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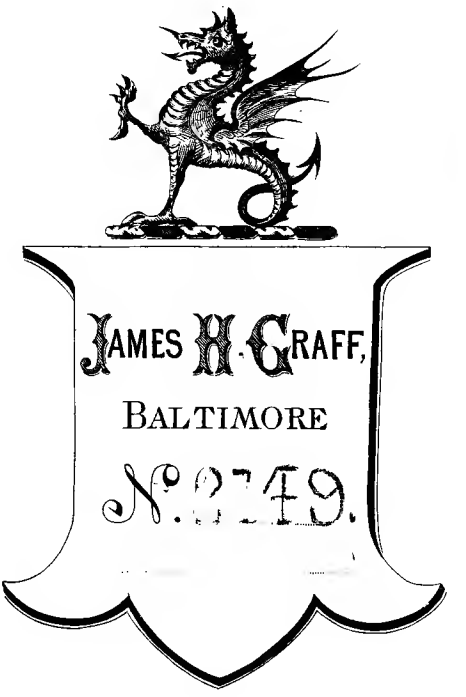

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ASCANIO.

CHAPTER I.

THE STREET AND THE WORKSHOP.

On the 10th July, in the year 1540, about four o'clock in the afternoon, at the door of the Church des Grands-Augustins, within the inclosure of the University of Paris, stood a tall and handsome young man, with a dark complexion, long hair, and large black eyes. He was dressed with elegant simplicity, and his only weapon was a small poignard, the hilt of which was beautifully chased. He had remained motionless during the whole time vespers had lasted, with his eyes lowered, and his whole attitude expressive of devout contemplation; he murmured something very low—probably his prayers—but still, when the service was nearly over, he raised his head, and his nearest neighbours could hear these words:—

"Mon Dieu, how abominably these French monks sing their psalms! Could they not sing better before *her*, who must be accustomed to hear the angels sing? Ah! vespers are over; I am not sorry. If I am only more lucky than last Sunday, and if she does but raise her eyes to me!"

Certainly, if the lady in question had raised her eyes to the speaker, she would have seen the most beautiful youth's head that she could ever have dreamed of as she read the mythological fables then so much in vogue, thanks to the beautiful poems of Clément Marot, in which are recounted the loves of Psyche and the death of Narcissus; for this young man, in his simple and sombre costume, was possessed of remarkable beauty and supreme elegance; there was also a wonderful sweetness in his smile, and his glance, which dared not yet be bold, was still as passionate as could be sent from the eyes of a youth of eighteen.

However, at the movement of the chairs, which announced the end of the service, our lover (for the reader must have perceived from the few words he had uttered, that he had a right to this title) retired a little to the side, and watched the people as they passed silently out: grave churchwardens, respectable and discreet matrons, and pretty girls. But it was not to see all these that the young man had come, and he looked carelessly on, until he saw

approaching, a young girl dressed in white, accompanied by a duenna, but a duenna who looked ladylike, tolerably young and gay, and not at all barbarous.

When these two ladies approached the holy water, the young man took some and presented it to them, courteously. The duenna smiled graciously, made a low curtsey, touched the fingers of the young man, and, to his great disappointment, passed the water herself to her companion, who, in spite of the fervent prayer of which a few minutes before she had been the object, kept her eyes constantly lowered: a proof that she knew the handsome young man to be there; so that when she went away, he stamped his foot, murmuring—

"Again, she has not seen me;" which was a proof that he, as we have already said, was but eighteen.

But, the first feeling of annoyance over, our unknown hastened to descend the steps of the church, and seeing that after having lowered her veil and taken the arm of her companion, the young lady had turned to the right, he followed her, remarking that it really *was* his way. The young girl went along the quay until she reached the bridge of St. Michael; it was still the route of the young man. Then she crossed the Rue de la Barillerie and the Pont au Change, and still the young man followed her like her shadow —every pretty girl has a lover for her shadow. But, alas! at the Grand-Châtelet, this beautiful star, of which the unknown had made himself the satellite, was suddenly eclipsed; the door of the royal prison opened as of itself when the duenna knocked, and then immediately shut again. The young man remained thunderstruck for a moment; then, as he was a lad of resolution, when no pretty girl was there to take it away, he soon decided what he should do.

A sentinel, his pike on his shoulder, was walking up and down before the door of the building, and our young unknown determined to imitate him, and, going sufficiently far off not to be observed and yet not to lose sight of the door, he began his lover-like walk. If our reader has ever practised this duty, he may have found out that one of the best methods of shortening the time is to talk to himself; now, our young man was, perhaps, in the habit of it, for he began at once:—

"It is assuredly not here that she lives. This morning after mass, and the two last Sundays—when, fool that I was, I only dared to follow her with my eyes—she did not turn to the right but to the left, in the direction of the Pré-aux-Clercs. What the devil can she be doing here? Let me think. To visit a prisoner, perhaps—her brother, probably. Poor young girl! if so, she must suffer much; for, no doubt she is as good as she is beautiful. Pardieu! I have a great mind to speak to her and ask her frankly what it is, and offer my services. If it be her brother, I will confide the affair to my master, and ask his advice. He who escaped from the Château St. Ange, knows well how to get out of

prison. That is settled; I will save her brother, and after such a service he will become my friend for life. He will ask, in his turn, what he can do for me; I will confess to him that I love his sister, he will present me to her, I shall fall at her feet, and we shall see then if she will not raise her eyes."

At this moment five o'clock struck, and the sentinel was relieved; the new man began his walk and the young man recommenced his, and his soliloquy:—

"How beautiful she is! What grace in her movements! What purity in her look! There is not in the whole world, any one but Leonardo da Vincè, or the divine Raphaël, who could do justice to this fair creature, and even they could scarcely succeed. Oh! why am I not a painter instead of a carver, sculptor, enameller and goldsmith? If I were a painter I should not require to have her before me to take her portrait. No; I see incessantly her blue eyes, her beautiful fair hair, her white skin and her slender figure. If I were a painter I would put her in all my pictures, as Sanzio did for Fornarina, and Andrea del Sarto for Lucretia. And what a difference between her and them! Neither one nor the other were fit to untie her shoe-strings. Firstly, the Fornarina——"

The young man had not reached the end of his comparisons—all to the advantage, as we may imagine, of his lady—when the next hour struck, and the second sentinel was relieved.

"Six o'clock! It is strange how quickly time passes thus," murmured the youth; "and if it passes thus while waiting for her, how must it pass when near her? Ah! near her, must be paradise. If I were near her, I should pass hours, days, months in looking at her. What a happy life that would be, mon Dieu!" And he stood still in ecstacy; for to his artist's eyes his lady love, though absent, seemed a reality.

The third sentinel was relieved, and at last eight o'clock struck; it began to grow dark, for everything authorises us to think that three hundred years ago it grew dark at eight o'clock in July, just as it does now. But what may perhaps astonish us more, is the marvellous perseverance of the lovers of the sixteenth century. All was powerful then; and young and vigorous souls did not stop half way, either in love, in war, or in art. However, the patience of the young artist was at last recompensed, when he saw the door of the Châtelet open for the twentieth time, but this time to give an exit to her whom he waited for. The same attendant was still at her side, but two men of the provost's guard now walked behind them, as an escort.

They retraced the road by which they had come, the Pont au Change, the Rue de la Barillerie, the Pont St. Michael, and the quays; but they passed the Augustins, and about three hundred feet further on, stopped before an immense door; the duenna knocked, and the porter opened; the two guards, after a low bow, returned to the Châtelet, and our artist found himself a second time standing

before a closed door. He might have stayed there until the next day, for he had begun a new series of dreams; but it happened that a passer by, rather the worse for wine, ran against him.

"Ah! my friend," cried the new comer, "are you a man or a post? If you are a post, you are in your proper place and I respect you; if you are a man, move and let me pass."

"Excuse me," replied the young artist, "but I am a stranger in this good city of Paris, and——"

"Oh! that is another thing, altogether; the French are hospitable, and it is I who ask your pardon, monsieur, as you are a stranger. Since you have told me who you are, it is just that I should tell you who I am. I am a student, and am called——"

"Pardon me, monsieur," interrupted the artist, "but before knowing who you are, I should like to know where I am."

"At the Port de Nesle, my dear friend, and this is the Hôtel de Nesle," said the student, pointing to the great door.

"Very well, and to arrive at the Rue St. Martin, where I live, which way must I take?" said our lover, hoping to get rid of the intruder.

"Rue St. Martin, you say; come with me, I will accompany you: it is just my way, and at the Pont St. Michael I will show you how to go on. I will tell you now that I am a student, returning from the Pré-aux-Clercs, and that I am called——"

"Do you know to whom the Hôtel de Nesle, belongs?" interrupted the artist.

"Know! of course I do. The Hôtel de Nesle, young man, belongs to the king, and is at present in the hands of the mayor of Paris, Robert d'Estourville."

"What! the mayor lives here?"

"I did not say that; the mayor lives at the Grand-Châtelet now, I understand."

"But how is it, then, that the king has given him the Hôtel de Nesle?"

"I will tell you. The king, you see, had formerly given the Hôtel de Nesle to our bailiff, a very venerable man, who guarded the privileges and legislated for the university in the most paternal manner. Unluckily this excellent man was so just to us, that they abolished his place two years ago, on the pretext that he slept at the sittings, and the duty of protecting the university was assigned to the mayor. A fine protector, ma foi! as if we could not protect ourselves. Well, this mayor, who is very greedy, thought that, as he succeeded to the office, he ought also to succeed to the property, and he quietly took possession of the Grand and Petit-Nesle, with the consent of Madame d'Etampes."

"And yet you say he does not occupy it?"

"Not he, the thief; but I believe he keeps here some daughter or niece, a beautiful girl, called Colombe or Columbine, I forget which."

"Ah! really!" said the artist, who now heard for the first

time, the name of his lady, "this usurpation seems to me a crying abuse. What! this immense hotel to lodge one young girl and a duenna!"

"Oh, stranger, it is a common abuse; we poor devils live six together in a wretched little house, while a great lord abandons to the nettles, this immense property, with its gardens, its lawn, and its tennis court."

"Ah! there is a tennis court?"

"Magnificent, my friend, magnificent."

"But then, this place is really the property of King François I.?"

"Certainly; but what could he do with it?"

"Give it to some one else, since the mayor does not inhabit it."

"Well, ask him for it."

"Why not? Are you fond of tennis?" "I adore it."

"Well, then, I invite you to play a game with me next Sunday."

"Where?" "In the Hôtel de Nesle."

"Agreed, monseigneur, the grand master of the royal châteaux. Ah! ça! now you must know my name. I am called——"

But as the artist knew all that he wished to know, the rest interested him but little; he scarcely heard a word of the history of his companion, who was informing him that he was called Jacques Aubry, was a student at the university, and was returning from the Pré-aux-Clercs, where he had had a rendezvous with the wife of his tailor; but that she, kept away, no doubt, by her unworthy husband, had not come, and that he had consoled himself for her absence by drinking Suresne wine; and how he was going to withdraw his custom from the tailor, whose wife had kept him waiting uselessly and forced him to get tipsy, which was contrary to all his habits.

When the two young men arrived at the Rue de la Harpe, Jacques Aubry pointed out the way to our friend, who knew it better than himself, and, giving each other a rendezvous for the following Sunday at noon, at the Pont de Nesle, they separated; one singing, the other dreaming. Our artist had enough to dream of, for he had learned more that day than in the whole of the three weeks preceding. He had learned that she he loved lived in the Petit-Nesle; that she was the daughter of the Mayor of Paris, M. Robert d'Estourville, and that she was called Colombe. He had not lost his day. As he dreamed, he went along the Rue St. Martin and stopped before a handsome-looking house, above the door of which were sculptured the arms of the Cardinal de Ferrara. He knocked three times.

"Who is there?" asked a young fresh voice from within.

"I, Dame Catherine."

"Who?" "Ascanio."

"Ah! at last."

The door opened and Ascanio entered. A abot girl pretty

nineteen, petite and rather dark, with a beautiful figure and lively expression, received the truant with transports of joy. "Here is the deserter," cried she; and she ran, or rather bounded forward, to announce him, letting her light blow out and leaving the street door open, which Ascanio, less giddy than herself, took care to shut. The young man, in spite of the darkness in which Catherine had left him, traversed with a sure step a large court, where a grass border encircled each stone, and which was surrounded by great sombre-looking buildings.

It looked like the austere abode of a cardinal, although it was long since the master had lived there. Ascanio ran nimbly up some steps green with moss, and entered an immense room, the only one in the house which was lighted; it was a kind of monkish refectory, generally black, sad-looking, and bare, but for the last two months it had been brilliant and alive with gaiety. During this period, the cold and colossal cell had been full of life, work, and laughter, activity and good humour, and ten benches, ten anvils and an improvised forge, helped to fill the enormous space, while drawings, models, shelves stored with pincers, hammers, and files, bundles of swords with marvellously carved handles and blades cut in open work, helmets, cuirasses and bucklers inlaid with gold, on which were chased, in relievo, the loves of the gods and goddesses, as if, by the subjects represented on them, it had been wished to make their destination forgotten, covered the dingy walls. The sun had been allowed to penetrate through the open windows, and the whole scene had been rendered cheerful by the songs of the workmen.

The refectory of a cardinal had been turned into the workshop of a goldsmith. Nevertheless, during that evening of the 10th July, 1540, the holiness of the Sabbath had for the time restored to the hall the tranquillity which had reigned there during a century. But a table, on which the remains of an excellent supper were visible, lighted by a lamp which looked as though it had been brought from the excavations at Pompeii, so simple and elegant was its form, attested that the temporary inhabitants of the cardinal's house were not given to fasting.

When Ascanio entered, four people were in the room: an old servant, who was clearing the table, Catherine, a young man who was drawing in a corner, and the master, who was leaning against the forge with his arms crossed.

There was about this man a strange power, which attracted to him the attention even of those who would have wished to withhold it from him. He was a man about forty years of age, thin, tall, and vigorous; but it would have required the chisel of Michael Angelo or the brush of Rebeira to have traced that fine and intellectual profile, or to paint that brown clear complexion, and do justice to that bold and princely look. His high forehead, his clear, frank, but penetrating glance, and his smile full of goodness and

kindness, although not unfrequently sarcastic, at once charmed and intimidated. His hand was nervous and supple, but also aristocratic and handsome, and everything in his look and attitude, when Ascanio entered, showed that although the lion was sleeping, he was not less the lion.

As for Catherine, and the apprentice who was drawing, they presented the most singular contrast to each other. He was sombre and taciturn, with a forehead narrow and already wrinkled, eyes half shut, and lips compressed; while she was gay as a bird, and under her eyelids always shone the most laughing eyes, and her smile incessantly displayed teeth as white as ivory. The apprentice, buried in his corner, seemed to economise his movements; Catherine, on the contrary, came and went, and never rested a minute in the same place: it seemed as if she had need of perpetual movement. She was like a child in the house, fully meriting the name of Scozzone, given to her by the master, and which means, in English, something like madcap. Full, however, of grace and fascination, Scozzone was the soul of the studio; when she sang, they listened; when she laughed, they laughed with her; and when she ordered, they obeyed without a word, and she was not often *exigeante* in her caprices. She was so frankly and so naïvely happy, that she shed good humour round her, and made others joyful in seeing her joy.

An orphan, and belonging to poor people, she had been thrown on the world in her infancy, but God had protected her. Destined to give pleasure to all, she met with a man on whom she conferred happiness.

Let us now resume our story.

"Ah! where do you come from, truant?" cried the master to Ascanio.

"Where from? I have been running about for you, master."

"Since the morning?" "Since the morning."

"Say rather that you have been engaged in some adventure."

"What adventure could I engage in?" "How can I tell?"

"Well! if he had, what great harm?" cried Scozzone. "Besides, he is so handsome, that if he does not run after adventures, they will run after him."

"Scozzone!" said the master, frowning.

"Come, you are not going to be jealous, now, of the poor dear child? But, mon Dieu! how pale you are! Have you not supped, M. le vagabond?"

"Why, no; I forgot it."

"Oh! then I decidedly agree with the master that you are in love, since you forget your supper. Ruperta! Ruperta! quick! supper for M. Ascanio."

The servant brought in some supper, which Ascanio eagerly attacked. He had a right to be hungry after his long promenade

in the open air. Scozzone and her master watched him smilingly and affectionately.

"I told you, master, that I had been working for you," said Ascanio, who fancied they were looking quizzically at him, and wished to turn the conversation from the subject of his love adventures.

"And in what manner? Let us hear."

"Did you not say yesterday, that the light was bad here, and that you wanted another studio?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I have found you one."

"Do you hear, Pagolo?" said the master, turning towards the worker.

"Did you speak, master?" said he, raising his head.

"Come, leave your drawing for a little while and listen. Ascanio has found a studio."

"Excuse me, master, but I can hear quite well from the corner, and I wish to finish this study. It seems to me that there is no harm, after having religiously fulfilled on a Sunday one's duties as a Christian, to spend one's leisure in a profitable manner."

"Pagolo, my friend," said the master, "you would do better, believe me, to work more assiduously and courageously in the week, and amuse yourself on the Sunday, instead of idling on working days and distinguishing yourself hypocritically from the rest of the world, by working on holidays; but you are your own master, act as seems best to you. But you, Ascanio, my child," continued he, in a voice of wonderful sweetness, "you say then——"

"I say that I have found you a magnificent studio."

"Where?" "Do you know the Hôtel de Nesle?"

"Quite well, from having passed it, but I never entered it."

"But does the appearance please you?"

"I believe so, pardieu! but——"

"But what?" "Is it not occupied by any one?"

"Yes; by M. Robert d'Estourville, the Mayor of Paris, who took possession of it without having any right to it. Besides, to put your conscience at ease, it seems to me that we may leave to him the Petit-Nesle, where some of the family live, I believe, and content ourselves with the Grand-Nesle, with its courts, its bowling green, and its tennis court."

"There is a tennis court?"

"Finer than that of Santa Croce at Florence."

"Per Bacco, it is my favourite game, you know, Ascanio."

"Yes; and then, master, besides that, a splendid situation, open all round and plenty of fresh country air, unlike this frightful corner, where we vegetate and where the sun forgets us; there is the Pré-aux-Clercs on one side, the Seine on the other, and the king close by, in the Louvre."

"But to whom does it belong?" "Pardieu! to the king."

"To the king! The Hôtel de Nesle belong to the king?"

"Yes; but it remains to be seen whether he will give you so magnificent a dwelling."

"Well! in three days it shall be my property."

"But the mayor will be angry, perhaps." "What do I care?"

"But perhaps he will not give it up."

"Will not! What is my name, Ascanio?"

"Benvenuto Cellini, master."

"Which means that if he does not yield it up willingly, we will force him to do so. Now let us go to bed; to-morrow we will speak of it again."

At this every one retired, except Pagolo, who remained some time longer working in his corner, until he believed every one to be in bed; then he rose, approached the table, drank off a large glass of wine and retired also.

CHAPTER II.

A GOLDSMITH OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

SINCE we have drawn the portrait and pronounced the name of Benvenuto Cellini, the reader must permit us to make a little digression about this strange man, who had for the last two months lived in France, and who is destined to become one of the principal personages of this story. But first let us describe a goldsmith of the sixteenth century.

There is at Florence a bridge called the Pont-Vieux, which is still covered with houses. These houses were goldsmiths' shops, but not as we now understand the term; it is now a trade, it was then an art. Thus, nothing could be more marvellous than these shops, or rather their contents: there were cups cut out of onyx, round which were turned dragons' tails, while the heads and bodies of these fantastic animals rose facing each other and extending their wings of azure, studded with gold, and seemed menacing each other with distended jaws and ruby eyes.

There were bowls of agate, round the feet of which were twined festoons of ivy, which, rising in the form of a handle, hid among their emerald leaves some tropical bird, fashioned in marvellous enamel, which seemed living and ready to sing.

There were urns of lapis-lazuli, over which hung, as though in the act of drinking, two lizards, so skilfully formed that you seemed to see the changing hues of their golden scales, and might almost fancy that at the least noise they would take fright and seek refuge in some crevice in the wall.

There were chalices and medals of bronze, of silver and of gold

all inlaid with precious stones, as though rubies, topazes, carbuncles, and diamonds were to be found by washing the sand of the river or scraping the dust from the roads; there were nymphs, naiads, gods, goddesses, a whole Olympus, mingled with crucifixes and crosses, Matres Dolorosæ and Venuses, Christs and Apollos, Jupiters launching the thunder, and Jehovahs creating the world; and all, not only skilfully executed, but poetically conceived—not only admirable as bijoux to ornament a lady's boudoir, but splendid as *chefs-d'œuvre* to immortalize the reign of a king or the genius of a nation. It is true that the goldsmiths of that epoch were Donatello Ghiberti, Guirlandajo, and Benvenuto Cellini.

Now Benvenuto Cellini has recounted himself, in memoirs more curious than the most extraordinary romances, the adventurous lives of the artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Titian painted with his cuirass on his back, and Michael Angelo sculptured with his sword at his side; when Masaccio and Domenichino died of poison, and when Cosmo I. shut himself up in order to discover how to temper a sword which would cut porphyry. We will only take from the memoirs of Cellini one episode of his life, that which led to his residence in France.

Cellini was at Rome, where Pope Clément VII. had called him, and was working ardently at a beautiful chalice which his Holiness had ordered; but as he wished to give all possible care to this precious work, he advanced but slowly. But, as we may imagine, he was envied by many, as much on account of the orders he received from dukes, kings, and popes, as on account of the great talent with which he executed these orders. One of these, named Pompeo, who had nothing to do but to calumniate, profited by his delay to speak against him to the pope, and that, every day without ceasing, declaring that it would never be finished, and that he was executing other orders and neglecting that of his Holiness. This worthy Pompeo said and did so much, that one day, when he entered Benvenuto's studio with a pleased air, Cellini guessed at once that he was the bearer of some bad news.

"Well, my dear friend," said Pompeo, "I come to release you from a heavy obligation. His Holiness is persuaded that your delay in completing his chalice proceeds, not from want of zeal, but from want of time, and consequently considers that he must relieve you of part of your work; he therefore withdraws from you your appointment of engraver of the coinage. Certainly you will have nine poor ducats of gold a month less, but you will have an hour a day more to spare."

Benvenuto felt a furious desire to throw the speaker out of the window, but he restrained himself, and did not even move a muscle of his face.

"Besides," continued Pompeo, "and I do not know why—but in spite of all I could say, his Holiness demands his chalice just as

it is. I really fear, my dear Benvenuto—and I tell you this as a friend—that he intends to have it finished by some one else."

"Oh! as for that," said Cellini, "my chalice belongs to me. His Holiness has no right to ask for anything more than the 500 crowns which he paid me in advance, and I will do with my work whatever seems good to me."

"Take care," said Pompeo, "for perhaps a prison may follow this refusal."

"M. Pompeo, yóu are an ass," cried Benvenuto.

Pompeo went away furious.

The next day, two chamberlains of the pope came to Benvenuto.

"The pope sends us to you," said one of them, "with orders that you are to deliver up the chalice you are executing for his Holiness, or to follow us to prison."

"Gentlemen," replied Benvenuto, "a man such as I, merited messengers like you. Take me to prison, I am ready. But I warn you that it will not advance, by one stroke of the graver, the chalice of the pope."

And Benvenuto went with them to the governor, who, having doubtless received his instructions in advance, invited him to dinner. During the whole meal he tried to persuade Cellini to accede to the wishes of the pope, affirming that if he made this submission, his Holiness, violent and headstrong as he was, would be satisfied with it; but Cellini replied that he had already shown the chalice, as commenced, to the pope, and that that was all that could be expected of him; that, besides, he knew him and would not trust him, for that he was quite capable of withdrawing the chalice from him, and giving it to some one to finish, who would quite spoil it; and he again repeated that he was quite ready to return to the pope the 500 crowns that he had received. This once said, Benvenuto replied to the governor only by praising his wine and his cook.

After dinner, all his dearest friends and all his apprentices, led by Ascanio, came to beg him not to ruin himself by opposing Clement VII. But Benvenuto replied, that for a long time he had desired to prove the great truth that a goldsmith could be more obstinate than a pope, and that, consequently, when the occasion presented itself, he would certainly not let it slip. His friends left him, declaring that he was mad, and Ascanio went away weeping. Pompeo was not yet at rest, so he said to the pope—

"Holy father, let your servant act. I will send to this obstinate man, and tell him to deliver up the 500 crowns as he offered to do; and as he is extravagant and will be sure not to have them, he will be forced to give up the chalice."

Clement thought it an excellent plan, and told Pompeo to carry it into execution. Consequently that same evening, as they were about to conduct Benvenuto to the room prepared for him, a chamberlain presented himself to say, that his Holiness accepted his

ultimatum, and desired to have immediately either the 500 crowns or the chalice. Benvenuto replied that they had only to reconduct him to his house and they should have the 500 crowns. Four Swiss, followed by the chamberlain, then conducted him home. Arrived in his bed-room, Benvenuto drew a key from his pocket, opened a drawer in the wall, plunged his hand into a great sack, drew out the 500 crowns, which he handed to the chamberlain, gave four crowns to the Swiss for their trouble, and dismissed them. The chamberlain returned to the pope and gave him the 500 crowns, on which Clement flew into a rage and began to abuse Pompeo.

"Go yourself to Cellini, animal," said he. "Say to him all the persuasive things of which your ignorant folly is capable; and tell him, that if he consents to finish my chalice, I will give him all the facility he can ask."

"But, your Holiness," said Pompeo, "will it not be time enough to-morrow morning?"

"It is late enough already, imbecile, and I do not wish Benvenuto to sleep on his wrath; therefore, do at once what I order, and at my early reception to-morrow, let me have a favourable answer."

Pompeo went out of the Vatican, looking very blank, and went to Benvenuto's shop, which was closed. He looked through the keyhole, but seeing no light anywhere, ventured to knock, and, receiving no reply, to knock again louder. Then a window in the first story opened, and Benvenuto looked out with an arquebuse in his hand.

"Who is there?" asked he. "I."

"Who is 'I?'" said Benvenuto, who knew him perfectly.

"Pompeo."

"You lie; I know Pompeo well, and I am sure he is too great a coward to venture at this hour into the streets of Rome."

"But my dear Cellini, I swear——"

"Hold your tongue; you are a thief, who have taken the name of that poor devil to get my door opened that you may rob me."

"No, M. Cellini, may I die if——"

"Say another word," cried Benvenuto, lowering his arquebuse, "and your wish shall be gratified."

Pompeo fled, crying murder, and disappeared round the corner of the next street. When he was gone, Benvenuto reclosed his window, hung up his arquebuse on its nail, and returned to bed, laughing at the fright he had given to poor Pompeo. The next day, when Cellini descended into his shop, which had already been opened for an hour by his apprentices, he saw Pompeo on the other side of the road, waiting until he should appear. On perceiving Cellini, Pompeo made the most friendly gesture of which he was capable.

"Ah!" said Cellini, "it is you, dear Pompeo. "Ma foi! last night a fellow had the insolence to take your name, and I was on the point of making him pay dearly for it"

"Really!" said Pompeo, forcing himself to smile; "how was that?"

Benvenuto then related to him what had passed, but Pompeo did not avow himself to be the person to whom Cellini had spoken. The recital over, Cellini asked Pompeo to what happy circumstance he was indebted for the honour of this early visit. Then Pompeo acquitted himself, in other words, we may be sure, of the commission which Clement VII. had given him. As he spoke, the face of Benvenuto grew bright. Clement had yielded—the goldsmith had been more obstinate than the pope. When Pompeo had finished—

"Tell his Holiness," said he, "that I shall be happy to obey him, and to do all in my power to regain his favour, which I have lost, not by my own fault, but by the malignity of the envious. As for you, M. Pompeo, as the pope does not want servants, I advise you, for your own sake, to take care that some other messenger is sent to me for the future; do not mix yourself up with what does not concern you, and in pity to yourself, do not let me find you crossing my path; and for the good of my own soul, do not force me, M. Pompeo, to play the Cæsar to you."

Pompeo said no more, but returned to the pope and delivered the first part of Cellini's message, but suppressing the latter part. A short time after, in order to complete the reconciliation, Clement ordered Cellini to strike a medal bearing his image. Benvenuto executed it in bronze, in silver, and in gold, and carried them to the pope, who was so delighted with them, that he declared that none of the ancients had ever equalled them.

"Well, your Holiness," said Benvenuto, "if I had not shown a little firmness, we should have permanently quarrelled, for I should never have pardoned you, and you would have lost a devoted servant. You see, holy father, you would do well to guard yourself from being duped by evil, envious, and calumniating tongues; and now, holy father, let us speak of it no more."

It was thus that Benvenuto pardoned Clement VII., which he would assuredly not have done if he had loved him less, but he was very much attached to him. His grief was great, when, some months after the adventure that we have just related, the pope died suddenly. This man of iron burst into tears at the news. His death was doubly unlucky to poor Benvenuto, for on the same day on which the pope was buried, he met Pompeo, whom he had not seen since the day when he had warned him to keep out of his way. The poor man had never dared to go out unless accompanied by twelve men well armed, to whom he paid the same wages as the pope did to his Swiss guard, so that every walk he took cost him three or four crowns. Even when surrounded by his guard, he trembled lest he should meet Benvenuto, knowing that if any quarrel ensued, and harm was to happen to Cellini, whom the pope loved much, it would be visited on him. But now,

as we have said, Clement was dead, and his death made Pompeo bold.

Benvenuto had been to St. Peter's to kiss the feet of the dead pope, and as he returned through the Rue dei Banchi, accompanied by Ascanio and Pagolo, he found himself confronted by Pompeo and his twelve men. At the sight of his enemy Pompeo turned pale; but seeing himself so well surrounded, while Benvenuto was only accompanied by two youths, he took courage, and stopping, made an ironical bow, while his right hand played with the hilt of his dagger.

At the sight of this troop, which menaced his master, Ascanio put his hand to his sword, whilst Pagolo feigned to look another way; but Benvenuto, who did not wish to expose his favourite pupil to such an unequal combat, laid his hand on him and pushed the half-drawn sword back into the scabbard, and continued his way as if he had seen nothing. Pompeo moved forwards, and Benvenuto went on, inwardly chafing, but with a smile on his lips.

Scarcely, however, had he gone a hundred yards, than he entered the shop of one of his friends, saying that he wished to see an antique vase which had been discovered in the Etruscan tombs of Corneto, and told his two pupils to go home and that he would soon rejoin them. This, of course, was only a pretext to get rid of Ascanio; for as soon as he believed the young man out of sight, he rushed out of the shop. In three bounds he was in the street where he had met Pompeo, but he was no longer there; however, luckily, or unluckily, this group was sufficiently remarkable for the first passer by to be able to tell him the way they had taken; and, like a bloodhound who has recovered the scent, Benvenuto flew on their track.

Pompeo had stopped at the door of a chemist, to whom he was boasting of his triumph over Benvenuto, when suddenly the latter appeared at the corner of the street with flashing eyes and a heated brow. Benvenuto uttered a cry of joy on seeing them, and Pompeo stopped short in the middle of his sentence.

