often we know not when it comes nor how. Now answer me, Walter. Since yesterday morning have any of Sir Hugh's enemies had admission to his tent?"

"No, sir, I am sure they have not."

"Have his enemies sent any messengers?"

"No."

"Art sure?"

"I am very sure."

"Then, Walter, answer me this. In the prince's immediate household—that is, among those who have access to his person—is there even one whom you could suspect for a moment of treachery, provided a great inducement were held out?"

Walter knew that the old physician was one of his master's truest and most honored friends; and under such circumstances he felt justified in speaking plainly.

"Why do you hesitate, Walter?"

"I was reflecting, sir, and I will show you that my cogitation hath not been entirely without result."

And thereupon the esquire related in full the conversation he had held with his master concerning the page Roland, at the same time expressing the firm belief that the lad had played the traitor more than once.

The cloud of doubt and anxiety was banished from the physician's brow, and his voice was even cheerful as he replied to Walter:

"I thank you for this, my friend, and in turn I can assure you that your master is beyond all danger. I have given him a medicine that will overcome all trouble, and when he revives I look to see him come forth quite like himself. And now tell me, did your master drink any wine before going out to the list?"

"Yes; he and Robert of Normandy came in and partook together."

Alberic started, gazed into the esquire's face with a blank expression, as though his thoughts were wandering, and then laid his hand nervously upon Walter's arm.

"Robert of Normandy came in?" he whispered, strangely excited.

"Yes."

"And drank with the prince?"

"Yes."

"Is there any of the wine left?"

"A little."

"Then I pray you keep it. No, no; let me have it, and I will take it away with me."

They returned to the inner apartment, where Walter took down the bottle, and found a very small quantity of the wine remaining. This Alberic took, and having looked once more at his patient, he directed the esquire how to proceed, and then called his companions to come away.

"If the prince wants wine—and a small quantity may benefit him—be careful and open a flask which you are sure has not been before unsealed. I will call on the morrow."

This the physician spoke to Walter in the outer pavilion, in a tone which could not reach other ears; and having expressed the belief that Hugh would revive in a very few hours, he took his leave.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PAGE'S CONFESSION.

During the remainder of the night Walter sat by his master's couch, though he did not pretend to sit all the while with open eyes ; but if he suffered himself to fall away occasionally into slumber, he was careful to place himself in such a position that the slightest movement on the part of the invalid would arouse him. When the day had broken, and the first bright beams had penetrated the pavilion, the esquire bethought him that he had better arouse the cooks, and see that a delicate broth was being prepared, which the physician had ordered for his patient. He saw that the knight was still sleeping, and with a noiseless step he made his way out from the pavilion, and went to the quarters of the servants.

No sooner had Walter left the apartment where his master lay, than the page, who had been apparently waiting in the outer pavilion, hidden away so that the esquire did not observe him, glided stealthily in, and having assured himself that the prince was asleep, he moved to the sideboard and began to search for some-

thing there. There were two flasks, and these he took down and examined ; and when he had replaced them he seemed to search for a third, but he could not find it.

"Death and confusion !" he ejaculated, after he had looked in every place where a flask could have been put, "some one has taken it away ! God grant that they have not discovered the secret. Oh, I wish I had not done it ! I might have used my ears and my tongue, but 'twas cruel thus to repay with almost certain death the noble lord who hath so truly befriended me ! Where can it be ? The physicians have been here. Old Alberic was here. If he hath taken it away then I am undone !"

At this moment the prince moved upon his couch and called for Walter. Quick as thought the page dropped upon his hands and knees and crawled away. And he had not much time to spare, for presently the knight sat up in his bed and looked around.

Walter de St. Valery spent more time than he thought with the servants, for he was anxious that the broth should be properly prepared, and he waited to see the ingredients put together. When he returned, he was not a little surprised upon beholding that his master had arisen and taken a seat upon one of the stools.

"My lord, I fear thou art doing a dangerous thing. I left thee but now fast asleep, having been by thy side since thou wert brought hither. When I saw the day had broken I went to call the cooks that they might prepare a broth which Alberic recommended for you."

"Bless you, good Walter, for your care and kindness, but fear not that I am in danger. By my soul, I feel very well and I think the savory broth of which thou speakest will give me new strength. Think not of me,

Walter. Go about thy business, if thou hast any and bring me the pottage when it is ready."

The esquire believed that Hugh would be alone, so he withdrew, and found matters without to absorb his time until the head cook announced that the broth was ready. Fixing the mess in as attractive a style as possible, Walter bore it in and set it upon the small table, and then took one of the sealed flasks of wine and opened it.

Hugh found the mess very palatable, and he partook with more relish than he had experienced for a long while. When he had eaten and had drunk a small measure of wine, he felt quite revived and his step, as he paced up and down the pavilion, was firm and steady, though far from being vigorous.

Thus far, since he had arisen from his couch, he had been thoughtful and moody, and Walter had marveled much that he did not speak with him upon the subject of the battle. Several times the esquire had found the knight's gaze fixed upon him with an earnest, eager look, but no question had been asked. Finally, however, the spell was broken. The prince had been slowly pacing to and fro while his esquire removed the tray, and when Walter had returned and would have proceeded to set the different articles of furniture in their proper places, his master addressed him :

" Walter, I would speak with thee. Be seated here."

The prince had taken a seat upon the edge of his couch, and the seat to which he directed his esquire was a chair directly in front of him—the same in which Walter had spent the hours of his night-watch. The latter gazed up, after he had taken the seat, and was unaccountably moved by the look which his lord gave him. It was a look such as he had never seen before, and he could not imagine what it meant.

"Walter," spoke the knight, "this is early morning?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And how long have I lain upon my bed?"

"Since last evening, *Messère*."

"It is as I thought. Yesterday, then, I was in the list."

A brief space of serious reflection, and then:

"Good Walter, some things of what transpired yesterday I know full well; and there be other things of which I know nothing. And then, again, there be some things of an intermediate character of which I partly know, and am partly in doubt. I was fully myself when I rode away from my tent with the duke, though I was not so strong as I could have wished. By the time I had reached the list a sort of faintness came creeping over me; my head was inclined to turn against my will; my vision was not certain, and my breath came and went with hard labor. So I hurried matters to the utmost, for I felt myself failing. I rode one tilt, and carried away one of De Grillon's vambraces. Did I not ride a second tilt?"

"A second!" cried Walter, in amazement. "Do you not remember that?"

"I remember that I was in my place at the end of the list, and that I raised my visor for air; and I think I made the charge, but I cannot call it clearly to my mind."

"Indeed, my lord, that second tilt was right nobly run. You carried away De Grillon's helm; and hurled him bodily to the earth."

"Say ye so?" cried the knight, starting up and seizing his esquire by the hand. "Did I unhorse him?"

"Aye. He went to the earth like a stricken boar; and thou didst keep thy seat right steadily."

"And did that end the conflict?"

"No, my lord. It proved that De Grillon was not much hurt, and you dismounted and took your ax, while I led your horse away."

"Aye," whispered Hugh, quivering from head to foot, and sinking back upon the couch. "I took my ax—and De Grillon took the ax?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And what then, Walter—what then?"

"Why, then it happened thus: No sooner had De Grillon approached, than you, unable to raise your ax, began to stagger; but presently you made a violent effort, and with a furious leap you dealt your opponent a blow that fairly staggered him. And that was your last. After that your ax dropped, and you tottered backward; and as you were falling De Grillon dealt a blow which would surely have been fatal, had not a sudden tripping of your heel thrown your head backward from the sweep of his blade. As it was, he only cleft the bars of your visor and touched your gorget."

"And I fell—fell before Guiscard de Grillon?"

"You fell beneath the hand of God, my master."

"Aye," responded the prince, in a hollow tone. "And to the judgment of God I had appealed."

"But you had not impiously challenged your Maker to combat; so that fall could not be accounted against you."

"And yet I fell beneath De Grillon's stroke! Who will believe that I was sick nigh unto death before I rode a tilt? Who will believe that I was not fairly overcome?"

"Your friends all believe so, my lord; and the decision of the judge has been postponed."

"Alas! That Hugh de Vermandois should have lived to see this day! What will the King of France

say when told that his beloved brother—his brother who came hither to uphold the honor of his royal arms —hath been overcome by a captain of Thoulouse? "Oh, this is dreadful! Dreadful! Leave me, Walter."

"But, my lord, you do not fully understand—"

"Hush, good Walter! I thank thee for thy kindness; but the stern truth will not be set aside. Leave me awhile. I would think."

With a heavy heart, the faithful esquire withdrew from the pavilion; and as he passed out into the court he found a number of the knights attached to the prince's immediate household, to whom he communicated what had thus far transpired. A few of them were anxious to see their lord, for the purpose of assuring him, upon their knightly honor, that his case yet stood as fair as though he had not yet entered the list; but Walter told them they had better wait, and after awhile they withdrew.

When these nobles had gone, Walter bethought himself that he had better go and see the Duke of Normandy; for he, more than any other, would be likely to cheer his master and open the truth to his understanding. Before taking this step, however, he thought he would see the prince and let him know that he was going out, but without exposing his real business. When he entered the inner pavilion, he uttered an exclamation of wonder at the scene that met his gaze.

There stood the prince, clad in mail from head to heel, his velvet surcoat thrown on over his hauberk, his sword upon his hip, and his silver casque in his hand.

"In mercy's name, my lord, what means this?"

The prince gazed upon his devoted attendant with a faint, sad smile; and gently shaking his head, he said:

"Walter, you need not say that I have gone out. I must have fresh air, and plenty of it. I must get away from the camp, that I may reflect by myself. It will be better for me."

"But thou wilt permit me to accompany thee my lord."

"Nay, Walter. I tell thee I must be alone. In Heaven's name, cross me not. I am not in a mood for much speech. Keep watch upon the pavilion, and wait for me here. Seek me not beyond the camp."

Thus speaking the prince donned his silver casque, and strode out from the tent. His esquire dared say no more, nor dared he to follow; and yet his heart was torn by doubt and anxiety, for he much feared that his lord was in a mood to do serious mischief unto himself. He went out and saw the knight mount his horse—saw him ride away over the plain—saw him turn toward the wood, and finally disappear beyond the dark line of forest. After this he returned to the pavilion, and was considering whether he should call upon the Norman Duke for counsel, when the arras was lifted, and a stranger entered—a youth, habited in the garb of a peasant, and bearing upon his face the Arab stamp.

"Who art thou?" demanded Walter, in no very pleasant manner.

The intruder held forth his hand, and Walter observed the signet of the prince; and on the instant his face grew bright, for here was one whom he might safely set upon his master's track.

"Dost thou seek Hugh de Vermandois?"

"Yes."

"And must you see him?"

"It is necessary that I should speak with him at once."

"I think thou art called Hassan?"

"So I am called."

"Then, good Hassan, I would have thee seek my master with all possible despatch." And thereupon Walter told to the Ismaelian the circumstances under which the prince had left the tent, and also pointed out the way he had taken. "I think the prince is too sensible a man to do injury to himself; but I fear it is not himself that hath thus gone forth. He was in a strange mood, and I know that his heart was heavy and sad."

The dusky youth put forth his hand, and when Walter had taken it, he said:

"As I thus freely offer to thee my hand, know that just as freely do I offer my life to the Lord of Vermandois. He is too good a man for this place, where I see that even now, ere a single city hath been yet taken, a bitter jealousy is growing up among those who should set the example of modesty and honor. But enough. I mean no disrespect. I will away at once and find the prince. I have good news for him."

"Good news! Then, in Heaven's name, find him, and give him the benefit thereof. If thou canst cheer him, thou wilt bless him."

Without further words Hassan hurried away, and when he had gone, Walter made preparation to visit the quarter of the Duke of Normandy; but before setting forth he made inquiry for Roland, the page. Where was he? He asked several of the servants and men-at-arms without success; but at length he met a page attending upon one of the prince's knights, who gave him reliable information. The story of this lad was to the effect that he and Roland were playing with their blunt spears in the court, when a servant of the old physician, Alberic, came and led Roland

away. He said that Roland went very reluctantly, and seemed considerably frightened when told that Alberic had sent for him.

Thus informed, Walter set forth for the Norman quarter, whither we will go on in advance, and learn what he was to discover.

Alberic of Montrillon was one of the most thoroughly versed alchemists of his time, and among the branches of that science which had particularly engaged his attention toxicology was one of the foremost. He had often claimed that there was not a poison in the world with which he was not acquainted; and he had also declared that no poison could be introduced into food or drink in such a manner that he could not detect it.

And now the old physician had an opportunity to try his skill. With the first beams of the morning he was up at his work. The wine which he had brought with him from the tent of Hugh de Vermandois was poured out into a small glazed crucible and subjected to a gradual heat. Several slips of soft paper, impregnated with different solutions, had been prepared and were ready at hand for use. With the first vapor that arose from the seething liquor came proof of one important secret. No sooner had Alberic allowed the vapor to come in contact with his nostrils than he discovered the odor of the inspissated juice of the poppy. But he knew that this could not be all. That simple narcotic poison could not have produced all the effects he had witnessed in the case of the prince. But he was not long in doubt. Three slips of his prepared paper had been subjected to the influence of the vapor without effect; the fourth slip, however, began to change color immediately; and in a little while the old man threw down the paper and cried:

"*Eureka !*"

"What is it?" asked the companion who had been assisting him.

"It is the double-distilled essence of hemlock. Now, you see, we can account for every symptom."

"Aye," exclaimed the other physician. "And it was a witty compound."

"And a common one when the poisoner desires that the victim shall possess some little show of vitality while the agent is performing its deadly work. And now let us seek Robert of Normandy."

Alberic and his companion found the Norman duke far from being a well man. He had sent for his own leech during the night, and a powerful emetic had given him relief. Hugh's physician wasted no words, but in as brief a manner as possible told his story—told of his conversation with De St. Valery—of his taking away the wine remaining in the flask, and of the recent experiment.

"Death of my life !" cried the stout duke, starting to his feet and smiting his fist upon his bosom. "The villains meant to poison our noble Hugh !"