It was evident that something terrible was about to happen, and the bravos gathered round Pompeo and drew their swords. It was madness in one man to attack thirteen, but Benvenuto was one of those lion-like natures who never count their adversaries. He drew, against the thirteen swords which menaced him, a sharp little poignard which he always wore in his belt, and flew into the middle of the group, seizing with one arm two or three swords, and overturning with the other two or three men, until he arrived at Pompeo, whom he seized by the collar, but immediately the circle reclosed on him.

Then nothing was to be seen but a confused *mêlée*, from which proceeded cries, and above which swords were visible. For an instant the mass rolled on the ground; then, with a violent effort,

a man burst out, uttering a cry of victory, and shaking triumphantly his bloody poignard; this was Benvenuto Cellini.

Another man lay on the pavement, rolling in the agonies of death. He had received two stabs, one above the ear, and the other behind the collar-bone, at the bottom of the neck; this was Pompeo. In a few seconds he was dead.

Any one but Benvenuto would now have fled; but he only passed his dagger into his left hand, drew his sword with the right, and waited quietly for the twelve men. But they had nothing more to do with Benvenuto; he who had paid them was dead, and could pay no more, so they ran off like frightened hares, leaving the body of Pompeo on the ground.

At this moment Ascanio appeared and flew into his master's arms; he had not been duped by the story of the vase, and had retraced his steps, but, with all his speed, had arrived a minute too late.

CHAPTER III.

DEDALUS.

BENVENUTO went away rather uneasy, not at his wounds, which were slight, but at the consequences of what had passed. He had killed, six months before, Guasconti, the murderer of his brother, but he had then been protected from punishment by Pope Clement VII.; besides, that death was only a reprisal, while this time Benvenuto's protector was dead, and the case was much more serious. Remorse he had none. But let not our readers have therefore the least bad opinion of our worthy hero, who, after having killed a man, feared the police, but not God; for in the year 1540, all men were alike in this. They thought so little in that age of dying, that they also thought little of killing. We are brave now, but then they were rash; we fight like grown men, they fought like impetuous boys. People then lost, sold, or gave away their lives with profound carelessness.

There is a much calumniated writer, whose name has long been used as a synonyme for treachery, cruelty, and every word that expresses infamy, and it required the nineteenth century, the most impartial of all centuries, to restore his fame as a patriot and a good man. Yet the only fault of Machiavelli was having belonged to a period when strength and success were everything, and when every one went straight forward to his desire, without scruple as to ways and means—the sovereign, Cæsar Borgia, the thinker, Machiavelli, and the artist, Benvenuto Cellini. One day a corpse was found cut into four quarters and lying on the Place de Cescena; this corpse was that of Ramiro d'Orco. Now as Ramiro d'Orco was a person of rank in Italy, the Florentine republic

wished to know the cause of his death. The eight lords wrote then to Machiavelli, their ambassador, to satisfy their curiosity. But Machiavelli only replied—

"Seigneurs,—I have nothing to tell you concerning the death of Ramiro d'Orco, if it be not that Cæsar Borgia is the prince who knows best how to make and unmake men according to their merits. "MACHIAVELLI."

Benvenuto put in practice the theory propounded by the illustrious secretary of the Florentine republic. Benvenuto, the genius, and Borgia, the prince, both believed themselves above the laws. The distinction of just or unjust for them was whether they could or could not. A man annoyed them, they got rid of him. Now, we should bribe him. But then, so much blood boiled in the veins of young nations, that they shed it for the good of their health. They fought by instinct, for the sake of fighting, nation against nation, and man against man. Benvenuto made war on Pompeo, as Francis I. did on Charles V. France and Spain fought duels at Marignan and at Pavia. We must not then be astonished at these men, who were never astonished themselves, and we may explain their homicides, their freaks, and their wildnesses by a phrase which explains and justifies everything—it was the fashion. But sometimes the police inquired about these things; they never protected a man while he lived, but once in ten times they revenged him when he was dead. This susceptibility seized them with regard to Benvenuto Cellini. Just as he had returned home, and had put some papers in the fire, and some money in his pocket, the pontifical guards arrested him, and took him to the Château St. Ange, a misfortune for which Benvenuto consoled himself by thinking that it was there that gentlemen were taken. But another consolation operated still more effectually on the mind of Benvenuto as he entered the castle, namely, that a man of inventive genius like himself must discover some method of getting out again. Thus, on entering, he said to the governor, who was sitting before a table covered with green cloth, and loaded with papers—

"Monsieur, triple your bolts, your bars, and your sentinels; shut me in your highest room or your lowest cell; let your surveillance watch me by day and night, and I warn you that, in spite of all, I will fly."

The governor raised his eyes to see the strange prisoner who addressed him thus, and recognising Benvenuto, who had dined with him three months before, he remained stupified for an instant. He was a Florentine, named Giorgio Chevalier des Ugolini, an excellent man, but rather weak. However, soon recovering himself, he conducted Benvenuto to the highest room in the château, the ceiling of which was the roof itself, on which, being flat, a sentinel always walked, while another watched at the

bottom of the wall. He made Benvenuto remark all this, then he said—

"My dear Benvenuto, one may open locks, force doors, work one's way through the earth of an underground cell, pierce a wall, gain over the sentinels, but without having wings you cannot descend from this height into the plain."

"I will descend, however," said Benvenuto.

The governor looked at him, and began to believe he was mad.

"But then you will fly?"

"Why not? I have always had an idea that men could fly, only I had no time to make the experiment. Here I shall have plenty of time, and par Dieu I will try. The adventure of Dedalus is a history, and not a fable."

"Take care of the sun, my dear Benvenuto," replied the governor, laughing.

"I will fly by night."

The governor did not expect this reply, so he retired without answering.

Benvenuto was determined to escape. At any other time he would not have disquieted himself for having killed a man, and would have escaped with nothing worse than following the procession of Nôtre Dame, clothed in a doublet, and cloak of blue silk. But the new pope was dreadfully vindictive, and when he was only Monseigneur Farnèse, Benvenuto had had a quarrel with him about a silver vase which he refused to give up without payment, and which his Eminence had tried to carry away by main force. Besides, he was annoyed that King Francis I. had asked for Benvenuto, through M. de Moutluc, his ambassador at Rome. On learning his captivity, M. de Montluc, thinking to serve him, had begged for him more earnestly than before, but he did not know the character of the new pope, who was still more obstinate than his predecessor; and Paul III. had sworn that Benvenuto should pay for what he had done, and so he risked, if not death, at least being left in prison. It was therefore important for Benvenuto to take care of himself, and he resolved to fly without waiting for interrogatories and judgments which might never arrive, for the pope, irritated by the interference of Francis I., would not hear Benvenuto's name mentioned. The prisoner learned all this through Ascanio, who kept his shop, and who, by constant entreaties, had obtained permission to see his master, on condition that these interviews took place through bars, and in the presence of witnesses, who watched that he did not pass to his master file, knife, or rope.

Benvenuto's cell contained within its four walls only a bed, a grate, a table, and two chairs; but he soon obtained clay and modelling tools, which the governor had refused at first, but afterwards granted, thinking that they would turn his mind from its projects of flight. The same day Cellini sketched a colossal Venus.

One cold day in December, when a fire was burning, they came to change Benvenuto's sheets, and left the dirty ones on a chair. As soon as the door was closed, he made one bound from his chair to his bed, drew from his palliasse two enormous handfuls of the Indian corn leaves, with which the Italian palliasses are made, pushed into their place the pair of sheets, returned to his statue, and recommenced his work. A minute after, the servant returned for the sheets, searched about everywhere, and not seeing them, asked Benvenuto if he had seen them; but Benvenuto replied carelessly, and apparently absorbed by his work, that perhaps some of his comrades had come and fetched them, or that he himself had carried them away without thinking of it. The servant had no suspicion, so little time had passed since he last left the room, and Benvenuto had played his part so naturally, and as he could not find the sheets, he never spoke of them lest he should be forced to pay for them.

No sooner was the man gone, than Benvenuto fell on his knees, and thanked God for the succour he had sent to him. Then he left the sheets quietly in the palliasse until dark. When night came, he began to cut the sheets, which luckily were strong and new, into strips two or three inches wide, which he plaited as tightly as he could; then he opened his statue, hollowed it out, put his treasure in, and covered up the opening with clay, so adroitly that no one could have imagined the operation to which the poor Venus had just been subjected. The next morning the governor entered unexpectedly, as was his wont, and found the prisoner working calmly as usual. Each morning the poor man, who had been menaced the night before with Benvenuto's escape, tremhled lest he should find the room empty, and could not hide his joy when he found it still occupied.

"I confess you disquiet me terribly, Benvenuto," said he to the prisoner; "however, I begin to believe that your threats of flight were vain talk."

"I do not threaten you, M. Giorgio; I warn you."

"Do you still hope to fly?"

"It is not now a hope, it is a certainty."

"But how will you do it, then?" cried the poor governor, whom this apparent confidence overwhelmed.

"That is my secret. But I warn you, my wings are springing."

The governor mechanically turned his eyes to the shoulders of the prisoner.

"It is quite true, monsieur," continued Benvenuto, working away at his statue. "There is war between us; you have for you, enormous towers, thick doors, tried locks, and a thousand guardians always ready; I have for me only my head and hands, and I warn you, you will be conquered. Only, as you are a clever man, and have taken all possible precautions, there will remain to you, when I am gone, the consolation of knowing that it was not

your fault, M. Giorgio, and that you can never reproach yourself that you have neglected anything to keep me. Now, what do you say to that leg? you are an amateur in art, I know."

So much assurance exasperated the poor governor. His prisoner was ever on his mind; he became sad, eat no more, and trembled every moment like a man suddenly awakened. One night Benvenuto heard a great tumult on the roof, then the sound advanced into the corridor, and finally stopped at his door; then the door was opened, and he perceived M. Giorgio in a night dress and cap, followed by eight gaolers and eight guards, who flew towards him, looking quite terrified. Benvenuto sat up in bed and laughed, but the governor cried, "Ah! thank Heaven, he is here still!"

"Well! what is it, then?" asked Benvenuto, "and what happy circumstance procures me the pleasure of a visit at this hour, M. Giorgio?"

"Mon Dieu! it is nothing, and I have got off this time with the fright. I dreamed that those cursed wings of yours had grown immense, and with which you floated tranquilly over the Château St. Ange, saying, 'Adieu, my dear governor, adieu. I would not go without taking leave of you. I am going, and hope never to see you again.'"

"How! I said that, M. Giorgio?"

"Those were the words. Ah! Benvenuto, you are a sad trouble to me."

"Ah! I hope you do not think me so unpolite. Luckily it w but a dream, or else I could not forgive you."

"Yes, luckily it is nothing. I have you still, and hope to have you for a long time."

"I do not think so," replied Benvenuto, with his confident smile. The governor went away, wishing Benvenuto at the devil, and the next day he gave orders that night and day his prison should be visited every two hours. This lasted for a month; then, as there was nothing to induce them to think that Benvenuto was occupied with his escape, the surveillance was relaxed. This month was not wasted by Benvenuto: from the moment of entering his room, he had fixed on his plan of escape. His window was barred, and the bars were too strong to be dislodged by the hand, or with his modelling tools, the only iron instruments he possessed. As to his chimney, it was so twisted that he would have required to be able to change himself into a serpent, like the fairy Melusina, to pass through it. There remained the door. Ah! the door, let us see how that was made.

It was an oak door, four inches thick, closed by two locks and four bolts, and covered inside by plates of iron fastened above and below with nails. It was through this door that he must pass; for Benvenuto had remarked that some steps from this door, and in the corridor which led to it, was the staircase by which they went up to relieve the sentinel on the roof. Every two hours

Benvenuto heard the sound of steps going up this staircase, afterwards coming down, and then he had two quiet hours. All he had then to do was to get to the other side of this door, and in this work Benvenuto had employed the month which had just passed. With his modelling tools he had taken off, one after the other, the heads of all the nails excepting two at the top and two at the bottom, which he reserved for the last day's work; then, that their absence should not be perceived, he had replaced them by heads exactly similar, modelled in clay and covered with scrapings of iron, so that it was impossible for the most practised eye to know the false nailheads from the true. Now, as there were sixty nails in the door, and each nail took upwards of half an hour to decapitate, we may understand the labour of the entire work.

Then every evening, when every one was in bed, and he no longer heard the noise of the sentinel overhead, he made a great fire in his grate, and then brought to the door a quantity of live coal, which he placed along the iron plates, which, as they grew hot, gradually reduced to charcoal the wood on which they were laid, without its showing on the outside.

At the end of the month all this was completed, and Benvenuto only waited for a favourable night for flight, when there should be no moon. As he had nothing more to do to his nails, he continued to burn the door and to enrage the governor. One day M. Giorgio said to him: "Well, my dear prisoner, do you still think of flight?" "More than ever, my dear host."

"Well, say what you like, I believe it an impossibility!"

"Impossible! M. Giorgio; you know that word does not exist for me, who have always amused myself by doing successfully things impossible to others. Impossible! my dear host, to me, who have almost made nature jealous, by creating with gold, emeralds, and diamonds, some flower more beautiful than any on which the dew falls. Do you believe that he who made flowers, cannot make wings?"

"Mon Dieu!" cried the governor, "with your insolent assurance you drive me mad. But, however, in order that your wings may sustain you in the air, which I confess appears to me impossible, what form would you give to them?"

"Well, I have thought much of that, you may rely upon it, since the safety of my person depends on it."

"Well?"

"Well! after examining all the animals that fly, I see none but the bat that I could imitate with success."

"But, if even you could succeed in making wings, when the moment for using them came, would not your courage fail you?"

"Give me what is necessary for making them, my dear governor, and I will reply by flying away."

"But what is necessary?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! a little forge, an anvil, files, pincers, and nippers to make the springs, and a quantity of cerecloth to make the membranes."

"Good! good! now I am a little reassured; whatever be your skill, you will never succeed in fabricating all that."

"It is done," replied Benvenuto.

The governor started up, but a moment's reflection convinced him that the thing was impossible. However, impossible as it was, the idea gave him no peace. In every bird that passed his window he feared to see Benvenuto, so great is the influence of a powerful mind over an ordinary one. The same day, he sent to the most skilful mechanician in Rome, and ordered him to make him a pair of bat's wings. The man looked stupified, and did not reply, thinking that M. Giorgio had gone mad. But as M. Giorgio insisted, and as, if he committed follies, he was rich and could pay for them, the artist began his work, and in a week's time brought home a pair of magnificent wings, which, fastened to the body by a steel corset, were moved by springs, made with great ingenuity and with wonderful regularity. M. Giorgio paid the price agreed on, measured the space occupied by the wings, then went up to Benvenuto's room, and, without saying a word, ransacked the whole place, looking under the bed, up the chimney, in the palliasse, in short, leaving no corner unvisited. Then he went away, convinced that unless Benvenuto were a sorcerer, he could not possibly have hidden in his room a pair of wings like his. When he went down he found the mechanician, who had returned to point out to him, that there was at the end of each wing a circle of iron destined to maintain the legs of the man flying, in a horizontal position. Scarcely had the man gone, when M. Giorgio locked himself in, put on his wings, put his legs through their circles, laid down on his stomach and tried to fly; but in spite of all his efforts he could not succeed in quitting the ground. He then sent for the artist. "Monsieur," said he, "I have tried your wings, and they will not fly."

"How did you try?"

M. Giorgio described his efforts. The man listened gravely, and then said:—

"I am not astonished. Lying on the ground, you could not possibly get air enough; you must mount to the top of the Château St. Ange, and then boldly let yourself go into the air."

"And then you think I could fly?" "I am sure of it."

"But if you are so sure, will you not try it yourself?"

"The wings are made to suit the weight of your body, and not mine; I should require wings at least a foot and a half more from tip to tip."

All day long M. Giorgio gave sundry indications of a wandering mind, and in the evening he called all the soldiers, servants, and gaolers, and said:—

"Gentlemen, if you hear that Benvenuto Cellini is flying away, let him go, and only tell me, for I shall know well how to catch him at once; I am a true bat, and he, whatever he may say, is only a false one."

The poor governor was quite mad; but as they hoped he might improve, they deferred until the next day to inform the pope of his condition. Besides, it was a dreadful night, rainy and dark, and no one cared to go out in such weather except Benvenuto, who, from a spirit of contradiction, doubtless, had chosen that night for his escape. When he had heard ten o'clock strike, and heard the guard relieved, he fell on his knees and uttered an earnest prayer, and then set to work. First, he tore off the remaining four nail-heads. The last came off as midnight struck. Benvenuto heard the steps of the sentinels going up to the terrace, then others coming down, and all was silent.

The rain redoubled, and Benvenuto, his heart bounding with joy, heard it patter against the window He then tried the sheets of iron, and they, no longer upheld by anything, easily gave way. Then Benvenuto, lying down flat on the ground, attacked the bottom of the door with one of his modelling tools, which he had sharpened in the form of a dagger and put into a wooden handle. The bottom of the door soon yielded, for the wood was completely reduced to charcoal, and in a few minutes he had made an opening sufficiently large for him to pass through. Then he opened his statue, took out his pieces of plaited linen, rolled them round him like a belt, armed himself with his tool, formed, as we have said, into a poignard, then passed first his head, then his shoulders, then the rest of his body through the door, and stood in the corridor.

His legs trembled, so that he was forced to lean against the wall for support. His heart beat as though it would burst, and his brain was on fire. However, as all was tranquil, and nothing stirred, Benvenuto soon recovered himself, and, feeling with his hand, followed the wall of the corridor until it failed him; then he advanced his foot and touched the first step of the staircase which conducted to the roof. He mounted it carefully, trembling at the creaking of the wood under his feet; he soon felt the air and the rain beat in his face, and then his head came to the level of the roof, and he could judge of what he had to hope or fear.

The balance turned to the side of hope: the sentinel, to shelter himself from the rain, had taken refuge in his sentry-box, and as the sentinel was placed there not to watch the staircase, but the country, the back of the box was towards Benvenuto as he mounted. He advanced silently on his hands and knees, to the corner furthest from the box, and there he attached one end of his rope to a brick which stood out beyond the others, and breathed a silent prayer of "Lord, help me, since I try to help myself."

This said, he let himself slide down, hanging by his hands, and

heedless of the scratches received on his face and hands from the wall. When he felt the earth under his feet, a sentiment of joy and pride filled his breast as he looked at the immense height from which he had descended, and he murmured in a low voice, "I am free!" But this moment of hope was short. Turning, he saw before him a high wall recently built, of which he had known nothing. He thought himself lost, and in despair threw himself on the ground, but in falling he knocked against something hard; it was a long ladder. How much one minute of human life may contain of alternations between hope and fear! Benvenuto seized the ladder as a shipwrecked man seizes the spar which is to sustain him on the water.

Under ordinary circumstances two men would have had trouble to lift it, but he seized it without hesitation and drew it to the wall. He climbed to the top of the wall; but once there, he found it impossible to pull up the ladder to let it down on the other side. For an instant his head turned; then he thought of his plaited rope, and, sliding down the ladder again, he ran to where he had left it hanging. But he had tied it so well that he could not tear it from the brick to which it hung; at last, after repeated efforts, one of the four knots that fastened the strips together gave way, and Benvenuto fell backwards, bringing with him a piece of cord about a dozen feet long.

This was all he wanted; he bounded up, full of new strength, remounted the ladder, fastened the rope to the top round, and slid down. When at the end of the rope, he felt about vainly for a footing, but, looking down, he saw the ground about six feet below him, he let himself drop. He was exhausted, and his hands and legs were half stripped of their skin, and he remained where he fell for about five minutes. Then one o'clock struck, and he rose; but as he did so, he saw a sentinel approaching towards him. Benvenuto knew he must kill or be killed, and he drew his dagger; but the soldier suddenly turned his back and walked off as though he had not seen him. Benvenuto ran to the last rampart, which overlooked a fosse of about fifteen or twenty feet. Such a jump would not stop a man like Benvenuto Cellini in such a situation, and as he had left the first part of his rope on the roof, and the second on the ladder, he let himself drop. This time he fainted where he lay.

Nearly an hour passed before he recovered consciousness. For a time he seemed bewildered, then the memory of his situation returned to him. He felt a great pain in his head, and the blood had flowed over his face on to the stones where he lay. He comprehended that he was wounded, though, as he thought, not seriously; so he smiled and tried to rise, but fell back; his right leg was broken three inches above the ankle. He took off his shirt, tore it in strips, then, bringing the bones together as well as he could, he bound it with all his strength and passed the band

under his foot. Then he dragged himself on all fours to one of the gates of the city, which was about five hundred feet off. When, after half-an-hour of fearful torture, he arrived there, he found it shut; but, seeing an immense stone under the gate, he displaced it and crept through the gap which it left. But scarcely had he gone fifty feet before a troop of wandering dogs, attracted by the smell of blood, threw themselves upon him. He drew his little dagger and killed one of the fiercest of them, upon which the others threw themselves on the carcase and devoured it, while Benvenuto dragged himself to the Church della Transpontina; there he met a water carrier, with an ass loaded with water cans. He called him and said:—

"I went to see my mistress, and a circumstance obliged me to jump out of an upper window, and I broke my leg; carry me to the steps of St. Peter's and I will give you a crown."

The man took him up at once and carried him to the spot indicated, and, having received his money, left him. Then Benvenuto crawled to the house of M. de Montluc, which was but a few doors off.

M. de Montluc showed so much zeal in his favour, that in a month he cured, in another pardoned, and soon after he set off for France with Ascanio and Pagolo.

As for the poor governor, he lived and died quite mad, always believing himself to be a bat, and making useless efforts to fly.

CHAPTER IV.

SCOZZONE.

When Benvenuto Cellini arrived in France, François I. was at the Castle of Fontainebleau, with all his court; the artist therefore stopped there, and sent word to the Cardinal de Ferrara that he had arrived. The cardinal, who knew that the king waited impatiently for him, transmitted this news at once to his Majesty. That same day Benvenuto was received by the king, who, addressing him in that sweet and vigorous language which the artist wrote so well, said to him:—

"Benvenuto, pass some days in gaiety to recover from your fatigues and annoyances, and during that time we will think of some beautiful work to command from you."

Then, having lodged the artist at the château, François gave orders that he should want for nothing. Benvenuto found himself then at once in the centre of French civilization, at that time behind that of Italy, but already trying to rival, and before long surpassing it. Looking round him he could almost believe that he had never

quitted the capital of Tuscany, for he found himself surrounded by art, and by artists whom he had known at Florence.

Benvenuto wished to anticipate the king's desires, and not to wait for orders to begin the desired work. He had remarked how dear to the king his present residence seemed, and he resolved to flatter his preference by executing for him a statue which he would call the Nymph of Fontainebleau. She was to be crowned with ears of corn, oak, and vine leaves; for Fontainebleau borders on the fields, is shadowed by a forest, and rises among vines. The nymph that Benvenuto dreamed of, was to combine Ceres, Diana, and Erigona, three marvellous types blended together, and which, although distinct, were to form one; then on the pedestal were to be the triple attributes of these goddesses: and those who have seen the beautiful little figures on the statue of Perseus, know how the Florentine master executed these marvellous details.

But one of the great misfortunes of an artist is, that although he has in himself the ideal sentiment of beauty, he requires a human model for the material part of his work. Now, where could he find this model which should unite the triple beauty of the three goddesses? Certainly if, as in ancient days, in the times of Phidias and Apelles, the beauties of the day—the queens of form, had come of themselves to stand to the artist, Benvenuto would have found within the court itself what he sought.

There was a whole Olympus there, in the flower of their age; there was Catherine de Medicis, then but twenty-one; there was Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre, whom they called the fourth grace and the tenth muse; there was Madame d'Etampes, of whom we shall hear more in the course of this history, and who was called the wisest of the beautiful and the most beautiful of the wise. There was more than necessary for the artist, but the times of Phidias and Apelles were past. Benvenuto must seek elsewhere.

It was, then, with great pleasure that Benvenuto learned that the court was about to move to Paris. Unluckily, however, the court, as he himself said, travelled at that time like a funeral. Preceded by 12,000 or 15,000 horses, stopping in a place where there were but three or four houses, losing four hours every evening in pitching the tents, and four hours each morning in striking them; although they were hardly sixteen leagues from Paris, they took five days to get there. Twenty times Benvenuto had been tempted to ride on, but had always been stopped by the Cardinal de Ferrara, who said that if the king were a day without seeing him he would certainly ask after him, and would regard his departure without leave as a want of politeness. Benvenuto was forced to submit, and during the long halts, tried to kill time by drawing sketches of his nymph of Fontainebleau.

At last they arrived at Paris, where Benvenuto's first visit was to Francesco Primaticcio, who had been sent for to continue the work of Leonardo da Vinci and Rosso. He who had lived so long

in Paris must surely be able to tell him where to find what he wanted.

One passing word about Primaticcio, often called Le Bologna, from the place of his birth. He was a pupil of Giulio Romano, under whom he had studied six years, and he had now been living eight years in France, where François I. had called him by the advice of the Marquis de Mantua. He was a man, as shown by his works at Fontainebleau, of a marvellous fecundity, grand style, and great correctness of drawing; but it was long before his vast intelligence and comprehensive talent, which embraced all the highest styles of painting, were appreciated.

He painted the pictures in the chapel of Beauregard, under religious inspiration: he personified, at the Hôtel Montmorency, the principal Christian virtues; and the immensity of Fontainebleau is filled with his works. On the gilded door and in the ball-room he painted the most pleasing subjects from the mythology; in the gallery of Ulysses and the chamber of St. Louis he drew from Homer, and translated with his brush the Odyssey and a part of the Iliad. Then from the fabulous ages he passed into the heroic times and depicted history. The principal events in the life of Alexander and Romulus, and the surrender of Havre, are depicted in the grand gallery, while the cabinet of curiosities is hung with his landscapes. He has painted ninety-eight great pictures and one hundred and thirty smaller ones, in which he has in turn produced landscapes, sea pieces, historical and religious subjects, portraits, allegories, and epic poems.

He was therefore, as we see, a man worthy to understand Benvenuto, and he received him with open arms. After the first eager conversation of two friends meeting in a strange land, Benvenuto showed his sketches to Primaticcio, explained to him his ideas, and asked him if he knew of any model who would serve his purpose. Primaticcio shook his head sadly. They were no longer in Italy, that daughter of Greece who rivals her mother. France was then, as now, the land of grace, fascination, and coquetry, but it was vain to seek there for the wonderful beauty which inspired Michael Angelo and Raphaël, on the banks of the Tiber. Doubtless if, as we said before, the painter could have sought among the aristocracy, he would soon have found the type he sought; but, like shades retained beyond the Styx, they were restricted to seeing these noble forms pass in the Elysian fields, to which the entrance was forbidden.

What Primaticcio had foreseen happened. He passed in review before Benvenuto all his army of models, and not one seemed to unite the necessary qualities for the statue of which he dreamed. Then Benvenuto sent for, to the Hôtel Ferrara, where he was installed, all the Venuses, at a crown a sitting, that he could hear of, but none of them pleased him. Benvenuto was in despair, when one evening, as he was returning from supping

with his compatriots, Pierre Strozzi, the Comte de l'Anquiltera, his brother-in-law, and Galcotto Pico, nephew of the famous Pico de la Mirandole, and as he was proceeding alone along the Rue des Petits-Champs, he saw before him a beautiful and graceful young girl.

He trembled with joy, for he thought she would do to embody his dream; he followed her, therefore, until they arrived at the Rue Pellican, and there she pushed open a door, through which she quickly disappeared. Benvenuto pushed the door in his turn, and it yielded in time for him to see, at the corner of a staircase, the skirt of the dress of her he was following. He went up, and caught sight of her again through a half open door. He entered the room, and without explaining the artistic motive of his visit—without saying a single word—he walked two or three times round the astonished girl, who obeyed him mechanically when he made her raise her arms above her head in the attitude which he intended to give to his nymph.

There was in the model that Benvenuto had before his eyes little of Ceres, and less of Diana, but much of Erigona; but seeing the impossibility of uniting the three types, he resolved to confine himself to the Bacchante, and for that he had really found a model—ardent eyes, coral lips, pearly teeth, the head well set, rounded shoulders, small waist, and hands and arms which, in their small wrists and ankles, and long fingers, had a look of aristocracy which decided the artist.

"What is your name, mademoiselle?" asked he, at last, in his foreign accent, astonishing the poor child more than ever.

"Catherine, at your service, monsieur," replied she.

"Well, Mademoiselle Catherine, here is a golden crown for you; come to me to-morrow, at the Hôtel Ferrara, in the Rue St. Martin, and I will give you another."

The young girl hesitated an instant, for she feared the stranger was laughing at her. But as the crown attested his sincerity, she said—

"At what hour?" "Will ten in the morning suit you?"

"Perfectly." "Then I may reckon on you?"

"I will come."

Benvenuto bowed, as if to a duchess, and returned with a heart full of joy. He burned all his ideal sketches, and drew one from nature. Then he brought some wax which he placed on a pedestal, and which soon assumed, under his hand, the form of his nymph, so that, when the next morning Catherine presented herself at the door of the studio, a part of the work was already done. Catherine had had no idea of the intentions of Benvenuto; she was therefore astonished when the artist, showing her his statue, informed her for what she was wanted. Catherine was a merry girl; she laughed heartily, and, quite proud of standing for a goddess, designed for a king. she undressed and took the required position, with so much

grace and quietness, that Benvenuto uttered a cry of pleasure. He set to work, and his noble and powerful nature grew inspired over it. Catherine, accustomed only to vulgar souls, or *blasé* young lords, for whom she had been a plaything, looked with astonishment at the enthusiasm and inspired look of the man before her, and seemed gradually to imbibe it from him. The sitting lasted for two hours; then Benvenuto gave Catherine her crown, and told her to come at the same hour the next morning. She came ten minutes before the time, and Benvenuto was once more sublime with inspiration; under his hand, as under that of Prometheus, the clay seemed to breathe. The head of the Bacchante was already modelled, and seemed a living seed coming out of an unformed mass. Catherine smiled at her celestial sister; she had never felt so happy, and yet she knew not why. The next day, when the time came for standing, she felt the blood mount to her face; the poor child began to love, and with love came modesty.

Two days after, when the statue was finished, Benvenuto thanked Catherine, and gave her four crowns; but Catherine let them fall to the ground. The poor child dreaded to fall back to her former condition, which, since her entrance into the studio, had become odious to her. Benvenuto, who did not know what was passing in her mind, picked up the crowns and gave them back to her, telling her to come to him if ever he could be of use to her: then he went away to call Ascanio to see his statue completed. Catherine, left alone, kissed one after another all Benvenuto's tools, and went away crying bitterly.

The next day she entered the studio when Benvenuto was alone, and when he asked her what brought her, she fell on her knees and asked him if he did not want a servant.

Benvenuto had an artist's heart, that is to say, one quick in emotion; he divined what was passing in that of the poor child, raised her, and kissed her forehead. From that time Catherine was installed in the studio, which she enlivened, as we have seen, with her infantine gaiety and eternal movement. She became indispensable to every one, but most of all to Benvenuto himself. She did everything, and ordered everything; scolding and caressing Ruperta, who had seen her enter with terror, and ended by loving her like every one else.

Benvenuto having now his model ever with him, touched and retouched his statue with a care which he had hardly ever given before to anything; then he carried it to King Francis I., who was struck with admiration at it, and commanded a copy of it in silver; then he talked with Benvenuto, asking him how he liked his studio, and where it was, and dismissed him, having determined to surprise him there one morning.

We have now arrived at the time when our story opened.

The day after that on which Ascanio returned so late, thanks to

his wanderings round the Hôtel de Nesle, they heard a violent knocking at the door; Dame Ruperta rose to open it, but Scozzone (which was, it may be remembered, Benvenuto's name for Catherine) was out of the room in two bounds. An instant after, they heard her cry, in a voice half joyful and half frightened—

"Oh! mon Dieu! master; it is the king! The king himself, come to visit your studio!"

And poor Scozzone, leaving all the doors open behind her, reappeared, pale and trembling, at the door of the room where Benvenuto was working with his pupils.

CHAPTER V.

GENIUS AND ROYALTY.

BEHIND Scozzone, King Francis I. entered, giving his hand to the Duchesse d'Etampes; the King of Navarre followed with the dauphine, Catherine de Medicis. The dauphin, afterwards Henri II., followed next, with his aunt, Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre, while the suite comprised a large body of the nobility.

Benvenuto advanced to receive, without any embarassment, the kings, princes, great lords and beautiful ladies, although there were many among them the most illustrious names in France, and the most striking beauties in the world. Marguerite charmed, Madame d'Etampes fascinated, Catherine de Medicis astonished, and Diana de Poitiers dazzled. But Benvenuto was familiar with the finest types of antiquity, and of Italy in the sixteenth century, and, as the loved pupil of Michael Angelo, was also well used to kings.

"You will have to permit us to admire other things in your presence," said François to Madame d'Etampes, who smiled at the speech.

Anne de Pisseleu, Duchesse d'Etampes, who, since the return of the king from his captivity in Spain, had succeeded in his favour to the Comtesse de Châteaubriand, was then in all the *éclat* of a truly royal beauty. Straight and well made, she carried her charming head with a dignity and a sort of feline grace, between the cat and the panther; but she had also their unexpected springs and murderous instincts, although she knew well how to assume an air of candour which might have deceived the most suspicious. Nothing could be more mobile and perfidious than the face of this woman, with pale lips, a smile, sometimes caressing, sometimes terrible, and an expression, at one moment pleasing and flattering, the next fiery and angry. She had a slow way of raising her eyelids, and one never knew if they would rise to express languor or

menace. Haughty and imperious, she subjugated Francis I., and her jealousy had exacted from him that he should demand from the Comtesse de Châteaubriand the jewels that he had given to her, and the beautiful and melancholy Comtesse had, by returning them in ingots, protested against this act. To complete her character, the supple and dissimulating duchess had more than once closed her eyes when the king had seemed to distinguish some young girl of the court, whom he soon abandoned again to return to his beautiful and powerful enchantress.

"I have long wished to see you, Benvenuto," said the king; "for you have now, I think, been two months in my kingdom, and the sad pressure of business has prevented me from thinking of the nobler cares of art. But you must blame for that my brother and cousin the emperor, who does not give me an instant's peace."

"I will write to him if you wish it, sire, and will beg him to leave you to befriend the arts, since you have already proved to him that you are a great captain."

"Do you know Charles V ?" asked the King of Navarre.

"I had the honour, sire, to present to him at Rome, four years ago, a missal of my making, and to pronounce to him a discourse at the same time, by which he seemed much touched."

"And what did his Majesty say to you?"

"That he knew me already, having seen, three years before, on the pope's robe, a button which did me honour."

"Oh! I see you are spoiled for royal compliments," said François.

"It is true, sire, that I have had the pleasure of satisfying a great number of cardinals, grand-dukes, princes, and kings."

"Show me your most beautiful works, that I may see if I am not a judge more difficult to please than others."

"Sire, I have had little time, but here are a vase and bowl that I have commenced in silver, and which are, perhaps, not unworthy of your Majesty's attention."

The king examined them for about five minutes without speaking; it seemed as though the work made him forget the workman. But at last, as the ladies approached curiously—"See, ladies," said he, "what a marvel! A vase of a form so new and so bold! What beauty of pattern in the bas reliefs! I admire above all the flow of the lines. And look at these figures, how true and varied the attitudes are! Look at this one raising her arm above her head: the fugitive gesture is so truthfully seized, that we are astonished she does not continue the movement. Really, I believe the ancients never executed anything so beautiful. I remember the best works of antiquity, and those of the best artists in Italy, but nothing has made more impression on me than this. See, Madame de Navarre, this pretty child lost among the flowers, with his foot raised in the air; how life-like, graceful, and pretty it all is!"

"Oh!" cried Benvenuto, "others have complimented me, but your Majesty understands me."

"Something else?" said the king, with a sort of avidity.

"Here is a medal, representing Leda and her swan, made for the Cardinal Gabriel Cesarini; and here is a signet which I have engraved, representing St. John and St. Ambrose."

"What! you strike medals?" said Madame d'Etampes.

"Like Cavadona of Milan, madame."

"You enamel gold?" asked Marguerite.

"Like Amerigo of Florence, madame."

"You engrave seals?" inquired Catherine.

"Like Lantizco de Perouse. Did you then believe, madame, that my talent was confined to ornaments in gold, and working in silver? I know how to do a little of all, thank God. I am a tolerable military engineer, and I have twice prevented Rome from being taken. I turn a sonnet pretty well, and your Majesty has only to command from me a poem, particularly if it be in your praise, and I engage to execute it as though I were Clement Marot. As to music, which my father taught me with blows, the method succeeded, and I play the flute and cornet well enough for Clement VII. to have engaged me when I was twenty-four, as one of his musicians. I have discovered besides the secret of making an excellent powder, and I can make also admirable fire-arms and surgical instruments. If your Majesty goes to war, and wishes to employ me, you will say that I know how to manage an arquebuse and level a culverin. As a sportsman, I have killed twenty-five peacocks in one day, and as artilleryman, I disembarrassed the emperor of the Prince of Orange, and your Majesty, of the Constable de Bourbon, traitors being apparently unlucky when near me."

"And of which are you most proud," asked the dauphin; "of having killed the constable or the twenty-five peacocks?"

"I am not proud of either, monseigneur; all skill comes from God; I did but use it."

"But I was ignorant that you had already rendered me such a service," said the king; "one, by the way, which my sister Marguerite will not easily pardon you for. So it was you who killed the Constable de Bourbon? And how did it happen?"

"Mon Dieu! in a very simple manner. The army of the constable arrived suddenly before Rome and assaulted the ramparts. I went with some friends to see what was going on, and had mechanically taken my arquebuse on my shoulder. Arriving on the wall, I saw that there was nothing there to do; but, directing my arquebuse towards a place where I saw the combatants most thick, I fired at one man taller than the others. He fell, and a great tumult ensued. I had, in fact, killed the constable."

"Well, I see," replied the king, "that before consecrating your genius to me, you lent me your bravery."

Sire," replied Benvenuto, gaily, "I really believe I was born your servant. An adventure of my early infancy has always made me think so. You have a salamander in your arms, have you not?"

"Yes, with this motto—*Nutrisco et extinguo.*"

"Well, I was about five years old, and was with my father in a little room where a good fire was burning. Looking into the fire, I perceived in the midst of the flames a little animal like a lizard, playing about in the hottest part. I showed it to my father, and he, giving me a violent blow (pardon this mention of a rather brutal custom of my country), said gently to me—'I do not strike you, dear child, because you have done wrong, but that you may remember that this little animal you have seen in the fire is called a salamander. No known person has ever seen that animal but you.' Is that not, sire, a warning of fate? There are, I believe, predestinations; and I was, when twenty years of age, about to set out for England, when Pierre Toreggiano, who was to take me with him, recounted to me how he had, when a child, in a quarrel struck Michael Angelo in the face. All was over then; for the title of prince I would not have gone with the man who had raised his hand against my great sculptor. I remained in Italy, and from Italy, instead of going to England, came to France."

"And France, proud of being chosen by you, will try that you shall not regret your own country."

"Oh! my country is art—my king, he who commands the finest works."

"And have you now in your head any fine composition, Cellini?"

"Oh yes, sire, a Christ. Not a Christ on the cross, but a Christ in his glory and light, and I will imitate, as much as possible, the infinite beauty under which he showed himself to me."

"What!" said Marguerite, laughing, "besides all the kings of the earth, have you also seen the King of Heaven?"

"Yes, madame," replied Benvenuto, simply.

"Oh! tell us about it," said she.

"Willingly, madame," replied Benvenuto, with a confidence which showed that he thought it impossible he could be disbelieved. "I had seen sometime before," continued he, "Satan and all his legion of angels, whom a necromantic priest had invoked before me at the Colisseum, and whom we had really some trouble to get rid of again; but the terrible souvenir of these infernal visions was soon effaced from my mind, when, in answer to my ardent prayer, the divine Saviour of man appeared, crowned with glory, to comfort me in the miseries of my prison."

"And you are really sure, without any mixture of doubt, that Christ actually appeared to you?" asked the Queen of Navarre."

"I have no doubt, madame."

"Come, then, Benvenuto, make us a Christ for our chapel," said François.

"Sire, will your Majesty be good enough to order something else?"

"Why so?"

"Because I have vowed to make this image for God alone."

"So be it then. Well, Benvenuto, I want twelve candelabra for my table."

"Sire, you shall be obeyed."

"I should like them to be twelve silver figures."

"Sire, that will be magnificent."

"These statues shall represent six gods and six goddesses, and shall be just my height."

"Yes, sire."

"But this is a colossal work you are commanding, sire. Is it not, Signor Benvenuto?" said the Duchesse d'Etampes.

"I am never astonished, madame," replied Benvenuto.

"I shall be astonished, however, if any modern sculptor accomplish it," replied the duchess, piqued at his answer.

"I hope, however, to accomplish it as well as though I were a sculptor of antiquity," replied Benvenuto, coldly.

"Oh! you boast, M. Benvenuto."

"I never boast, madame;" and, as he said this with perfect calmness, Cellini looked at Madame d'Etampes, and the proud duchess lowered her eyes, in spite of herself, under this look so firm, confident, and yet not angry. Anne instantly felt resentment against him for this kind of power exercised over her. She had believed, until then, that beauty was the first power in the world—she had forgotten genius.

"What treasures," replied she, scornfully, "could suffice to pay such talent as yours?"

"Not mine, certainly," said François; "and àpropos, Benvenuto, I remember that you have received as yet but five hundred crowns of gold. Shall you be satisfied with what I give to my painter, Leonardo da Vinci—seven hundred golden crowns a year, I paying besides for all I order?"

"Sire, these offers are worthy of a king like François I., and, I venture to say, of an artist like Cellini. I will have, however, the boldness to address one request to your Majesty."

"It is granted beforehand, Benvenuto."

"Sire, I am badly off, and straitened for room for my work in this hotel. One of my pupils has seen a place better suited than this for any great works that your Majesty may command from me; it is the Grand-Nesle, and is the property of your Majesty. It nominally belongs to the Mayor of Paris, but he does not live there; he only occupies the Petit-Nesle, which I will willingly leave to him."

"Well! so be it, Benvenuto; install yourself in the Grand-Nesle, and I shall only have the Seine to cross to come and talk to you, and admire your works."

"How, sire!" cried Madame d'Etampes; "you deprive thus, without motive, a gentleman and a friend of mine of his possessions."

Benvenuto looked at her, and for the second time Anne lowered her eyes under this singularly penetrating glance. Then he said—

"But I am also noble, madame. My family descends from a gallant man, first captain of Julius Cæsar, called Fierino, who was from Cellino, near Montefiascone, and who has given his name to Florence, while your mayor and his ancestors have not, if my memory serves me, as yet given their name to anything. However," continued he, turning towards the king, "perhaps I was too bold; perhaps I shall excite against me powerful hatreds, which, despite your Majesty's protection, would overwhelm me at last. The Mayor of Paris has, they say, a kind of army at his command."

"I was told," replied the king, "that one day at Rome a certain goldsmith, called Cellini, kept, until he was paid, a vase which had been ordered from him by Monseigneur Farnese, then cardinal and now pope."

"It is true, sire."

"They said also, that all the cardinal's retainers came sword in hand to carry away the vase by main force."

"Still true, sire."

"But this Cellini, in ambush behind the door, his carabine on his shoulder, defended himself valiantly, and put all these people to flight, and was paid the next day by the cardinal."

"All that, sire, is quite true."

"Well; are you not that Cellini?"

"Yes, sire; and if your Majesty will continue your kindness to me I fear no one."

"Go on, then, straight before you," said the king, smiling.

Madame d'Etampes was silent; but from that moment she swore a mortal hatred to Cellini—the hatred of an offended woman.

"Sire, one last favour," said Cellini. "I cannot present to you all my workmen—I have ten, French and German—all brave and skilful; but here are my two pupils, whom I brought from Italy with me—Pagolo and Ascanio. Advance, Pagolo, and raise your head, and look not impudent, but fearless, like an honest man, who knows he has done nothing to blush for. Pagolo wants invention, perhaps, sire, and also, to some extent, ardour; but he is an exact and conscientious artist, who works slowly, but well; understands my ideas and executes them correctly. Now here is Ascanio, my noble pupil and beloved child. He has certainly not the vigour of creation which would depict armies fighting on a bas relief, or design powerfully on the edge of a vase the claws of a lion or the teeth of a tiger; nor has he the power of inventing monstrous chimeras and impossible dragons; but his soul, which resembles his face, has the instinct of a divine ideal. Ask him to mould for you an angel, or to group some nymphs, and nothing can sur-

pass his exquisite poetry and grace. With Pagolo I have four arms, with Ascanio I have two souls; and since he loves me, I am very happy to have near me a heart so pure and devoted as his."

While his master spoke thus, Ascanio stood near him, modestly, but without embarrassment, in an attitude full of grace, and Madame d'Etampes could not turn her eyes from the young and charming Italian, who seemed a living copy of Apollo.

"If Ascanio," said she, "understands beautiful things so well, and will come one morning to my hotel, I will furnish him with jewels and gold, of which he could make me some marvellous flowers."

Ascanio bowed with a smile of thanks.

"And I," said the king, "assign to him and to Pagolo one hundred golden crowns a-year."

"I promise that they shall earn their money, sire," said Benvenuto.

"But who is that with the long eyelashes, hiding in that corner?" said François, noticing Scozzone for the first time.

"Oh! do not mind her, sire," replied Benvenuto; "she is the only beautiful thing in the studio that I do not like to be looked at."

"Ah! you are jealous, M. Benvenuto."

"Mon Dieu! sire, yes; and, without daring to institute a comparison, would you not be furious if any one thought too much about Madame d'Etampes? Well, Scozzone is my duchess."

The duchess bit her lips, the courtiers smiled, and the king laughed aloud.

"Well, Benvenuto," said he, "you have a right to be jealous if you like, and the king understands the artist. Adieu, my friend; I recommend my statues to you. You will naturally begin with Jupiter, and when you have finished the model, you must show it to me. Adieu! and I wish you success with the Hôtel de Nesle."

"How shall I enter the Louvre, sire, when I wish to show you my model?"

"Your name shall be mentioned at the doors, with orders to admit you to my presence."

Cellini bowed, and, with Ascanio and Pagolo, accompanied the king and court to the door. Arrived there, he kneeled down and kissed the hand of François.

"Sire," said he, "you have already, by the intervention of M. de Montluc, saved me from captivity, perhaps from death; you have bestowed on me riches, have honoured my poor studio by your presence; but what I feel most grateful for, is your magnificent appreciation of my dreams. We work ordinarily only for a few *élite*, disseminated through centuries; but I have the happiness of having found a living and enlightened judge. Let me call myself your Majesty's goldsmith."

"My goldsmith, my artist, and my friend, Benvenuto, if this

title appears to you not more to be disdained than the others. Adieu, or rather, *Au revoir.*"

Of course all the princes and lords—every one, except Madame d'Etampes—followed the king's example, and overwhelmed Cellini with friendship and praises. When all were gone, and Benvenuto remained with his pupils, they both thanked him—Ascanio with enthusiasm, Pagolo with constraint.

"Do not thank me, my children," said he; "it is not worth while. But stay; if you believe you are really under some obligation to me, I wish, as the occasion offers, to make a request to you on a subject very near my heart. You heard what I said to the king about Catherine; she is necessary to me as my life, to me as an artist, because she is so good and so willing a model; and to me as a man, because I believe she loves me. Well! then I beg you, although she is beautiful and you are both young, never turn your thoughts towards her. There are plenty of pretty girls in the world; do not, therefore, distress me, nor betray my friendship, by casting on Scozzone too bold a glance; and even in my absence watch over her and counsel her like brothers. I beg this of you; for I know myself, and I feel that if I discovered anything wrong, I should kill both her and her accomplice."

"Master," said Ascanio, "be easy; I respect you as my master, and love you like a father."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Pagolo, clasping his hands, "Heaven forbid that I should dream of such infamy. Do I not know that I owe everything to you; and would it not be an abominable crime to abuse your confidence, and repay your benefits by such cowardly perfidy?"

"Thanks, my friends; thanks a thousand times," cried Benvenuto, pressing their hands. "I am content, and I have faith in you. Now, Pagolo, return to your work; for I have promised to M. de Villeroi that he shall have to-morrow the seal on which you are working; while Ascanio and I will go and see the property which the king has been graciously pleased to give to us, and of which, next Sunday, we will take possession by some means. Come, Ascanio; come and let us see if this famous Hôtel de Nesle, which appeared to you so suitable from the exterior, is equally good within."

And then, with a last glance round, to see that every one was working, and a tap on the round rosy cheek of Scozzone, Benvenuto took his pupil's arm and went out with him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE USE OF DUENNAS.

SCARCELY had they taken ten steps in the street, when they met a man about fifty years old, slight and small in figure, but with a fine face.

"I was going to your house, Benvenuto," said the new comer, whom Ascanio saluted with respect, and to whom Benvenuto gave his hand cordially.

"Was it for anything important, my dear Francesco?" said he; "if so, I will return with you; if not, come with me."

"It was to give you advice, Benvenuto."

"Speak, then; advice from a friend is always welcome."

"But what I have to say to you can only be said when you are alone."

"This young man is like myself, Francesco; so speak."

"I should have done so before this, had I thought it right."

"I will retire, master," said Ascanio.

"Well, then, go alone where we were going together, my dear boy; if you approve, it will satisfy me. Examine everything in detail; see if the studio will have a good light, if the court-yard will be convenient for casting, and if we shall be able to separate our working room from that of the apprentices; and do not forget the tennis court."

Benvenuto then passed his arm through that of the stranger, and retraced his steps homewards, leaving Ascanio standing in the Rue St. Martin. Indeed, there was plenty in this commission to trouble the mind of the young man. His agitation had been great when he thought he had to go with his master; how much more when he was told to go alone? Thus he, who for two Sundays had seen Colombe without daring to follow her, and on the third had followed her without daring to speak to her, was about to present himself at her house, and for what? To visit the Hôtel de Nesle, of which Benvenuto intended, on the following Sunday, to deprive her father. The position was awkward for any one, but terrible for a lover.

Luckily it was some way from the Rue St. Martin to the Hôtel de Nesle; had it been close, he could not have gone in; but he had half a mile to walk, so he went on. Nothing familiarises with danger like the time or distance which separates us from it, and to all sanguine minds reflection is a powerful auxiliary. Ascanio was of this class. It was not then the fashion to be disgusted with life when you had scarcely entered it, and all feelings were frankly

acknowledged and displayed; joy by laughter, grief by tears, and no young man was ashamed of either.

Now, in Ascanio's trouble there was a degree of happiness. He had only reckoned on seeing Colombe on the following Sunday, and he was going to see her that very day. It was six days gained; and six days of waiting are, we know, six centuries to a lover. Thus, as he approached the house, the thing became more and more easy to him; it was certainly he who had advised Benvenuto to ask the hotel from the king; but could Colombe be angry with him for trying to live near her? Certainly, the installation of the goldsmith in the old palace could only take place by the dispossession of her father, who regarded it as his; but was the injury a real one, since M. d'Estourville had never lived there? Besides, Benvenuto could pay grandly for his lodging; a vase to the mayor, and a necklace for the daughter (and Ascanio promised himself to make the latter), would doubtless smooth over everything. Ascanio had seen grand dukes, kings, and popes, who would almost have sold their crowns, their sceptres, or their tiaras, to buy one of the marvellous productions from his master's hands. Therefore, after all it would be M. d'Estourville who would be indebted to Benvenuto; for his master was so generous, that if M. d'Estourville behaved well, Benvenuto, Ascanio was certain, would repay him royally. By the time he had arrived at the end of the Rue St. Martin, Ascanio looked on himself as a messenger of peace between two rival powers. However, in spite of this conviction, so strange are lovers, he was not sorry to lengthen his route by some minutes; and instead of crossing the Seine in a boat, he went along the quay, and passed over the Pont aux Moulins. In spite of this, however, he soon found himself opposite the Hôtel de Nesle. Arrived there, when he saw the little arched door through which he had to pass; when he saw the charming little Gothic palace, which showed its turrets above the wall; when he thought that behind the Venetian blinds, half closed on account of the heat, was his beautiful Colombe; all the scaffolding of rich reveries built upon the road vanished like those buildings which we fancy in the clouds, and which the wind disperses in an instant, and he found himself face to face with the reality, and the reality was not reassuring.

However, after a pause of a few minutes, Ascanio felt that he must make up his mind to do something, and all he had to do was to enter the hotel. So he advanced and raised the knocker; but Heaven knows when he would have let it fall again, had not the door opened at that moment, and he found himself confronting a man of about thirty years of age, who looked half valet and half peasant. It was the gardener of M. d'Estourville.

Each drew back, then the gardener said: "What do you want?"

Ascanio, forced to speak, called up all his courage, and replied bravely: "I want to see the hotel."

"See the hotel, and for what?" "In the king's name."

"In the king's name! Mon Dieu! is the king going to take it from us?"

"Perhaps," replied Ascanio.

"What does that mean?"

"My friend, I have no account to render to you," said Ascanio.

"That is true. To whom do you wish to speak?"

"Is M. d'Estourville here?" asked Ascanio, who knew perfectly well that he was not.

"No, monsieur; he is at the Châtelet."

"Then, who represents him in his absence?"

"Monsieur, there is his daughter, Mademoiselle Colombe."

Ascanio felt himself redden.

"And then," continued the gardener, "there is also Madame Perrine. Will Monsieur speak to her or to Mademoiselle Colombe?"

This question was very simple, and yet it produced a terrible struggle in the mind of Ascanio. He opened his mouth to say he wished to speak to Mademoiselle Colombe, and then, as if her name could not pass his lips, asked for Dame Perrine. The gardener bowed his head in token of obedience, and advanced across the court-yard to the inner door of the hotel, followed by Ascanio. They crossed a second court, then passed through another door, ascended some steps, and traversed a long gallery, after which the gardener opened the door and said—

"Dame Perrine, here is a young man who wishes to go over the hotel in the king's name."

And he drew back and gave place to Ascanio, but he leaned against the wall, and a cloud passed over his eyes; a thing most likely, but still of which Ascanio had never thought, had happened, Dame Perrine and Colombe were together, and Ascanio stood before them both. Dame Perrine was spinning at her wheel, and Colombe was working tapestry. Both raised their heads at once and looked towards the door. Colombe recognized Ascanio instantly. She had expected him, although her reason told her that he would not come. As for him, when he saw the eyes of the young girl fixed upon him, although with an expression of infinite sweetness, he thought he was going to die. He had foreseen a thousand difficulties, and dreamed of numberless obstacles before arriving at his beloved; these difficulties were to strengthen him—obstacles to exalt him—and now, on the contrary, all had gone smoothly, and he found himself suddenly in her presence; and of all the fine discourse that he had prepared, and of which the ardent eloquence was to astonish and soften her, he could not find a phrase, a word, or a syllable.

Colombe, on her side, remained motionless and mute. These two young and pure beings, who seemed to be drawn towards each other irresistibly, and already to feel that they belonged to each other, frightened at this first rencontre, trembled, hesitated, and remained silent. It was Dame Perrine, who, half rising from her

chair, drawing out her distaff, and leaning on her wheel, was the first to break the silence.

"What did that Raimbault say?" cried the worthy duenna. "Did you hear, Colombe?" Then, as Colombe did not reply, "What do you want here, my young master?" continued she, advancing towards Ascanio. "But, mon Dieu! it is the gallant gentleman, who, for the last three Sundays, has so politely offered me holy water at the church door. What do you want, my friend?"

"I wished to speak to you," stammered Ascanio.

"To me alone?" asked Dame Perrine, mincingly.

"To you alone," replied Ascanio, thinking all the time what a fool he was.

"Then, come this way, young man," said she, opening a door and signing to Ascanio to follow her. He followed; but as he did so, he threw on Colombe one of those long looks into which lovers contrive to put so much meaning, and which, however unintelligible they are to the bystander, are always understood by the person to whom they are addressed. Doubtless Colombe understood the meaning; for her eyes having met those of the young man, she blushed prodigiously, and then, feeling that she did so, she lowered her eyes to her tapestry, and began to spoil a flower. Ascanio made a step towards her, but at that moment Dame Perrine turned and called the young man, and he was forced to follow. Scarcely had he left the room when Colombe abandoned her needle, let her arms fall, and uttered a long sigh of happiness and regret. As for Ascanio, he was in a bad humour, with Benvenuto for giving him the commission, with himself for not having profited better by it, and with Dame Perrine, for making him leave the room just when he thought Colombe's eyes told him to stop. Therefore, when he was alone with the duenna, and she asked him again the object of his visit, he replied very decidedly—

"The object of my visit, my dear lady, is to beg you to show me the Hôtel de Nesle, from one end to the other."

"Show you the Hôtel de Nesle! and why do you wish to see it?"

"To see if it will suit us, and if it be worth while to disturb ourselves in order to move here."

"How! to move here! have you then hired it from M. le Prevôt."

"No, but his Majesty has given it to us."

"His Majesty has given it to you!" cried Dame Perrine, more and more astonished.

"Yes, unreservedly."

"To you?" "Nay, not quite, good lady, but to my master."

"And who is your master, may I be allowed to inquire, young man?—some great foreign lord, no doubt."

"Better than that, Dame Perrine, a great artist come expressly from Florence to serve his most Christian Majesty."

"Ah!" said the good lady, who did not understand very well, "what does your master do?"

"What does he do? everything; he makes rings for the fingers of young girls; ewers for the tables of kings; statues for temples; then, at odd times, he besieges or defends towns, according as it is his caprice to make an emperor tremble, or to reassure a pope."

"Mon Dieu! and what is he called?"

"He is called Benvenuto Cellini."

"It is odd, but I do not know that name; but what does he call himself?"

"He is a goldsmith."

Dame Perrine looked at Ascanio with astonished eyes.

"A goldsmith!" murmured she; "and you believe M. d'Estourville will yield up his palace to a goldsmith?"

"If he does not yield it, we will take it from him."

"By force?" "Yes."

"But your master will never dare to oppose M. d'Estourville?"

"He has held out against three dukes and two popes."

"Bon Dieu! two popes! he is not a heretic, I hope."

"No, he is as good a Catholic as you or I, Dame Perrine, so reassure yourself, for Satan is not in the least our ally; but in default of him, we have the king."

"Ah! but M. le Prevôt has better than that."

"What has he?" "He has Madame d'Etampes."

"Then, the sides are equal."

"And if M. d'Estourville refuses?"

"M. Benvenuto will take it."

"And if M. d'Estourville entrenches himself here?"

"We will besiege him."

"M. le Prevôt has twenty-four armed men."

"M. Benvenuto Cellini has ten apprentices; so the sides are still equal."

"But, personally, M. d'Estourville is a clever man at arms; at the tourney which took place on the king's marriage, he was one of those who kept his place, and all those who entered the lists against him were overthrown."

"Well! Dame Perrine, that is just the man Benvenuto wants, for he has never yet met with his master; and the only difference between him and M. d'Estourville is, that all those who fought against your master were soon up again, as gay and as well as ever, while those who fight with my master never rise again, but a few days after are dead and buried."

"All this will end badly," murmured Dame Perrine; "they say, young man, that terrible things always pass in a town taken by assault."

"Reassure yourself, Dame Perrine; we shall be merciful conquerors," said Ascanio, laughing.

"What I mean, my dear boy," said Dame Perrine—who wished to make a friend of one of the besiegers—"is, that I fear blood will be spilt; for, as to your near neighbourhood, you know it could not

but be agreeable to us; for really we want a little society in this wretched solitude, to which M. d'Estourville condemns his daughter and me, as though we were two poor nuns, although neither she nor I have pronounced any vows, thank Heaven. Now, 'it is not good for man to be alone,' say the Scriptures, and when it says man, it also means woman; is that not your opinion, young man?"

"Certainly."

"And we are quite alone, and consequently sad in this immense place."

"But do you never receive any visitors?"

"Mon Dieu! no, we are worse off than nuns, as I told you. Nuns, at least, have relations and friends who come to see them through a grating. They have the refectory, where they meet and talk. It is not very amusing, I know, but still, it is something. Now, we have only M. le Prevôt, who comes from time to time to scold his daughter for growing too beautiful, I believe—for I am sure that is her only crime, poor child!—and to scold me, for not watching her severely enough. Good Heavens! when she never sees a living soul, and when, besides what she says to me, she never opens her mouth but to say her prayers. Therefore, I beg you, young man, tell no one that you have been received here, and that, after having visited the Grand-Nesle, you returned to chat with us at the Petit-Nesle."

"What! shall I then return with you? I shall then——" But Ascanio stopped, fearing lest his joy should carry him too far.

"I do not think it would be polite, young man, after having presented yourself before Mademoiselle Colombe—who certainly in her father's absence is the mistress of the house, and having asked to speak to me alone—I do not think it would be polite, I say, to leave the place without a word of adieu to her. However, if you do not like it, you are free, of course, to go out directly by the door of the Grand-Nesle."

"No, no," cried Ascanio. "Peste! Dame Perrine, I hope I have been brought up sufficiently well, always to be courteous to ladies. But now, let me examine the place at once, for I am in a great hurry."

And indeed, now that Ascanio knew that he was to return to the Petit-Nesle, he was in a great hurry to have done with his task. And, as Dame Perrine was always in dread of being surprised by the mayor when she least expected him, she did not wish to detain Ascanio; so, taking down a bunch of keys which hung behind a door, she walked before him. Let us now throw with Ascanio a glance over the Hôtel de Nesle, where the principal events of our story will henceforth take place.