"I do not think they meant to take his life," said Alberic, "but only so paralyze his body that he might be overcome in the list."

"Which is a thousand times more foul and dastardly!" returned Robert, quivering from head to foot. "And how can we bring this wickedness home upon them ?"

"Let us rest here awhile and summon the page of whom Walter told me. If you will lend me two of your men, I will send for him."

The men were summoned, and Alberic directed them to proceed at once to the quarter of the Vermandois and bring back the page Roland.

The messengers departed, and were not long in per-

forming their mission. The boy was pale and anxious, and his knees shook so that he could scarcely stand. The duke claimed the privilege of examining him, and he resolved to proceed upon the assumption that the lad had done the deed.

"Look ye, boy. Can you tell me what prevents me from taking my stout, sharp dagger thus and cutting your head from your shoulders?"

The duke drew his dagger as he spoke, and the boy shrank back, uttering a cry of terror.

"Tell me! Why should I not cut out your false young heart?"

Another cry of terror, and the boy fairly staggered from weakness.

"Oh, thou wicked wretch! And he so kind a master! How had the noble prince ever injured thee that thou shouldst do so foul a deed! I think I must cut that young head of thine off ere thou dost further mischief. It is our only safety, else we shall have the whole camp poisoned."

"Perhaps," suggested the old physician, as the boy clasped his hands and tried to articulate, "this lad did not do it of his own accord. If he was instigated by others I think he should be spared."

"If he can show to us that he was not the author of the plot, I may spare him, but if he cannot, then his head must come off. And it shall not fall with the blow of an ax, but I will cut it off with a knife as I would cut off the head of a wolf."

There was something in the look and manner of the dark-browed Northman, as he thus horribly spoke, that filled the boy with a terror almost deadly, and when the duke advanced toward him with the gleaming dagger naked in his hand, he sank down upon his knees and his speech found utterance:

"Oh, spare me! Spare me! I did not know what it would do. They told me it would not kill him; that it would not do him serious harm, but that it would only make him so confident and so furious that he would run himself into danger, and then they could overcome him in battle."

"And did they tell you to put it into his wine?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Which one gave you the poison?"

"Oh, my lord, he said it was not poison!"

"Never mind that now. Did Guiscard de Grillon give it to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And why did you obey him?"

The boy hesitated and looked anxiously around.

The duke, having thus broken the ice and reflecting that further truth might be more readily obtained by gentle means, changed his tone:

"Roland, when I regard thy youth and think what a shame it would be to have thy young life made forever black and horrible from sin and iniquity, I am tempted to spare thee upon the condition that thou tellest me the whole truth, and I pledge thee in advance that I will shield thee from all danger arising therefrom."

In this way the lad was induced to make a full confession, and when he found that the duke had knowledge of his former treason to his master, he told the whole story, from the time of his entering the service of the prince, after the wreck at Epirus, to the present. Guiscard de Grillon was his uncle, and all the time that he had eaten the bread of De Vermandois he had been secretly in the service of De Grillon. Touching this last deed, his confession was to the following effect:

Immediately after the breaking up of the council, at which arrangements for the battle had been made, De

Grillon called Roland aside and gave into his hands a small phial, containing a liquid that he was to mix with wine which the prince would drink that afternoon. He must mix it with wine, if possible ; if not, he must put it into something else. But as the lad had free access at all hours to the prince's private apartment, there would be no trouble. De Grillon solemnly swore that the thing would not produce death, and he promised, in case of success, that he would procure Roland's advancement to the office of esquire at least a full year sooner than might otherwise be.

When the page had concluded his confession, the duke explained to him that he should be forced to hold him in close confinement until they had made further investigation.

"Not that you are imprisoned for crime," said Robert, "but that you may be no more tampered with by bad men."

"I care not now where you put me, my lord," replied the boy, "so that you keep me from my uncle."

"That is the very end we aim at, Roland ; so make your mind easy. And in the meantime thou hadst better pray to God that He may pardon this crime of thy youth, ere thy heart becometh hard and corrupt."

For some time after the page had been led away, the Duke of Normandy sat with his head bowed upon both his hands.

"My soul," he cried at length, starting up and lifting his right-hand toward Heaven, "how shall the true soldiers of the Cross ever reap success against the Infidels, while in their very midst, and bearing upon their breasts the sacred symbol of Christ, such black-hearted traitors are suffered to wear the holy emblems of knighthood?"

CHAPTER XII.

A CONFERENCE—THE SEARCH.

The first movement of Robert of Normandy, after he had seen the traitorous page placed under proper restraint, was to seek the Italian quarter, where he found Tancred and Bohémond together. Calling them to attend him upon a matter of great importance, he conducted them to the pavilion of Godfrey de Bouillon, where old Alberic had preceded them. The stout chieftain of Bouillon was chafing with impatience, the physician having informed him that he was about to be visited by several of the princes on a matter of great moment, and having yet withheld from him the nature of their business. So when he saw these valiant warriors before him, he was ready at once to attend to them, and bade them relieve his burdened mind as quickly as possible.

"Easy, my noble brother," said Tancred, toward whom Bouillon had cast an impatient glance. "I am as ignorant of this matter as yourself. Our gentle knight of Normandy will enlighten us."

Whereupon Robert turned to the old physician, saying:

"Alberic, thou hast the gift of speech, and moreover thou knowest of this matter more particularly than do I or any other."

And then Alberic told his story. He told how he had found Prince Hugh after the battle; how he had suspected poison; how he had brought away the flask; and of the test to which he had subjected the wine that was in it. While he was speaking, Duke Robert's physician came in, and he was forced to tell his story over again; and when he had concluded the Norman chief made explanation of his own case, his medical attendant assisting him materially.

The effect upon the Italian knights and upon Godfrey can be better imagined than described. For a time they were so astounded that they could hardly speak. It did not seem possible that such things could be; and yet there they were proved beyond their power to doubt.

"As for me," cried the Duke de Bouillon, "I will no more believe that our brother of Vermandois hath been guilty of any treason at all!"

"He hath not," answered Robert. "I'll stake my life upon his innocence of all that hath been pronounced against him."

"Aye," added Tancred, with fiery zeal, at the same time striking hands with the Norman, "and I am with thee to the end. Hugh hath never had it in his heart to do aught of evil against the Christian cause, and I will pledge my life with yours, my brother."

Bohémond spoke more carefully, and shook his head admonitorily.

"I think the Prince of Vermandois hath been much abused and traduced, and I am willing to believe that

he hath not intended so much of ill as hath been represented ; and, moreover, this wickedness which we have discovered showeth to us that he hath most bitter enemies, and we can judge full well that their accusations should be taken with much allowance. Still, my brothers, there have been grave things proved against him, and I pray God that he may show them in a proper light, but we must not let our suddenly aroused sympathies lead us into error. Because those who accused him have shown themselves to be false and wicked, we must not necessarily admit that Hugh stands wholly vindicated. Let us see Raymond of Thoulouse. He should know of this."

Godfrey admitted the justice of Bohémond's speech, but not so Robert and Tancred. They could see no sense in further suspicion of Hugh's loyalty to their cause ; and the fact that his three accusers had sought so abominably to break him down bodily in the list was proof enough to them that the same three had sought full as wickedly to break down his reputation.

In answer to this, Bohémond bade them remember that only one of the three accusers had had any hand in the poison.

But Tancred and Robert would not admit the supposition. They believed that all three of the rascals had been engaged in the diabolical plot.

The dispute was waxing warm, and threatened to lead to harder feelings and harsher speech, when the old Count of Thoulouse entered the tent. He had heard that several of the chiefs were assembled there, and he had a curiosity to know what the business was. So, when he had seated himself, Alberic told to him the story. Those who had looked to see Raymond start with horror at the revelation were sorely disappointed. On the contrary, he took it rather coolly,

and seemed, by his manner, to feel more of chagrin that his favorite captain should have allowed himself to be exposed, than of sorrow for what said captain had done.

"Why man!" cried Robert, starting to his feet and facing the count, "dost thou not hold this to be a most diabolical piece of work, and one which should consign its instigator to everlasting infamy?"

"Truly, good Robert," answered Raymond, with irritating coolness, "if De Grillon hath done this thing, he hath been guilty of a grave offense; but you seem to forget that the knight hath a tongue, and that he may successfully defend himself against the charge. At present you have the simple story of a mere boy—a boy who hath shown himself to be a traitor—against the knightly honor of a bold and valiant soldier."

"Bold and valiant!" retorted the Norman, with intense disdain. "'Sdeath! I hold him beneath the level of contempt!"

Godfrey began to tremble, lest there should be trouble in his pavilion; but Raymond of Thoulouse, usually so stern and defying, took no offense at Robert's hot speech; but replied with much seeming frankness:

"We will not try Guiscard de Grillon's case here. Let it be of him when he is present to defend himself. Only allow me to say this: If it shall be proven that he hath done this thing with evil intent, I will not seek to shield him. And now let me advise you: Allow not the doings of another to lead you into excusing Hugh de Vermandois; for I am fully persuaded that he is a traitor."

What might have been the final result of the discussion we cannot determine. Tancred and Robert, their eyes flashing, and their frames quivering with

excitement, had both started forward to make answer to the old count, when Walter de St. Valery entered the pavilion.

"My noble lords," spoke the gentle esquire, in a hurried, fearful manner, "the prince, my beloved master, hath left the camp, and I know not whither he hath gone; but I fear he may come to harm if he be not pursued and overtaken."

"Gone!" cried Alberic, in alarm. "My soul! He was not fit to go."

"So I told him," said the esquire; "but he would not listen to me."

"Why did you not bear him company?" demanded the physician, trembling more and more. "You should have known that he was not fit to venture forth alone."

"Be generous with Walter, good Alberic," interposed Robert, who observed the esquire's trouble of manner. "Thou knowest well that Hugh of Vermandois is not a man to be openly opposed by a dependent."

"But," cried the doctor, beside himself with the anxiety which had been every moment increasing with reflection, "the prince was not in his right mind. Oh, my lords, I beseech you, mount and pursue him with all possible speed!"

"Did he depart on his horse!" asked Raymond.

Walter answered that he did.

The old count shook his head, at the same time muttering, half to himself:

"Verily, the doings of the prince are marvelously strange of late. I see not why this alarm. He hath been to the mountain before; and we know why he went; or, at least, we have good ground for judgment. And now, if we follow him, who shall say that we pursue him not into the jaws of the lion?"

"Raymond! The jaws of the lion?"

"Aye," replied the count to Tancred, who had thus interrupted him. "I believe Kilidge Arslan is called a lion."

"The Sultan of Roum!" uttered Robert of Normandy, aghast.

"Our mortal enemy!" added Tancred.

"So I have said," calmly answered Raymond.

"But my master went not in the direction of the Turkish fastnesses," pleaded Walter, in pain.

"Who shall tell where, in these mountains, the Turks have not a guard?" retorted he of Thoulouse.

"Out upon thee for a false knight, if thou dost thus fling cruel suspicion upon a brother without just cause!" exclaimed the Prince of Otranto.

"And I say the same!" chimed the Duke of Normandy. "And now let us away in pursuit of our noble Hugh. Oh, God grant that no evil hath befallen him!"

"Upon my life," said Tancred, as he and the Duke of Normandy walked away together, "I cannot understand why Raymond of Thoulouse should be Hugh's enemy! His manner is passing strange."

"A thing came to my ears yesterday, after the battle," replied Robert, "which gave me light. It hath been impressed upon Raymond's mind that Hugh was not altogether blameless in the matter of the loss of his daughter. He hath information that the prince and Gertrude had quarreled, and that at the time of the wreck they were at open enmity, and he fears that Hugh did not afford her that protection which he might have given her had he pleased."

"'Sdeath! And do you credit that, Robert?"

"No! By my good right arm, no! The old count hath been imposed upon; and it shall be ours, if possible, to bring to light the whole wicked plot. Upon

my life it puzzles me. Oh, if some kind power would but send the Lady Gertrude to our assistance, how quickly all the dark places would be illumined !"

"Ah," responded Tancred, solemnly, "I fear me that may never be ! I saw the lady at Rome ; and the man who says that Hugh de Vermandois could, knowingly or willingly, allow harm to come to such, while it was in his power to prevent it, lies, and the truth is not in him !"

And Robert and Tancred were not the only ones who wondered exceedingly at the conduct of Raymond of Thoulouse. It had been known that once Raymond loved the gallant prince right warmly, and that he had been very proud and happy when the prince had won his daughter's love and the promise of her hand.

But let us go back for one moment to Godfrey's tent, where the duke and Raymond had been left alone together, and we are just in time to hear from the man's own lips the source of all the trouble. Godfrey has just asked the very question which had exercised the mind of Tancred, and the old count makes answer :

"My noble Godfrey, since so much hath been said here in your presence, I am forced to tell you that which I had almost resolved should never escape my lips until the time should come when I could tell it to the prince himself. You are of course aware that my daughter was Hugh's affianced bride ?"

"Yes, Raymond. So it hath been told me."

"And it hath been told thee truly. They were affianced, and it had been arranged that they should be married in Jerusalem. Believing that Hugh loved the maiden truly, and knowing that his opportunity of conducting her readily to Constantinople was better than mine, I intrusted her to his care. But, good

Godfrey, I have reason to believe that the prince had tired of poor Gertrude. He liked not the thought of wedding her. Should his brother Philip die without issue he will be king, and he had grown to dislike the thought of raising a woman who had worn the armor, and bestrode a horse, to the throne of France. Feeling thus, he resolved that he would rid himself of her if he ever had the opportunity; and at Epirus the opportunity came. He placed her in an out-of-the-way hut during the night—left her entirely alone—and then set a Tyrian freebooter to fall upon her and carry her away. Now do you wonder that I like him not?"

"I wonder much, however, that you can give full credit to that story," said the duke.

Raymond looked up in surprise, but ere he could make reply other knights entered the pavilion, and the subject was dropped.

It was near the middle of the forenoon that ten knights, fully armed and equipped, set forth from the Christian camp in search of Hugh de Vermandois, Walter de St. Valery bearing them company. The esquire led the way to the opening in the wood which he had seen his master enter, and at a short distance they came to a small stream, upon the sandy shore of which they found the prints of a horse's feet. Walter dismounted and examined them and declared them to be the prints of Dominic's feet. He knew the hind shoes. The armorer had made them of a peculiar pattern only a few weeks before and he was confident there were no others like them.

"It is safe enough to follow the direction they indicate," said Tancred, who had taken charge of the expedition. "I doubt if any other Christian's horse hath been this way to-day."

Of the two passes here opening they took the one

thus indicated and for half an hour they rode on, not very swiftly, for they were careful to examine the woods upon either hand as they went, and at the end of that time they came to a point where the path branched again, one branch seeming to lead away through the forest to the left, on level ground, while the other appeared to lead directly on up the mountain. Here Walter dismounted again and very quickly discovered the prints of Dominic's feet in the latter path.

"Once more on," cried the valiant Tancred, darting on ahead up the steep ascent. "I don't think we'll find many more by-ways."

"I care not what we find, so that we find our noble Hugh!" suggested Robert of Normandy.

"So that we find him safe," added he of Otranto.

"'Sdeath, man, don't turn your speech into such dubious ways! You freeze me!"

Tancred could make no reply to this, for he had reached a narrow rocky defile, where he was forced to guide his horse with great care. Up through this dark pass, and they came to a broader path where nature had terraced the solid rock before them, so that they ascended without trouble. Up this, and they came upon a broad table of rock, which the horses had no sooner reached than they began to snuff and to neigh, as though they scented danger. It was truly a wild and romantic scene. Before them lay the broad level of rock, beyond which the mountain still arose, lifting its dark and gloomy summit, rough and rugged, against the sky at a far, far distance. To the left the table seemed to drop off into a chasm, the tops of the dingy firs and cedars forming a scraggy line just above the ledge; while to the right, reaching away to a dizzy height, arose a perpendicular cliff of solid rock. It was

as though this had been a court of some Cyclopean castle, and the cliff had been a vast wall, raised by square and plummet to defend that side.

"My lords," said Walter de St. Valery, when they had viewed the whole scene, "I should judge that this was the place where the prince met—"

A sudden cry from Robert of Normandy, who occupied a position at the extreme right, stopped his speech.

"See—see!" broke from the Norman chieftain's lips in wild, spasmodic accent. "What is that?"

Tancred and Walter advanced a few paces and stood appalled.

"Oh, my soul! What is this my eyes behold?"

CHAPTER XIII.

HIC JACET !—THE BLACK KNIGHT.

What was it that lay upon the hard rock, close in under the face of the cliff—that lay there in the dusky shadow, thrown into a strange and grotesque shape—that lay where patches of the somber shadow were made still more somber by mottled, ghastly dabs and pools? What was it, so still and so quiet, in that silent place, and upon that hard bed? Oh, so like a thing that, only a few short hours before, had borne a noble front, and had breathed the fresh air of heaven with every promise of buoyant, vigorous life! So like the gallant chief whom the thousands that loved him had followed to battle as they would have followed him to the sports of a holiday!

Oh, no, no, no! There could be no hope. So still! So strangely conditioned! And those dabs and pools? The rich velvet of the surcoat torn and soiled; the fine mail of the hauberk rent and bedaubed, the bright network of rings here and there dimmed by the ghastly flow that had reached the rock; the silver helm—.

How those stern warriors, used to scenes of blood from their very childhood, started back appalled when they saw that silver helm, and read the story that came from the voiceless lips that lay pale and cold within the bruised and shattered bars!

Hark! The neighing of a horse. And presently, from the path at the opposite side of the table, came a richly caparisoned steed, with long, swift strides, stopping first over the prostrate form, bending his head and snuffing, as though for the breath of the lips that were never to speak to him more.

"Poor Dominic!"

The horse raised his head and recognized Walter, and in a moment more the faithful beast had moved slowly up and pressed his muzzle upon the esquire's shoulder.

By and by Walter and Tancred turned the body of the knight upon its back, and unloosed the helm and drew it off. Until this moment there had been a hope that death might not have claimed the prince for his own; but their hope vanished when the casque had been removed. The skull was broken almost to a pomace, and so terrific had been the blow, that even the bone of the forehead was crushed to the very eyes.

Everything was there save the prince's sword. Where was that? Had Dominic become restive and thrown his master? Had he become frightened in the wood and had Hugh's sword been torn off by coming in contact with the stout shrubbery? For a long time not a word of sense was spoken; but at length Tancred asked: "How did it happen?" And from that moment there were questions and answers enough.

After a little consideration, Tancred and Robert of Normandy, leaving Walter to watch the body, went around to where the upper sweep of the cliff lost itself in the wood, and here they found a path leading upward. It was very steep, but the jagged projections were so plenty and so near together that they afforded a very convenient staircase, and the adventurers made their way to the top without difficulty, ever and anon,

on the passage, discovering marks of a recent ascent. In one place Tancred found a twig freshly broken and a bunch of green leaves not yet begun to wilt, which had been stripped off as though the bough had slipped through the hand that clutched it, leaving its foliage behind. Robert was the first to reach the summit, and an exclamation of astonishment broke from his lips as his eyes rested upon Prince Hugh's sword. He and Tancred both knew it, as did every knight who had been intimate with him; for it was a weapon which had come down from the first Capet, and which was said to have first graced the hip of Charlemagne.

"My soul! Look!"

So spoke Tancred, as he turned back, with swimming brain, after having looked down from the brow of the precipice.

Robert looked over, and grew suddenly sick at heart as his eyes caught the scene far, far below him, and the thought of pitching over and falling that frightful distance presented itself.

For a little time the two chiefs stood there upon that elevated perch, and looked each into the other's face.

He of Otranto was the first to speak, though not the first to offer an opinion:

"Robert, what think you of this?"

And the Duke of Normandy, speaking slowly and solemnly, gave utterance to an opinion which was afterward entertained by most of those who had been friends to the unfortunate man:

"Upon a system already heavily stricken, the cup of the poisoner made sad effect. First to fall upon our prince was the blow which he received on the head, probably in this very place. If Walter is correct, the Turk who launched the stone that struck Hugh to the

earth stood where we now stand. That blow, followed by a week's prostration, left him hardly in a condition to receive calmly the frightful charges which were brought against him. These charges, together with the wickedness that instigated them, and the fact of brave men's believing them possibly true, were not calculated to cheer his already drooping spirits. Then came the poison and the battle. When he awoke this morning he was not himself. His reason had become shattered, and he dwelt upon his situation with shame and horror. When he knew that he had sunk down before Guiscard de Grillon in the list, and that the judgment of God which he had evoked had gone against him, he felt that he was ruined and disgraced; and he left his tent resolved that he would not live. Life to him had no more charms, for he looked through falsehood and deceit. Oh, when he stood here, on this dizzy pinnacle, when he took off his trenchant blade and laid it reverently aside, never to be worn again, and wielded by the arm than which a better never grasped a hilt, then, then, could he but have known what we know now, how different it might have been! If he could have known that his page had confessed the wickedness of his chief accuser! But alas, he knew it not. He only knew that he had failed, and his noble nature rebelled at the thought of begging explanation; for of all the things an honorable knight can be called upon to do, the most dread-inspiring and soul-harrowing is to explain a defeat in a passage at arms which he himself hath invited. Hugh must have had his plan perfected in his mind when he set forth, and he probably came directly to this place, left his horse to wander at his will, and then, having ascended this height, prepared for the death he courted. Methinks I can hear his simple prayer—I can see him take off that precious

sword, fully assured that his friends would find it—I see him lay it down and—and—oh, if I could think he said in his heart, 'Robert of Normandy, thou wert my friend—God bless thee !'—if I could think that he said so—"

"And if he did," cried the Prince of Otranto—"if he thought of his friends, be sure he forgot not Tancred !"

"Aye," replied the Norman, warmly, "none could have had a deeper place in his heart than thyself, brave Tancred—no, not one ! We will think that he remembered us, and then—then—came the end. And God knows the Christian army hath this day lost the best knight of all that bore its standard. It is not a strain upon truth to say that Hugh of Vermandois was the best knight in Christendom."

"I agree with thee, Robert. Thou speakest truly. And neither of us will ever again touch the hand of a truer friend !"

Thus they spoke, and then turned and made their way down the rugged declivity, and were soon with their friends below.

Walter, assisted by two of the knights, unable to bear the sight of the terribly mangled head, had re-shaped the bruised and battered casque, and, with tremulous hands and many sighs, lifting the gory front as though it might still feel pain from an unkind touch, the silver helm had been drawn on to its proper place, and the visor shut close and hooked down. Tancred and Robert fixed the corse upon Dominic's back, and having laid the old sword of Charlemagne reverently across the saddle-bow, they started back down the mountain.

The mourning party, with Tancred riding at the head, had reached the foot of the mountain, and the

question arose whether they should take the shorter way directly toward the camp or move toward the plain. In the former case they would gain almost a league, but would have a full league more of forest to penetrate; while in the latter, they would, while travelling further, enjoy a clear and open way.

"Strike for the plain," said Tancred. "We had better travel a score of leagues beyond the shorter way, than drag this sacred charge through the hard forest."

So they took the path that led them for a while away from the camp, but which brought them very quickly to the open country, and at a short distance from the wood they struck the highway over which travellers came from Constantinople. They were just entering the broad well-beaten track, when an object met their gaze that caused them to stop, as though a peremptory order had been given to that effect.

Coming up the road was a knight clad in complete armor, and mounted upon a powerful horse; and it was observed that he closed his visor when they appeared in the road before him. A nobler presence Tancred swore he had never seen. And well might he say so. In stature, the stranger was of that fair, medium proportion most favorable to compactness and vigor of body, while his erect and easy bearing bespoke grace and self-reliance. But the chief peculiarity—that which struck our friends as something solemnly prophetic—was the funeral hue of the strange presence. The knight's armor, from top to toe, was utterly black; the closely fitting and admirably adapted plates seeming to be enameled in jet; and three towering ostrich plumes as black as the plumage of the raven surmounted the sable helmet and crest. The horse was evidently an Andalusian, large and

powerful, and of a form so symmetrical that the most practiced eye could find no fault; and its color was black—not a spot, not a hair, to break the solemn hue. The knight's lance was black; his scabbard black; and all the trappings, of both man and beast, even to the bars of the bits, were the same. In short, a statue cut from a massive block of pure jet, could not have been more evenly and entirely black.

Tancred and his party reached the highway just as the stranger came up, and the former looked to see if there were any device upon any part of the black armor, but no device was to be seen. The stranger was the first to speak:

"In the name of God and St. Denis, I give thee Christian greeting, brothers all!"

"In the name of God and his Holy Son, whom we serve, we welcome thee to our companionship," said Tancred.

"Meeting thee here," pursued the stranger, "gives me the hope that I am not far from the Christian camp. I have had a toilsome ride, brothers, and more than once have I disputed the way with intruding infidels."

"And thou hast come to join the crusaders, sir stranger?"

"Yes, and other lances will be with me in time. I rode on in advance, anxious to meet my noble friend, the Prince of Vermandois. Can you lead me to his tent? Ha! Why start ye in such blank amaze?"

"Wouldst thou know the prince?" asked Robert of Normandy.

At that moment, even as the Norman spoke, the gaze of the black knight had rested upon the horse that bore the melancholy burden, and as he saw the limp and lifeless form, the mail broken and dabbed in gore—as he saw that princely surcoat, with its royal emblazonry torn and disfigured—and as he saw the

dark horrible gouts that hung quivering from the bars of the silver helm, he seemed at once to comprehend the fearful truth.

"My life upon it," he cried, raising his mailed hand toward the ghastly scene, "that is Hugh's full garb as he wore it on the field in Paris. Tell me—hath ill befallen him? Where is Walter de St. Valery?"

"Here I am," answered the esquire, advancing, and at the same time gazing eagerly up at the bars of the black visor, to catch, if possible, a glimpse of the features beneath.

"Speak, Walter! In God's name, speak; and tell me what hath befallen thy noble master!"

And then, partly from Walter and partly from Tancred and Robert, the stranger gained the whole story. It was told in oddly disconnected sentences, and with many sighs and moans; but in the end the newcomer had heard all that was necessary to make him understand that the Prince of Vermandois had been most wickedly traduced and betrayed; and that in a temporary fit of insanity, induced partly by his sufferings and partly by poison, he had thrown away a life which he feared had been darkened forever.

The Black Knight listened to the end, and then, letting go his rein, he raised his clasped hands on high, and solemnly spoke as follows:

"Before Thee, thou God of my fathers, I give myself to the avenging and the justification of Hugh of Vermandois; which work, I swear by the holy cross, I will do! And until my oath is fulfilled, the light of day shall not shine upon my face!* Hear me God, and record my vow!"

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* It was very common in those days for a knight who had taken it upon himself to redress some grievous wrong, to swear that he would not raise his visor to the light until the work had been accomplished.

Then lowering his hands, he turned to the company before him :

"Brethren in arms," he continued, in a tone of peculiar earnestness, "I have a favor to crave at your hands. If I have dropped a word, or given a sign, that may lead you to suspect me, keep your thoughts to yourselves until I may choose to expose my face to the world. I have a reason for asking this ; and I know that you will give me frank acquittal when you know all."

"By my life," cried Tancred, looking hard into the dim interstices of the black visor, "thou hast given me no such sign."

"Nor me," added Robert of Normandy.

And they all were equally ready to swear ignorance save Walter de St. Valery. He alone seemed to have hit a suspicion that found lodgment in his mind ; and when the party had once more started on its way, he rode to the stranger's side.

"Sir stranger," he said, "to show thee that I put full confidence in the avowal thou hast made, and that I hold thee as a friend to my master's memory, I offer thee rest in his pavilion."

"Hast thou authority so to do, good Walter ?"

"Yes, my—lord."

The esquire spoke the last word very reluctantly, and with much hesitation ; whereupon the other quickly responded :

"I have a right to the title, Walter. I accept the offer gladly, though God knows it must be an aching heart I bear to the couch where Hugh hath rested !"