The hotel occupied, on the left bank of the Seine, the place where the Hôtel de Nevers afterwards stood, and where since then the mint has been built. It terminated Paris on the south-west; for

beyond its walls were only to be seen the fosse of the town, and the verdant meadows of the Pré-aux-Clercs. It was built towards the end of the twelfth century by Amaury, Seigneur of Nesle in Picardy, of whom Philippe-le-Bel bought it in the year 1308; it was then made into a royal château. In 1520, the tower, of bloody and luxurious memories, had been separated to form the quay, and had remained on the bank of the river, isolated and sad, like a sinner doing penance. But, fortunately, the Hôtel de Nesle was vast enough for this loss not to be apparent. The hotel was nearly as large as a village; a high wall, in which was pierced one large arched door and a smaller one, separated it from the quay. One entered first into a vast court-yard surrounded by walls; this second quadrangular wall had a door on the left and a door at the bottom. If one entered, as Ascanio had done, by the door at the left, one found a charming little edifice in the gothic of the fourteenth century; this was the Petit-Nesle, which had a separate garden. If one passed in by the door at the bottom, one saw on the right the Grand-Nesle, built of stone, and with two turrets, with its pointed roofs, its high windows, its coloured glass, and its twenty weather-cocks. Then, if you still advanced, you lost yourself in all sorts of gardens, in which you found a tennis court, a foundry, and an arsenal; after which came the poultry-yards, cow-houses, and stables, enough for three large farms in our days. It was all, it must be confessed, much neglected, and badly kept, as Raimbault and his two assistants were barely sufficient to keep in order the garden of the Petit-Nesle, where Colombe cultivated flowers and Dame Perrine cabbages. But all was vast, well lighted and well built, and a very little trouble and expense would make of it the most magnificent studio in the world. Even had it not been so perfectly suitable, Ascanio would have been delighted with it; the principal thing for him being to be near Colombe. The visit was short; Ascanio rapidly saw and appreciated everything. Dame Perrine, after vainly trying to follow him, had given him the bunch of keys, which he now returned to her, and then said—

"And now, Dame Perrine, I am at your orders."

"Well! then let us return to the Petit-Nesle, since you agree with me that it is polite."

"Oh! by all means, it would be very rude not to do so."

"But, not a word to Colombe about the object of your visit."

"Oh! mon Dieu! then of what shall I speak to her."

"Oh! there is no need of any embarrassment. Did you not say that you were a goldsmith?"

"Doubtless."

"Well! speak to her of jewels; it is a subject which always pleases the wisest. If she is a daughter of Eve, she loves finery. Besides, she has so little amusement in her retreat, that it is a charity to amuse her a little. It is true that the amusement which

would suit her age would he a good marriage. Therefore, every time her father comes to the house I whisper in his ear, 'Marry this poor little girl; why do you not marry her?'"

So speaking, Dame Perrine retraced her steps to the Petit-Nesle, and, followed by Ascanio, re-entered the room where they had left Colombe. She was still sitting pensive and thoughtful, in the same position in which we left her. Only, some twenty times her eyes had been turned towards the door through which the handsome young man had disappeared, as if expecting his return. Yet, no sooner did the door turn on its hinges, than Colombe resumed her work, with so much *empressement* that neither Ascanio nor Dame Perrine could imagine it had ever been interrupted.

"I bring back to you our giver of holy water, my dear Colombe for it is he. I was about to send him away, through the door of the Grand-Nesle, when he observed to me that he had not taken leave of you, which was quite true; for you, neither of you, said a single word to the other just now, and yet neither of you are dumb."

"Dame Perrine," interrupted Colombe, trembling.

"Well! there is no need to blush like that; M. Ascanio is an honest young man. Besides, he is, it appears, a good artist in jewels, precious stones, and ornaments, which are always to the taste of pretty young girls. He will come and show you some, my child, if you like."

"I want nothing," murmured Colombe.

"Not now, possibly; but it is to be hoped you will not die a recluse in this wretched retreat. You are now sixteen, Colombe, and the day will come when you will be a beautiful *fiancée* to some one, who will give you all sorts of jewels; and then, when you are a great lady, you will want to buy others. Well, you may as well give the preference to this young man as to another."

Colombe was in agonies. Ascanio, who was not particularly pleased at this speech of Dame Perrine's, now addressed Colombe for the first time.

"Oh! mademoiselle," said he, "do not refuse me the favour of bringing you some of my works; it seems to me now as though I made them for you, and dreamed of you as I did them. Oh! yes, believe it, for we artists mingle our dreams with the gold, silver, and precious stones. In the diadems that crown your heads, in the bracelets that clasp your arms, in the necklaces that caress your shoulders, in the birds or the angels which hang from your ears, we often express our respectful adoration."

At these words Colombe's heart dilated, for Ascanio, so long silent, spoke at last, and spoke as she had dreamed he must speak; for, without raising her eyes, the young girl felt his ardent gaze upon her, and even the foreign accent of his sweet voice added a singular charm to his words, an irresistible accent to the harmonious language of love.

"I know well," continued Ascanio, his looks still fixed on Colombe, "I know well that we add nothing to your beauty. But at least we surround your grace with what is suitable to it, and console ourselves for our inferiority, by thinking that we adorn you."

"Oh, monsieur," replied Colombe, "your beautiful things would probably be not only strange, but useless to me. I live in solitude and obscurity, and so far from this distressing me, I confess I love it, and would wish always to stay here; and yet I should like to see your works, on their own account, not to wear them, but to admire."

And, trembling for fear she had said too much, Colombe bowed, and retreated so quickly, that it looked like a flight.

"Well, that will do," said Dame Perrine; "she acknowledges to some little interest in these things. It is true that you speak like a book, young man. Yes; I really believe you must have in your country, secrets to charm people; for you enlisted me on your side at once, and I actually trust that my master will not be too strong for you. *Au revoir*, young man; go and tell your master to take care of M. d'Estourville, for he is a very obstinate man, and very powerful at court. Therefore, if your master would believe me, he would renounce his project of living here, and, above all, of taking it by force. As for you, we shall see you again, shall we not? But, above all, do not mind Colombe; she is, from her mother's fortune alone, richer than is necessary to satisfy every fancy she may take into her head. And mind to bring with you also a few more simple things; perhaps she might think of making me a little present. I am not yet, thank God, of an age to be past such things. You hear, do you not?"

And she laid her hand upon his arm. At the touch, Ascanio gave a start, like a man suddenly awakened. Indeed he seemed to be in a dream. He could hardly realize that he had been with Colombe, and that the white apparition whose melodious voice still sounded in his ears, whose slight form still seemed before his eyes, was really her for a look from whom he felt ready to give his life. Thus, full of present happiness and hope for the future, he promised Dame Perrine everything she liked. What mattered it to him? He was ready to give all he was worth, in order to revisit Colombe. Then he took leave, promising to return on the morrow.

As he left the house, he came against two men just entering. He fancied one to be the mayor, and he felt grieved at his imprudence for having stayed so long, fearing that blame might fall on Colombe. Returning to the workshop, he found Benvenuto very thoughtful. The man whom they had met in the street was Primaticcio, who had come to warn him that, during the king's visit, the imprudent artist had managed to make a mortal enemy of Madame d'Etampes.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIANCE AND A FRIEND.

One of the two men entering the hotel as Ascanio left it, was indeed M. Robert d'Estourville; as for the other, we shall soon know who he was. Thus, five minutes after, as Colombe was standing thoughtfully in her own room, where she had taken refuge, Dame Perrine entered precipitately, to announce to the young girl that her father was waiting for her.

"My father!" cried Colombe, in terror—then to herself, "Mon Dieu! can he have met him?"

"Yes, your father, my dear child," replied Dame Perrine, "and with him another old gentleman whom I do not know."

"An old gentleman!" cried Colombe, terrified by instinct. "Mon Dieu! Dame Perrine, what can that mean? It is the first time for years that he has come here accompanied by any one else."

However, as, in spite of the young girl's fears, it was necessary to obey, as she knew well her father's impatient character, she summoned up her courage and returned to the sitting-room, which she entered with a smile on her lips; for, in spite of her fear, she really loved her father, and the days when he visited the Hôtel de Nesle seemed always happy ones to her, who led so solitary and uniform a life. She advanced holding out her arms; but her father neither gave her time to embrace him, nor to speak, but, taking her by the hand and leading her up to the stranger, who was leaning against a great fireplace full of flowers—

"Dear friend," said he, "I present to you my daughter." Then turning to his daughter, "Colombe," said he, "here is the Comte d'Orbec, the king's treasurer, and your future husband!" Colombe uttered a feeble cry, and leaned on a chair for support.

To comprehend how terrible this mandate seemed to Colombe, more especially in her present state of mind, we must know what the Comte d'Orbec was like.

Certainly, M. d'Estourville, Colombe's father, was not handsome; there was in his thick eyebrows, which were ready to frown at the smallest opposition, an air of hardness, and in his squat person something heavy and *gauche*, which was not prepossessing; but near the Comte d'Orbec he looked like Michael the archangel near the dragon. At least his square head, and strongly-marked features, announced resolution and force, while his small lynx eyes, grey and lively, indicated intelligence; but the Comte d'Orbec, lank, dry, and lean, with his long spider-like arms, his shrill voice, and snail-like movements, was not ugly but hideous: an ugliness at once wicked and stupid-looking. Thus, at the

aspect of this frightful creature, presented to her as a husband, when her heart, her eyes, and her thoughts were still full of the handsome young man whom she had just seen in that very room, Colombe, as we have said, could not repress a cry, and then she stood pale and trembling, looking with dread at her father.

"I ask your pardon, my dear friend," said the prevôt, "for Colombe's embarrassment; she is a little recluse, who has never left this place for two years, the air of the present time not being very good, as you know, for pretty young girls; then, to tell the truth, I had never spoken to her of our projects, which was besides needless, as my wishes have no need to wait for any one's approval, and she does not know that you are with your name, and the favours of Madame d'Etampes, in a position to reach the highest rank; but after reflecting on this, she will appreciate the honour that you do us in allying your old illustrious family to our young nobility; she will learn that friends during forty years——"

"Enough, my dear sir," interrupted the comte; then addressing himself to Colombe, with that familiar and insolent assurance which contrasted so well with the timidity of poor Ascanio, he said, "Come, come, my child, and recall to your cheeks those pretty colours which suit you so well. Oh! mon Dieu! I know what a young girl is, and even what a young woman is, for I have already been married twice, *ma petit.* Come, you must not look so troubled; I do not frighten you, I hope," said he, twisting his meagre mustachios; "but your father was wrong to announce me as your husband so brusquely—a title which always agitates a young heart when heard for the first time; but you will end by pronouncing it yourself with your own pretty mouth. What! you grow pale again. Good Heavens! I believe she is going to faint." And he held out his arms to sustain Colombe, but she started back as though it had been a serpent offering to touch her, and rallying her courage, said—

"Pardon, monsieur, pardon—my father—it is nothing; but I hoped, I believed——"

"What did you hope and believe? Let us hear!" cried her father, in an irritated tone.

"That you would permit me to stay always with you, my father. Since my mother's death, you have only my affections, my care to look to, and I thought——"

"Hold your tongue, Colombe," replied her father imperiously; "I am not yet old enough to need a nurse, and you are of an age to be married."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" said d'Orbec, "accept me without so much fuss, *ma mie.* With me you will be as happy as possible, and plenty will envy you, I can assure you. I am rich, mon Dieu! and I shall wish you to do me honour; you shall go to court with jewels which will make—I do not say the queen, but Madame d'Etampes, envious." At the word "jewels" Colombe coloured

deeply, and she answered, in spite of her father's menacing looks—

"I will at least ask my father, monseigneur, for time to reflect on your proposition."

"What is that?" cried M. d'Estourville, violently. "Not an hour, not a minute. You are from this moment the comte's *fiancée*, do you hear? and you should be his wife this evening, if in an hour he was not forced to set out for Normandy; and you know that my wish is law. Reflect, *sarpejeu!* D'Orbec, let us leave this little fool. From this moment she is yours, my friend, and you can claim her when you like." D'Orbec wished to stay to add a few more words, but d'Estourville passed his arm through his, and led him away; so he contented himself with bestowing on Colombe one of his wicked smiles, and went out. Behind them Dame Perrine entered, having heard the prevôt's voice raised, and guessing that he had been treating his daughter to one of his accustomed scoldings, she arrived in time to receive Colombe in her arms.

"Oh! mon Dieu!" cried the poor child, "mon Dieu! must it all finish thus? Oh, my golden dreams! Oh! my hopes! all, then, is lost, vanished, and it only remains to me to die!"

We need not ask if these exclamations, joined to the paleness and feebleness of Colombe, frightened Dame Perrine, and at the same time awakened her curiosity. Colombe then recounted, with tears more bitter than she had ever shed in her life, what had just passed. Dame Perrine allowed that the bridegroom was neither young nor handsome; but as, in her opinion, the worst misfortune that could happen to a woman was to remain unmarried, she argued with Colombe that a husband, old and ugly, but rich and powerful, was better than none; but as this theory revolted Colombe, she retired to her room, leaving Dame Perrine, whose imagination was very lively, to build a thousand schemes for the future, when she should be raised from the rank of duenna to Mademoiselle Colombe, to that of *dame de compagnie* to the Comtesse d'Orbec. During this time the two gentlemen were making, in their turn, the tour of the Grand-Nesle. It would have been a strange thing if the walls, which some people say have ears, had also eyes and a tongue, and recounted to those who entered, what they had seen and heard from those who had just gone out. But as the walls kept silent, and only looked at the pair, smiling, perhaps, after the manner of walls, the treasurer spoke:—

"Really," said he, "*la petite* will do very well: she is the sort of wife I want, my dear d'Estourville; well-behaved, and ignorant. When the first time has passed, we shall have fair weather, believe me. I know that all young girls dream of a husband, young, handsome, rich, and intellectual. Ah! mon Dieu! I have at least half the qualities wished for, and few men can say as much." Then, passing from his future wife to his future possessions, he

went on in the same way: "I like the Grand-Nesle: on my honour, it is a magnificent abode; we shall do wonderfully here, my wife and I. This will do for our private habitation; this for my offices; that for my people. All is rather out of order, but with some expense, which we will find means to make the king pay, it will do excellently. *Apropos*, d'Estourville, are you quite sure of this property? You ought to get your claim recognized; for, if I remember rightly, the king never gave it to you."

"No, that is true; but he let me take it, and that is the same thing."

"Yes; but if some one else played you a trick, and applied formally for it?"

"Oh! that would be badly received; and I am so sure of Madame d'Etampes, that I would make any one repent of his interference. No, I am quite easy about it; the hotel belongs to me as truly, my dear friend, as Colombe belongs to you; set off, then, in peace, and return quickly."

As he finished these words, of the truth of which neither of them had any reason to doubt, a third personage, conducted by the gardener, Raimbault, appeared on the scene. This was also an aspirer to the hand of Colombe, but a rejected one. He was a great *blond* fellow with a bright colour, insolent, self-sufficient, talkative, full of impertinence to women, who, however, often used him as a cloak to their real intrigues, proud of his position as secretary to the king, which permitted him to approach his Majesty in the same manner as his greyhounds, his paroquets, and his apes. M. d'Estourville was not deceived by the apparent favour and superficial familiarity he enjoyed near the king, which he owed chiefly to the lax extension which he allowed to his duties. Besides, the Vicomte de Marmagne had long since run through all his patrimony, and had no fortune but what he owed to the king's liberality, which might stop at any time, and M. d'Estourville knew better than to trust, in anything of importance, to the caprices of this very capricious king. He had, therefore, refused the offer of the vicomte, avowing to him confidentially, and as a secret, that his daughter's hand had long been promised to another. Thanks to this confidence, which prevented his taking offence, the Vicomte de Marmagne and M. Robert d'Estourville had remained in appearance the best friends in the world, though since that time the vicomte detested the mayor, who on his side mistrusted the vicomte, who, in spite of his affable and smiling air, had been unable to hide his rancour from a man so accustomed to read hearts and minds as was M. d'Estourville.

As for the Comte d'Orbec, Marmagne had almost quarrelled with him; it was one of those court enmities which are visible to all eyes. D'Orbec despised Marmagne because he had no fortune, and Marmagne despised d'Orbec, because he was old, and had consequently lost the power of pleasing women, and they hated each other, because they had so often crossed each other's path.

Therefore, as soon as they met, the two courtiers saluted each other with that cold and sardonic smile seen only in the antechambers of palaces, and which means—"Ah! if we were not both cowards, one of us would long since have ceased to live." The only thing which could have united them momentarily, would have been to injure some third person.

D'Orbec now took leave, and the mayor was left alone with the vicomte.

"Well, my dear friend," said Marmagne, "you look very joyful."

"And you, my dear Marmagne, look very serious."

"Ah! my poor d'Estourville, the misfortunes of my friends afflict me as much as if they were my own."

"Yes, yes, I know your heart."

"And when I saw you so joyful with your future son-in-law, the Comte d'Orbec—for your daughter's marriage with him is no longer a secret—and I congratulate you on it——"

"You know I told you I had long promised the hand of Colombe."

"Yes; I do not know really how you can consent to separate from such a charming child."

"Oh! I shall not separate from her; my son-in-law will inhabit the Grand-Nesle, while I, whenever I can, shall live in the Petit-Nesle."

"Poor friend!" said Marmagne, shaking his head sadly, and laying one hand on the mayor's arm, while with the other he pretended to wipe away a tear which did not exist.

"What do you mean? What have you to announce to me?"

"Am I the first to announce it to you?"

"What? speak!"

"You know, my dear friend, one must be philosophical in this world. There is an old proverb, that our poor human race ought incessantly to have in their mouths, for it includes all wisdom."

"And what is this proverb?"

"'Man proposes, and God disposes,' my dear friend."

"And what have I proposed of which God has disposed? Come, finish and have done with it."

"You have destined the Grand-Nesle for your daughter and son-in-law?"

"Doubtless, and I trust they will be installed here before three months are over."

"Undeceive yourself, my dear friend; the Hôtel de Nesle is no longer your property. Excuse me for causing you this grief; but, knowing your rather passionate character, I thought it better that you should learn the news from the mouth of a friend than from that of some fellow who, enchanted at your misfortune, would throw it brutally in your face. Alas! my friend, the Grand-Nesle is no longer yours."

"And who has taken it from me?" "The king."

"The king!"

"Yes, himself; so you see that the misfortune is irreparable."

"And when did it happen?"

"This morning. If I had not been detained by my service at the Louvre, I should have come to tell you at once."

"You have been deceived, Marmagne; it is some false report spread about by my enemies, and of which you are prematurely the echo."

"I wish it were so; but unluckily I was not told, but heard it myself."

"Heard what?" "Heard the king give it to another."

"And who is that other?"

"An Italian adventurer—a certain goldsmith, whose name you perhaps know; an intriguer, who calls himself Benvenuto Cellini, who arrived from Florence about two months ago, and to whom the king has taken a fancy—Heaven knows why. However, he went this morning with all his court to visit him at the hotel of the Cardinal de Ferrara, where this pretended artist has established his shop."

"And you were there, you say, vicomte, when the king gave this hotel to the fellow?"

"I was there," said the vicomte, with evident pleasure.

"Ah! ah!" said the mayor; "well! let him come to take the royal present."

"What! do you intend to resist?" "Doubtless."

"The king's orders?"

"The order of the devil, or any one else, who tries to make me leave this place."

"Take care, take care; besides the king's anger, to which you would expose yourself, this Cellini is in himself more to fear than you think."

"Do you know who I am, vicomte?"

"But, firstly, he has all his Majesty's favour, for the present, at all events."

"Do you know that I, Mayor of Paris, represent the king at the Châtelet; that I sit under a canopy, with my sword by my side, and my plumed hat on my head, and holding the bâton of command in my hand?"

"But I tell you that this cursed Italian talks of contending with princes, cardinals, and popes, and they say that he wounds and kills without scruple all who oppose him."

"Do you not know that I have a guard of twenty-four men day and night at my orders?"

"They say that he killed some one who had offended him, although he was surrounded by sixty men."

"You forget that the Hôtel de Nesle is fortified, without counting the city fort, which renders it impregnable on that side."

"They say he understands sieges, like Bayard or Antonio di Leyra."

"We will see that." "I fear so."

"And I wait."

"Shall I give you a piece of advice, my dear friend?"

"Yes, if it be short."

"Do not try to strive against those who are stronger than yourself."

"Stronger than me! A poor workman from Italy! Vicomte, you exasperate me."

"I believe you will repent it if you do. Remember, he has the king for him."

"Well! I have Madame d'Etampes."

"His Majesty will be angry at your resisting his wishes."

"I have done that already with success."

"Yes, I know, in the affair of the toll of the Pont de Mantes. But——"

"But what?"

"But one risks little in resisting a king who is feeble and good-natured, but much in entering into a contest with a man as strong and terrible as Benvenuto Cellini."

"*Ventre mahom!* Vicomte, do you wish to drive me mad?"

"No; I wish to make you wise."

"Enough, vicomte, enough; I swear to you that the intruder shall pay dearly for the pleasant half-hour your friendship has given to me."

"Heaven grant it!"

"Well! you have nothing else to tell me?" "No, I think not."

"Well, then, adieu." "Adieu, my poor friend."

"Adieu!" "At least I have warned you."

"Adieu!"

"I shall have nothing to reproach myself with, and that will console me."

"Adieu!"

"Good luck to you, but I can hardly hope to see my wish accomplished."

"Adieu!" "Adieu!"

And the Vicomte de Marmagne took his leave, with as many sighs and as sad a face as if he was bidding an eternal farewell to a dear friend.

We may imagine this conversation had not increased M. d'Estourville's good humour, and he sought for some one on whom to vent his passion, and he remembered the young man whom he had seen leaving the house as he entered. He called Raimbault, and questioned him about it, and the gardener replied that the young man had demanded entrance in the king's name; that he had not dared to refuse him admittance, but had taken him to

Dame Perrine. The mayor rushed in to ask for an explanation from the worthy duenna, but she had just gone out. Colombe was in, but her father never dreamed that she could have seen the young man, after all his cautions on the subject of visitors. Then, as his duties recalled him to the Châtelet, he went away, after ordering Raimbault to admit no one, but more especially not the miserable adventurer who had just been there.

Therefore, when Ascanio presented himself the next day with his jewels, as he had been invited to do, Raimbault only opened a little window, and told him through the bars that the Hôtel Nesle was closed to every one, but especially to him.

Ascanio retired in despair; but he never for a moment accused Colombe of this strange reception. In her few looks and words there had been so much modest love, that Ascanio had felt in Paradise since his last visit. He conjectured rightly, that as he had been seen by M. d'Estourville, it was he who had given these terrible orders against him.

CHAPTER VIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR ATTACK AND DEFENCE.

Scarcely had Ascanio returned to the hotel, and given his account to Benvenuto of that part of his excursion which concerned him, than he, seeing that the residence would suit him perfectly, went to the financial secretary, M. de Neufoille, to ask for a deed of conveyance. M. de Neufoille begged for a day, to assure himself of the reality of Benvenuto's pretensions; and although he thought it impertinent enough not to believe him or his assertion, Benvenuto could not but yield, but determined on the morrow to insist upon it.

Therefore, the next day he presented himself to the minute, and was introduced at once, which appeared to him a good augury.

"Well! monseigneur," said Benvenuto, "was the Italian a liar, or did he speak the truth?"

"The exact truth."

"That is well."

"And the king has ordered me to give you the deed in good form, yet——"

"Well, what is it?"

"If you will allow me to give you a good counsel——"

"A good counsel! Diable! it is a rare thing, monsieur, so pray give it."

"It is to seek another place than the Grand-Nesle for your studio."

"Really! do you not think it suitable?"

"Oh! it is not that; truth forces me to acknowledge that it would be difficult to find a better."

"Well! then, what is it?"

"That it belongs to too high a personage for you to contend with, with impunity."

"I belong, myself, to the noble King of France, and while I act in his name I will never draw back!"

"Yes; but in our country, M. Cellini, every man is king of his own house, and in endeavouring to drive the mayor from his, you will risk your life."

"One must die sooner or later."

"Then you are resolved?"

"To kill the devil before he kills me; trust to me for that, monsieur. Therefore, let M. d'Estourville look well to himself, or any one else who endeavours to oppose the king's will, when Benvenuto Cellini has charged himself with its execution."

M. de Neufoille now ceased his philanthropic observations, but pretended that there were all sorts of formalities to be gone through previous to delivering the deed; but Benvenuto seated himself quietly, declaring that he would not leave the place until he had it, and that if it were necessary to sleep there, he was ready to do so, as he had left word at home that possibly he might not return.

So M. de Neufoille was forced to give it to him, and immediately wrote to M. d'Estourville, to tell him what he had been forced to do by the king's will, and the perseverance of the goldsmith.

Benvenuto returned home, said nothing of what he had been doing, shut up the deed with his precious stones, and returned quietly to his work. The news transmitted by M. de Neufoille to M. d'Estourville, proved to him that de Marmagne's information had been correct. He therefore kept on his guard, sent for his twenty-four men, placed sentinels on the walls, and never went to the Châtelet but when absolutely obliged.

Days passed, however, and Cellini, quietly occupied with his work, made no attack. But his enemy was convinced that this apparent tranquillity was only a *ruse*, the object of which was to tire out his surveillance, and take him by surprise. Thus, M. d'Estourville, his eyes and ears always on the watch, and his thoughts constantly occupied by warlike ideas, became so feverishly impatient, that if it lasted long, he seemed likely to become as mad as the governor of the Château St. Ange; for he neither eat nor slept in peace. From time to time he drew his sword, crying, "Let him come! I am ready for him. If he would but come!"

But Benvenuto did not come.

Thus M. d'Estourville had his intervals of calm, during which he persuaded himself that the goldsmith's tongue was fiercer than his sword, and that he would never dare to execute his projects.

Once Colombe noticed all these warlike preparations, and asked her father what they meant.

"Only a fellow to punish, that is all," replied her father; and as it was his province to chastise, Colombe asked no more, being too pre-occupied not to be satisfied with this simple explanation. Indeed, by one word, her father had made a terrible change in her life, until then so simple, so obscure, and so retired; that life of calm days and tranquil nights, resembled now a lake tossed by a whirlwind.

Sometimes perhaps, on former occasions, she had felt that her soul was asleep and her heart empty; but she thought that this sadness came from her loneliness, and attributed the void to having so early lost her mother; and now, all at once, her heart and her soul were filled—but by grief.

Oh! how she regretted that time of ignorance and tranquillity, when Dame Perrine almost sufficed for her happiness; that time of hope and faith, in which she reckoned with certainty on her future; that time of filial confidence, in which she believed in her father's affection. Alas! her future now, was the odious love of the Comte d'Orbec; her father's tenderness was ambition in disguise. Why, instead of being the sole heir of a noble name and a great fortune, had she not been born the daughter of some obscure bourgeois of the town, who would have loved and cherished her? Then she might have easily met that young artist, who spoke with so much emotion and so charmingly, that handsome Ascanio, who seemed to have so much love and happiness to bestow.

But when the beating of her heart, and the burning of her cheeks, warned Colombe that the image of this stranger was occupying her thoughts too long, she condemned herself to drive away this sweet dream, and succeeded, by placing before her eyes the desolate reality.

She had, since her father's commencement of his projects for her, forbidden Perrine to receive Ascanio any more, threatening to tell her father if she disobeyed; and as her companion had never spoken to her about Ascanio's hostile projects, poor Colombe thought herself safe in that quarter.

And yet, we must not believe that the poor girl was resigned to obey her father's orders like a victim. No; her whole being revolted at the idea of an alliance with this man, whom she would have hated had she been capable of such a sentiment. Therefore, she resolved in her mind, thoughts to which she had been before a stranger, thoughts of revolt and rebellion, which she almost immediately repelled as crimes, and asked for pardon on her knees. Then, she thought of throwing herself at the feet of François I.; but she had heard it said, that, in far more terrible circumstances, the same idea had come to Diana de Poitiers, and that she had left her honour behind her. Madame d'Etampes could protect her if

she would. But would she? Would she not smile at the complaints of a child? She had already seen a smile of disdain and raillery on her father's lips, when she had begged him to keep her near him, and it had hurt her dreadfully. Colombe had no one then to apply to, so she only went a hundred times a day to her *prie-dieu*, imploring the Disposer of all things to send aid to her weakness, before the end of the three months which still separated her from her hated *fiancé*; or, if all human succour was impossible, to let her at least go and rejoin her mother.

As for Ascanio, his existence was not less troubled than that of her whom he loved. Since he had been refused admittance by Raimbault, he had every morning, before any one was up, and each night, when every one slept, gone to wander and dream round the high walls which separated him from her. But not once did he attempt to enter the garden; his love was yet too timid and respectful; so he was restricted to the wildest dreams, which he indulged in at all times, whether wandering round the garden or employed with his pearls and diamonds.

These dreams turned particularly on the day, at first so much feared and now so much desired, when Benvenuto should possess himself of the Hôtel de Nesle; for Ascanio knew his master, and felt sure that this apparent tranquillity was that of the volcano waiting for the eruption. Cellini had announced at first that he would act on the following Sunday, and on that day Ascanio never doubted its accomplishment.

But, as well as he could judge in his wanderings, Benvenuto would not easily succeed, for a continued guard was kept on the walls; it was evident that if there was an attack there would be a defence, and as the fortress did not seem disposed to capitulate, they would have to take it by assault.

And then it was that Ascanio's chivalry was to develope itself. There would be a fight, a breach, perhaps a conflagration. Oh! that would be glorious; above all a fire, that put Colombe's life in danger. Then he would rush up the shaking staircase, across the burning beams, along the crumbling walls. He heard her voice calling for aid, he found her, carried her away, nearly fainting, in his arms through the flames, pressing her against him, feeling her heart beat against his heart and her breath on his cheek. Then, through a thousand dangers, a thousand perils, he placed her at her distracted father's feet, who afterwards recompensed his courage by giving him her he had saved.

Or else, flying over some trembling bridge above the fire, his foot slipped and they both fell together and died in each other's arms, mingling their spirits in one first and fast kiss. And this *pis-aller* was not to be disdained by a man who had no more hope than Ascanio; for, after the happiness of living for each other, the next was to die together.

Every one passed then, very agitated days and nights, excepting Benvenuto, who seemed quite to have forgotten his hostile projects, and Scozzone, who did not know them.

The week passed thus, and Benvenuto, who had nearly finished the model of his Jupiter, on the Saturday, about five in the evening, put on his suit of mail, buttoned his doublet over it, and telling Ascanio to accompany him, took his way to the Hôtel Nesle. Arrived there, he went round the walls, examining the weak parts and considering his plan of siege.

The attack presented great difficulties, as the mayor had said to de Marmagne, as Ascanio had testified to his master, and as Benvenuto could see for himself. The Château de Nesle was fortified, had a double wall on one side, and the fosses and ramparts of the city on the side of the Pré-aux-Clercs; it was one of those solid and imposing feudal mansions which could perfectly defend themselves by their own massiveness, provided that the doors were well closed. His examination finished, thinking that, according to all rules of modern and ancient strategy, he must summon the place to surrender before besieging it, he knocked at the little door by which Ascanio had once entered. For him, as for Ascanio, the wicket opened; but this time, instead of a peaceful gardener, it was a soldier who presented himself.

"What do you want?" asked he.

"To take possession of the hotel, which has been given to me, Benvenuto Cellini."

"Wait!" replied the man, who went off, according to orders, to acquaint M. d'Estourville.

After a few minutes he returned, accompanied by the mayor, who, without showing himself, remained in a corner to listen.

"We do not know what you mean," said the soldier to Benvenuto.

"Then, give this parchment to M. d'Estourville; it is a certified copy of the deed of gift." And he passed the parchment through the wicket. The sergeant disappeared again; but as, this time, he had not far to go, the wicket re-opened almost immediately.