It was late in the day when the mournful cavalcade drew up before the headquarters of the Department of the Vermandois ; and like wildfire spread the startling intelligence that Prince Hugh was dead.

Some few, even on that first evening, gained a knowledge of the truth as it appeared from what had been discovered; but by far the greater portion of the Crusaders heard wild and exaggerated stories, as false as they were ridiculous and improbable.

"The Black Knight!" That name, ere many hours, had been upon every lip; and as it was necessarily associated with the death of the French prince, it created an excitement second only to that resulting from the latter event. Thousands of men tried to get a sight at the mysterious stranger before the darkness fairly threw its curtain over the scene; but they were disappointed. He had entered the pavilion of the prince immediately on his arrival, and had not come forth since.

Quite late at night--nearly the fourth hour—Tancred and Robert of Normandy, arm-in-arm, approached the quarter of Vermandois, and were fortunate enough to find Walter without calling for him.

"Good Walter," said Tancred, "the pledge which we gave the Black Knight need not prevent us, who were then present, from mentioning our suspicions to each other. Have you not an idea of that man's name?"

"Have you, my lord?" returned Walter.

"I have."

"You may speak to me, and if you strike my thought I will give you the sign."

"Suppose I were to say—Philip?"

"Do you say so?"

"Yes."

"Then, my lord, there is no ground for dispute between us."

And Tancred and Robert went away fully believing that Hugh's royal brother, the King of France, had como to join them. But they resolved that they would give no sign to that effect.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLACK KNIGHT'S CHALLENGE—THE ATTACK.

With the first beams of the morning the crusaders from every quarter began to assemble in the open space before the pavilion of Vermandois, and ere long the thousand and one wiid stories of the previous night were corrected, and the facts were told as they had been gathered from those who knew. Had Kilidge Arslan made a descent and carried away half the women and children of the camp, the excitement could not have been more intense; for it was now openly acknowledged, by knight and esquire, and by noble and prince, that Hugh de Vermandois had been the strongest knight of them all and the most accomplished chieftain. Even Tancred, whose lance and sword were deemed invincible, acknowledged that Hugh was a better man than himself at the head of an army.

"Because," said the generous Italian, "he held a better command over himself."

The nearest friends of the French prince consulted with Walter, and it was finally decided that the body should be embalmed as well as they could do it, Alberic having declared that he could so preserve it that common decay would be effectually arrested—that it should

be embalmed and secured in an air-tight casket, and then Tancred, together with Robert of Normandy and Stephen of Blois and Chartres, vowed that they would bear it with them to Jerusalem and there give it final sepulcher in thrice consecrated ground.

And now how looked the chiefs of the army upon this death? All were horrified, but many there were who shook their heads with the belief that the suicide of the prince was an evidence of guilt. Had he been innocent he might have known that in time his innocence would have been proved. This rash step, therefore, gave strong testimony against his own assurance of right.

Some time during the night Guiscard de Grillon had gained access to Roland, the page, and on this morning the lad had asked to take back the testimony he had given against his uncle. He said now that he had given it because he feared his head would be cut off if he did not. When asked to explain the circumstance of the wine, he said that some weeks before, when he was sick, Peter, one of the physicians in Count Raymond's quarter, had given him some medicine. He had not used the whole of it, and when he saw his master sick it occurred to him that the same medicine might be good for him, so he mixed it in the wine Sir Hugh was to drink. The physician, Peter, was called and he bore out the boy's testimony so far as his part in the transaction was concerned, and when asked the nature of the medicine he said it had been a vegetable preparation which was entirely innocent in its fresh state, but which became very nauseous and almost poisonous when kept long enough to ferment. This latter fact he had not mentioned to Roland, because he had no thought of the medicine's being kept so long.

This story, so ridiculous and so improbable, had its

effect, the result of which was that Hugh's chief traducers were permitted to be present and take part in the consultation which somehow improvised itself in Godfrey's pavilion on this very day succeeding the death.

Tancred and Robert had gone first to relate to Godfrey de Bouillon the circumstances attending the finding of the body of their grand-master. It happened that Raymond of Thoulouse, with his captain of Grillon and the brothers of Bourbon, had also sought Godfrey to tell the story of the page's recantation. Seeing these knights going toward Godfrey's pavilion, others of the chiefs had come up, until at length more than a thousand of the leading men of the army had assembled there without summons; and when the place was so nearly filled that not many more could gain accommodation within, Tancred arose, at the earnest request of many true knights, and told the sad story he had come to tell to Godfrey.

When Tancred had resumed his seat, Robert of Normandy desired to know how Guiscard de Grillon, Peter of Bourbon and Arnold of the Marche dared be present in that assembly.

This called forth the story which the reader has already heard, of the page's new revelation.

And this opened up a general discussion upon the subject of Hugh de Vermandois's case. Loud words were spoken on both sides, and at length it seemed that something harder than hard words was likely to follow. Robert of Normandy had just taken his seat, after having hurled defiance into the teeth of any man who dared stand before him and traduce the character of the dead prince, and the old Count of Thoulouse, boiling with passion, had started to his feet, in spite of all that Godfrey de Bouillon and

Bohémond could do to maintain peace, when the whole assembly was electrified by a voice which at that moment broke upon the air like a thunderbolt.

"HOLD! *In the name of the* DEAD, *I command it!*"

And up the central aisle stalked the towering form of the Black Knight, his visor shut close, and the sable plumes waving above his crest in solemn grandeur. With stately tread he advanced to the dais, and stood upon it, and having gracefully inclined his head to Godfrey, he turned to the assembled warriors. Those who sat in a line before him could see the burning fire of two lustrous orbs within that visor; while all who gazed knew full well that they beheld a man of might and prowess. Had a robed spirit from the upper world come down in their midst, they could not have been more strangely or deeply moved.

"My lords and gentlemen, answer me!" he said, in tones that thrilled them to the very soul—tones so deep that they seemed to come from a closed tomb, and yet as powerful as ever sounded above the shock of battle: "You have come to wrest the sepulcher of our Lord Jesus Christ from the hands of the infidel. Have you yet fought a battle?"

For a little time there was a dead silence, all seeming to shrink from meeting the strange presence, even in speech; but at length the Prince of Otranto replied:

"Yes, Sir Knight; we have not been idle all this while. We have had several light battles with the enemy outside, and one grand attack upon the city."

"Did Hugh de Vermandois raise his arm against the infidel?" asked the Black Knight.

Tancred and Robert of Normandy, with the Count of Flanders and he of Blois and Chartres, were upon their feet in a moment; but Tancred led the speech:

"Aye; Hugh of Vermandois it was who advanced farthest upon the walls, and who did more deeds of valor upon that day than were ever done by a single man before. I saw him myself hold his place against a full score of infidel swords, and the tower would have been carried if he had been supported."

And a hundred voices said:

"Aye, and amen!"

"Answer me again," pursued the stranger, in the same commanding tone. "Can any man say that Hugh of Vermandois did ever lift his arm against the cause of the cross?"

For a few seconds there was a solemn silence; and then Tancred, advancing to the open space before the dais, proclaimed:

"If any man hath it in his heart to answer to the prejudice of Prince Hugh in this, he is a liar, and the truth is not in him!" And as he thus spoke he threw off his gantlet and cast it upon the ground.

Another silence, during which the true-hearted Italian gazed around upon the assembled knights to see if any chose to accept the alternative which he had offered, and then he turned to the stranger knight.

"Sir Knight, no man can say that."

And then he of the sable armor raised his hand and spoke again:

"Oh, ye ungrateful brethren of a true and gallant knight! Ere yet the tear of grief hath been wiped from the eyes of mourning friends, and while the ghastly emblem of mortality hath not yet received the honors of a funeral rite, ye assemble here and make loud accusations against him whose arm ye no more fear! Before God, Hugh of Vermandois was innocent of even a thought against the cause he had espoused; and henceforth I am his champion and vindicator.

Let the days elapse which common decency should give to mourning for the dead, and then I will present my body to the judgment of God, and with lance sword and ax, I will maintain the right! And let not any man who hath traduced the noble prince flatter himself that he can escape the ordeal! For, by the holy saint whose patronage I crave, I do swear this thing: Him who hath of his own free will declared that Hugh de Vermandois was a traitor, and who shall refuse the trial of arms I offer, I will seek in the center of the camp, and will there smite him in the face for a liar and a coward! I claim five days of repose from my wearisome journey—which five days methinks should be given to the memory of the dead—and on the sixth day from this I will hold myself against all comers. God save the right!"

And having spoken thus, the sable knight stepped down from the dais and stalked out as he had entered, with calm, majestic tread.

"Look!" whispered Tancred, pulling Robert of Normandy by the sleeve of his hauberk. "See where the cowed cravens wince!"

Robert looked, and saw that Guiscard de Grillon and the two brothers of Bourbon were pale and tremulous, like men afraid; and even the old Count of Thoulouse shook with a fearful tremor.

Not another word was spoken against Hugh de Vermandois, but with murmurings of wonder the assembly broke up; and from that hour there was one question upon every lip—a question which none could answer: "Who is this strange knight that hath come unheralded to our camp?"

And while the crusaders were thus wondering, the object of their curiosity had sought the pavilion of the chief of the Vermandois, where Walter de St.

Valery, reverently kneeling, swore to serve and obey him.

On the following day a consultation was held at the quarters of Vermandois, at which the black knight was present, on this occasion dressed in a suit of black velvet, his face covered by a mask of the same color; and it was then and there decided that no funeral rites, further than had been already observed, should be performed until they reached Jerusalem.

Three days of the five had passed, and but one theme had seemed to occupy the minds of the Christian knights in that camp. Guiscard de Grillon and his two companions moved about like doomed men; and when they sought to find friends who would unite with them in maintaining the charge of treason against Hugh de Vermandois, they found not one.

And why should such men tremble? Where was there a knight who had boasted more of his prowess than had he of Grillon? Aye, and he had not done it all vainly; for many a true and stalwart warrior had bitten the dust before him. And where were there two who had more loudly prated of their deeds of valor and strength than had they of Bourbon and La Marche? Surely such as they ought not to have held in fear the challenge to honorable combat from any single man. But it was marked that they possessed not their wonted spirit; and Tancred was not far from the truth when he declared to a companion that they were haunted by a dread specter in the guise of a black knight.

Three days had passed, and the evening was at hand—a calm, beautiful evening, with a bright, full moon just rising above the tops of the eastern hills, casting upon the camp of the crusaders a soft, silvery sheen that held to view every tent and every banner,

rendering secrecy of movement a difficult thing. Still it was evening; and the busy hum of the day was done, and the warriors were seeking their rest.

Walter de St. Valery had just been out to observe where the moon was, and had reported to the black stranger that the third hour of the night was well-nigh spent, when an intruder glided unbidden into the pavilion. Walter's hand had found the hilt of his dagger when the light of the lamp revealed the features of Hassan, the Ismaelian.

"Do mine eyes behold the stranger who hath but recently arrived in the East?" the intruder asked.

"I am he," replied the Black Knight.

"My Thrice Illustrious Master," pursued Hassan, speaking rapidly, but calmly and distinctly, "who hath his servants in every quarter of the world, and from whom nothing can be hidden, hath sent me unto you with most important information. Let this have attention first, and then shall come that which alone concerns the dwellers within this pavilion. This night, ere the sixth hour is gone, Kilidge Arslan, at the head of a hundred thousand men, will sweep down upon your camp from the mountains; and he thinks he will completely rout and destroy the whole Christian army."

"But," said the knight, in surprise, "only this very day, now gone, spies came hither with sure intelligence that the Sultan had drawn his army away to the south."

"That was only for deception. Not more than ten thousand men marched away; and even they may come back."

"And when will the Infidel strike?"

"He may strike within an hour. My master had information from one who cannot be mistaken." Has-

san cast a quick glance around the apartment, and then added, in a lower tone: "Do you think the mighty Hashishin could fail to gain knowledge whence it pleased him? Do you think the Sultan of Roum could live if the Old Man of the Mountain were to speak his doom? Know ye that my own brother is Kilidge Arslan's chief page!"

Aye, both the knight and the squire realized how wondrously subtle was the power wielded by this white-haired Assassin; but they had no time then for consideration of that subject. Placing full confidence in Hassan, and understanding his hint, they saw that the information concerning Kilidge Arslan's proposed attack had come from one who held place near that chieftain's person; and straightway they resolved to act. But had Hassan any idea of the manner in which the Turk would come?

"Yes," replied the guard. "The first swoop is to be made upon the quarter farthest to the north, away from the city. Those will be light, fleet horsemen, who can fly about at pleasure, and no great work will they seek to do; because, when the suddenly started Christians have been drawn in that direction, the sultan, with his main army, will fall upon the quarter of Godfrey de Bouillon with all his might, and thence sweep in and spread destruction with an unsparing hand."

"There is no time to be lost, good Walter," spoke the Black Knight, casting off a velvet robe which he had donned for the evening. "Go you to the quarters of our captains, and bid each one that he calleth his men and holdeth himself in readiness to follow me. Then send word to the Italian quarter; then to De Bouillon, and let them call the rest. Our good Hassan will help me with my armor. Is it not so?"

The *Fedaï* gave a ready assent, and then to Walter he of the sable presence added :

"Give strict injunctions that not a herald sounds his loud-mouthed trumpet. There must be no note of warning to let the infidel know that we are aware of his purpose."

With this the esquire hurried away ; and very soon the notes of preparation sounded through the camp. And not a moment had the crusaders to rest upon their arms ; for within one hour after Hassan entered the pavilion of Vermandois, the night was made hideous by the wild war-cries of a thousand mounted Moslems that came sweeping out from the mountain forest upon the quarter of Robert of Flanders. They spread over a vast area of the plain as they swiftly advanced ; but a careful eye could have seen that, though occupying so much space, they were really few in number ; and, furthermore, that instead of hurrying to the charge, they circled around and swayed to and fro, evidently for the purpose of using up time. The Count of Flanders was himself sufficient for the defense of this point; and when the matter had been explained to him, he readily undertook it.

Meantime the main army had been drawn up near the quarter of Godfrey de Bouillon, the mounted knights and men-at-arms so disposed among the tents that the flashing of their bright armor and spear-heads in the moonbeams should not expose them to an advancing foe.

The conflict to the north had raged but a little while when the attacking party turned as if to flee, and at that juncture Bohémond who held position well in advance, observed a dark mass separating itself from the distant wood. On it came, swelling and spreading—noiselessly at first—on with swifter motion, until at

length, when it had come so near that the tramp of the horses could be heard, one wild, prolonged cry like the howling of a thousand demons of storm and tempest, broke upon the Christian camp, and ere the quake had ceased its reverberations full twenty thousand Moslems came thundering over the plain.

As if by the touch of a magician s wand, a serried rank of iron-clad warriors appeared between the camp of the crusaders and the advancing foe, and ere the latter could draw a rein to wheel either to the right hand or to the left, another war cry shook the air, and at the very first shock more than a thousand Turks went down.

"It is the will of God! It is the will of God!" shouted the crusaders, as they met and beat back the enemy at every point.

"Behold that man!" exclaimed Tancred, pointing with his dripping ax.

"Aye, I have marked him well," answered Bohémond, twisting off a broken bar of his visor. "See that stout Saracen go down! What an arm?"

It was of the Black Knight they spoke.

One valiant chief there was at this moment in deadly peril. A score of Turks had slipped in among the tents of the quarter De Montpelier—one of Raymond's divisions—and having seized a mass of booty, together with a young Christian maiden, they were making off, when Count Raymond discovered them, and without waiting to see if any of his knights or men-at-arms were with him, he plunged on in pursuit. Being mounted upon the best horse in the camp, he gained rapidly upon the fleeing Turks and very shortly he dashed in among them and smote him who bore the maiden to death. One loud cry from the Moslem chief caused the whole party to come to a sudden halt, and

before he could fairly remember how he had brought himself into such a strait, the old count found almost a score of stout Turkish warriors charging upon him —and he alone to meet them!

For a little Raymond of Thoulouse held his own, his armor of finely tempered steel safely turning such blows as he could not dodge, or turn off upon his buckler. Four of the infidels had gone down beneath the blows of his ax—four beside him who bore the maiden; but they still pressed upon him as hard as ever, and he was just muttering to himself that this was his last battle, when a new shout broke upon his ear, arousing him to hope once more.

"*God and Saint Denis!*" was the note of war that sounded above the clang of arms, and in a moment more the Black Knight was by Raymond's side. Like an avenging demon launched into the midst of condemned spirits, came the sable warrior, and beneath the swiftly falling blows of his trenchant ax, the Turks went down like heads of corn before the knife of the reaper; and ere long, those of the turbaned riders who still lived were seized with mortal dread, and sought safety in flight.

"You were rash, Sir count," said the Black Knight, when it was clear that the enemy had no thought of turning back. "Raymond of Thoulouse needs not undertake such hazardous work to prove his bravery to those who know him. See, the maiden waits for you."

And before the astounded count could speak a word of reply, the strange knight had ridden away toward the camp, where he arrived to find that the enemy had been entirely and disastrously routed, all who were not prisoners having fled back into the mountains.

CHAPTER XV.

GERTRUDE'S CHALLENGE ACCEPTED.

It had been whispered all through Nice, that the Emir Abu Hassa held a Christian maiden in captivity, whom he dared not meet in open combat, that she was very beautiful, and that he was dying of passion for her love ; but that she held her love to be won by the lance and sword, and that the old emir had not yet dared to meet her in the list. Some scoffed at the story, treating it as an idle fable ; but by far the majority of the inhabitants believed it. They believed it because Zyr had said so, and Zyr knew everything that transpired in the emir's palace.

This Zyr was a giant of such prodigious strength that no four men were to be found in Nice who could stand against him. He was full ten spans in height, and of a firm and muscular build ; and he it was who, in steel armor, with a towering crest upon his helm, had repeatedly gone outside the walls and challenged any Christian knight to single combat.

More than once had Tancred started to accept the braggart's challenge ; and once had Bohémond and Robert of Normandy ; for the giant's taunts were so insulting that they caused the brave knights of the Christian host to boil with indignation ; but wise and

cool counselors had kept the venturesome nobles back, bidding them remember that they had no right to throw their lives away.

Zyr was an emir, and a brother of Abu Hassa; and he declared upon his oath that his elder brother was afraid of the Christian maiden. But Zyr had a purpose in this. He greatly desired that Abu should meet the maiden and be defeated, in which event he hoped to win the beautiful woman for himself; for he possessed a susceptible heart, and the charms of his brother's prisoner had not been lost upon him.

At length it came to the ears of the emir that his soldiers talked in their quarters of their chieftain who was afraid of a woman; and it may be that the Princess Gertrude was indebted for the consideration to be shown her to a conversation which her master overheard one day while he was passing through an out-of-the-way part of his palace. It was in a wing where old lumber was stored, and whither the emir had been to search for a rusty suit of mail which had been consigned to the lumber-room some months before, and from which he wished to obtain a pattern for one of his armorers. He was stepping out from a closet-like apartment into a corridor which ran along by the side of the soldiers' quarters, when the pronunciation of his own name arrested his attention. It was an open space high up in the partition that admitted the voices to his ears, while his person was entirely concealed.

"If Abu Hassa knew what a feeling existed among his followers, he would be surprised and mortified," said one voice.

"Aye," responded another, "and I think he would give the beautiful Frank her wish. 'Sdeath, it is ridiculous to suppose that a woman could overcome the stout emir in battle."

"I don't know," added a third speaker. "It hath been said that the maiden, despite her beauty, is marvelously strong. One of the emir's officers, in a gallant manner, offered her a kiss one day—he was drunk, I think—and it is reported that she struck him a blow which knocked him down. But that should not frighten the emir. I have heard honest men declare that they should fear to follow him to battle."

"More than that," said the first speaker. "Some of the very best of Abu Hassa's officers will request to be sent to some other command. They swear, by the beard of the prophet, that they will not follow a man who fears a woman."

"But," suggested a new speaker, "may not the emir be influenced by emotions of gallantry? May it not be the thought of raising a mortal weapon against a woman that deters him?"

"No, no!" replied one of the others. "He is afraid of her. Has she not declared that she would be his if he can overcome her with lance and sword? Surely it doth appear that his love must either be very tame, or his fear very strong; and I 'll take my oath upon the Koran that his love hath not one whit of tameness."

At this the party laughed heartily, and all finally joined in the opinion that the emir was afraid.

Abu Hassa walked away, very busily engaged in thought. One thing gave him torment of reflection. Brave men had wished to leave his command because they thought him a coward. And then he said to himself:

"I will no longer let my prejudice govern. She hath for the time unsexed herself in usurping man's province of battle, and I will regard her as a man, and dread the conflict no more."

Now in this the emir told himself that which was

not exactly true. It had not been the fear of raising his arm against a woman that had held him back ; nor had it been solely the fear of defeat, for Abu Hassa was not a coward in that direction ; but it had been the dread of giving to history the sentence, "*The Emir Abu Hassa was felled, in single combat, by the hand of a woman!*"

But even that should restrain him no more. Ere he had reached his closet he had resolved that Gertrude's challenge should be accepted at once ; and he furthermore resolved that he would overcome her—without bodily harm, if he could ; but let the end be what it would, even to the losing of her in death, it should never be said that a daughter of the Christians, whose love he had sought, had conquered him in a trial at arms.

And there was another consideration that bore much weight of influence. Though he had no fear of the crusaders entering Nice as conquerors, yet he doubted if the knights with whom he had corresponded would be able to induce their companions to raise the siege, now that it had been begun ; and if the sultan should finally give up and withdraw, and the city should surrender to the Greek Emperor, these crusaders would be privileged to enter ; and then, if he had not already won the maiden, he would be very sure to lose her.

The evening was calm and beautiful, the full, bright moon silvering with its beams the roofs and towers of the city, while the aroma of opening buds and dew-dipped blossoms loaded the air with a delicious fragrance. Gertrude, the Christian captive, sat by an open window, looking out upon the scene, ever and anon speaking with herself, or answering some question put by the girl who attended her.

"Nicetta, how many guards doth the emir employ to keep a watch upon me?"

The princess asked the question suddenly, withdrawing her gaze from the scene without, and looking up into the face of the maid, who chanced to be at that moment passing.

"I mean," added Gertrude, who saw that the girl did not fully comprehend her, "how many people Abu Hassa employs to care for me who would not be employed if I were not here?"

Nicetta reflected, and finally replied that she was sure there were at least a hundred men who did nothing but guard her mistress.

"And yet," cried Gertrude, "he keeps me here, swearing that he is dying of love for me, and will not accept the terms I offer."

"If you speak of the battle, my lady, I think you may make your mind easy; for this very evening I heard the giant Zyr declare that his brother had resolved to fight you."

"Ha! Say ye so?"

"Even so, lady."

"Then bring me the bar and the buckler. Oh, if he does this I am saved!"

Nicetta retired to an adjoining closet and presently returned, dragging in a bar of iron full five spans in length, and almost as large around as her own delicate wrist. This she dragged to the lady's side and then went back and returned with a heavy shield of the same metal.

These things, which the sprightly girl had found almost beyond her power to lift, seemed as implements of dry wood in the hands of the mistress. Slipping her left arm into the leathern beckets of the shield, with the free hand she grasped the iron bar and began

to whirl it about in a manner which to Nicetta was strange and unaccountable. Sometimes in a circle, then to and fro and up and down, then a succession of thrusts, and then, poised at arm's length, she held it so steadily that the point thereof did not quiver an atom.

"By the mass!" she cried, as she thus stood—erect and firm, the line of her back perfectly straight, her arm extended at a right angle from her side, and the bar, held by one extreme end, poised in a direct horizontal line—"let Abu Hassa do that if he can! I defy him! Ho, my gentle Nicetta, you need have no cause for fear if you see me arrayed in arms against the emir. My wrist was never before so strong as it is now; and never before was my whole body in such perfect harmony of strength. I have no doubt that these things appear very curious to you; but where so much—aye, more than life—depends upon the result of battle, one must have the physical strength to succeed; and that strength can only be kept up by persistent exercise. Just think of it, Nicetta; one little quiver of the good right wrist before its time might lose the victory and bring sure defeat."

Nicetta's eyes sparkled with satisfaction, because she saw from the manner of her mistress that she was confident of success; and if all this strange whirling and poising of iron bars and swinging and surging of heavy wooden lances and imaginary attacks and defenses with ponderous old swords—if all these had helped to fit the lady for the work of battle, then she was glad that she had been forced, night after night, to witness the exhibition.

Aye, Gertrude of Thoulouse knew too well the value of practice to neglect it, in view of the work which she might possibly have to do, and she had neglected no

means within her reach to keep her muscles in tune, and her powers of physical endurance up to the required pitch. And in this respect she knew she should have an advantage over the emir. He, by nature indolent and fond of ease, took exercise at arms only when forced; and, though gifted with a goodly share of strength, he would be likely to fall under protracted effort.

"Hark! Some one approaches. Away with these playthings, Nicetta!"

Hardly had the closet-door been closed upon the strange "playthings" of the princess, when another door was opened, and a female attendant announced that the emir was in waiting.

Nicetta withdrew, and Abu Hassa was ushered in. He approached the Christian maiden with a look of admiration, and when quite near he stopped and gazed upon her lovely face. Never, never had she looked more beautiful. Never had his eyes rested upon such a picture of female loveliness.

Ah! Could he have known what had given that rich color to her face, what had sent the warm blood to her cheeks and temples, and what caused the swelling of that full bosom—could he have known this, he might have found his reflections somewhat distracted from simple contemplation of her beauty.

A few of the old love passages which he had been wont, from time to time, to recite in her presence, a few fresh compliments adapted to the occasion, and then the emir said:

"Sweet lady, even now my heart rebels at the thought of poising a lance at such as thee and of raising a sword against such loveliness, but if thou wilt have it so what can I do? Is your determination unchanged?"

"It is, emir," replied the princess, calmly and serenely, for her late exercise had imparted a vigor to her system that made her feel strong.

"You demand that I meet you in the list, there to fight as though you were a redoubtable warrior?"

"I demand that you give me that opportunity to win my freedom. You will fight as you please. If you love me as you say, and if you would not have me return to the Christian camp and there find love in the heart of some one of mine own people, you will use all the power you can to overcome me."

The perfect coolness of the maiden, and the satisfaction she evinced at the thought of conquering him in the list, fired the emir with anger, and starting to his feet, he exclaimed:

"By Allah! Thou shalt have thy wish! Already do my own people begin to fancy that I am afraid to meet a woman in battle. Aye, they talk it openly. But they shall have no more ground for such suspicion, nor shalt thou have cause to taunt me more. To-morrow we will meet in the list and I swear to thee by the beard of the prophet that I'll spare thee not one jot! Mark that!"

"If thou dost spare me, emir, it will be upon thine own head, for I swear to thee that I'll put forth all the power I possess to bring thee to the ground!"

"Enough! To-morrow be it."

"Remember, emir, thou didst promise me that four good knights might attend from the Christian army."

"No. I said *three*."

"Well, three be it, then. Shall they have safe entrance, and shall they have safe departure?"

"I have sworn it. Let them come alone to the Gate of the Dragon, and they shall be admitted."

"And if I am victor, I shall go forth with them?"

"I have sworn it!"

"Emir Abu Hassa," spoke the princess, arising and standing before him, "it is no secret to you that a slave of the Old Man of the Mountain is in my service, and that he hath companions always near to watch over his outgoings and incomings. Hashishin will not help me to leave you by stealth; but should you break your plighted word touching the result of this battle, or should harm befall one of these Christian knights—

The emir put forth his hand, and stopped her. He was pale, and the tremor that shook his frame told very plainly that the thought of awaking the vengeance of the dread chief of the mountain filled him with terror.

"I know!" he cried. "I know all about it. Thou hast my oath. The three knights shall have safe entrance within our city, and they shall depart in safety when they please; but they shall only enter at the Gate of the Dragon, pass at once to the battlefield, and, in the end, return as they came. They are not to view the walls. As for thyself, gentle lady, be sure I shall keep thee behind."