"Here is your answer," said he, returning the parchment torn into pieces.

"Good," said Cellini calmly. "*Au revoir.*"

And, enchanted by the attention with which Ascanio had followed his examination of the place, and the judicious observations he had made on their anticipated *coup de main*, he returned to his studio, affirming to his pupil that he would have made a great captain, had he not been destined to be a still greater artist, which, in Cellini's eyes, was much better.

The next day the sun rose magnificently. Benvenuto had begged all his men to come to the studio, although it was Sunday, and none of them neglected the summons. "My lads," said he now

to them, "I engaged you to work as goldsmiths, and not to fight, that is certain. But, during the two months that we have known each other, I have seen enough of you to think that I can count on your assistance in my necessity, as you may always reckon on mine. You know what the question is; we are badly lodged here, want air and space, and have not elbow-room to undertake great works, or even to hammer properly. The king, you are all witnesses, was willing to give me a larger and more commodious lodging, but has left to me the care of establishing myself in it. Now, as they will not give up to me this lodging so generously granted by the king, it follows that I must take it. The Mayor of Paris, who retains it contrary to the king's wishes (it seems that is done in this country), does not know the man he has to deal with; when I am refused, I insist, when they resist, I take by force. Will you help me? I do not conceal from you that there will be danger; there is an escalade to attempt, and a few other little pleasures; we have nothing to fear from the police or the watch, for we have his Majesty's authority for what we do; but some one might be killed, my lads. Thus, let those who do not wish to come, make no compliments; let those who like, stay behind, for, I want none but resolute men. If you leave me alone with Pagolo and Ascanio, I shall not be uneasy; I do not know how I shall manage, but I know that I will succeed somehow. But, if you will lend me your hearts and your arms, then let the mayor look to himself. And now that you know all about it, speak; who will follow me?"

There was but one cry.

"Anywhere, master, where you lead us."

"Bravo! my lads, then you are all ready for the fun?" "All."

"In that case, storm and tempest! We will go and amuse ourselves," cried Benvenuto, quite in his element. "I have rusted long enough. Courage! and draw your swords. Ah! please God, we are going to give and receive some hard blows. Come, my dear boys, come, my brave friends, we must arm, we must settle on a plan. Let every one be ready to fight well and *vive le joie!* I will give you all the offensive and defensive arms I have, besides those which are hanging against the wall, amongst which any one can choose. Ah! we want a good culverin; but never mind, we have plenty of arquebuses, pikes, swords, and poignards, and then coats of mail, helmets, and cuirasses. Come, quick! quick! let us dress for the the ball; it is the mayor who shall pay for the music!"

"Hurrah!" cried all.

Then there ensued in the studio a movement and tumult admirable to see; the enthusiasm of the master carried every one away and animated all faces and all hearts. They tried on cuirasses, brandished swords and daggers, laughed, sang; any one might have thought they were going to a fête or masquerade. Benvenuto came and went to one and another, teaching one a thrust, buckling the

belt of another, and feeling his blood run free and warm through his veins.

As for the workmen, there were numberless jokes passing between them, on their warlike looks and bourgeois awkwardness.

"Ah, master, look!" cried one, "look at Simon, the left-handed, putting his sword on the same side as other people."

"And Jehan," replied Simon, "holding his halberd as he would his cross, if he were a bishop."

"And Pagolo, putting on two coats of mail."

"Why not?" replied Pagolo; "Hermann, the German, has dressed himself like a knight of the time of the Emperor Barbarossa."

Indeed, Hermann was covered with iron from head to foot, and looked like one of those gigantic statues which the sculptors of that age were fond of placing on tombs. Benvenuto, in spite of the strength, proverbial in the studio, of this brave fellow, observed to him, that perhaps he would find it difficult to move so encased, and would lose instead of gaining by it. Hermann answered by jumping over a joiner's bench, as lightly as though he had been dressed in velvet, and, taking down an enormous hammer, swung it round his head, and then struck on the anvil three such terrible blows, that at each of them the anvil went an inch into the ground. There was no more to be said after this; so Benvenuto declared himself satisfied.

Ascanio only had armed in silence and alone; he was somewhat anxious as to the results of the enterprise, for Colombe might be angry with him for attacking her father; above all, if the quarrel gave rise to any catastrophe, though nearer to his eyes, he might find her farther from his heart. As for Scozzone, half joyful, half uneasy, she alternately laughed and cried; the tumult and the fight pleased her, but not the blows and wounds; the preparations amused her, but she trembled for the consequences.

Benvenuto, seeing her smiling and crying together, went to her and said—

"You, Scozzone, will stay here with Ruperta, and prepare lint for the wounded and a good dinner for those who return well."

"Oh, no," cried she; "I will follow you. With you I am brave enough to defy the mayor and all his men, but alone here with Ruperta, I should die of anxiety and fear."

"Oh, I will never consent to your following us," replied Benvenuto; "it would trouble me too much to think that some harm might happen to you. You will pray for us, dear child, while we are gone."

"Listen, then, Benvenuto; I cannot support the idea of staying quietly here while you may be wounded or dying there. But there is a medium plan: instead of staying here to pray to God, I will go to the church nearest to the scene of combat; I shall be out of danger, and yet should know at once either of victory or defeat."

"Do so, then; we also shall not go to kill others or be killed ourselves, without first going to hear mass. Therefore, we will all go together to the Church des Grands-Augustins, which is the nearest to the Hôtel de Nesle, and then we will leave you there, *petite.*"

The preparations all finished, they added to their defensive and offensive arms, hammers, pincers, ladders, and ropes, and set off, not altogether, but two and two, at sufficiently long distances not to attract attention.

Not but what a *coup de main* was as common then as a change of ministers is now; but people did not usually choose the hour of noon, nor the Sunday, for their operations, and it required all the boldness of Benvenuto Cellini, and his knowledge of being in the right, to risk such an attempt.

One after another our friends entered the church, and after having deposited their arms and tools at the sexton's, who was a friend of Simon's, they went piously to the mass, to pray God to let them exterminate as many as possible of the mayor's men.

However, we must allow that, in spite of the importance of the prayers that he had to offer up, Benvenuto showed himself singularly inattentive; for a little behind him, but on the opposite side, a young girl was reading out of an illuminated missal, with such an adorable face that she might really have distracted the attention of a saint, and much more that of a sculptor. The artist fought vigorously against the Christian. The good Cellini could not refrain from communicating his admiration to some one; and doubtless fearing that Catherine would not sympathize with him, he turned to Ascanio, who was at his right hand, in order to direct his attention to her. But he had no need to do that; for from the moment the young man had entered the church, his eyes had never left her. Benvenuto, seeing this, contented himself with jogging his elbow.

"Yes," said Ascanio, "it is Colombe; is she not beautiful, master?"

It was, indeed, Colombe, whom her father, not fearing an attack in broad daylight, had allowed, after some persuasion, to go to the Augustins. She had begged hard, for it was her only remaining consolation. Dame Perrine was with her.

"Who is Colombe?" asked Benvenuto.

"Ah! true! you do not know her; she is the daughter of M. d'Estourville. Is she not beautiful?"

"Oh! she is Hébé, Ascanio, the goddess of youth; the Hébé that François has ordered from me; the Hébé that I dreamed of and prayed for, who has come down from heaven in answer to my prayer."

And Benvenuto went on mingling his prayers, his praises of Colombe's beauty, and his military plans, as the Catholic, the artist, or the soldier took their turn to get uppermost in his mind.

"Our Father which art in heaven—but only look Ascanio,

what a beautiful profile !—thy kingdom come—what a charmingly undulating figure!—give us our daily bread—and you say that charming child is the daughter of that rascal of a mayor, whom I hope to exterminate with my own hand.—And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us—even if I have to burn the hotel to get at him—Amen !"

And Benvenuto made the sign of the cross, quite satisfied with his own devotion. The mass terminated in the midst of these diverse pre-occupations, which may appear rather profane to men of another character and another age, but which were quite natural at that time to a man of Cellini's temperament. The *Ite missa* was pronounced, Benvenuto and Catherine pressed each other's hands, and then, while the young girl remained in her place with tears in her eyes, Cellini and Ascanio, their eyes fixed on Colombe, who had not raised hers from her hook, went, followed by their companions, to a deserted *cul-de-sac*, situated about half-way between the church and the Hôtel de Nesle. As for Catherine, she remained as agreed on, as did Colombe and Madame Perrine, who had only arrived rather too soon, and were going to stay to hear a solemn mass, and never suspected that Benvenuto was about to close up all communication with the house which they had so imprudently quitted.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SIEGE.

THE decisive moment had arrived. Benvenuto divided his ten men into two troops, of which one was to try and force by every possible method the door of the hotel, and the other to protect the workers, and to drive from the walls, by fire or sword, those of the besieged who would appear on the battlements, or attempt a sortie. Benvenuto took himself the command of this last troop, and chose Ascanio for his lieutenant. At the head of the other he placed Hermann, that good and brave German, who could flatten a bar of iron with a blow from a hammer, and knock down a man with a blow of his fist. He took for his second the little Jehan, a lad not more than sixteen, but as active as a squirrel, as tricky as a monkey, and as bold as a page, for whom the Goliath had conceived a great affection, apparently because the boy never ceased tormenting him. Jehan then placed himself proudly by the side of his commander, to the great annoyance of Pagolo, who, in his double curiass, resembled in his movements the statue of the commander. Things thus disposed, Benvenuto addressed some last words to these brave fellows, who went with so much good will to face danger, and perhaps even death, on his account; then

he shook the hands of all, made the sign of the cross, and then cried, "Forward!"

The two troops immediately set off, and, going along the quay of the Augustins, deserted at that hour, arrived presently before the Hôtel de Nesle.

Then Benvenuto, not wishing to attack his enemy without having used all the customary formalities in such a case, advanced alone, his white handkerchief on the end of his sword, to the little door of the hotel where he had knocked the evening before. Again, they asked through the grating what he wanted, and again he replied, that he had come to take possession of the château, which had been given him by the king. But this time he obtained no answer. Then, in a loud voice, he cried—

"To you, Robert d'Estourville, Seigneur de Villebon, and Mayor of Paris, I, Benvenuto Cellini, goldsmith, sculptor, painter, mechanician and engineer, make known, that his Majesty, King François, has freely given to me the proprietorship of the Grand-Nesle; and, as you insolently detain it and refuse to give it up to me, in spite of the royal desire, I declare to you, that I come to take it by force. Therefore defend yourself; and, if evil results from your refusal, remember that it is you who will have to answer for it on earth and in heaven, to man and to God."

Benvenuto stopped, but all remained quiet within the walls. Then he loaded his arquebuse, ordered his troops to prepare arms, and said—

"You see, my men, there is no method of avoiding the fight. Now, how shall we begin?"

"I will break in the door, and you will all go in," said Hermann.

"And with what, my Samson?"

Hermann looked round him and saw, lying on the quay, an enormous log of wood.

"With that log," said he.

And he quietly picked it up, and returned to his general.

However, a crowd began to assemble; and just as Benvenuto was about to give the order for attack, the captain of the king's archers appeared at the corner of the street, with five or six men on horseback. The captain was a friend of the mayor's, and although he knew perfectly the point in dispute, he advanced, hoping to intimidate Benvenuto.

"What do you want, and why do you thus trouble the tranquillity of the city?" said he.

"He who troubles it," replied Cellini, "is he who refuses to obey the king's orders, and not he who executes them."

"What do you mean?" asked the captain.

"I mean that here is an order from his Majesty, in due form, and delivered by M. de Neufoille, his secretary, giving to me the hôtel of the Grand-Nesle. But the people who are shut up in it refuse to obey this order, and consequently refuse me my

rights. Now, the Scripture says, 'Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;' and I think Benvenuto Cellini has a right to take what belongs to Benvenuto Cellini."

"And, instead of hindering, you ought to help us," cried Pagolo.

"Hold your tongue," said Benvenuto; "I want no one's help!"

"You are both right and wrong," said the captain.

"How so?" cried Benvenuto.

"You are right to wish to possess your own property, but wrong to attempt to obtain it in this manner; for you will not gain much, I warn you, by fighting with the walls. If I have a counsel to give you, as a friend, it is to address yourself to justice, and complain—to the Mayor of Paris, for instance. Adieu, and good luck to you." And he went away laughing.

"Let those laugh that win," said Benvenuto. "Forward, Hermann."

Hermann took up his beam, and while Cellini, Ascanio, and the others stood ready to fire on the besieged, he advanced like a living catapult against the door. But as he approached, a shower of stones began to fall, without any one being visible, for the mayor had caused these stones to be piled on the top of the ramparts, and they had only to give them the least push to make them fall on the assailants. Thus they, being saluted by this shower of blows, were forced to retreat. No one, however, was hurt but Pagolo, who, encumbered with his double armour, could not retire as quickly as the others, and was struck on the heel. As for Hermann, he seemed to mind it no more than an oak tree does the hail, and continued his way to the door, where he began to deal such blows, that it was evident that it could not resist very long.

Benvenuto and his party stood, arquebuse in hand, ready to fire on any one—the first man who should show himself—but no one appeared, and the Grand-Nesle seemed to be defended by an invisible garrison. Benvenuto was furious at not being able to aid his brave German. All at once he thought of the old tower of Nesle, which, as we have said, stood alone on the other side of the quay, washed by the Seine.

"Wait, Hermann!" cried Cellini, "wait, my brave fellows! the Hôtel de Nesle is ours, as truly as I am called Benvenuto Cellini."

Then, calling Ascanio and two others to follow him, he ran towards the tower, while Hermann, according to his orders, stepped back out of reach of the stones, and waited to see the effect of the general's promise.

As Benvenuto had guessed, the mayor had neglected to have the old tower guarded; they therefore mounted without resistance, and were in a few minutes on the terrace, which overlooked the walls of the Grand-Nesle, so that the besieged, hitherto sheltered behind their ramparts, were now exposed to view. The sound of an arquebuse, the whistling of a ball, and the fall of one of his men, announced to the mayor this change in the state of affairs.

At the same time, Hermann, seeing that he was likely to have an open field for his operations, recommenced his battery on the door.

As for the crowd, the moment the firing had commenced, with an admirable instinct of self-preservation, every one had taken flight excepting one individual. This was our friend Jacques Aubry, the student, who had come to keep his appointment with Ascanio for a game of tennis. He soon saw what was going on; and as fighting or tennis were equally pleasing to him, he looked on with great satisfaction.

"Well! my lads," said he, advancing towards the group who stood waiting until the door should be forced, "it seems you are undertaking a siege. Peste! it is not a hut you are attacking, and it is a difficult enterprise you are engaged in, so few of you before such a strong place."

"We are not alone," said Pagolo, who was tying up his heel, pointing to Benvenuto and his three men, who kept up so effectual a fire, that the stones began to fall far less frequently than before.

"I understand, M. Achilles," said Jacques Aubry, "for you have, I doubt not, besides being wounded in the same place, a host of other resemblances to that hero—I suppose that is my friend Ascanio and his master, at the top of the tower?"

"Just so," said Pagolo.

"And that other who knocks so rudely at the door, is he also one of your party?"

"It is Hermann," said little Cæhan.

"Peste! how he goes at it. I must go and compliment him," said Aubry.

And he approached, his hands in his pockets, without troubling himself about the balls that were flying all around him, close to the brave German, who was continuing his work with the regularity of a machine.

"Do you want help, my dear Goliath?" said Aubry. "I come to place myself at your service."

"I am thirsty," said Hermann, without stopping.

"Peste! I should think so, from the way you work; I wish I had a cask of beer to offer you."

"Water," cried Hermann.

"Oh! if you are content with that, we are close to the river, and you shall be served in a minute."

And Jacques ran towards the Seine, filled his cap with water, and brought it to the German, who drank it off at a draught, and then, thanking Aubry, returned to his task. Then, in a minute he said, "Go and tell the master to be prepared, for I am getting on."

Jacques went to the tower, and soon found himself between Ascanio and Benvenuto, who had kept up so constant a fire, that two or three men were already *hors de combat*, and the others began to show some disinclination to mount on the wall.

However, as Hermann had said to Benvenuto, the door was

beginning to yield, and the mayor encouraged his men to make a last effort, and a shower of stones began to fall again; but the arquebuses soon cooled their ardour, and in spite of all M. d'Estourville's promises and menaces they refused to expose themselves. Seeing this, he advanced himself, and taking up an enormous stone, prepared to let it fall on Hermann.

But Benvenuto no sooner saw him appear than he raised his arquebuse, and all would presently have been over for M. d'Estourville, had not Ascanio, recognizing the father of Colombe, uttered a cry and struck up the arquebuse, so that Benvenuto fired in the air.

Just as Benvenuto turned furiously to demand an explanation, the stone dropped by the mayor fell heavily on the helmet of Hermann. Now, whatever might be the strength of this modern Titan, he could not resist this Petion; he let go the beam, opened his arms as though to seek a support, and finding none, fell fainting with a terrible noise.

Besieged and besiegers both uttered a cry, Jehan and the others flew to seize Hermann and drag him from the wall; hut at the same time, the doors of the Grand and Petit-Nesle opened, and the mayor rushed out at the head of fifteen men, so that Hermann's friends were forced to fall back, in spite of the cries of Benvenuto to keep firm and he would come to their aid. Eight men then seized Hermann by the arms and legs, and carried him off, protected by the others, so that Benvenuto and his party only arrived in time to see them disappear with Hermann, and the door close hehind them. There was no doubt that it was a severe check; they had wounded three or four men, but their loss was nothing to the mayor, in comparison with the loss of Hermann to Benvenuto.

There was a moment of bewilderment; then Cellini cried, looking towards the town—

"I have a project."

"And I also," cried Ascanio, looking in the other direction.

"I have thought of a method to make the garrison come out."

"And I, to get the door opened."

"How many men do you want?" "Only one."

"Choose."

"Jacques Aubry, will you come with me?" said Ascanio.

"Anywhere, my dear friend, only I should like some sort of a weapon, something like a sword, or a dagger—four or five inches of steel to use on occasion."

"Well! take Pagolo's sword; he can no longer use it, as he is holding his heel with one hand and making the sign of the cross with the other."

"And here, to complete your equipment, is my own dagger," said Benvenuto, "only do not forget it and leave it in the wound: you would make too handsome a present to the wounded man, as

it is engraved by myself, and the handle is worth at least hundred golden crowns."

"And the blade?" said Jacques; "for, however valuable the handle may be, I care most for the blade in these circumstances."

"The blade is priceless, for I killed with it the assassin of my brother."

"Vivat!" cried Jacques. "Now, Ascanio, I am ready."

"And so am I," said Ascanio, rolling two or three fathoms of rope round his body, and putting one of the ladders on his shoulder.

And the two adventurous young men went about one hundred feet down the quay, turned to the left, and disappeared at the corner of the wall of the Grand-Nesle, behind the city fosse.

Let us leave Ascanio to try his project, and follow Benvenuto in his. If he looked to the left, it was because, in the midst of a group of people, he fancied he saw there Colombe and her companion. It was indeed them, returning home after the mass, and who, frightened at what they saw and heard, had stopped tremblingly in the midst of the crowd.

But no sooner did Colombe see that there existed a temporary cessation of hostilities between the combatants, than, in spite of the prayers of Dame Perrine, who begged her not to expose herself, she, anxious for her father, advanced resolutely towards the hotel, leaving Dame Perrine to follow or not as she pleased; but, as the dame sincerely loved Colombe, she followed her in spite of her fears. Both quitted the group, just as Ascanio and his companion turned round the corner of the wall.

Benvenuto no sooner caught sight of them than he advanc towards them, and offering his arm gallantly to Colombe—

"Fear nothing, mademoiselle," said he; "if you will accept my arm, I will conduct you to your father."

Colombe hesitated; but Dame Perrine, seizing the arm on her side, which Benvenuto had forgotten to offer, said—

"Come, dear child, accept the protection which this noble gentleman offers to us. See, there is your father leaning over the wall, doubtless anxious about you."

Colombe took Benvenuto's arm, and the three advanced to the door of the hotel. There Benvenuto stopped, and cried out loudly—

"M. d'Estourville, here is your daughter, who wishes to enter. I trust you will open the door to her at least, unless you wish to leave so charming a hostage in the hands of your enemies."

Twenty times had the mayor, sheltered behind his intrenchments, thought of his daughter, whom he had so imprudently allowed to go out, and whom he did not know how to get in again. He hoped that she would be warned in time, and would think of going to the Châtelet to wait for him there.

"The little fool!" growled he; "but, however, I cannot leave her among these miscreants."

"Well," said he, coming down and speaking through the grating, "what do you ask?"

"This is my offer. I will let Mademoiselle Colombe and her governess go in, but you must come out with all your men, and we will fight it out openly. He who gains the day shall possess the hotel, and then, so much the worse for the vanquished—'*væ victis*,' as Brennus said."

"I accept, but on one condition," said the mayor.

"What is it?"

"That you and your men shall draw off, to allow my daughter time to go in and my men time to come out."

"So be it; but you must come out first, then Mademoiselle Colombe shall go in, and, to cut off all retreat, you shall then throw the key over the wall."

"Agreed."

"On your word?" "On my honour."

This promise exchanged, the door was opened, the mayor's men came out and ranged themselves in two ranks before the door, with M. d'Estourville at their head. They were still nineteen in all. On his side, Benvenuto, deprived of Ascanio, Hermann, and Jacques Aubry, had but eight, of whom Simon le Gaucher was wounded, luckily in the right hand: but Benvenuto was not a man to calculate the number of his enemies, he who had killed Pompeo among his twelve men.

He therefore hailed with delight a general and decisive action.

"Now you run in, mademoiselle," said he to his pretty prisoner.

Colombe flew across the space between the two camps, as quickly as the bird whose name she bore, and ran to throw herself into her father's arms.

"My father! in Heaven's name do not expose your life," cried she, weeping.

"Go in," cried the mayor, brusquely, leading her to the door; "it is your folly which has reduced us to this extremity."

Colombe went in, followed by Dame Perrine, to whom fear had given, if not wings, swifter legs then she had had for ten years.

The mayor closed the door behind her.

"The key," cried Benvenuto.

The mayor, faithful to his word, threw the key over the wall, so that it fell in the courtyard.

"And now," cried Benvenuto, rushing on the mayor and his troop, "each for himself, and God for us all."

Then ensued a terrible *mêlée*, for, before the soldiers had time t lower their guns and fire, Benvenuto, with his seven workmen, fell on them, cutting right and left with their terrible swords, which they managed so well, and which, made by Benvenuto himself, found so few shirts of mail, or even cuirasses, which could resist

them. The soldiers threw down their arquebuses, drew their swords, and began to fight also. But, in spite of their numbers, in less than a minute they found themselves scattered, and two or three of the bravest were so wounded as to be unable to continue the combat, and were forced to draw back.

The mayor saw the danger, and as he was a brave man, and who, in his time, had had great success in arms, he advanced to this terrible Benvenuto, before whom all gave way, crying—

"Here, vile thief, let all be decided between us two."

"Oh, on my life, I ask no better; and if you will tell your men not to disturb us, I am your man."

"Let all keep quiet," said the mayor.

"Let no one stir," said Benvenuto.

And the combatants remained in their places, silent and motionless as those heroes of Homer, who interrupted their own combat not to lose that of two renowned chiefs.

Then Benvenuto and the mayor rushed on each other sword in hand.

M. d'Estourville was skilful in arms, but Benvenuto was his master. Besides, the mayor was out of practice, and Benvenuto scarcely passed a day without his sword in his hand. At the first passes M. d'Estourville discovered the superiority of his enemy, while Benvenuto, meeting with more resistance than he expected, put forth all his skill. It was a marvellous thing to see how his sword menaced at once head and heart, flying from one spot to another, and giving his adversary barely time to parry without attacking once. Thus the mayor, seeing that he was dealing with a man stronger than himself, began to retreat, defending himself all the while. Unluckily for him, he had his back turned to the door, so that after a short time he found himself against it. Once there, he felt himself lost; but, like a wild boar turning on the dogs, he rallied all his strength, and made two or three passes so rapidly that Benvenuto was forced to parry in his turn, and even once, in spite of his excellent shirt of mail, was touched; but, like a wounded lion, Benvenuto turned on him, and would have pierced him through and through, if, just at that moment, the door had not suddenly opened, and M. d'Estourville fallen backwards, while the sword struck him who had so unexpectedly saved the mayor's life by this movement.

But now it was the wounded man who was silent, and Benvenuto who uttered a terrible cry, for in him he had wounded, he recognized Ascanio. He threw himself like a madman on the neck of the young man, seeking for his wound, and crying, "Killed, killed by me! Ascanio, my child, that I should have killed you."

During this time Hermann, who stood behind, lifted up the mayor safe and sound, as though he had been a child, placed him in a little house where M. Raimbault kept his garden tools, and, shutting the door on him, drew his sword and stood guard over his prisoner.

As for Jacques Aubry, he made but one bound from the court-yard to the top of the wall, and stood there brandishing his dagger triumphantly, and crying, "*Fanfare! fanfare!* the Grand-Nesle is ours!"

How all these surprising things happened our readers shall hear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER X.

THE ADVANTAGE OF FORTIFICATIONS.

THE Hôtel de Nesle was protected, towards the Pré-aux-Clercs, by the walls and ditches of the town, so that on that side it passed for impregnable. Now, Ascanio had sagaciously considered that people seldom think of guarding that which cannot be taken, and had determined to try an attack there. It was with this view that he went off with his friend Jacques Aubry, without suspecting that, at the moment he disappeared on the one side, his beloved Colombe was about to appear on the other, and to furnish Benvenuto with a means of forcing the provost to make a sortie, much against his inclination.

Ascanio's project was both difficult and dangerous of execution. It was necessary to cross a deep ditch, to scale a wall twenty-five feet high, which might, after all, bring them upon an overpowering number of the enemy's forces. When they arrived at the edge of the ditch, Ascanio felt his resolution falter; as for Jacques Aubry, he halted a few steps behind, looking alternately at the wall and the ditch.

"Ah! my dear friend," said he, "have the kindness, I pray, to tell me why the devil you brought me here, unless it was to fish for frogs. Oh! you look at your ladder; but that is only twelve feet high and the wall is twenty-five. Besides, the ditch is ten feet wide, so that we want twenty-three feet more, if I count rightly."

Ascanio remained overwhelmed for an instant, then he cried—

"Oh! an idea! look." "Where?"

"There, there." "That is not an idea, but an oak tree."

Indeed, an enormous oak rose sturdily out of the earth almost on the edge of the ditch, and peeped curiously over the walls of the Hôtel de Nesle.

"What! do you not understand?" said Ascanio.

"Yes, yes, I begin to see! The oak is the commencement of a bridge, which this ladder might complete; but the ditch is below, comrade, and full of mud. Diable! I have my best clothes on, and the husband of Simone is getting tired of giving me credit."

"Help me to raise the ladder, that is all I ask."

"Yes, and I stay below. Thank you."

And each seizing hold of a branch of the tree, they soon found themselves in the oak. Then, uniting their efforts, they drew up the ladder and threw it across for a bridge. They saw with joy, that while one of its extremities rested firmly on a great branch, the other lay securely on the wall, which it passed by two or three feet.

"But," said Aubry, "when we are on the wall?"

"We will draw the ladder to us and get down."

"There is but one difficulty; the wall is twenty-five feet high, and the ladder but twelve feet."

Ascanio began to unroll the rope which he had wound round his body, and, tying one end to the trunk of the tree, he threw the other over the wall.

"Oh, great man! I understand," cried Aubry; "I am happy to break my neck with you; I go."

"No, let me go first." "We will toss for it."

"So be it."

"You have won," said Aubry; "go on, but be calm and cool."

"Make yourself easy."

He began to advance on the frail bridge, which Aubry steadied by leaning on the end. Jacques scarcely breathed, but Ascanio ran lightly over and arrived safely on the wall. There, again, he was in great danger, if any of the besieged perceived him; but he had been correct in his surmise, and, throwing a rapid glance over the garden—"No one," cried he.

"Then forward!" replied Jacques, advancing in his turn over the narrow and trembling bridge. He was not less adroit or less active than his companion, and in a minute he was close to him. They then sat astride on the wall and drew the ladder towards them, and, tying it to the end of the rope, let it down on the inside; then Ascanio, taking the cord in his hands, glided down to the first round of the ladder, and an instant after was on the ground. Jacques Aubry followed, and the two friends found themselves in the garden.

Once there, it was necessary to act quickly. All these manœuvres had taken some little time, and Ascanio trembled lest his absence and that of his companion should have been prejudicial to his master's interest; both, therefore, drawing their swords, ran to the door which opened into the first court, where the garrison had been. On arriving at the door, Ascanio looked through the key-hole and saw that the court was empty.

"Benvenuto has succeeded," said he. "The garrison has gone, and the hotel is ours;" and he tried to open the door, but it was locked.

They both began to shake it with all their strength.

"This way," said a voice, which vibrated to the bottom of the young man's heart; "this way, monsieur."

Ascanio turned and saw Colombe at a window on the ground floor. In two bounds he was close to her.

"Oh! oh!" said Jacques Aubry, following him, "it appears that we have friends within the walls. Ah! you did not tell me that."

"Oh! save my father, monsieur," cried Colombe to Ascanio, without expressing any astonishment at seeing him there. "They are fighting outside, and it is all my fault. Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! do not let them kill him."

"Be easy," said Ascanio, jumping into the room, from which there was access to the court, "I answer for him."

"Be easy," repeated Jacques, following him, "we answer for him."

On arriving at the threshold of the door, Ascanio heard himself called a second time, but by a voice less gentle than the first.

"Who calls me?" said Ascanio.

"I, my young friend," repeated the same voice, in a decided German accent.

"Eh! pardieu! it is our Goliath! What the devil are you doing in that hen-coop, my brave giant?"

"I found myself here, but how I came here I do not know. Unlock the door that I may go and fight, quick—quick!"

Jacques Aubry rendered him the service he asked, while Ascanio went towards the door opening on to the quay, where he heard a terrible clashing of swords. When he was only separated from the combatants by the thickness of the wood, he feared, by opening the door, to fall into the hands of his enemies, and he looked through the little grating we have spoken of. Then he saw in front of him, Cellini, ardent and furious, and saw also that M. d'Estourville was lost. He picked up the key, which was on the ground, opened the door, and, thinking only of the promise which he had made to Colombe, he received, as we have before said, the thrust, which, but for him, would inevitably have ended the career of the provost.

We have seen what was the consequence of this event; Benvenuto, in despair, rushed to Ascanio, Hermann shut up the provost in the prison from which he had just emerged, while Jacques, perched on the ramparts, shouted victory. The victory was indeed complete; the provost's men, seeing their master a prisoner, did not even try to dispute it, and laid down their arms. The workmen all entered the court, henceforth their own property, and locked the door on the inside.

As for Benvenuto, he still held Ascanio in his arms; he had taken off his shirt of mail and torn open his doublet, and thus reached the wound, of which he was stanching the blood with his handkerchief.

"My Ascanio! my child!" repeated he incessantly, "wounded by me! What must your mother think from above? Pardon, Stephana, pardon. You suffer; does my hand hurt you? Ah! will this blood never stop? A surgeon—quick! Some one go for a surgeon."