Gertrude started.

"I mean that thou, not I, shalt be overcome in the list."

The princess bowed and the emir withdrew.

Within an hour from that time Hassan glided into Gertrude's apartment.

"Oh, good Hassan, it hath come at last. Where is my armor?"

"I have it where my hands can touch it readily, lady."

"Bring it to me this very night—immediately. I will wait!"

The *Fédaï* withdrew, and in less than an hour he returned, bearing with him the armor of the princess, which, when she beheld it, she knelt down and embraced, shedding tears of joy and gratitude.

"Hassan, away now to the Christian camp; and be thou the guide for my three knights on the morrow. The third hour of the day is the time fixed."

Shortly after this Gertrude retired, and never had she a sleep more sound and refreshing. She was aroused in the morning by a loud din without the palace, and upon going to the window she saw a crowd of soldiers collected in the court, and the burden of their excited eager speech, as it reached her ears, was of the coming battle between the Emir Abu Hassa and the Christian princess, Gertrude!

CHAPTER XVI.

A BATTLE FOR LIBERTY.

Early on the morning after the attack of the Turks, Walter de St. Valery called upon Tancred and Robert of Normandy, and requested them to visit the Black Knight in the quarter of the Vermandois. Both the gallant chiefs responded cheerfully, for they had conceived a passionate love of this bold and stalwart warrior. Arrived at the pavilion, they were at once conducted to his presence in the inner apartment, where they found a youth whose face bore the stamp of Syriac origin. If they wondered what this stranger did here, they were not to be kept long in suspense.

"Brothers," said the Black Knight, with easy grace, but in tones which bore a strong tinge of sadness, "since my relations with Hugh de Vermandois have, in my own estimation at least, rendered it necessary, as well as eminently fitting, that I should take in hand his business affairs, I have deemed it no more than just and proper that I should assume his place in matters which he had arranged of a personal character. You are aware that the chief event upon which his enemies based their accusations against him was, his secret visiting of the city which we are besieging."

Tancred and Robert nodded assent.

"You are this day to behold how false was the charge of bad faith based upon that act. Three Christian knights are called to enter Nice, to be present at a trial-at-arms between the Emir Abu Hassa and a Christian whom he hath held in bondage since the first damp days of the winter that is passed set in. The emir hath finally accepted the challenge of his prisoner, and doth accord freedom from further restraint upon condition of his defeat. And he hath futhermore given safe conduct, to and from the city, to any three Christian knights who may be chosen to be present to witness that the battle is conducted fairly and honorably.

"And who is this Christian knight, that is held in bondage?" asked Tancred.

"I said not it was a knight, my brothers."

The countenances of the two proud warriors fell, and they shook their heads in doubt.

"Sir Knight," spoke Robert, kindly, but yet with just pride, "it might not be hardly fitting for one who has refused the throne of a powerful nation to lend himself as an umpire for the quarrels of the common herd. Surely I respect the sympathy which moves you to espouse any cause that our noble Prince Hugh may have left uncared for; but—"

"Robert," interrupted the Black Knight, with an admonitory wave of the hand, "I know thou didst refuse the throne of England, upon which thy younger brother sits; and yet thou art not nearer to a throne than may be she whom I ask you this day to serve."

"*She!*" gasped Robert and Tancred, at a breath.

"You can keep a lady's secret, and speak to no one of what you shall see and hear until the need is removed?"

"We can."

"Then know ye that the Prince de Vermandois discovered, through this youth whom you here behold, that Gertrude of Thoulouse was held prisoner by the Emir Abu Hassa; and it was to visit her that he entered the city of Nice. They consulted together, and it was decided between them that the princess should meet the emir in the list, if he would consent. They might wait for the fall of the city, hoping then her friends would successfully demand her liberation; but they feared treachery. Oh, there hath been more of treachery than you think! But here it is: The princess is this day—within two hours—to meet the emir in battle; and she asks you to come."

For some moments the two knights were so filled with wonder and astonishment that they could not speak. The Duke of Normandy was the first to reply:

"I crave your pardon! Forgive me. Dolt that I was to allow the feeling for a moment to possess me that thou couldst have asked an unjust thing at my hands! I am lost in wonder. But we have not time to waste here. I will prepare at once, and thou shalt explain as we go forth upon our mission. This is the most wonderful thing I ever heard."

Tancred was equally moved; and having given words to other thoughts, he added:

"By my faith, I do most firmly believe that the Lady of Thoulouse will win the day. I think my own great desire in her behalf will be answered to strengthen her arm."

Never did Tancred's faith betray more enthusiasm, and never was his great heart more warmly enlisted. If ever a bold warrior lived who fought for renown without ostentation, and who ought to conquer without ambition, willing to wear the laurels of a hero while others wore the crown and bore the scepter, that

man was Tancred of Otranto, almost the only prince of that crusade who never allowed the lust of power to win him from the stern duties of a soldier.

In half an hour from that time the three knights, accompanied by Hassan, were at the Gate of the Dragon; and when they had passed in, they found Zyr, in full armor, ready to receive them. At first Tancred and Robert hesitated, at thus finding themselves face to face with the redoubtable giant who had so often challenged them to combat; but the latter quickly set their minds at rest.

"Sir Knights," he said, inclining his head with a friendly smile, "accept my guidance while you remain within these walls to-day; and be sure you are with a friend. He who dares to offer insult to you puts shame upon Zyr."

The Christian knights replied becomingly; and Tancred, after he had accepted the giant's hand, remarked to his companions:

"What a pity that I must of necessity be the enemy of that man!"

Never had there been held in anticipation by the people of Nice an entertainment that produced such profound and eager excitement as was now manifest on every hand. Business was everywhere suspended, and it was only by the watchful care of the officers that the reliefs were held for the guard-houses. Long had it been known that Abu Hassa held in durance a Christian maiden, who was said to be very beautiful, and for several weeks it had been said that the lady—a princess by birth—had offered her love to the emir upon condition that he should overcome her at arms, she to have her freedom if she vanquished him. At first no credit had been given to this, but when Zyr came forth and publicly proclaimed it for the truth,

there could be no more doubt. At every street corner and in every shop people congregated and talked of the wonderful thing. A maiden, beautiful as an houri and chaste as Fatima, had offered to fight a Moslem knight with lance and sword for her freedom. It was wonderful beyond anything they had ever known.

And now, when the news went abroad, proclaimed by the emir's own herald, that the battle was to take place, the people were fairly frantic with excitement.

"Ah!" muttered Robert of Normandy, when they had reached the great square wherein the list was prepared, "could our brethren but know of this auspicious hour, I believe the city could be taken without the loss of a hundred lives."

And no wonder he thought so, for every soldier not on guard was evidently in the square.

Zyr had been appointed grand master of the ceremonies, and our three Christian knights very soon made up their minds that they had nothing to fear from treachery or unfairness on his part, and if they could have looked down into his heart they would have known that he almost wished to see his brother defeated. He was not wicked enough to wish his brother dead, but he was ambitious and he was human. He had himself looked upon the Christian maiden with admiration, and should Abu Hassa die, he would be raised to the vacant place—the second office in the city.

The square, or open space, was a large tract used in times of peace for the pitching of tents by traveling merchants and temporary residents, and the list, near its center, was an inclosure of light palisades, nearly as large as that in the Christian camp. Upon one side a platform had been erected, capable of accommodating a hundred people, or more, though there were a few

seats higher than the others. Zyr had selected, in behalf of his brother, three Arabian knights, thinking they might be less objectionable to the Christians than Turkish knights would be; and so profoundly sensible were our Christian warriors of this act of courtesy, that they embraced the gigantic master with gratitude.

The six knights had been seated but a few minutes, when Hassan appeared, and informed the Black Warrior and his companions that the princess was fully armed and equipped, and ready to set out, and that she had bidden him assure them that she was sure of victory.

"But her esquire?" demanded Tancred. "Much depends upon his address and skill."

"None better than Walter de St. Valery," remarked the Black Knight. And then, observing the look of wonder upon the faces of both Tancred and Robert, he added: "Walter came by another way, and, in all probability, reached the city before we did."

Before any reply could be made to this, a loud shout, with a succession of prolonged cries, arose from the entrance to the square, and presently the emir, Abu Hassa, made his appearance. He was clad in a superb suit of crimson armor, and mounted upon a steed of milky whiteness. He was a formidable looking warrior, and rode with much grace; and when Tancred had viewed him from top to toe, and had marked his stoutness of limb and the ease with which he handled his horse, he shook his head with doubt.

"God's will be done!" he said. "But I fear me much that the result of this day's work will not please me!"

Robert of Normandy seemed to hold the same uncomfortable opinion; and even he of the sable

guise bore himself not like a man who is wholly at ease.

The shouts which had died out upon the verge of the square, were pretty soon renewed with greater force than before, and as the din swelled and grew in power and volume, another warrior came upon the scene. For the time, be that presence man or woman, it is deserving the name of knight, and a knight she was from that time forth.

Never rode a knight with more stately grace and beauty of motion, than marked the Amazon as she rode across the square. She was clad in plate armor of burnished steel, each separate piece being fit for a mirror; upon her head she wore a helm of the same metal, surrounded by a crest of pure and polished silver, above which floated a pair of magnificent ostrich plumes. Her horse was the one which Hassan had ridden in from the Christian camp, and Tancred recognized it at once as Hugh's favorite "Dominic."

At the outer edge of the square the cry had arisen, "That is not a woman!" and many had caught it up and repeated it. They could not believe that the stalwart, warlike presence was a young and handsome maiden; and in a moment of pride and defiance determined that they should know who had conquered their emir. Gertrude not only threw up her visor, but lifted the casque from her head and handed it to Walter. In an instant the long curls of molten gold swept down over her shoulders, and the people of Nice beheld the face of a maiden as beautiful as their imaginations had ever given to the houri of Paradise. And so she rode, proud, beautiful, and defiant, until she had reached the list; but when she had passed the barrier, she called Walter to her side, and while she gathered and confined the golden tresses, he placed

the helmet upon her head, after which she advanced to the dais, drawing her horse up very near to the emir, her visor being raised.

"Noble knights," she said to the Christian trio, smiling sweetly as she spoke, "your presence gives me new strength. If you think of God while this combat is in progress, forget not Gertrude in your prayers!"

Tancred betrayed the most emotion of the three, though in the stern seclusion of the Black Knight there was something of feeling which could not be read. But the gallant Italian, brave and impulsive, would at that moment have fought the Moslem with a hoodwink upon his eyes, if he might thereby have set the lady free. But this might not be, so he was forced to see the work go on.

The six knights in consultation had agreed upon the conditions, and it only remained for Zyr to announce them to the combatants as follows :

They were to commence the combat on horseback, with the lance. They should take their respective places at the extreme end of the list, and should start at the second blast of the trumpet, the first blast signifying preparation. They might ride with a swiftness without limit, but neither should so swerve from the true course as to bring the horses one upon the other ; they should pass each other fairly to the left hand, striking with their lances as they pleased at any point above the girdle. They might thus ride until one or both had been unhorsed. When both had been unhorsed, if neither had been vanquished, they should take their swords ; nevertheless, if, when one had been fairly unhorsed, that one should so elect, the other should dismount and continue the combat on foot with the sword. Other rules were laid down, and in the end, Zyr said :

"It is a Moslem against a Christian; and we are ten thousand followers of the Prophet to one of the Cross; but if wrong is offered by the Moslem, I swear that I will avenge it on the spot. As for the Christian, I will pledge my life that a thought of wrong finds not room in her heart!"

Gertrude blessed him with a smile that sent joy to his bosom, and then, having closed her visor, she rode away to her place, where Walter stood in waiting. She told him that she was ready, and he took his position near the center of the list, about where th combatants were to meet.

Tancred, still nervous and uneasy, stepped down to the edge of the platform and beckoned to Walter, who hastened to him.

"Walter, do you know the weight of Gertrude's lance?"

"It is a common battle lance, my lord. The shaft is of firmest ash, and the head of steel."

"Good!" ejaculated the Italian, resuming his seat. "If she have strength of arm like that, and her endurance faileth not, she will win the day!"

He had observed how she swept and poised the weapon, and the thought had occurred to him that it must be a light, frail affair, and hence his eagerness to gain information.

At the first blast of the herald's trumpet every tongue was hushed, and the thousands upon thousands of eyes turned to and fro, from end to end of the list.

The second blast, and like two bolts from two opposing mangonels, started the horses from their places. If the emir had entertained a thought of striking to spare the Christian maiden, that thought had vanished. He saw before him an Amazon of known courage and prowess, who meant to defeat him if she could, and

who would strike without mercy; and, what was of more account to him, he felt sure that ninety-and-nine of every hundred people who looked upon the scene, his own brother included in the major number, would be glad to see him vanquished. So he grasped his spear with all his might, and put forth all his cunning. As he made the motion of the heel that drove the rowels into his horse's flesh, and aimed his gleaming spear, his nearest attendant heard him distinctly, and quite fervently, pray:

"Great Allah, grant that I do not slay her at this very first onset!"

And his prayer was answered in a most remarkable manner. From the direction in which he bore his point, it was evident that he meant to twist the lance of his opponent from her grasp, and, if possible, throw her out from the saddle at the same time; and in the eagerness with which he applied himself to this work, he must have forgotten that she could strike as well as he, else he would have made more provision for defense.

Tancred and Robert were upon their feet, their hearts hushed.

"Ha! See!" The princess had dropped the rein, knowing that the horse would do his duty, and thus she held her buckler at her will.

"It is God! God's will be done!" cried the excited crusaders, as they were wont to cry when victory perched upon their banners. And this is what they had seen:

As the two combatants came together, the point of the Moslem's lance was seen to touch the surface of Gertrude's buckler, and pass off harmless over her shoulder, while her own point, having, with lightning-like motion, described a circle in the air, struck the

emir's cuirass full in the center; and, as the tremendous force of the shock threw him backward, the princess bore her lance so stoutly and so steadily, that the point glided up under the gorget, caught the bars of the visor; and, in spite of all the Moslem could do, he was dragged out from his saddle, and borne some little distance upon the maiden's lance ere he fell sprawling upon the ground.