Jacques Aubry ran off.

'It is nothing, dear master, it is nothing," said Ascanio; "the arm only has been touched. Do not afflict yourself! I tell you it is nothing."

Indeed the surgeon, brought five minutes after by Jacques, declared that the wound, though deep, was not dangerous, and began to dress it.

"Ah! monsieur, what a weight you take off my mind," said Benvenuto. "My dear child, I shall not then be your murderer. But what is the matter, my Ascanio? Your pulse beats quickly, the blood mounts to your face. Oh! doctor, we must carry him in; fever is coming on."

"No, no master; on the contrary, I feel much better; leave me here, I beg of you."

"What have you done with my father?" said a voice behind Benvenuto. He turned and saw Colombe, very pale and looking about for the provost.

"Oh, safe and sound, mademoiselle, thank Heaven," cried Ascanio.

"Thanks to this poor boy, who received the blow destined for him; you may be sure he saved your life, M. d'Estourville. But where are you?" continued Benvenuto, looking round for the provost, whose disappearance he could not understand.

"He is here, master."

"Where?" "In the little prison."

"Oh! M. Benvenuto," cried Colombe, flying towards the place and making a gesture at once of reproach and supplication.

"Open the door, Hermann," said Cellini.

Hermann obeyed, and the provost came out, rather humiliated at his discomfiture. Colombe threw herself into his arms.

"Oh! my father, are you wounded?" cried she.

"No," replied he, in his rough voice, "thank Heaven I am uninjured."

"And," continued she hesitatingly, "is it true, father, that it was that young man——?"

"I cannot deny that he arrived just in time."

"Yes," said Cellini, "to receive the thrust destined for you, M. le Prevôt. Yes, Mademoiselle Colombe, it is to this brave lad that you owe your father's life; and if he does not declare it openly, he will be not only a liar but an ungrateful one."

"He will not pay too dearly for it, I trust," said Colombe, blushing at her own words.

"Oh! mademoiselle," cried Ascanio, "I would have paid for it with all my blood."

"See, M. le Prevôt, what tenderness you inspire. But my Ascanio will grow weak; now the dressing is finished, it would be well, I think, that he should have some repose."

After what Benvenuto had said regarding the service rendered to the provost, he approached with a tolerably good grace and said—

"Young man, I place a room in my house at your disposal."

"In your house, M. d'Estourville!" said Benvenuto, laughing. "Do you then wish the fight to begin over again?"

"What! do you really wish to turn out my daughter and myself?"

"Certainly not, monsieur; you only occupy the Petit-Nesle—keep it, and let us live like good neighbours. As for us, monsieur, Ascanio shall install himself at once in the Grand-Nesle, and we will join him there in the evening. After that, if you prefer war——"

"Oh! father!" cried Colombe.

"No, peace!" said the provost.

"There is no peace without conditions, monsieur," said Benvenuto. "Do me the honour to follow me to the Grand-Nesle, or receive me as a friend at the Petit-Nesle, and we will settle the terms."

"I will go with you, monsieur," said the provost. "Mademoiselle," continued he to his daughter, "be good enough to go home and wait for my return."

Colombe, in spite of the tone in which this command was given, presented her cheek to her father, to kiss, and, bowing to every one, retired. Ascanio followed her with his eyes until she had disappeared, and then asked to be taken in. Hermann took him up as he would have done a child, and carried him to the Grand-Nesle.

"Ma foi! M. d'Estourville," said Benvenuto, who had always followed the young girl with his eyes, "you were quite right to send your daughter away, and I thank you for it; her presence might have been injurious to my interests, by making me too weak, and causing me to forget that I am a conquerer, and to remember only that I am an artist—that is to say, an admirer of every perfect form and divine beauty."

M. d'Estourville answered the compliment with a grimace; but he followed Benvenuto without openly displaying his ill humour, although he grumbled to himself. Cellini, to complete his wrath, begged him to go round his new abode with him, and the invitation was given with so much politeness, that it was impossible to refuse; the provost, therefore, however unwillingly, followed his new neighbour over the whole of the house and garden.

"Well, all this is superb," said Benvenuto, when they had finished their inspection. "I quite understand, monsieur, your repugnance to give up possession of this hotel; but I need not tell you that you will always be welcome when you will come as to-day, and do me the honour to visit me."

"You forget, monsieur, that I am here to-day only to receive your conditions and to propose mine; I am waiting."

"M. d'Estourville, I am at your orders; if you will permit me first to communicate to you my wishes, you will then be free to express yours."

"Speak."

"First, the essential clause, namely: Article 1st. M. Robert d'Estourville, provost of Paris, recognizes the right of Benvenuto Cellini to the possession of the Grand-Nesle, and abandons it freely to him and his for ever."

"Accepted," said the provost "only if it please the king to retake it from you, as he has from me, and give it to some one else, I am not responsible."

"Ah!" said Cellini, "this must hide some bad intention; but never mind, I can defend what I have acquired. Let us proceed."

"Now it is my turn," said the provost.

"That is but fair."

"Article 2. Benvenuto Cellini engages to make no attempt upon the Petit-Nesle, which is to remain the property of M. Robert d'Estourville; and he will not even attempt to enter there as a neighbour, or under the cloak of friendship."

"So be it," said Benvenuto, "although the clause is rather unpolite. Go on."

"Article 3. The first court yard, situated between the Grand and the Petit-Nesle, shall be common to both houses."

"Agreed; and if mademoiselle wishes to go out——"

"Oh! my daughter will go out and come in by a private door, which I shall have made; I only wish to secure for myself a passage for carriages."

"Is that all?" asked Benvenuto.

"Yes; now I hope you will let me carry away my furniture."

"Certainly; your furniture is your own. Now, M. le Prevôt, one last addition to the treaty."

"What is it?"

"Article 4, and last. M. Robert d'Estourville, and Benvenuto Cellini, abjure all rancour and agree upon a loyal and sincere peace."

"I am willing to agree to this; but it must not oblige me to lend you aid and assistance against those who may attack you. I promise not to injure you, but I do not undertake to be agreeable to you."

"As for that, monsieur, you know that I can fight for myself. Then, if you have no other suggestion, sign, M. le Prevôt, sign."

"I will," said the provost, with a sigh. He signed, and each party kept a copy of the treaty.

M. d'Estourville then went to the Petit-Nesle, being anxious to scold Colombe for her inopportune return. Colombe hung her head, and let him scold without listening to a word, being solely occupied with one idea—that of getting news of Ascanio. But in spite of all her efforts, she could not bring herself to utter his name.

While this was passing on one side of the wall, on the other side, Catherine, who had been sent for, entered the Grand-Nesle, threw herself into Cellini's arms, pressed Ascanio's hand, congratulated Hermann, laughed at Pagolo, went, sang, and asked questions, all

together. She had been terribly anxious; the noise of the firing had reached her, and had several times interrupted her prayers; but now that all had ended well, except that four men were killed and three wounded, her gaiety knew no bounds.

When the excitement occasioned by Catherine's arrival had subsided a little, Ascanio remembered the motive which had brought Jacques Aubry so opportunely to their aid, and, turning to Benvenuto, he said—

"Master, I was to have played at tennis to-day with our friend M. Jacques Aubry; I am scarcely in a fit state to do so; but he has so valiantly aided us, that I venture to ask you to take my place."

"With all my heart," said Benvenuto. "Look well to yourself, M. Jacques."

"I will try."

"And as we shall sup after our game, the conquered shall be bound to drink two bottles more than the conqueror."

"Do you want me to be carried away dead drunk from your house, M. Benvenuto? Never mind, *vive la joie!* I am ready, Ah! Diable! Simone is waiting for me. Bah! I waited for her last Sunday; to-day it will be her turn, so much the worse for her."

And, taking balls and rackets, Benvenuto and his guest proceeded towards the garden.

CHAPTER XI.

OWLS, MAGPIES AND NIGHTINGALE.

On the following day Benvenuto commenced moving, and on the third morning he was settled at his work, as quietly as though nothing had happened.

When the provost saw himself absolutely beaten, and learned that Benvenuto, his workmen, and his tools were installed in the Grand-Nesle, his rage re-awakened, and he began to meditate vengeance. He was full of these rancorous feelings when the Vicomte de Marmagne visited him on the morning of Wednesday. The vicomte could not refrain from exhibiting the triumph which a coward and a fool feels in the griefs and defeats of his friends.

"Well!" said he to d'Estourville, "I told you how it would be, my dear friend."

"Ah! is it you, vicomte?"

"Yes. Was I not right?" "Alas! yes."

"At least, I have nothing to reproach myself with, for I warned you."

"Has the king returned to the Louvre?"

"You thought that it was nonsense, and that Benvenuto was a

common workman, and a person of no consequence; but you have found yourself mistaken, my poor friend."

"I asked you if the king had returned from Fontainebleau."

"Yes; and he much regrets that he was not at the Louvre on Sunday, to have witnessed, from one of the turrets, the victory gained by his silversmith over his provost."

"What do they say of it at court?"

"That you were ignominiously beaten."

"But——"

"He killed two of your men, did he not?" "I believe so."

"If you wish to replace them, I have at your service two Italian bravos; they require to be well paid, certainly, but they are sure men. If you had had them, matters might have turned out differently."

"I do not say no; if not for myself, for my son-in-law, the Comte d'Orbec."

"Still, whatever they say, I will never believe that Benvenuto vanquished you, personally."

"Who says that?"

"Everybody. Some are indignant, like me; others laugh, like the king."

"Enough. We are not yet at the end."

"You were wrong to fight with such a fellow, and for such a thing. If it had been for a lady, you might have been excused; but for a house——"

"The Hôtel de Nesle is a house fit for a prince."

"Granted; but even for that, to expose yourself to be treated so, by such a blackguard——"

"Ah! an idea, Marmagne," said the provost. "Parbleu! you are so devoted to me that I should like to render you a service, and I am delighted to have the opportunity of doing so. As a noble, and secretary to the king, you are really badly lodged in the Rue de la Huetre, my dear vicomte. Now, I lately asked the Duchesse d'Etampes, who cannot refuse me anything, for one of the king's houses as a residence of a friend of mine. It so happened, however, that my *protégé* was compelled to go to Spain, and I have, therefore, at my disposal the papers granting this residence. I cannot make use of them myself, but shall be happy to give them to you, and thus repay your good services and friendship."

"My dear d'Estourville, what a service you render me! It is true that I am badly lodged, and I have twenty times complained to the king of it."

"I make one condition." "What is it?"

"That you shall select the Hôtel de Nesle."

"Ah! it was a joke?"

"Not at all; here is a brevet duly signed by the king, with blanks for the names of the occupant and the house. Now, I

write in the name of the Hôtel de Nesle, and leave you to write in the name of the man."

"But this cursed Benvenuto?"

"Is not at all on his guard, relying on a treaty entered into between us. He who would wish to enter would find the doors open, and on Sundays the rooms empty. Besides, you need not turn out Benvenuto; the Grand-Nesle is large enough to accommodate three or four families. He will listen to reason——but what are you doing?"

"Writing in my name."

"Be on your guard, however; Benvenuto may perhaps be more formidable than you expect."

"Oh! I will select my men, and surprise him one Sunday."

"What! contend with a fellow like that, for a house!"

"A conqueror is always in the right; besides, I shall be revenging a friend."

"Well, I wish you success; but I warn you to be careful."

"Thank you twice over for the present, and for the advice;" and Marmagne, enchanted, went off to hire his ruffians.

"That is all right," said M. d'Estourville, rubbing his hands; "go, vicomte; either you will revenge me on Benvenuto for his victory, or he on you for your sarcasms, so that I shall be a gainer in any event. Let my enemies fight and kill each other."

While the inhabitants of the Hôtel de Nesle were menaced with the hatred of the provost, Benvenuto worked on peaceably, without even suspecting the rancour he had excited. He rose with daybreak, and went every morning to a little solitary room which he had found in the garden, and of which one window looked on to the garden of the Petit-Nesle. There he modelled a little statue of Hébé. After dinner, that is, at one o'clock, he went to his studio and worked at his Jupiter, and in the evening he played at tennis or took a walk.

Catherine worked, danced, and sang, and was quite happy; as for Ascanio, although his wound still kept him from working, he was not *ennuyé*, for he dreamed his life away.

If we now pass into the Petit-Nesle, we shall find Colombe in her little room, dreaming also; but while Ascanio's dreams were *couleur de rose*, hers were sombre and dark. Dame Perrine, who went out every day to market, was obliged to cross the court-yard common to both houses, for a separate entrance to the Petit-Nesle had not yet been made; and by a singular chance it happened that Ruperta, Benvenuto's old servant, went out at the same time to get her master's dinner. These two estimable persons were above entering into their master's enmities, and talked together with the most touching concord. Ruperta began by inquiring of Dame Perrine the price of provisions, and the names of the best shopkeepers in the neighbourhood; then they passed to more interesting subjects.

"Your master is a terrible man, is he not?" said Dame Perrine.

"He! when you do not offend him he is as gentle as a lamb; but when one does not do what he likes, he is not easy tempered. When he once gets anything into his head, all the devils could not get it out again; but if you obey him, he is very kind. You should hear him say—'Dame Ruperta, that was an excellent roast'—'Dame Ruperta, your vegetables were excellently seasoned'—'Dame Ruperta, I regard you as the queen of housekeepers.'"

"Ah! but he kills people."

"Yes, when they annoy him: it is the custom of his country; but it is only when he is attacked—in self-defence. Then he is very gay and agreeable."

"I have never seen him; he has red hair, has he not?"

"No, it is black, like yours and mine—at least, like what mine used to be; come in some day to borrow something, and I will show him to you. He is very handsome."

"*Apropos* of handsome; how is that young man who was wounded in saving my master's life?"

"Ascanio! Do you know him, then?"

"Certainly; he promised Mademoiselle Colombe and me to show us his jewels; recall it to his mind, if you please, dear lady. But tell me how he is: Colombe would be so glad to hear that the saviour of her father was out of danger."

"Oh! you can tell her that he is getting on very well; he got up a little while ago. It would do him a great deal of good to get a little air, but in this hot sun it is impossible, for the garden of the Grand-Nesle is a perfect desert; not a bit of shade, briars and nettles instead of vegetables, and two or three great leafless trees the only verdure. It is large, but not pretty. My master consoles himself by playing at tennis; but poor Ascanio is unable to do that, and must be cruelly *ennuyé*. He is my favourite, he is always so gentle and polite, not like that bear of a Pagolo, or that madcap, Catherine."

"But, mon Dieu!" cried the charitable Dame Perrine, "tell the poor young man to come to the Petit-Nesle, where we have such nice shade; I will willingly open the door to him, although the provost has expressly forbidden it. But to do good to his preserver, it would be my duty; and, talking of *ennui*, we are dying of it. This young man would amuse us; he would show us necklaces and bracelets, and would talk to Colombe. Young people like to see each other, and talk to each other; therefore, tell M. Ascanio that if he will come alone, or with you, Dame Ruperta, I will let him in. Knock four times—three times gently and once loudly, and I will come and open the door."

"Thanks for Ascanio, and for myself; I shall not fail to communicate to him your obliging offer, and I have no doubt that he will not fail to profit by it."

"I am glad to hear it."

"*Au revoir,* Dame Perrine; I am delighted to have made acquaintance with so amiable a person."

"And I also, Dame Ruperta."

And with a deep curtsey they separated, enchanted with one another. The gardens of the Hôtel de Nesle were indeed arid and burned up on the one side, and fresh and shady on the other. The avarice of the provost had left uncultivated the large garden, the trees of which he had cut down; but for his daughter's sake he had left the Petit-Nesle untouched: and Raimbault, with two assistants, sufficed to keep it in order. At the bottom was the kitchen garden—the kingdom of Dame Perrine—while along the walls of the Grand-Nesle was Colombe's flower garden, where she generally went with the rising sun to water her pinks and her roses, and which was, therefore, called by Dame Perrine, "the morning walk." There was also "the noon-day walk," terminating in an arbour, where Colombe loved to read or embroider during the heat of the day. At the other end of the garden was "the evening walk," planted with a triple row of limes, which spread a charming freshness.

It was this walk which Dame Perrine had considered most fit to hasten the convalescence of Ascanio. She did not, however, acquaint Colombe with her charitable intentions, knowing that she, ever docile to her father, might refuse to countenance this disobedience. And in that case what would become of Dame Ruperta's authority and influence? No; since she had dared, perhaps a little too boldly, to give the invitation, she must stick to it. And, really, the good lady was very excusable, when we consider that she had no one to speak to from morning to night except Colombe, who, often absorbed in her own reflections, did not hear or answer.

We may imagine Ascanio's transports when he heard that his Paradise was open to him, and the benedictions that he showered upon Ruperta. The thought that perhaps Colombe had authorized the offer of Dame Perrine, rendered him wild with joy, and Ruperta had great trouble to persuade him to wait till the evening. He counted the slow hours impatiently; but at last five o'clock struck. The workmen left; Benvenuto had been away since noon; then Ruperta said solemnly—

"Now, young man, that the hour has struck, follow me;" and, crossing the court with him, she struck four blows on the door.

"Say nothing about it to the master, my good Ruperta," said Ascanio, who knew Cellini to be rather sceptical about love, and did not wish his pure passion to be made a jest of. Before Ruperta had time to inquire the reason of a discretion always disagreeable to her, the door opened and Dame Perrine appeared.

"Enter, monsieur," said she; "how are you? Your paleness is becoming. Come in also, Dame Ruperta. Take the walk to the left, young man. Colombe will soon come into the garden; it is

the hour for her walk, and persuade her not to scold me for having admitted you."

"What! Mademoiselle Colombe does not know, then——"

"Oh! do you think she would have consented to disobey her father? I have brought her up too well for that. No, I have disobeyed for both; one cannot always live like recluses. Raimbault will see nothing, or if he does, I know how to make him hold his tongue."

Ascanio did not hear all this, but he caught her last words. "That is the walk which Colombe takes every evening; she will be there, no doubt, and there you will not feel the sun, my dear invalid."

Ascanio bowed and walked on, full of impatience and anxiety. Yet he overheard the words—"That is Colombe's favourite bank." He sat down gently on the sacred spot. What did he desire? He did not know himself; he sought Colombe because she was young and beautiful. Ambitious thoughts he had none; to be near her was his only idea—he thought of nothing beyond.

Colombe, on her side, had often thought, in spite of herself, of the handsome young stranger, and to see him again was her secret desire. She endeavoured to banish the thought, but uselessly, and she had passed the last three or four days alternately longing and fearing to see Ascanio. Her only consolation was to dream, which she did all day long, to the despair of Dame Perrine, who was reduced to an eternal monologue.

All at once, the young man saw Colombe appear at a turn of the walk, with a book in her hand. She was reading the "Lives of the Saints," that dangerous romance, which may perhaps be a fit preparation for the sufferings of life, but not for its cold realities. Colombe did not at first perceive Ascanio; but, seeing a strange woman near Perrine, she made a movement of surprise. At this decisive moment Dame Perrine, like a skilful general, attacked the question boldly.

"Dear Colombe," said she, "you are so good that I did not think it necessary to ask your leave to invite this poor young man, who was wounded instead of your father, to come and refresh himself in these shades. You know there is no shade at the Grand-Nesle, and the surgeon thought it necessary to his life that he should walk an hour every day."

While Dame Perrine uttered this falsehood, Colombe turned her eyes upon Ascanio, and a deep colour covered her cheeks.

"It was not my leave which was necessary, but my father's," said she.

And, saying this sadly but firmly, she advanced to the bank where Ascanio was sitting. He had heard her words, and clasping his hands, said—

"Pardon, mademoiselle; I thought—I hoped that your goodness had ratified Dame Perrine's obliging offer; but since it is not so,"

continued he, with a gentle pride, "I beg you to excuse my involuntary boldness, and I will retire."

"But it is not me," cried Colombe; "I am not the mistress. Stay to-day at least; even if my father's prohibition does extend to his preserver, you must stay to receive my thanks."

"Oh, madam, it is I who thank you from the bottom of my heart; but by staying, shall I not interfere with your walk?"

"No," said Colombe, sitting down on the other end of the bank. Perrine, taking Ruperta's arm, walked away, and the young people remained alone. Colombe kept her eyes fixed upon her book, but she could not read; a cloud seemed to pass before her eyes, and the utmost she could do was to try, instinctively, to conceal her agitation.

Ascanio, on his side, had experienced so lively a grief when he thought that Colombe wished to send him away, and so wild a joy when he perceived her agitation, that his emotions were almost too much for him in his weak state, and the tears flowed over his cheeks.

Above them a bird sang in a tree, the leaves of which scarcely stirred in the wind; never was there a more calm and peaceful July evening; but between these two, who seemed so well fitted for one another, and who had but to extend their hands to unite them, there seemed to be an abyss. In a few minutes Colombe raised her head—

"You weep," cried she, impulsively.

"No," said he; but as he spoke he felt the tears on his cheeks. "It is true," he added.

"What is the matter? do you suffer?"

"I suffer from a thought."

"What is it?"

"That perhaps it would have been better for me to have died the other day."

"To have died! What age are you who talk of dying?"

"Nineteen; but when one is unhappy it is better to die."

"But then your parents would weep in their turn."

"I am without father or mother, and no one would weep for me, except my master, Benvenuto."

"Poor orphan!"

"Yes, an orphan. My father never loved me, and I lost my mother when I was ten years old, and learning to know and return her love. My father—but why do I speak of it? What are my father and mother to you?"

"Oh, yes! go on, Ascanio."

"Saints in heaven! you remember my name."

"Go on, go on," cried Colombe, hiding her blushes with her hands.

"My father was a goldsmith, and my mother was the daughter of Raphaël del Moro, a member of a noble Italian family; for in our Italian republics, work does not dishonour, and you may see

more than one ancient and illustrious name over a shop door. Thus, my master, Benvenuto Cellini, for instance, is as noble as the king of France, if not more so. Raphaël del Moro, who was poor, married his daughter Stephana, in spite of her opposition, to a rich neighbour almost as old as himself. Alas! my mother and Benvenuto loved each other, but both were without fortune. Benvenuto travelled to gain wealth and fame, and was far away, and could not oppose the marriage. Gismondo Gaddi, my father, although he did not know that she loved another, soon hated my mother because she did not love him. He was a jealous and violent man; children have retentive memories, and I recollect that my mother often sought, beside my cot, a refuge which he did not always respect, Sometimes he would strike her while she held me in her arms, and at each blow she would give me a kiss. Oh! I remember well both blows and kisses.

"God, in his justice, punished my father, by depriving him of what was dearest to him—his wealth. He became bankrupt and died of grief; my mother did not long survive him. I remained alone in the world; my father's creditors seized everything, and although an old servant who loved me, fed me for a few days, she lived on charity herself, and had not more than enough for her own wants. She was pondering one day as to what was to be done with me, when a man, covered with dust, entered the room, wept over and embraced me, and after giving some money to the old woman, took me away with him. It was Benvenuto Cellini, who had come from Rome to Florence on purpose to fetch me. He loved me, instructed me in his art, and kept me always with him, and, as I have said, would be the only person to weep for my death."

Colombe had listened with a sad heart to this story, for the life of the poor mother might one day be her own; for she also was about to be married by constraint to a man who would hate her, because she did not love him.

"You are ungrateful to God," said she; "some one, at least, loves you, and you have known your mother; I cannot remember mine, she died in giving me birth. I was brought up by a sister of my father's; she was cross and harsh, yet I wept much when two years ago she died. I had attached myself to her, from the absence of all other ties. For two years I have lived here with Perrine, and in spite of my solitude, for my father rarely visits me, they have been the happiest years of my life."

"You have suffered much in the past, it is true," said Ascanio, "but your future must be magnificent; you are noble, rich, and beautiful, and the shade over your young days will but make the others seem more brilliant."

Colombe shook her head sadly. "Oh my mother!" she murmured.

Ascanio looked at her with infinite tenderness, and she at him with divine confidence; then, with [illegible] cried—

"Listen, Colombe; if you wish for anything, or if any misfortune threatens you, and a life can accomplish that desire or avert that misfortune, speak, I am ready."

"I thank you from my heart; you have once exposed your life at a word from me, but God alone can save me this time."

She had no time to say more, for Perrine and Ruperta approached. They, as well as the lovers, had made good use of their time, and were already firm friends. Perrine had given Ruperta a receipt for curing chilblains, and she, in return, had imparted to Perrine a secret for preserving plums. They had promised to meet again, at any risk.

"Well, Colombe," said Perrine, "are you still angry with me? Would it not have been a shame to refuse entrance to him, without whose aid this house would no longer have had a master? Must we not help to cure this young man of a wound received for us? And see, Dame Ruperta, has he not more colour already than when he came?"

"It is true; I never saw him look better."

"Reflect, Colombe," continued Perrine, "that it would be absolute murder to retard a recovery so well commenced. You permit me to invite him to come again to-morrow evening? It will be an amusement for you, my dear child, and a very innocent one. Shall not Dame Ruperta and I be here? Besides, you had authorized M. Ascanio to bring his jewels to show you: he forgot them to-day: he must bring them to-morrow."

Colombe looked at Ascanio; he had turned pale, and was anxiously awaiting her reply. There was, then, some one in the world who depended upon her, and whom she could make sad or happy by a word. The impudent airs of the Comte d'Orbec had humbled her; she could not resist the desire to bring a look of joy into Ascanio's eyes; so she said, blushing and smiling—

"Dame Perrine, what are you making me do?"

Ascanio tried to speak, but could only clasp his hands.

"Thanks, my pretty lady," said Ruperta, with a deep curtsey. "Ascanio, you are still weak, take my arm and come home."

Ascanio could hardly speak, even to say "adieu," and "thanks," but his looks supplied the place of words. Colombe sat down again on the bank, but Perrine followed him to the door, and said—

"Till to-morrow, then; and you can come if you like every day for three months."

"And why only for three months?" said Ascanio.

"Because in three months Colombe is to marry the Comte d'Orbec."

Ascanio had need of all his energy to prevent himself from falling. "Colombe is to marry the Comte d'Orbec!" murmured he. "Oh, mon Dieu! she does not love me, then."

But neither Perrine nor Ruperta heard him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUEEN OF THE KING.

We have said that Benvenuto had gone out about eleven, without saying where he was going. He had gone to the Louvre to visit his Majesty, Francois I. The king had kept his word, and Benvenuto found himself admitted merely on giving his name. One door, however, remained closed to him ; it was that of the council room, where Francois was discussing affairs of state, to which the ushers did not dare to admit Cellini without express orders.

The position of the king's affairs was grave. We have not yet spoken of state affairs, convinced that our readers would prefer those of the heart ; but we are now arrived at an epoch when we can no longer avoid it, and we are forced to throw a glance, which we shall make as rapid as possible, over France and Spain, or rather over Francois I. and Charles V : for in the sixteenth century kings were nations.

The position of affairs had much changed since the famous treaty of Cambray, of which two women, Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V., and the Duchess d'Angoulême, mother of Charles I., had been the negotiators. This treaty, which was the completion of that of Madrid, provided that the King of Spain should abandon Burgundy to the King of France, who should renounce, on his part, Flanders and Artois. It was also agreed that the two young princes, who served as hostages for their father, were to be given up on the payment of two millions of golden crowns, and finally, that the good Queen Eleonora, sister of Charles V., first promised to the constable and then married to Francois I., as a pledge of peace, should return to the Court of France with the two children.

All these conditions were faithfully fulfilled, but the renunciation by Francois of the Duchy of Milan, exacted of him during his captivity, was but temporary. Scarcely was he free and powerful again, than he once more turned his eyes towards Italy, and with the view of strengthening his influence at the Court of Rome, he had married his eldest son Henry to Catherine de Medicis, niece of Pope Clement VII. Unluckily, Clement died soon after, and was succeeded by Alexander Farnese, who mounted the Papal throne under the name of Paul III., resolved neither to join the party of the emperor or of Francois, but to hold the balance equal between them.

The emperor, therefore, reassured on that side, prepared an expedition against Tunis, which had been seized by the famous corsair, Barbarossa, who, after chasing Muley-Hassan, had taken possession of the country and ravaged Sicily. The expedition had

been completely successful, and Charles V., after having destroyed three or four vessels of Admiral Soliman's, had entered triumphantly into the port of Naples. There he heard news which completely reassured him; namely, that Charles III., Duc de Savoy, had detached himself from the party of François I., to whose troops he refused a passage through his territories, when required to do so by virtue of former treaties; so that François found himself obliged to force the terrible passage of the Alps, which he had hitherto always found open to him.

But Charles V was roused from his security. François had marched upon Savoy so rapidly, that the duke saw his province occupied before he suspected the invasion; Brion, who commanded the attacking force, seized Chamberg, and appeared on the Alps, menacing Piedmont, just as Francis Sforza died suddenly, leaving the Duchy of Milan without an heir; and consequently giving both claim and facility to François.

Brion descended into Italy and seized Turin; there he established his camp and waited.

Charles V., on his part, had quitted Naples for Rome. The victory which he had just gained over the enemies of the Christians, insured him a triumphal entry into the capital of the Christian world; and this so intoxicated him, that he broke through all bounds, and accused François, in the consistory, of heresy, grounding this accusation on the protection that he had granted to the Protestants, and on the alliance that he had made with the Turks. Then, having recapitulated all their old quarrels, in which, according to him, Francois had always given the offence, he swore a war of extermination against his brother-in-law.

His past misfortunes had rendered Francois as prudent as he had formerly been adventurous; therefore, when he saw himself menaced at once by Spain and the empire, he left Annebaut to guard Turin, and recalled Brion, with orders simply to watch the frontiers.

All those who knew the chivalric character of Francois, were surprised at this retreat, and thought that the moment he took a step backwards, he must consider himself sure of defeat. Charles V. accordingly put himself at the head of his army, and resolved to invade France in person. We know the result of this attempt; Marseilles, which had resisted the Constable de Bourbon and Pescora, the two greatest generals of the time, found no difficulty in holding out against Charles V., who was a great politician, but a poor general. Charles left Marseilles behind him, intending to march upon Avignon. But Montmorency had established between Durance and the Rhone a camp, which he attacked in vain; so that after six weeks of useless efforts, repulsed and harassed, he in his turn commanded a retreat, which much resembled a flight, and after having nearly fallen into the hands of his enemies, reached Barcelona, without money or men.

Then, all those who had been waiting for the issue of the campaign, declared against Charles. Henry VIII., of England, repudiated his wife, Catherine of Arragon, to marry Anne Boleyn; Soliman attacked the kingdom of Naples and Hungary, and the Protestant princes of Germany entered into a secret league against the emperor. Lastly, the inhabitants of Ghent, weary of the taxes which were incessantly levied on them to defray the expenses of the war with France, revolted suddenly, and sent ambassadors to Francois, begging him to place himself at their head.

New negotiations, however, were entered into between Charles and Francois. The two sovereigns met at Aignes-Mortes, and Francois decided on a peace, of which he felt that France had the greatest need. He therefore acquainted Charles with the proposals of the people of Ghent, offering him, at the same time, a passage for his troops through France. It was on this subject that the council was debating when Benvenuto presented himself. Francois immediately, on being apprised of his visit, ordered him to be admitted. He therefore heard the end of the discussion.

"Yes, gentlemen," Francois was saying, "I am of the opinion of M. de Mortmorency; and my desire is to conclude a durable alliance with the emperor, to raise both our thrones, and to overwhelm between us all those communities and popular assemblies which pretend to impose limits to our royal power, by refusing us, sometimes the arms, and sometimes the money of our subjects. My desire also is to crush all the heresies which ruin our holy mother church, and to unite all our forces against the enemies of Christ; to chase the Turks from Constantinople, were it but to prove that they are not my allies, as was asserted, and to establish at Constantinople a second empire, rival of the first, in strength, splendour, and extent. This is my dream, gentlemen; I call it so, that I may not build too much upon the hope of success, or be too much disappointed if I fail. But if it succeeded, Constable, if I had France and Turkey, Paris and Constantinople, the east and the west—say, gentlemen, would it not be grand and glorious?"

"Then, Sire," said the Duc de Guise, "it is definitively settled that you refuse the sovereignty offered to you by the people of Ghent, and that you renounce the ancient domains of the House of Burgundy?"

"It is settled; the emperor shall see that I am as loyal an ally as I am a determined enemy. But before all things, I shall exact that the Duchy of Milan be restored to me: it belongs to me by hereditary right, and I will have it, on the faith of a gentleman, but I hope without quarrelling with my brother Charles."

"And you will offer Charles V. a passage through France to chastise the revolted people of Ghent?" added Poyet.

"Yes, monsieur; send M. Frejus at once in my name, to invite him. Let us show him that we are disposed to do everything to preserve peace. But if he wishes for war——"

Francois stopped, for he had just caught sight of Benvenuto.

"But if he wishes for war," continued he, "by my Jupiter, of whom Benvenuto comes to bring me news, I swear that he shall have it, terrible and bloody. Well, Benvenuto, where is my Jupiter?"

"Sire," replied Cellini, "I bring you the model of your Jupiter; but do you know of what I thought as I listened to you? I imagined a fountain for Fontainebleau, a fountain surmounted by a colossal statue sixty feet high, which should hold a broken lance in his right hand, and keep the left on the guard of his sword. This statue, Sire, would represent Mars, that is to say, your Majesty; for in you all is courage, and you employ that courage with justice, and for the defence of your glory. Wait, Sire, that is not all; at the four corners of the base of this statue, four figures would be seated, Poetry, Painting, Sculpture, and Liberality. This, Sire, was my dream."

"And you shall realize this dream in marble or in bronze, Benvenuto," said the king, smiling cordially.

All the council applauded, for every one thought the king worthy of the statue, and the statue worthy of the king.

"And now," said the king, "let us see your Jupiter."

Benvenuto drew the model from under his cloak, and placed it on the table. Francois looked at it with unmistakeable admiration.

"At last," cried he, "I have found a man after my own heart." Then, laying his hand on Benvenuto's shoulder—

"My friend," continued he, "I do not know who experiences the most pleasure, the prince who finds an artist like you, or the artist who meets with a prince capable of understanding him; I think my pleasure is the greatest."

"Oh no, Sire, it is surely mine."

"Then let us say they are equal."

"Sire, you have called me your friend, and that word overpays me for all that I may be able to do for your Majesty."

"Well, I wish to prove that it is not a vain word, Benvenuto; bring me my Jupiter as soon as possible, and then, whatever you ask me for, on the faith of a gentleman I will grant. Do you all, gentlemen, in case I should forget my promise, remind me of it."

"Sire, you are a great and noble king." Then, having kissed the king's hand, Benvenuto replaced the Jupiter under his cloak, and went out with a heart full of pride and joy.

On leaving the Louvre he met Primaticcio entering.

"Where are you running to, my dear Benvenuto?" said he.

"Ah! it is you, Primaticcio; I have just seen our great sublime king, Francois."

"And have you seen Madame d'Etampes?"

"Who said such things to me, Francesco, that I dare not repeat them, although people say modesty is not one of my virtues."

"What did Madame d'Etampes say to you?"

"He called me his friend, and told me that when my Jupiter is finished, I may ask him any favour I like, and that it is granted beforehand."

"But what did Madame d'Etampes promise you?"

"What an odd man you are; you will talk of nothing but Madame d'Etampes."

"Because I know the court better than you do, Benvenuto; and as you are my compatriot and friend, and remind me of our beautiful Italy, in my gratitude I wish to save you from a great danger. Listen, Benvenuto. The Duchess d'Etampes is your mortal enemy; I told you before that I feared it, and now I am sure of it. You have offended her, and if you do not appease her, you are lost. Madame d'Etampes, Benvenuto, is queen over the king."

"I offended Madame d'Etampes!" cried Cellini, laughing, "and how, mon Dieu?"

"I know no more than you, but she hates you."

"What can I do?" "Let the courtier save the sculptor."

"I play the courtier to her!"

"You are wrong, Benvenuto; Madame d'Etampes is very beautiful—every artist must acknowledge that."

"I do."

"Well, tell her so, then. It needs no more for you to become the best friends in the world. You wounded her, and it is for you to take the first steps to appease her."

"If I wounded her, it was unintentionally; she said some bitter words which I did not forget, and I taught her her place."

"Never mind; forget what she said, Benvenuto, and make her forget your answer. I repeat to you that she is imperious and vindictive, and holds in her hands the heart of the king, who loves the arts, but who loves her better. She will make you repent your boldness, Benvenuto, and will raise enemies against you; she has already incited the provost to resist you; and moreover, I am going to Rome by her order, and the object of this journey, Benvenuto, is against you, and I myself, your friend, am forced to serve as an instrument to her spite."

"What are you going to do at Rome?"

"You promised the king to rival the ancients, and I believe you can keep your word; but the duchess thinks that you have been boasting, and in order to crush you by the comparison, she sends me to model at Rome the most beautiful ancient statues, the Laocoon, the Venus, and others."

"What a terrible refinement of hatred!" cried Benvenuto, who, in spite of the good opinion which he had of himself, was not without uneasiness as to a comparison of his works with those of the great masters; "but to yield to a woman, never!"

"Who speaks of yielding? I will open a path for you. Ascanio has pleased her; she told me to tell him to call on her. Well, nothing would be more simple than for you to accompany your

pupil to the Hôtel d'Etampes, and to present him to her. Take with you some of your marvellous trinkets, such as you alone can make; show them to her; then, when you see her eyes glisten at the sight of them, offer them as a tribute hardly worthy of her. She will accept them, thank you graciously, make you in exchange same present worthy of you, and will take you into favour. But if you have this woman for your enemy, you may renounce all your brilliant dreams. I was forced to bend for a time, in order to rise after. Until then, I saw that dauber, Rosso, always placed above me."

"You are unjust towards him, Francesco," said Benvenuto, incapable of hiding his thoughts; "he is a great painter."

"You think so" "I am sure of it."

"And I also; and that is just why I hate him. Well, they used him to crush me; I flattered their miserable vanity, and now I am the great Primaticcio in my turn. Do as I did, Benvenuto, and you will not repent it; I beg you for your own sake, and for that of your glory and your future, which you will compromise if you are obstinate.

"It is hard," said Cellini.

"If not for yourself, Benvenuto, do it for the king, and do not force on him the painful necessity of choosing between a mistress whom he loves, and an artist whom he admires."

"Well, then, so be it; for the king's sake I will do it," cried Cellini, enchanted to have found an excuse for giving way.

"That is right. And now, you understand that if a word of this conversation be repeated, I am lost."

"Oh! I trust you are tranquil on that point?"

"Benvenuto's word suffices."

"You have it." "Then, adieu."

"A pleasant journey to you." "And success to you."

CHAPTER XIII.

WOMAN IS CHANGEABLE.

The Hôtel d'Etampes, which was not far from the Hôtel de Nesle, was situated near the Quay les Augustins, and extended along the Rue Gilles-le-Gueux. Francois had given it to the duchess, and had tried to render the present worthy of the beautiful Anne d'Heilly. He had had it rearranged in the latest fashion, and on the sombre and severe facade had sprung up, as if by magic, the delicate flowers of the Renaissance. The rooms were furnished with royal luxury, and the whole establishment was far more regal than that occupied by the excellent and chaste Eleonora, the real queen, who was thought so little of at court.

We must now penetrate indiscreetly into the bed-room of the

duchess, where we shall find her half-lying on a couch, leaning her charming head on one beautiful hand, and passing the other negligently through her golden ringlets. Her naked feet looked small and white in her black velvet slippers, and her flowing deshabille lent an indescribable charm to her appearance.

The king was there, but standing before a window, and apparently deep in thought.

"What are you doing there, Sire, with your back turned to me?" said the duchess at last.

"Composing verses for you; and now I have finished them," replied Francois.

"Oh! tell them to me, my crowned poet."

The king repeated them.

"Oh, what charming verses!" cried the duchess. "Look at Aurora as much as you please, since it brings me such beautiful lines. Let me hear them again, I beg."

Francois repeated them a second time.

"Sire," said she, "I can repeat now with more authority what I said yesterday evening: 'A poet has still less excuse than a king for letting his lady be insulted, for she is not only his mistress but his muse.'"

"Again!" cried the king, rather impatiently. "Your resentment must be very implacable, to make you immediately forget my verses."

"Monseigneur, I hate as I love."

"But if I begged you to forgive Benvenuto, who does not think of what he says, who speaks as he fights, rashly, and who never had, I feel sure, any intention of annoying you? You know, besides, that clemency is the attribute of the gods; dear goddess, pardon this wild fellow, for the love of me. Yesterday I saw him, and I promised him marvels. He is a man who has, I believe, no equal in his art, and who will do me honour in the future, as much as Andrea del Sarto, Titian, and Leonardo da Vinci. You know well how I love my artists; dear duchess, be indulgent to this one, I entreat. Oh! mon Dieu! April showers, women's caprices, and artists' whims have a charm for me. Therefore, you whom I love, pardon him who pleases me."

"I am your servant, and will obey you, Sire."

"Thank you. In exchange, ask me what you please. But, alas! it is growing late, and I must leave you; I have another council to-day; my brother, Charles V., gives me so much employment. He uses cunning instead of chivalry, and the pen instead of the sword. Adieu, my beloved; I will try to be cunning and clever. You are very lucky to have nothing to do but to look beautiful, and Heaven has done that for you. Do not get up. *Au revoir*, and think of me."

"Always, Sire."

And waving a last adieu, Francois raised the tapestry, and left

the beautiful duchess, who, faithful to her promise, began immediately to think of everything else but him. She was of an active, ardent, and ambitious nature, and after having ardently sought, and valiantly conquered, the love of the king, this love no longer sufficed her, and she began to be *ennuyée*. Admiral Brion, and the Comte de Longueval whom she loved for a time, and even Diana de Poitiers, whom she hated, did not sufficiently occupy her mind, and during the last week the void was occupied, thanks to a new love and a new hatred. She hated Cellini, and she loved Ascanio, and it was of these men that she thought, while her women completed her toilette. When nothing but her hair remained to be done, M. d'Estourville and the Vicomte de Marmagne were announced. They were some of the duchess's most devoted partisans, in the two parties which were formed at court, for her and for Diana de Poitiers, the mistress of the dauphin. It was therefore with an infinite grace that Madame d'Etampes gave her hand to the two gentlemen to kiss.

"M. d'Estourville," said she, "I have heard the odious manner in which that Italian fellow has treated you, my best friend, and I am indignant at it."

"Madame," replied d'Estourville, "it would have been wonderful that my age and character should have restrained the man, who was not restrained by your beauty and grace."

"Oh!" said Anne, "as to my personal injuries, the king, who is really too good to these insolent strangers, has begged me to forget them, and I do so."

"If so, madame, the request which we came to make, will doubtless be badly received, and we ask permission to retire without speaking of it."

"What! M. d'Estourville! am I not your friend at all times? Speak at once."

"Well, madame, I had intended to give to the Comte de Marmagne the right of living in one of the royal houses, which I held from your munificence, and we naturally thought of the Hôtel de Nesle, which has fallen into such bad hands."

"Well!"

"At first, Madame, the vicomte accepted eagerly; but now, after reflection, he hesitates, and thinks with terror of this formidable Benvenuto."

"Pardon, my worthy friend," interrupted the vicomte; "you explain the affair badly. I do not fear Benvenuto, but I fear the king's anger. I do not fear being killed by this Italian fellow, but I fear my killing him and getting into disgrace, for having deprived the king of a man whom he seems to value."

"And I dared, madame, to give him the hope of your protection."

"It has never failed my friends," replied the duchess; "and besides, would you not have a better friend on your side than

I could be—justice—should you not be acting by virtue of the king's own order?"

"His Majesty gave the Hôtel de Nesle to Cellini, and our choice, it must be confessed, would have the appearance of revenge."

"And then, if I should kill this Cellini."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" said the duchess smiling, and showing her white teeth, "the king protects the living, but will think little, I am sure, of revenging the dead; and this man insulted me so publicly, Marmagne; do you forget it?"

"But, madame, I wish you to feel clear as to what you will have to defend," said the prudent vicomte.

"Oh! you are perfectly clear, vicomte."

"If you permit it, madame, I will be explicit. With this devil of a man, force might fail; then I will confess that we shall have recourse to cunning; if he escapes my men by daylight in his own house, it is possible they may meet him in some bye-street, and, madame, they have poignards as well as swords."

"I understood perfectly," said the duchess, without losing a tinge of colour over this pretty little plot of assassination.

"Well, madame."

"Well, vicomte, I see that you are a man of precaution, and that it is not wise to make an enemy of you."

"But the thing in itself?"

"Is serious; but the king knows that this man offended me. I hate him, as much as I do my husband, or Madame de Poitiers, and, *ma foi!* I think I can promise you——What is it, Isabeau, why do you interrupt us?"

These last words were addressed to a woman who entered.

"Mon Dieu, madame! I ask pardon, but it is that Florentine artist, Benvenuto Cellini, who is here with the most beautiful little gilded vase you can imagine, which he very politely said he came to offer to your ladyship, and asked permission to see you for a minute."

"Ah!" cried the duchess, with the satisfaction of mollified pride, "what did you reply, Isabeau?"

"That madame was not dressed, and that I would tell her."

"Very well. It appears," continued the duchess, turning towards the much-annoyed provost, "that our enemy begins to see what we are worth, and what we can do. Never mind; he will not come off so cheaply as he supposes, and I shall not receive his excuses thus immediately; he must feel his offence and my anger. Isabeau, tell him that you have told me, and that he is to wait."

Isabeau went out.

"I was saying, M. de Marmagne," continued she, modifying her anger, "that the subject of which you spoke was serious, and that I could scarcely promise to lend my aid to what is, after all, a murder."

"His insults were so great."

"And the reparation will not, I hope, be less. This pride which has resisted kings now waits in my antechamber, and my woman's pleasure, and two hours' waiting will expiate an impertinent word. One must not be pitiless, provost. Pardon him, as I shall, in two hours."

"Permit us, then, madame, to take our leave," said the provost, bowing.

"Oh! no," said the duchess, who desired witnesses of her triumph; "I wish that you should be present at the humiliation of your friend, and thus we shall be avenged at the same blow. I will devote these two hours to you and the vicomte. They tell me you are about to marry your daughter to the Comte d'Orbec. A good match, I believe. But sit down, gentlemen. Do you know that my consent will be necessary to the marriage, for d'Orbec is as devoted to me as you are? But though you have not asked it, I give it you. I hope her husband will bring her to court. What is her name?"

"Colombe, madame."

"It is a sweet and pretty name. They say that names have an influence over one's destiny; if it be so, the poor child must have a tender heart. Take care of Colombe, M. d'Estourville; the comte will be a husband something like mine, as ambitious as he is avaricious, and very capable also of exchanging his wife for some duchy; and beware of me also, if she be as pretty as they say. You will present me, will you not? It is just that I should put myself in a state of defence."

Thus the duchess chatted on gaily.

"Come," said she, at last, "an hour and a half is gone; one more half hour, and we will deliver poor Benvenuto from his waiting. He must have suffered horribly; he is not used to be kept waiting, he to whom the Louvre is always open. And not to be able to show his rage! But, mon Dieu! what do I hear? what shouts! what a noise!"

"It must be Benvenuto growing tired," said the provost.

"I should like to see it!" cried the duchess, growing pale. "Come with me, gentlemen."

Benvenuto resigned, for the reasons we have seen, to make peace with the all-powerful favourite, had taken with him his little vase, and, supporting Aseanio, who was very feeble and pale after his night of anguish, had gone to the Hotel d'Etampes. At first the valets refused to announce him at such an early hour, and that irritated him. Then Isabeau told him that her mistress was dressing, and begged him to wait. He took patience, and sat down near Ascanio, who, racked by fever, the walk, and his unhappy thoughts, began to feel ill.

An hour passed thus. Benvenuto began to count the minutes; but after all, thought he, the duchess's toilette is the important

affair of the day, and for a quarter of an hour more or less, I will not lose the benefit of my visit.

However, Ascanio grew more and more pale; he had eaten nothing that morning, and, though he refused to allow it, his strength began to fail him.

Benvenuto began to walk up and down the room. A quarter of an hour passed.

"You suffer, my child!" said Cellini to Ascanio.

"No, really, master, you suffer the most. Take patience, I beg; she cannot be long now."

At this moment Isabeau passed.

"Your mistress is a long time," said Benvenuto.

"You have only waited an hour and a half," said she, maliciously, looking at the clock, and bursting out laughing.

Benvenuto restrained himself by a violent effort; he looked calm, but his anger boiled inwardly. He turned towards Ascanio, and saw that he looked ready to faint.

"Ah!" cried he, "she is doing it purposely. I believed her, and waited through complaisance, but if it be an insult she is offering (I am so little accustomed to them, that the idea did not strike me before), I am not the man to let myself be insulted, and I go. Come, Ascanio."

Ascanio, terrified for his master, tried to rise; but his emotion had exhausted the remains of his strength, and he fell, fainting. Benvenuto did not notice it, but he saw the duchess approaching.

"Yes, I go," repeated he, in a voice of thunder; "and tell this woman that I carry away my present to give to I know not whom; but the first comer must be more worthy of it. Tell her, if she took me for one of her valets, she was mistaken, and that we artists do not sell our obedience and respect as she does her love. Now, Ascanio, follow me."

At this moment he turned towards his beloved pupil, and saw him with closed eyes, his head thrown back against the wall, and very pale.

"Ascanio, my child!" cried he; "Ascanio, fainting, perhaps dying! Oh, my Ascanio; and it is all that woman."

Benvenuto turned to the duchess with a menacing gesture, stooping at the same time to raise Ascanio and carry him off.

As for her, full of anger and terror, she had not yet pronounced a word. But, seeing Ascanio white as marble, his head hanging, and looking so beautiful in his paleness, by an irresistible impulse she rushed towards him, and found herself almost kneeling opposite Benvenuto, holding, like him, one of Ascanio's hands in hers.

"He is dying," cried she. "If you carry him away you will kill him. He wants immediate help. Jerome, run for M. André. He shall not go away in this state. Do you hear? You go or stay, as you like, but leave him."

Benvenuto looked at the duchess with penetration, and Ascanio

with anxiety. He saw that there was no danger in leaving his pupil to the care of Madame d'Etampes, and that it might be running a risk to carry him away. His decision, as usual, was soon taken.

"You answer for him, madame?" said he.

"Oh! on my life."

He kissed the apprentice on the forehead, and, wrapping himself in his cloak, and with his hand on his poignard, went out proudly, after exchanging with the duchess a glance of hatred and disdain. As for the two men, he did not deign to look at them. Anne, on her side, followed her enemy as long as she could see him, with eyes full of fury, then, changing their expression, these eyes were lowered with a sad anxiety upon the gentle invalid; love succeeded to anger, and the tigress became a gazelle.

"M. André," said she to her doctor, who now entered, "save him, he is wounded and dying."

"It is nothing; a passing weakness," said M. André. He poured upon Ascanio's lips some drops of a cordial which he always carried with him.

"He is recovering," cried the duchess; "he moves! Now, monsieur, he wants quiet, does he not? Carry him into that room, and lay him on the couch," said she to the valets; "and remember, if one word of all this passes your lips, your heads will pay the forfeit. Go!"

The trembling laqueys bowed, and, raising Ascanio gently, bore him off.

Left alone with the provost and the vicomte, she turned towards them, and said—

"I was saying vicomte, that the matter was grave; but never mind, I have, I believe, power enough to enable me to strike a traitor. The king will punish this time, I hope, but I will revenge myself. I counsel you not to let this man escape, and do not oblige me to have recourse to some one else. Vicomte de Marmagne, you like plain speaking. I guarantee to you the same impunity as to an executioner; only if you wish me to give you some advice, it is to renounce the sword and keep to the poignard, Do not reply; prompt action is the best answer. Adieu, gentlemen."

After pronouncing these words in a dry, bitter tone, the duchess extended her arm as if to show the gentlemen to the door. They bowed and went out.

"Oh! to be only a woman, and to have to make use of these cowards!" cried Anne, with a look of disgust. "How I despise all these men—my royal lover, my venal husband, valets in doublets, and valets in liveries—all excepting one whom, in spite of myself, I admire, and another whom I love."

She entered the room where Ascanio was, and as she did so he opened his eyes.

"It was nothing," said M. André; "the young man has re-

ceived a wound in the shoulder, and fatigue, or some emotion, perhaps even hunger, caused a momentary faintness, which my cordials have removed. He is now quite recovered, and can well bear to be taken home in a litter."

"That is well," said the duchess, giving money to M. André, who bowed and left the room.

"Where am I?" said Ascanio, looking round.

"You are near me at last, my Ascanio," said the duchess.

"In your house, madame? Ah, yes, I recognize you; you are Madame d'Etampes, and I remember also—Where is Benvenuto? where is my master?"

"Do not move, Ascanio; be easy; he is safe at home by this time."

"But how did he come to leave me here?"

"You fainted, and he confided you to my care."

"And you assure me, madame, that he is in no danger, and that he left here without any injury."

"I declare to you, Ascanio, that he was never in less. Ungrateful! you whom I, the Duchess d'Etampes, have watched like a sister, only speak to me of your master."

"Oh! madame, pardon and thanks."

"It is quite time," said the duchess, with a gracious smile. And then she began to talk in a tender tone of voice, asking questions and listening eagerly for the answers. She was humble and caressing, attentive to all he said, and displaying herself all that intellect and cultivated mind, which had given her the name of the most learned of the beautiful and most beautiful of the learned.

"You speak to me, Ascanio," said she, "with so much eloquence and fire of your beautiful art, that it is quite a revolution for me, and that I shall henceforth see ideas, where I have formerly seen nothing but ornament. And according to you, Benvenuto is a master of the art."

"Madame, he has surpassedthe divine Michael Angelo himself."

"You will diminish my resentment for his rudeness to me."

"Oh! you must not mind it, madame. This *brusquerie* hides the most devoted and ardent soul, but he is also impatient and fiery. He thought you were making him wait for amusement, and this insult——"

"Say rather this mischief," replied the duchess, with the pretended confusion of a spoiled child. "The truth is, that I was not dressed when your master arrived, and I only a little prolonged my toilette. You see I make my confession: I did not know you were with him."

"Yes, but, madame, Cellini, who has doubtless been misinformed, thinks you, who are so gracious and good, are wicked and terrible, and in a joke he fancied an insult."

"Do you think so?" said the duchess, who could not repress an ironical smile.

"Oh! pardon him, madame; if he knew you, believe me, he is so noble and generous, he would ask your pardon on his knees for his error."

"Hold your tongue, you want to make me love him, and I will dislike him; and as a beginning, I will raise him up a rival."

"That will be difficult, madame."

"No, Ascanio, for that rival shall be you, his pupil, you whose graceful invention Cellini himself praises; will you refuse to put this invention at my service? And if you do not partake the prejudice of your master against me, prove it to me by consenting to embellish me."

"Madame, all that I can do is at your service. You are so good to me, and take so much kind interest in my past and future, that I am devoted to you heart and soul."

"Oh! I have done nothing for you yet, and asked you only for a little of your genius. Come, have you ever dreamed of some wonderful ornament? I have some magnificent pearls here; into what marvellous thing will you transform them, my young magician? Let me tell you an idea of mine. Just now, when I saw you lying in this room, pale and with your head hanging down, I fancied I saw a beautiful lily of which the wind had bent the stalks. Well! make me a lily of pearls and silver, which I will wear in my bosom," said the enchantress.

"Ah! madame, so much goodness!"

"Ascanio, if you think so, promise me to show it by making me your confidant—your friend; by hiding from me none of your actions, projects, or griefs, for I see that you are sad. Promise to come to me when you need aid or counsel."

"It is a new favour that you are conferring upon me, instead of asking for a proof of gratitude."

"But do you promise me?"

"Alas! madame, yesterday I might have applied to your generosity; to-day it is no longer in any one's power to serve me."

"Who knows?" "I do, madame."

"Ah! Ascanio, you suffer; I see it."

Ascanio shook his head.

"Do not dissimulate with a friend, Ascanio," continued the duchess, taking the young man's hand and pressing it gently.

"My master must be uneasy, madame, and I fear to be importunate. I feel quite recovered; permit me to retire."

"What a hurry you are in to leave me! Wait at least till they have prepared a litter: do not resist; it is the doctor's order, as well as mine."

Anne called a servant and gave him the necessary orders, then she told Isabeau to bring her pearls and some other jewels, which she gave to Ascanio.

"Now I will set you at liberty," said she; "but when you are quite recovered, let my lily be the first thing with which you oc-

cupy yourself; meanwhile think of it, and when you have finished your design, come and show it to me."

"Yes, madame."

"And shall I not try to serve you? Come, Ascanio, my child, what do you desire? For at your age, one must desire something. You must think I have little power or credit, that you will not confide in me."

"I know, madame, that you have all the power you deserve. But no human power can aid me."

"Still, speak, I will have it—no, I beg of you."

"Alas! madame, since you are so good, and since my departure will hide from you my shame and my tears, I will not address a prayer to the duchess, but confide in the woman. Yesterday, I should have said, 'I love Colombe and I am happy.' To-day, I say, 'Colombe does not love me and I have but to die.' Adieu, madame, pity me."

And Ascanio, kissing her hand, rapidly fled away.

"A rival! a rival!" cried she: "but she does not love him, and he shall love me; I will have it so. Oh! yes, I swear that he shall love me, and that I will kill Benvenuto."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH SHOWS THAT HUMAN LIFE IS FULL OF GRIEF.

We must be pardoned for the bitterness and misanthropy of this title; the reflection is not new, which will perhaps serve as an excuse to the reader, whom we shall conduct, as Virgil did Dante, from despair to despair.

Our friends were all, from Benvenuto down to Jacques Aubry, full of sadness. We left Benvenuto very uneasy about Ascanio, and on his return to the Hôtel de Nesle, he thought little enough of Madame d'Etampes' anger, but a great deal of his dear pupil. His joy, therefore, was great when the litter appeared, and Ascanio, leaping lightly out, ran to press his hand, and to assure him that he was not worse than in the morning; however, his brow quickly clouded over at Ascanio's first words.

"Master," said the young man, "I come to ask you to repair a wrong, and I know that you will thank me instead of being angry. You were wrong about Madame d'Etampes: she does not hate you, but, on the contrary, honours and admires you; and it must be allowed that you treated her rudely, she, a lady and a duchess. Master, she is not only beautiful as a goddess, but as good as an angel; modest and enthusiastic, simple and generous; and what you thought this morning great insolence, was only a piece of innocent mischief. I beg you for your own sake, (for you hate

to be unjust,) as much as for mine, for she received and tended me with a touching grace and kindness. Do not persist in your error; I guarantee that there will be little trouble in making her forget all. But you do not answer, dear master; you look grave; have I offended you?"

"Listen, my child," replied Benvenuto, gravely; "I have often repeated to you, that in my opinion there is but one thing in the world eternally beautiful, eternally young, eternally new, and that is art. Nevertheless, I believe, I hope, in certain tender souls love is a great and profound sentiment, which may render a whole life happy; but it is rare. What is love in general? The caprice of a day; a joyous occupation in which people deceive each other. It has on a small scale all the joys, all the sweets, and all the jealousies of a serious passion; but its wounds are not mortal. Comedy or tragedy, after a certain time all is as completely forgotten as a theatrical representation, and then, Ascanio, women are charming; but they understand little beyond these fancies. To give them more, is to be duped or mad. See, for example. Scozzone; if she could enter into my soul, she would be frightened. I leave her on the threshold and she is gay, she sings, she laughs, she is happy; add to that, Ascanio, that these changing alliances have one lasting foundation which suffices to an artist—the worship of form and beauty. But, Ascanio, there are other loves which make me tremble instead of laugh,—terrible loves, wild as dreams."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" thought Ascanio, "has he learned anything of my mad passion for Colombe?"

"These," continued Cellini, "neither bestow pleasure nor happiness, and yet they occupy one entirely; they are vampires which slowly drain away one's existence, which devour one's soul little by little; they hold one fatally in their grasp. We see that they are chimeras, and that we can gain nothing by them, and yet we give ourselves up to them soul and body, and abandon our days to them willingly."

"He knows all," thought Ascanio.

"Dear son," continued Benvenuto, "if there is still time, break these bonds which will enslave you for ever; you will always bear their mark, but try at least to snatch your life from them."

"And who told you that I loved her?"

"If you do not love her, God be praised," replied Benvenuto, who thought Ascanio was denying instead of interrogating; "but take care, for I saw this morning that she loved you."

"This morning! of whom are you speaking?"

"Of whom? of Madame d'Etampes."

"Madame d'Etampes!" cried Ascanio, in astonishment. "You are wrong, master; it is impossible. You saw that Madame d'Etampes loved me!"

"Ascanio, I am forty years old, and I feel certain, by the way in which that woman looked at you, and by the light in which

she has been able to appear to you, that she loves you; and by the enthusiasm with which you defended her, I fear that you love her. If so, dear Ascanio, you would be ruined; ardent enough to consume you, this love, when it left you, would leave you without a hope, an illusion, or a belief, and you would have no other resource but to love as you have been loved, with a fatal love, and to carry into other hearts the ravage that had been made in your own."

"Master, I do not know if Madame d'Etampes loves me; but certainly I do not love her."

Benvenuto was but half reassured by Ascanio's air of sincerity, for he thought that, perhaps, he did not understand himself. He said no more, but often looked at Ascanio with a sad air. Besides, he seemed tormented by some personal grief. He lost his frank gaiety, and no longer indulged in his former original sallies. He remained shut up all the morning in his room under the foundry, and allowed no one to come in to disturb him. The rest of the day he worked at his gigantic statue of Mars with his accustomed ardour, but without talking with his usual enthusiasm. In Ascanio's presence particularly, he seemed sombre and embarrassed, and avoided his favourite pupil as though he were a creditor or a judge. It was easy to see that some great grief or terrible passion had invaded that vigorous soul.

Ascanio was not more happy; he was persuaded that Colombe did not love him. The Comte d'Orbec, whom he knew only by name, was to his jealous imagination a young and elegant nobleman, and Colombe, the happy *fiancée* of this handsome man, never thought for a minute of the obscure artist. Even had he preserved that vain and fugitive hope which never abandons a heart full of love, he had taken away his last chance by denouncing the name of her rival to Madame d'Etampes, if it was true that she loved him. This marriage, which she might have had power to prevent, she would now hasten by every means in her power, and would pursue poor Colombe with her hatred.