It had all been done in an instant; but so eagerly had the people watched, that all saw plainly how it had beeen done. The skill of the Christian maiden was something to be wondered at; but that was as nothing in the estimation of the spectators, compared with the marvelous strength of arm which had enabled her to bear the heavy man bodily out of his saddle.

It was with difficulty that the Christian knights restrained themselves from hastening to the princess's side; but it was not their right; and they were very soon made easy, for they saw that she had come forth unscathed, and they knew that Walter de St. Valery understood his duties.

For a few moments it was feared that Abu Hassa had been seriously injured, if not killed; but the point of the lance had not touched his throat. Instead of passing up under the chin, it had glided off toward the ear; so that the only harm done him was such as came from the shock; and this did not prevent him from very soon standing erect, and demanding the trial of the sword. He would not ride again.

The Christian knights would have objected to this, if there had been any ground; but the emir had the right, and they were forced to submit.

They were not long in making the preparations; and when the Moslem chief went forth this time, he went with the determination to conquer, let the result be

what it might. He saw—and heard—that of all the thousands who had come to witness the combat not one showed any sympathy for him ; nor was there one who seemed inclined to pray for him. And how could he expect it otherwise ? His antagonist was a woman, and these people had seen with their own eyes that she was young and very beautiful ; and, furthermore, these people were all human.

But Abu Hassa observed one thing that inspired him with courage. He could see that the thousands of faces all bore anxious and uneasy expressions. Even the knights upon the platform exhibited the same feelings. Aye, and his brother Zyr believed now that he was to win.

For a few brief moments it was as though the hush of a calm midnight had fallen upon the vast square. Not only was every tongue dumb and every limb motionless, but even those ten thousand hearts seemed to have suddenly stopped their beatings.

Could it be possible that the Christian maiden possessed the strength of wrist necessary to the successful use of so heavy a sword, and could she endure to the end?

The followers of the cross and the followers of the prophet all prayed alike. The maiden was beautiful and innocent, and had been unfortunate. She had done no wrong to any one, and sought only her liberty. Aye ; she had offered to purchase her liberty with her life. Surely he must have been a monster who gave her not his sympathies.

" Gertrude," spoke the emir, after the last trump had sounded, " I will not do thee harm if I can help it ; but I tell thee, plainly and truly, and with all good intent, that thou hadst better surrender at once."

" Look to thyself, Abu Hassa ! The charge has been sounded !" And as she spoke, she tapped the point of her sword upon his buckler.

And then came the battle charge. A few strokes—a few parries—a few changes of position, and it became evident to all who gazed upon the scene that the maiden made the best use of her sword. A little while she answered with her own blows only in time with the somewhat tardy movements of her antagonist; but gradually she quickened the strokes—quicker and quicker, her sword flashing and whirling and leaping—her buckler ever ready to take the blows offered from above, while, by her quick and graceful movements of body, she avoided those thrusts which were made at vulnerable points.

What in the world was she doing? Literally seeking to exhaust the stout emir without doing him bodily harm! Many times had she opportunity to strike when she did not; and many a deadly thrust was withheld ere the vital point was reached. Yet she struck, and struck with right good will—struck until she had cut his gorget from his throat, hewn the vambraces from his left arm, cut the shoulder-strap of the cuirass, and so smashed down his visor that his left eye was useless.

What strength! What power of endurance! How could it be?

Ah, they did not know that for long and weary weeks, while the emir had been lounging upon his soft divan, the maiden, with sword and buckler and with massive bars of iron, had been preparing for this event.

Weaker and weaker grew the Moslem, and at length, when his buckler began to droop and his blows to fall aimless and uncertain, the maiden caught his sword-point under her guard, and with a quick, powerful jerk, she hurled his weapon high into the air, throwing him backward with a force that sent him to earth, and while he was going down, she with wonderful dexterity, caught the descending sword fairly by the hilt.

Never did the eye of Christian knight rest upon a prouder sight. There stood the princess, not a rivet of that armor started, not a plate marred, no spot of blemish upon its burnished surface; erect she stood, her head thrown gracefully back, her whole figure the very model of grace and ease, in her hands the two swords, their points resting upon the ground, while at her feet, supine and helpless, lay the man who had been her opponent.

While the air was rent with the shouts of the excited spectators—shouts that shook the very earth and startled the Christian army without into eager, anxious watching—they went and lifted the emir to his feet and bore him to the platform, where his bruised and shattered armor was removed, and his body examined. But he had received no serious wound; he was only exhausted, that was all. Would he continue the combat?

Poor man! He had hardly strength to make audible reply, much less to take the sword again.

They offered to the princess the emir's horse, and all his equipment; but she only kept the sword. She had won that fairly, and she would bear it away with her.

"Sweet lady," said Zyr, stepping down from his elevated seat and extending his hand, "since no hope was ever mine that the light of thy lovely face could shine alone for me, I feel a profound and heart-born joy in restoring thee to the care of thine own people. Thou hast won thy freedom right bravely. Go—go with your countrymen, and may the richest gifts of earth be thine below; and may the gates of Paradise be opened to thee when this life is done!"

He raised her hand to his lips and a bright tear fell upon it as he kissed it. Then he turned away, and presently afterward the Black Knight led the maiden to where Walter waited with the horses.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT.

The morning of the sixth day from the giving of the Black Knight's challenge at length dawned, and great was the excitement prevailing. Not only had thecircumstances attending the original charges of treason against Hugh de Vermandois been of a nature to keep alive deep and unaltering interest in the breasts of the zealous crusaders, but the coming of the strange knight, his ready assumption of Hugh's cause, and the mystery which enveloped him, had made that interest so intense that to some it became almost painful. And this was not all. Prince Tancred of Otranto and Duke Robert of Normandy, than whom there were none in that army more reverenced and admired for their sterling honor and unconquerable valor, had publicly proclaimed that a second knight claimed the privilege of fighting against the enemies of Hugh de Vermandois. Godfrey de Bouillon, who had come to be acknowledged as the leader and whom none cared to disobey, had heard the story of this second knight's wrongs and had declared that they were to be received and respected.

It had been arranged that the meeting should be

held in the list and that there all preliminaries should be settled, and at an early hour in the day the knights began to assemble. It was known that a second strange knight had arrived in the camp and had found quarters with Stephen of Blois and Chartres, but who he was or whence he came, none could tell. The Black Knight went several times to Stephen's quarters to see his stranger companion, and many were the curious ones who hung upon his steps, seeking eagerly to gain even a grain of knowledge concerning this double mystery, but all their labor was in vain and they turned from the prying labor no wiser than they were at first. Count Stephen's wife was with him and superintended the affairs of his household, and some of those knights who had broken lances in honor of the gentle countess now approached her for information, thinking she would gladly tell them all she knew. But the Lady Adela only shook her head, declaring that she had nothing to tell.

As the dial which had been set up in the center of the camp marked the arrival of the fourth hour of the day, Godfrey de Bouillon left his pavilion, and moved on foot toward the list. With him were the two bishops, Adhémar de Montell and Odo of Bayeux, together with the chiefs, Bohémond, Tancred, Robert of Normandy, Robert of Flanders, and another Robert, Count of Paris, also Stephen of Blois and Chartres, Everard of Prusaie, Richard, prince of Salerno, and the old Count Raymond of Thoulouse. These proceeded to the list, and took seats upon the raised platform, having been selected to act as judges on the occasion. The Black Knight had named Tancred and Robert of Normandy, while Guiscard de Grillon and his companions had named Robert of Paris and Richard of Salerno. Then these four had selected four others,

and the eight knights thus designated had made choice of Raymond of Thoulouse to act as umpire. Godfrey de Bouillon was elected to preside, and as the matter was one of grave import, he called the two bishops to assist him.

There had been a change in the feelings of Raymond of Thoulouse. Guiscard de Grillon had sought him, and asked him to act as his chief judge ; but the old count had flatly refused. Though still willing to believe that De Grillon was in the right, he could not lend himself to occupy a place where he would appear to sit in judgment against a man who had so bravely and unselfishly come to his rescue, and saved him from the hands of the Infidels.

"I am willing to sit as an independent judge," he had said ; "and in that case I should give you every point that should appear to be justly your due."

So the friends of the accusing party had named Raymond for umpire, and not one of the others had objected.

As soon as the judges had taken their seats, the heralds made proclamation throughout the camp that the trial was about to proceed, warning all, not kept away by duty, to be present, and to strictly observe the result, and be governed thereby. It was called "*The Judgment of God*," invoked by the knights whose names were given, "*to be rendered upon the termination of a Trial at Arms between the said knights.*"

In less than half an hour after the first note of preparation was sounded, every knight and footman not elsewhere on duty had arrived and taken position at the list, and the ground was of such a nature that all could easily witness the proceedings. Of late Guiscard de Grillon and his two companions had spent much time in military exercise, especially with the sword

and ax ; and in every possible way had they sought to gain strength and vigor for the work which was in store for them. And on this morning they had been abroad seeking to inspire their companions in arms with the belief that they were three righteous men, and that their cause was just.

The excitement was at its height. Not a loud, uproarious excitement, but an emotion deep and pervading, manifest in eager looks and anxious waiting, every man seeming to feel himself a judge, upon whose decision this thing was to finally rest. But there were whisperings of the two strange knights, and of guesses concerning their identity ; and on all hands there were confessions of joy and thankfulness in view of the near approach of the time when the veil was to be lifted.

At length a murmur at the main entrance to the field, which was caught up and borne along until it swelled to a shout that shook the very vault, announced the arrival of the Black Knight and his companion. The Black Knight they had all seen before, but not the gallant-looking warrior who now bore him company. They presented a strange contrast, these two knights, as they rode into the list—the one clad in armor black as jet, with the sable plumes floating above his crest, while the other wore an armor polished so brightly that it gleamed like burnished silver, with plumes of pure white surmounting the helm. He of the sable garb was the largest of stature, and mayhap the most powerful of limb, but the other displayed such an exquisite grace and ease of carriage, and in every movement gave token of such suppleness of body, that the beholder felt assurance at once that might and power were combined in marvelous degree within that faultless frame.

Arrived at the space in front of the dais, the Black

Knight dismounted and addressed the court as follows :

" My lords and noble knights, the day and the hour have arrived, and I appear before you to fulfill my vow ; and with me I bring one who hath right to fight by my side in defense of the character of Hugh de Vermandois. Touching that matter, I refer you to the three valiant knights and noble princes, Tancred of Otranto, Robert of Normandy and Stephen of Blois and Chartres. If they shall swear that my companion's claim is just, and that he is of gentle birth, I trust there will be no objection. That claim being admitted, I propose my challenge thus :

" Guiscard de Grillon, Peter of Bourbon and Arnold de la Marche are, each and every one, false knights and wicked men, in that they have done divers deeds unworthy of knighthood, whereby their names are a by-word and a reproach, and their characters black like unto sin itself. For these things their hearts do already reproach them, and the torments of Satan shall be their portion. But, in addition to these things, these same false knights, whose names I have called, have dared cast reproach upon the character of a true and faithful follower of the cross, and to traduce the name of one whose sandals they were never worthy to loose. And now, we two, placing our trust in God, do challenge those three to meet us in battle at this time and in this place, here and now to invoke the judgment of God upon the cause between us !

" My lords and noble knights, in such a battle the horse and the lance cannot well be used ; so we demand that the said Guiscard de Grillon, Peter of Bourbon and Arnold de la Marche do meet us with sword and buckler, face to face, and that they do stand and fight, and make good their charges upon our bodies, or sub-

mit to the defeat which we pray God to vouchsafe. So pray we, and may God protect the right."

There was much surprise on the part of those who were not prepared for this announcement, and at first there was a disposition to refuse the petition on account of its unfairness to the challengers themselves ; but after deliberation, in which the Prince of Otranto and the Duke of Normandy took an active part, the matter was decided, and Godfrey de Bouillon arose and announced that the challenge was more than fair to the challenged party, and he summoned the three responding knights to appear before him. They were at hand, and were quick to answer the summons, De Grillon having been commissioned to speak for his companions.

Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, when he had looked upon the three knights, and had marked them well, turned to his brother prelate, and remarked :

" Adhémar, those knights are not so easy at heart as they would have us believe. I can mark the unrest of their consciences ; and I can see that they dread the wrath of God. Do you note that slight inclination of the body from its proud elevation ? And do you mark ever and anon a movement as though something were drawing uncomfortably about their necks ?"

The bishop saw it all, and it was as he had said. And he was not the only one who had observed the same thing.

Guiscard De Grillon spoke with pompous air. The present meeting was not of his seeking. He and his companions could never have thought of offering to fight two knights at one and the same time, so that two should be pitted against three ; but if the two venturesome strangers, seeking renown in arms, persisted in their demand, then he, speaking for his

brothers, would accept the challenge as it had been given.

"And," he said in conclusion, "not to us, but to God, be the victory ascribed!"

The rules laid down were very simple. They were to fight agreeably to the laws of chivalry; and they were to fight to the death if there was no surrender.

The Black Knight and his companion gave their horses up to Walter, and then walked together to the center of the list, conversing earnestly as they went. They had taken their places, and drawn their swords, when the three opponents appeared before them.

At that moment the thousands of hearts were hushed, and not a breath arose to interfere with the speech of, Godfrey, who arose and stretched forth his naked sword, saying, as he did so:

"God uphold the right! Let the just be brave! Let the wicked tremble, and be afraid! Behold the judgment of God! *Strike!*"

In an instant the Black Knight advanced, as though to invite all three of the opponents; and on the same instant, it became very evident that those three feared him. It was apparent in their hesitation and in the perceptible tremor which shook their frames. The Black Knight cast one quick glance at his companion, and then he turned upon De Grillon. The captain caught the glance of the two eyes that looked out upon him from behind those bars, and a cry of terror burst from his bloodless lips. As though by a lightning stroke his sword was beat down, and on the next instant the point of the sable knight was at his throat, driven under the gorget and over the rim of the cuirass. Those who stood near to the list saw the movement—saw the sword beat down—saw the blade of the avenger, like a flash of light, leap to the throat—saw

the bright point disappear—saw the traducer's arms flying wildly in the air—then saw the Black Knight shake him from the trenchant blade—and Guiscard de Grillon fell backward, his squadron left without a captain.

It had all been done so quickly that to some it appeared incredible; but when they had time, with their hearts bounding not quite so wildly, to think over what they had seen, they understood it perfectly; and they saw that the stout captain had fallen beneath an arm that was not to be resisted.

When the Black Knight had freed his sword, he found that not another blow had been struck. His dash at De Grillon had seemed to paralyze the other two, and they had watched for the result, all unconscious of what they did; but now they started to life, and the sable warrior attacked Peter of Bourbon, leaving Arnold de la Marche to his companion.

The knight of Bourbon fought with desperation, but he must have felt from the first that his case was hopeless. He could not help seeing that he was at the mercy of his opponent; and directly that opponent gave him proof that he held such to be the case.

"Peter of Bourbon, thrice have I spared thy life. Wilt thou ask it at my hands by surrendering?"

"Never!" was the answer, fierce and vindictive.

And he would have sworn by an oath, had not the ponderous blade of his antagonist at that moment descended upon his head with a force that crushed the convex steel of the helm in upon his skull, felling him to the earth like one dead. With his foot upon Bourbon's breast, the Black Knight looked to see how it was with his companion. And we may here remark, that not once had he lost sight of that companion. Though he had fought with the Bourbon, yet not a

sweep had the sword of De La Marche made that he had not seen. He looked now more at his leisure, and a cry of joy burst from his lips as he saw Sir Arnold go down with the sword of the white-plumed knight driven completely through his body.

Then he knelt upon the Bourbon's breast, and presented the dagger to his throat.

"Peter de Bourbon, hast thou sense and reason left?"

The fallen knight groaned in agony.

Then the Black Knight unlaced the battered helm, and drew it off. This gave Peter quick relief, and his senses returned; and when he felt the knee of the avenger upon his breast, and saw the gleaming dagger ready for the finishing stroke, he cried aloud for mercy.

"Peter de Bourbon, thy life is in my hand, and I hold it in judgment. Tell me; wast thou guilty in every charge thou didst make against Prince Hugh of Vermandois?"

And the wretch made answer:

"I was guilty of falsehood from first to last."

"Then thou art no more worthy to die by the hand of a true knight. Get thee up and go to thy doom."

And thus speaking, the Black Knight arose, and took his companion of the white plume by the hand, and together they approached the dais.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REVELATIONS—CONCLUSION.

"*It is the Will of God! It is the Will of God!*"

Such was the cry that broke from a hundred thousand lips, as, with wild and eager movement, the people rushed toward that part of the field whence they could look upon the victorious knights as they stood before the judges; for now they were to know who and what was the man that had caused so much of excitement and discussion in the Christian camp; and they fully believed that other revelations were to be made.

Slowly the Black Knight approached the dais, and when he had reached the herald's stand he stopped and addressed the judges:

"My lords and noble knights," he said, still keeping his visor closed, "we have met the traducers, and we have fulfilled our vow. We fought for Hugh de Vermandois. How standeth he now?"

Godfrey de Bouillon arose, and on the instant every tongue was hushed, that his words might be heard. In him the crusaders instinctively beheld their leader, and already they had learned to honor and obey him

above every other chieftain. And these were the words that Godfrey spoke :

" Brethren in arms, listen to the judgment which God hath given us to pronounce : The memory of Hugh de Vermandois standeth this day above reproach ; and he who shall dare henceforth to speak evil of the knight whose cause hath been so gallantly maintained shall answer with his life ; for know ye, that we who sit here in judgment do hold ourselves ever bound, with lance and sword, to defend the right. These things our heralds will proclaim throughout the camp. *God's will be done !*"

When the joyous cries of satisfaction had made manifest the feelings of the assembled warriors, of high and low degree, Godfrey addressed the Black Knight as follows :

" And now, Sir Knight, we claim at thy hands a removal of the mystery which hath enveloped thy person since thou hast been in our midst. Behold the anxiety of the people. They would know the hero of this occasion, that they may render unto him the honor which is his due."

" Noble Godfrey," replied the knight, " ere I reveal my face, I have somewhat to tell of the story of Hugh de Vermandois ; and I think I shall tell it so that all will understand how foully he hath been dealt with ; and not only him, but others who have found grief at the same fount that shed such bitter waters. Listen to me, and I will explain those things which have not yet been explained. They have all been written down, and Walter de St. Valery hath had them in possession ; and I will tell them as they were written :

" You all know full well the circumstances attending the shipwreck of the fleet of the Vermandois upon the coast of Epirus. The first thing that occupied the

attention of Hugh, after having dragged himself on shore, was to prepare for the safety of the Lady Gertrude, who was his affianced bride. He found a comfortable place beneath the roof of a poor fisherman, and there he left her, while he went to see if the horses could be got on shore. All night long he worked upon the wreck-strewn shore; and while he worked, three false-hearted nobles conceived and executed a plot so wicked that the heart of a robber might stand appalled in contemplation thereof. They were Guiscard de Grillon, Peter of Bourbon, and Arnold de la Marche. They had all been suitors for Gertrude's hand, and had been rejected; and now they found opportunity for revenge, both upon the maiden who had refused them, and upon him whom she had accepted. At Durazzo lay a pirate of Tyre, and these men made a bargain with this pirate that they would deliver the maiden into his hands, and he should convey her to Nice, and there deliver her into the hands of the Emir Abu Hassa, who was an uncle to Guiscard de Grillon—Sir Guiscard's mother having been a native of Bithynia. And thus they did their work:

"During that dark night, Sir Peter and Sir Arnold went to the fisher's cot, and told to Gertrude that Hugh was dead—that he had been killed while getting the horses on shore—and they bade her that she should choose between them which she would take for a husband; and when she had so spurned them both that they knew their case was hopeless, the claims of De Grillon were presented. And then they told her of the pirate and threatened that if she remained obstinate she should be sent away by him; and when she would not yield they did as they had said. They dragged her away to the pirate ship, and De Grillon sent six of his own men-at-arms to keep her company;

and to see that she was safely delivered into the hands of the emir. And this was the compact which they made with Abu Hassa of Nice. He was to take the maiden and keep her until the Christian army approached that city, and then, if Gertrude had relented and would became De Grillon's wife, he would take her, trusting to the time for the means whereby he might satisfy her father. Perhaps he thought the lady would lie for him. But if at that time the maiden was still determined not to give her hand to De Grillon, then the emir was to keep her for his own, provided he could do so. There were other things in this compact—things of a treasonable character—which I will not tell to you now. Suffice it for me to say that the Lady Gertrude was delivered to the emir at Nice, and that the six men-at-arms who bore her company carried to Abu Hassa their own death-sentence. Guiscard de Grillon wrote, in the letter which they delivered, that they should be instantly put to death, that their tongues might never tell what their ears and eyes had heard and seen. And it was done as had been commanded.

"You know, my lords, how your army reached Nice. You had not been here a great while when the three traitors began to fear that Hugh might discover the whereabouts of Gertrude, and hence their desire to be rid of him. I only wonder why they did not poison him outright. And Hugh did make the discovery. First he discovered her on the wall seeking to escape, during your attack upon the city. He caught but a glimpse of her then, for when he would have rushed to her assistance, a hundred men beat him back; but he could not doubt the evidence of his senses, and firmly believing that his love was held prisoner within those walls, he could find no rest until he had satisfied

himself. In this emergency he sought the assistance of the Old Man of the Mountain, who sent unto him a trusty servant; that servant entered Nice, there found the Princess Gertrude, and brought forth a message to the prince that he should come in and counsel her. So now, my lords and noble knights, I think you may begin to understand why Hugh de Vermandois sought entrance to the besieged city, and also why he sought the Old Man of the Mountain. It was Gertrude herself who had obtained from him a pledge that he would not make her presence known to her friends without until she had made at least one trial for her freedom."

As the Black Knight ceased speaking, amid all that throng of strangely excited men, the old Count of Thoulouse was the only one who found words for speech, and even he was wild and incoherent.

"Sir knight!" he cried, starting to his feet, "how can these things be? Who shall prove that Guiscard de Grillon was such a villain? Are his lips not sealed? Where is the proof? Oh, my soul! And I have been such a tool in the hands of wicked men? It cannot be! It cannot be! Where are the proofs? I have trusted Guiscard de Grillon—you know I have trusted him. Where are the proofs of what you charge? The proofs!"

"*Here they are! Behold them!*"

As the Black Knight thus spoke he turned to the companion who stood by his side, and having loosed the straps of the upper armor, the helm was lifted from the head, and at the same moment the gorget, the cuirass, the shoulder-plates, and the vambraces fell to the ground, and the fair form and beautiful features of the Princess of Thoulouse stood revealed before the astonished multitude. The old Count Raymond was,

for a moment, as one transfixed; but like a flash came the story he had just heard to his mind, connecting the past with the present, and when the dark gulf was thus bridged over, he started down and caught his long-lost daughter to his bosom.

"Come, come," cried Godfrey, realizing that anything like due order could be preserved but for a short time longer, "let us have the whole story Sir Knight of the Black Armor. God knows I am as curious as the rest. Who art thou?"

"I am thy brother, who this day stands approved of God, and vindicated by his own good sword. God protect the right!"

With these words the Black Knight lifted the sable-plumed helm from his head, and Hugh de Vermandois stood revealed to the doubly-astonished host!

It could not be! It was some wild phantasy? And yet, with his helm removed, he now addressed them in his own manner of speech, and they knew him for the noble prince whom they had mourned as dead.

And then they pressed forward to grasp his hand—all the gallant chiefs of the army, and the knights of his own household. Tancred and Robert of Normandy were the first; and one of the last was Raymond of Thoulouse. He hung upon the prince's neck, big tears rolling down his cheeks, asking if he could ever be forgiven for the wrong he had done. He was going on, blaming himself for his blind folly, when Hugh stopped him with the remark:

"Touching these things, my Lord, let this fair hand be the mediator between us and the pledge of our lasting friendship and love."

"So be it!" replied the old count, and as he spoke he placed the hand of his child within that of the noble prince.

Hugh de Vermandois was not insensible to the anxiety of his friends, and as soon as he could get clear of those who pressed upon him with their congratulations, eager not only to greet him, but also to know if it were really their beloved prince, he took his stand upon the dais, and told them how it had happened that he was able to be with them, alive and well.

"My friends," he said, "on that morning when I went forth from the camp—the morning after my attempted battle with De Grillon—I went as one for whom life had no more charms. I knew that I had been poisoned; but could I make others believe it? The thought that one of my friends held suspicion of my loyalty was agonizing; and when I came to reflect that a battle, to the result of which I had left my vindication, had gone against me, my grief knew no bounds. In short, with the effect of the poison still upon me, the thoughts that thronged my mind drove me fairly mad; and as I wended my way up the mountain, I came to feel that I would rather die than live. In my frenzy, I cared not if I never beheld another human face. I was reflecting thus, my thoughts running upon the taking of my own life, when I met Hashishin, with two of his attendants, upon the edge of the great table of rock; and when we had greeted each other, he informed me that a Christian soldier lay dead under the cliff. I went with him to the spot, where I found the dead body to be that of a cross-bowman, and from his garb I judged that he had belonged to the quarter of the Count of Flanders. By his side, or very near to him, lay a dead kid, with an arrow through its heart. The man had evidently discovered the kid upon the brow of the precipice, and

had shot it; and upon going up after it, he must have been careless, and fallen over.

"As I stood and gazed upon the dead body a strange thought presented itself. The man had been almost exactly of my own size; his hair and beard were of the same color, and were trimmed as though he had fancied my style, and had copied it. And his general form—the hands, feet, length and size of limb—was all mine own. In falling from that terrible height, he had struck so far forward upon his head that the features of his face were completely bruised and marred; and I knew, if he were in my garb, no living man, not knowing the circumstances, could detect the cheat.

"And what should I gain by this? People should think I was dead; my enemies should be thrown off their guard; and I could take my own time and method in bringing the truth to light. I told Hashishin of my thoughts, and he said he could help me. If I would put my armor upon the dead soldier, he would let me have a suit of black armor, which was once worn by Solyman of Tyre, and which he was sure would fit me; and if I would leave my horse, he would give me another; and he declared that he could give me a cordial which would quickly restore my strength.

"And so the work was done. I removed my outer clothing, and the two guards stripped the cross-bowman of his coarse haubergeon, and then drew my suit of mail carefully on in its place. You know how the body was found. So we left it. I knew search would be made for me; and I knew that Walter would find the place. After that I went with the old man and got the promised cordial, and also the black suit, which I found not only to fit me, but of remarkable quality;

and Hashishin, anxious to serve me, constructed a simple but curious contrivance upon the inside of my visor, which had the effect to materially change the tone of my voice without interfering with my speech. Thus I was prepared in season to strike the highway to the north and wait for the appearance of my friends. You know the rest. Only I must here declare that the purpose for which I assumed this disguise might have been accomplished easily without. But I did not know then—or I did not realize—what noble friends I had.

"Tancred—Robert! Oh, may I live to prove to you how grateful I can be for all that you have said and done."

And there were other knights whom Hugh embraced and blessed; and in the end he discovered that if he would embrace all his friends he must needs muster the whole army, and leave out not one who was worthy of regard.

Peter of Bourbon, unable now to deny his guilt, made a full and free confession, substantiating all that Hugh had told, and much more. In presence of the whole army his spurs were hacked from his heels by the common executioner, his sword broken, and he cast out from the companionship of the knights of the crusade.

Hugh and Gertrude, after consulting with the old count, and taking some slight counsel of their own hearts, concluded that they would not wait until they reached Jerusalem for the sacerdotal mandate that was to make them man and wife. They were married in Godfrey's pavilion, and when the ceremony had been performed, the bold and gallant chieftains there assembled did, with one accord, declare that never

was there a nobler knight, and never a fairer wife; and from that time forth the recording minstrels of the crusade found much employ in preserving to history the valiant deeds of Hugh the Great and his much beloved Gertrude.

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