Yes, Benvenuto was right; that woman's love was formidable and fatal, but the love of Colombe must be that sublime and celestial sentiment of which he had first spoken; but, alas! it was for another that that happiness was reserved.

Ascanio was in despair; he had believed in the friendship of Madame d'Etampes, and this deceitful friendship was a dangerous love; he had hoped for Colombe's love, and this love was but a slight friendship. He felt ready to hate these two women, who had fulfilled his dreams so badly, each one feeling for him as he wished the other to do.

Absorbed in this gloomy discouragement, he never even thought of the lily ordered by Madame d'Etampes, and, in his jealous state of mind, he had refused to return to the Petit-Nesle, in spite of the supplications and reproaches of Ruperta, whose thousand

questions he left unanswered. Sometimes, however, he repented of his resolution; he would see Colombe and ask her for an explanation.

But of what? Of his own extravagant dreams? Again, he thought he would see her, would confess his love as a crime; and she was so good, that she would console him for it, as for a misfortune. But how to return now—how to excuse himself? In these sad thoughts, Ascanio passed his time, and took no steps.

Colombe waited for him with terror mingled with joy, on the day following his visit; but in vain she counted the minutes, in vain she and Perrine listened: Ascanio did not come. What could it mean? Ascanio must be ill—dying, perhaps; at least too ill to come. So thought Colombe, and she passed the whole evening kneeling down on her *priedieu*, weeping and praying. The anxiety which filled her heart terrified her, and with reason, for Ascanio so filled her mind, as to make her forget her God, her father, and even her own unhappiness.

And now Ascanio was suffering, dying, close to her, and she could not see him. This was not the time to reflect, but to weep.

The next day was worse; Perrine watched for Ruperta when she went out, and ran to meet her to obtain news. She heard that Ascanio was not ill, but had simply refused to come to the Petit-Nesle, or to reply to any questions. The two women could not comprehend it. As for Colombe, she was not in doubt long; she said to herself at once, "He knows all, he has learned that in three months I am to marry the Comte d'Orbec, and he will not see me any more." Her first impulse was to be pleased with her lover for his anger; but soon she began to be angry with him for not feeling sure that she was in despair at the idea of such a marriage. "He despises me," thought she. All these various emotions of indignation and tenderness were very dangerous, and she suffered in her misunderstood love, and in her tender conscience.

Hers was not the only love that Ascanio neglected. There was another more powerful, more impatient to reveal itself. Madame d'Etampes would not believe in the depth of Ascanio's love for Colombe. "A child who does not know what he desires," thought she, "who has fallen in love with the first pretty girl he saw pass, who has been met with disdain by the little vain fool, and whose pride is irritated at meeting with an obstacle. Oh! when he shall feel what a real, ardent love is; when he shall learn that I, the Duchesse d'Etampes, whose caprice governs a kingdom, love him,—he must know it."

The Vicomte de Marmagne and the provost were almost as uneasy in their hatred, as the others in their love, for they hated Benvenuto.

Thus they all suffered; Scozzone, herself, laughed and sang no more, and often her eyes were red with tears; Benvenuto loved her no longer—Benvenuto was cold and *brusque* towards her.

Poor Scozzone had one fixed idea, which had become almost a monomania with her; she wished to become Benvenuto's wife. When she came to him, and he treated her so well—so respectfully, the poor child had felt herself raised by this unhoped for honour, and was profoundly grateful to her benefactor. She had consented to serve him as a model, at his request, and seeing herself so often reproduced and admired in bronze, silver, and gold, had begun to attribute to herself half her master's success, and persuaded herself that she was quite indispensable to her lover, and had become as much a part of his glory as of his heart.

Poor child! she did not know that she had never entered into the artist's secret soul; but she little by little begun to hope that he would raise her to the rank of his wife. As she could keep nothing to herself, she had frankly avowed these hopes to Benvenuto, who had listened to her gravely, and replied, "We will see." The fact was, that he would have preferred returning to the Fort St. Ange, at the risk of breaking his leg a second time in escaping. Not that he despised Scozzone; he loved her tenderly, and even rather jealously; but he adored art before all things, and his true wife was sculpture.

"When I cease to love and to model Scozzone," he thought, "I will find her some worthy lad, too short-sighted to look at the past, who will see only a pretty woman, and the good dowry which I will give her. Thus I shall satisfy her desire of bearing the name of a husband." For Benvenuto was convinced that it was a husband that Scozzone wanted, and that she would care little who it was.

Meanwhile, he allowed her to cherish her ambitious dreams. But since they had been installed at the Grand-Nesle, she could delude herself no longer; she found that she was no longer necessary to him; that he had begun to model a Hebe, for which she had not sat, and that her gaiety could no longer chase the clouds from his brow. Lastly, terrible to think! the poor little thing had tried to coquette with Ascanio before Cellini's face, without the least frown from him, betraying either jealousy or anger. Must she, then, bid adieu to all her sweet dreams?

As for Pagolo, he had become more sombre and more taciturn than ever. We might imagine that the joyous Jacques Aubry had escaped the contagion of grief. Not at all. He also had his troubles; Simone, after waiting long for him on the Sunday of the siege, had returned furious to her home, and had refused ever since to receive her impertinent lover. He, to revenge himself, had, it is true, withdrawn his custom from her husband; but this dreadful tailor had manifested at this proceeding only a lively satisfaction, as Jacques Aubry wore his clothes out fast, (all but the pockets,) and never paid for them. Therefore, when Simone's influence was no longer used to counterbalance the want of money, this egotistical tailor decided that the honour of clothing Jacques

Aubry did not make up for the loss of clothing him for nothing. Thus, our poor friend was deprived at once of his love and his clothes. Luckily he was not the person to give way to melancholy, and he soon discovered a charming little consolation, called Gervaise. But Gervaise was difficult to fix, and he had almost ruined himself already in trying to do it, particularly as his favourite innkeeper had also refused to give him any more credit.

All those, then, whose names have been mentioned in these pages, were unhappy; from the king, uneasy as to whether Charles V. would pass through his kingdom or not, down to Perrine and Ruperta, who were much annoyed not to be able to continue their conversations; and if, like Jupiter of old, all our readers had the right, and the *ennui*, of listening to all the complaints and all the wishes of mortals, they might have heard the following plaintive chorus:—

Jacques Aubry. "If Gervaise would but give up laughing at me."

Scozzone. "If Benvenuto would be jealous again."

Pagolo. "If Scozzone would get tired of Benvenuto."

Marmagne. "If I could but meet Cellini alone."

Madame d'Etampes. "If Ascanio but knew that I love him."

Colombe. "If I could but see him for a minute, to justify myself."

Ascanio. "If I could but see her."

Benvenuto. "If I dared, at least, confess my torments to Ascanio."

All. "Alas! alas!"

CHAPTER XV

JOY IS ONLY GRIEF CHANGING ITS PLACE.

All these wishes were to be realized before the end of the week; but their success did but leave those who had formed them more unhappy than before.

Gervaise laughed no longer at Jacques Aubry—a change which had been ardently desired by him. He had found the golden chain with which to bind the young girl, and this was no other than a ring made by Benvenuto himself, representing two clasped hands.

Ever since the day of the combat, Jacques Aubry had conceived a warm friendship for the frank and energetic Florentine artist. He looked and listened to him with a respect which he had never before paid to any one, and he admired his works with an enthusiasm which, if not very enlightened, was at least very sincere, and very warm. On the other hand, his honesty, courage, and good humour, had pleased Cellini. He was just clever enough at tennis to defend himself well, but to lose. He

was a good boon companion, and in fact they became excellent friends; and Cellini, generous because he knew his riches to be inexhaustible, had forced him one day to accept this little ring, so beautifully cut, that although the apple was not there, it would have tempted Eve. Jaques Aubry hoped that he had conquered Gervaise. Poor fool! it was she who had conquered him.

Scozzone, according to her desire, succeeded in reanimating in Benvenuto's heart a spark of jealousy, in the following manner. One evening, when all her coquetries had failed before the immoveable gravity of her master, she took a solemn air.

"Benvenuto," said she, "do you know that you do not appear to remember your engagements with me."

"What engagements, little one?"

"Have you not often promised to marry me?"

"I do not remember it."

"You do not remember it?"

"No; I believe I simply said, we shall see."

"Well, have you seen?" "Yes."

"What?"

"That I am too young to be anything but your lover, Scozzone."

"And I am no longer so foolish, monsieur, as to be content with such vague promises."

"Do as you like, little one."

"But why do you object to marriage? How would it change your life? You would have made a poor girl who loves you, quite happy, and that is all."

"How would it change my life? Scozzone, you see this candle, whose pale flame feebly lights up this vast room; I put an extinguisher on it, and it becomes quite dark. Marriage is that extinguisher. Light the candle again, Scozzone; I detest darkness."

"I understand," cried Scozzone, bursting into tears: "you bear a name too illustrious to give to a poor girl who has yielded up to you her soul, her life, all that she had, who is ready to endure anything for you, who only lives for you, who loves but you."

"I know that, Scozzone; and believe me I am grateful."

"Who has enlivened your solitude as much as she could; who, knowing you to be jealous, has never even looked at the beautiful processions of archers; who has closed her ears to all soft speeches, which, however, have been made to her even here?"

"Even here?" cried Benvenuto. "Yes; here."

"Scozzone, it is not, I trust, one of my household who has dared so to insult his master."

"He would marry me, if I liked," continued Scozzone, attributing all Benvenuto's anger to love.

"Scozzone, speak; who is the insolent fellow? Not Ascanio, I hope."

"It is some one who has said a hundred times, 'Catherine, the master deceives you; he will never marry you; you, so good and

so pretty; he is too proud for that. Oh! if he loved you as I love you, or if you would but love me as I love you!"

"The name of the traitor," cried Benvenuto, furiously.

"But I did not listen to him," continued Scozzone, enchanted; "on the contrary, all these fine words were thrown away, and I threatened to tell you if he went on. I loved but you; I was so blind. Ah! yes, try to look indifferent, as though you did not believe me: it is none the less true, however."

"I do not believe you, Scozzone," said Benvenuto, who saw that he must employ a different method if he wished to learn the name of his rival.

"What! you do not believe me?" "No."

"You think I lie?" "I think you are mistaken."

"Then you think no one can love me?" "I do not say that."

"But you think so?"

Benvenuto smiled, for he saw that he had found out the way to make Scozzone speak.

"It is true, nevertheless; he loves me more than you have ever loved me, or ever will."

Benvenuto laughed.

"I should like to know the name of this Mèdor."

"He is not called Mèdor."

"What then, Amadis?" "No; not Amadis."

"Galaor?" "No, Pagolo, since you will know."

"Ah! ah! it is Monsieur Pagolo."

"Yes, it is," cried Scozzone, annoyed at the contemptuous tone in which Cellini had pronounced the name of his rival. "A worthy lad of good family, well behaved, religious, and who would make an excellent husband."

"That is your opinion, Scozzone?" "Yes, it is."

"And you have never given him any hope?"

"I would not even listen to him, fool that I was. But, henceforward——"

"You are right, Scozzone; you must listen to and answer him."

"How! what do you say?"

"I tell you to listen when he speaks of love, and not to repulse him. The rest is my affair——"

"But——"

"Be easy, I have an idea."

"That is well. However, I hope you will not punish too severely this poor devil, who seems as though he were confessing his sins, when he says, 'I love you.' Play him any trick you like, but do not use your sword."

"You shall be content with my vengeance, Scozzone, for it shall be to your advantage."

"How so?"

"It shall accomplish one of your most ardent desires."

"What do you mean, Benvenuto?" "That is my secret."

"Oh! if you knew how droll he looks when he tries to be tender," laughed the girl, incapable of remaining sad for five minutes together. "Then it does still interest you, that people should make love or not to your Scozzone? You still love her a little?"

"Yes. But do not fail to obey me exactly about Pagolo, and to follow my instructions to the letter."

"Oh! do not fear; I can play in a comedy as well as another. It will not be long before he says to me, 'Well, Catherine, are you still cruel?' I shall reply, 'What, again! M. Pagolo;' but, you understand, in rather an encouraging tone. When he thinks that I am no longer so severe, he will believe himself the conqueror of the world. And you, what will you do, Benvenuto? When will you begin to revenge yourself on him? Will it be soon? Will it be amusing? Shall we laugh?"

"Yes; we shall laugh."

"And you will always love me?"

Benvenuto gave her a kiss, the best of all answers, as it answers all or nothing.

As for the Vicomte de Marmagne, he met Benvenuto, according to his wishes. Spurred on by the anger of the provost and of Madame d'Etampes, and by his own avarice, he determined to go and attack, with two men, the lion in his den, and selected for his attempt the day of St. Eloi, the fête of the corporation of goldsmiths, when the studio would be empty. He walked, therefore, along the quay, with his head raised, but his heart palpitating, and his two men walking ten steps behind him.

"There," said a voice at his side, "is a handsome young lord going to his amorous conquests, with his valiant mien for the lady and his two bravos for the husband."

Marmagne turned, thinking that some of his friends had spoken to him, but he only saw a stranger following the same road as himself.

"I wager I have hit upon the truth," continued the unknown. "I wager my purse against yours, without knowing what there is in it. Oh! tell me nothing; be discreet in love, it is a duty. As for me, my name is Jacques Aubry, and I am going to a rendezvous with my sweetheart, Gervaise Philipot, a pretty girl, who would not listen to me, however, till I gave her a ring; it is true that this ring is marvellously engraved by Benvenuto Cellini."

Until then the Vicomte de Marmagne had paid little attention to the chatter of the impertinent stranger, but at the name of Benvenuto his attention was attracted.

"A work of Benvenuto Cellini's? Diable! that is rather a grand present."

"Ah! you understand, my dear baron. Are you baron, comte, or vicomte?"

"Vicomte," said Marmagne, biting his lips at the impertinent familiarity of the student, but anxious to learn more.

"Well, then, my dear vicomte, I did not buy it; I do not spend my money in these bagatelles. Benvenuto gave it to me in return for my aid last Sunday in taking the Grand-Nesle from the provost."

"Then you are a friend of Cellini's?"

"His most intimate friend, vicomte, and I glory in it. You know him also, doubtless?"

"Yes."

"You are very lucky. He is a sublime genius, is he not, my dear fellow? Pardon me if I am too familiar, it is my way of speaking; besides, I believe that I am noble also, at least my mother used always to say so to my father, every time he beat her. I am, then, as I told you, the admirer, confidant, and friend of the great Benvenuto, and consequently the friend of his friends, and the enemy of his enemies—for he has enemies. Firstly, Madame d'Etampes, then the provost of Paris, an old wretch, and then a certain Marmagne, whom you perhaps know, and who wishes they say, to take the Grand-Nesle. Ah! pardieu! he will be well received."

"Benvenuto is prepared for him, then?" said Marmagne, who began to take a great interest in the conversation.

"Yes, he has been warned; best say nothing about it, that Marmagne may receive the punishment he deserves."

"Then Benvenuto is on his guard?"

"He always is so. They tried to assassinate him, I do not know how often, in his own country, and he always escaped."

"And what do you mean by being on his guard?"

"Oh! I do not mean that he keeps a garrison, like that old coward of a provost; no, on the contrary, he is alone just now, for all the others have gone to enjoy themselves at Vancres. I was to have gone to play tennis with him, but unfortunately Gervaise wanted me also, and of course I give the preference to her."

"In that case I will take your place," said Marmagne.

"Well! do so; it will be a good action; go, my dear vicomte, and tell Benvenuto that I will come this evening. Three knocks is the signal. He has adopted this precaution on account of that fellow, Marmagne, whom he believes to be disposed to play him some trick. Do you know this Marmagne?"

"No."

"What a pity; you might have described him to me."

"For what purpose?"

"That if I meet him, I might challenge him; for, though I do not know why, I hate him particularly. But, pardon me, we are at the Augustins, and I must leave you. Ah! *à propos*, what is your name?"

The vicomte went on as if he had not heard the question.

"Ah! ah! it seems, my dear vicomte, that you wish to preserve

your incognito; that is pure chivalry. As you please, as you please."

And Jacques went whistling down the Rue du Batton, at the end of which Gervaise lived. As for the vicomte, he continued his way to the Grand-Nesle.

Benvenuto was indeed quite alone; even Catherine had gone to visit a friend with Ruperta. He was in the garden working at the model of his gigantic statue of Mars, of which the colossal head peeped over the walls of the court-yard, when little Jehan, deceived by Marmagne's manner of knocking, and taking him for a friend, admitted him and his two companions.

If Benvenuto did not work like Titian, with a cuirass on his back, he worked at least like Salvator Rosa, with a sword at his side, and a carabine close to his hand. Marmagne saw then that he had gained no great things by surprising him.

Cellini, in a tone which admitted no delay in the answer, asked Marmagne why he presented himself there.

"I have business with you," said he; "I am the Vicomte de Marmagne, the king's secretary, and here is an order from his Majesty, which grants to me a part of the Grand-Nesle; I come, therefore, to arrange my part of the hotel according to my own fancy."

So speaking, Marmagne, followed by his two men, advanced towards the door of the château.

Benvenuto laid his hand on his carabine, which, as we have seen, was always within his reach, and with a single bound placed himself on the threshold of the door.

"Halt!" cried he, in a terrible voice; "one step more and you are a dead man."

The vicomte stopped short, and a terrible combat might have been expected. But there are men who have the gift of being formidable. One can hardly tell what terror emanates from their look, their gestures, their attitude, as from those of the lion. Valiant men recognize their fellows and go straight to them; but the weak, the timid, and the cowardly, tremble and draw back.

Now, Marmagne, as we know, was not brave, therefore, when he heard the terrible voice of the goldsmith, and saw his carabine extended, he comprehended that in that and the sword and dagger lay his death. Even the little Jehan, seeing his master menaced, had seized a pike. Marmagne felt that he had failed, and should be only too happy if he got away safe and sound.

"Well, monsieur," said he, "all we wanted was to know whether you were disposed to obey his Majesty's orders or not. You despise them, and we must therefore address ourselves to those who will know how to make you obey. We shall not do you the honour to fight with you. Good evening."

"Good evening," said Benvenuto, laughing; "Jehan, shew these gentlemen out."

Thus sorrowfully ended the fulfilment of the vicomte's wish to find Benvenuto alone. He was furious.

"Madame d'Etampes was right," said he, "and I shall be forced to follow her advice; I must discard the sword and take to the poignard. This devil of a man is not patient; I saw in his eyes that if I had taken another step forward, I should have been a dead man: but I shall have my revenge. Look to yourself, M. Benvenuto."

Then he began to blame his men, who would have asked no better than to gain their money honestly, by killing Benvenuto, and who in retiring had only obeyed their master's orders. They promised him to do better next time, and he announced to them that he should not again accompany them. Then, after enjoining silence, he went to the provost's and told him that he had judged it safer, in order to turn suspicion from himself, to defer Benvenuto's punishment until some day when he should be returning home with some money or precious work, and then people would think he had been murdered by robbers.

It now remains to be seen how the wishes of Madame d'Etampes, Cellini, and Ascanio were fulfilled.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COURT OF THE DUCHESS D'ETAMPES.

Ascanio had finished the design of his lilies, and either from curiosity, or from that attraction which draws the unhappy towards those who pity them, had gone to the Hotel d'Etampes.

It was about two o'clock, at which time the duchess was surrounded by a real court; but orders had been given to admit Ascanio whenever he came. He was therefore shown into a room, while they went to tell the duchess. She trembled with joy at the thought that the young man would see her in all her splendour, and she whispered to Isabeau, who returned to Ascanio and ushered him into the reception-room, without saying a word. The duchess immediately held out her beautiful hand for him to kiss.

She was, as we have said, surrounded by a real court. At her right sat the Duke of Medina Sidonia, ambassador from Charles V., and M. de Montbrion, governor to the king's second son, on her left; the rest of the company formed a half-circle before her. There were all the principal men in the kingdom, soldiers, statesmen, magistrates, artists, and also the chiefs of the Protestant party, which Madame d'Etampes secretly favoured. The conversation was animated, and full of raillery about Diana de Poitiers, and Anne would every now and then utter such speeches

as—"Come, gentlemen, no scandal about Diana; Endymion will be angry;" or else, "Poor Madame Diana, she was married the day I was born."

Sometimes she talked quietly to her two neighbours, but not so low but that Ascanio could hear what passed.

"Yes, M. de Montbrion," he heard her say, "we must make an admirable prince of your pupil; he is truly the future king. I am ambitious for that dear child, and I want an independent sovereignty for him whenever it shall please God to remove his father. Henri may be king of France; we will leave him, Madame Diana, and Paris, but we will carry away with us and our Charles, the spirit of Paris. The court shall be with us; we will have the great painters, and the poets like Clement Marot, who is moving restlessly in yonder corner without speaking, a certain proof that he wishes to repeat some verses. All these people will follow—not those who have most riches, but those who give them most praise. The dauphin loves nothing but tournaments; let him keep his lances and swords, and let us take pen and pencil. What do you say to the Duchy of Milan? you would not be far from your friends at Geneva, for I know that you are not indifferent to the new doctrines—hush! we will speak of that again, and I will tell you things that will surprise you. Why did Madame Diana make herself the protectress of the Catholics? She protects, therefore I protest."

M. de Montbrion, thunderstruck at these confidences, still tried to answer, but the duchess had already turned to the Duke of Medina Sidonia.

"Well, monsieur," said she, "has the Emperor decided to traverse France? I do not see how he can do otherwise. By sea, Henry VIII. of England would carry him off without scruple, and if he escaped him, he would fall into the hands of the Turks; by land, the protestant princes would oppose his passage. He must pass through France, or else, cruel sacrifice! renounce chastising the rebellion of the people of Ghent. We understand him well; he fears that the King of France would take the opportunity to revenge his imprisonment. Oh! mon Dieu! he may reassure himself; if he does not understand our chivalric good faith, at least he has heard it spoken of, I hope."

"Doubtless, madame, we know the honour of François I., if left to himself; but we fear——"

"His counsellors, I suppose. Well! yes, and advice given by a pretty mouth, and clothed in clever and amusing words, would not fail to have power over the king. It is for you, Monsieur Ambassador, to take precautions; you have full powers; I know it would be painful to Charles V to give up a part of his empire to assure his safety; on the other side, however, Flanders is one of the brightest gems in his crown, the heritage of his grandmother, Marie de Bourgoigne; and it is hard to renounce a patrimony with

a stroke of a pen, when the patrimony, after being a great duchy may become a little monarchy. But of what am I talking, mon Dieu!—I who have such a horror of politics—for they say it makes women ugly. Sometimes, certainly, I let fall from time to time some words about state affairs; but if his Majesty wishes to know my opinions fully, I beg him to spare me the *ennuis;* sometimes, I even run away and leave him. You will tell me, you, who are a skilful diplomatist, and who know men well, that it is precisely these carelessly uttered words which take root in a mind like the king's, and have more influence over him than long discourses to which he does not listen. It is possible, M. le Duc, you understand these things far better than I, who am but a poor woman, wholly occupied with finery and bagatelles; but the lion may have need of the ant—the boat may save the crew."

"If you are willing, madame, we could easily arrange."

"Who gives to-day, receives to-morrow," continued the duchess, without replying directly; "as for me, my woman's instinct would always lead me to counsel François to great and generous actions, but often instinct is opposed to reason. We must think of the interest of France. But I believe still, that the emperor will do well to trust himself to the king's word."

"Ah! if you were for us, madame, he would not hesitate."

"M. Clement Marot," said the duchess, without appearing to hear the ambassador, "have you no pretty madrigal or sonnet to recite to us?"

"Madame," replied the poet, "sonnets and madrigals are under your steps, natural flowers which grow in the sunlight of your eyes; therefore, merely by looking at them I have found one."

"Really! we are ready to hear it. Ah! M. d'Estourville, pardon me for not having noticed you sooner; have you news of your future son-in-law, our friend the Comte d'Orbec?"

"Yes, madame, he says that he is going to hasten his return, and we shall see him soon, I hope."

A half-stifled sigh made Madame d'Etampes start, but without turning round, she went on—

"He will be welcome. Well! M. de Marmagne, have you found your poignard?"

"No, madame, but I am on the track."

"Good luck, then, M. le vicomte." So saying, the duchess rose, and every one with her. This woman had reason to think herself the real queen. Thus, it was with a queenly gesture that she took leave of, and dismissed all but Ascanio, to whom she said in a low voice, "Stay here." He obeyed.

When every one was gone, it was no longer the disdainful and haughty queen, but a humble and loving woman who turned towards the young man. Ascanio, born in obscurity, brought up in retirement, and unaccustomed to palaces, was already astonished and somewhat dazzled at this splendour. He had felt no little as-

tonishment when he had heard Madame d'Etampes speak so simply, or rather so coquettishly, of grave business, and of the destinies of kings and of kingdoms. And this queen, so haughty to her flatterers, turned to him, not only with the gentle look of a woman who loves, but with the supplicating air of the slave who fears. From a simple spectator, he had suddenly found himself the principal personage.

Ascanio felt the empire that this woman was gaining, not over his heart, but over his thoughts; and, child as he was, he armed himself with coldness and severity, to hide his trouble. Then, between him and the duchess he had doubtless seen his modest Colombe pass like a shadow, with her white dress and clear brow.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE, PASSION.

"MADAME," said Ascanio, "you may remember that you ordered a lily of me, and told me to bring you the design when I had finished it. I finished it this morning, and here it is."

"We have plenty of time, Ascanio; sit down," said the duchess, with the smile and the voice of a syren. "Well, my gentle invalid, how is your wound?"

"It is quite cured, madame."

"Cured in the shoulder; but there," said the duchess, placing her hand on his heart.

"I beg you, madame, to forget all those follies, which I am sorry I ever troubled your highness with."

"Oh, mon Dieu! what means that constrained air, that darkened brow, that severe voice? All these men annoyed you, did they not, Ascanio? and I—I hate them, abhor them, but I fear them. Oh! how I longed to be alone with you! You saw how quickly I dismissed them."

"You are right, madame; I felt myself misplaced in such a noble company—I, a poor artist, who came simply to show you my lily."

"Oh, mon Dieu! presently. You are very cold and gloomy with a friend. The other day you were so open and so charming. Whence comes this change? Doubtless from some speeches of your master's, who cannot bear me. Why did you listen to him? Come, be frank; you spoke of me to him, did you not? And he told you that it was dangerous to trust to me—that the friendship which I had shown to you concealed some snare—that I detested you, perhaps?"

"No, madame; he told me that you loved me," said Ascanio, looking steadily at the duchess.

Madame d'Etampes remained thunderstruck for a minute. Certainly she had desired that Ascanio should know of her love; but she would have wished for time to prepare him for it, and to destroy a little his passion for Colombe. Now that all was discovered, she must contend for victory openly. She decided on her part rapidly.

"It is true that I love you," said she. "Is that a crime? is it even a fault? Can one command either love or hatred? You would never have known it from me; for of what avail would it have been, when you love another? But this man has revealed it to you; he has shown you my heart, and he has done well. Look at it, then, Ascanio, and you will see there an adoration so profound that you will be touched by it. And now, Ascanio, in your turn you must love me."

Anne d'Etampes, disdainful and ambitious, had had many lovers, but until then had never loved. At last she felt a true love, tender and deep, and now another woman disputed its object with her. Ah! so much the worse for that woman, who did not know with what a passion she had to contend, and what it was to have the Duchesse d'Etampes for a rival, the duchess who would rob her of her Ascanio, and was powerful enough to destroy any one who came between them. Henceforth all her ambition, all her beauty, would be exercised to serve her love for Ascanio and her jealousy of Colombe. Poor Colombe! at that moment bending over her embroidery or kneeling on her *priedieu*.

As for Ascanio, in the presence of a love so frank and so formidable, he felt himself both fascinated and frightened. Benvenuto had told him, and he understood it now, that this was more than a caprice; but he wanted not the strength to struggle, but the tact to deceive and subdue. He was scarcely twenty years old, and, too candid to feign, he imagined, poor boy, that to invoke the name of Colombe would be to arm himself with sword and buckler, while, on the contrary, it but inflamed Madame d'Etampes, whom a love without rivalry or struggle might soon have wearied.

"Come, Ascanio," continued she, more calmly, seeing that the young man did not speak, terrified perhaps at the words which she had uttered, "let us forget for to-day my love, which an imprudent word has revealed to you. Let us think only of you yourself. Oh! I love you, more for your own sake than mine, I swear to you. I wish to illumine your life as you have done mine. You are an orphan; have me for a mother. You must have heard what I said to Montbrion and Medina, and perhaps believe that I am wholly engrossed by ambition. It is true that I am ambitious, but for you alone. Since when, have I dreamed of this project of creating for a son of France an independent duchy in the heart of Italy? Since I loved you. If I am queen there, who will really be king? You. Ah! you do not know me, Ascanio; you do not know what I am. You see I tell you the truth; I unfold to you all my projects. In your turn

confide in me, Ascanio. What are your wishes, that I may accomplish them? What are your passions, that I may serve them?"

"Madame, I will be as frank and honest as yourself; I will tell you the truth, as you have told it to me. I desire nothing, I wish for nothing, but the love of Colombe."

"But since she does not love you—you told me so yourself."

"I despaired the other day, but now who knows——" Ascanio lowered his eyes and voice—"*You* love me," said he.

The duchess remained thunderstruck before this truth, divined by the instinct of passion. There was a moment's silence; then recovering herself—

"Ascanio," said she, "let us speak no more of affairs of the heart. Love, to you men, is not everything. Have you never wished for honours, riches, and glory?"

"Oh yes! during the last month I have desired them ardently," said Ascanio, carried away, in spite of himself, by one constant thought. There was another pause.

"Do you love, Italy?" said Anne, with an effort.

"Yes, madame," replied Ascanio. "There there are flowery orange trees, under which conversation is sweet. There the blue sky sets off so well every beauty."

"Oh, to carry you there, alone, by myself! To be all to you, as you would be all to me! Mon Dieu!" cried the duchess, returning insensibly to her love; but remembering herself, "I thought," said she, "that you loved art better than anything."

"Oh! it is not I, it is Cellini, who gives his soul to art. He is the great, the sublime artist, while I am but a poor apprentice. We came to France, he, not to gain riches but glory; I, because I loved him, and could not separate from him; for at that time he was all in all to me, who have no personal will, no independent strength; I became a goldsmith to please him, and learned to chase because he loved it."

"Well!" said the duchess; "live in Italy almost as a king, protect artists, Cellini before all; give him bronze, silver, and gold to work upon; and above all, love and be loved—Is not that a beautiful dream?"

"It is paradise, if it be Colombe whom I love, and by whom I am loved."

"Always Colombe!" cried the duchess. "So be it, then, since you return to that subject so obstinately; since Colombe must be present with us, incessantly before our eyes, and in your heart, let us speak of her frankly. She does not love you—you know it well."

"Oh no, madame, I do not know it,"

"But she is to marry another."

"Her father forces her, perhaps."

"Her father forces her! And do you think, if I were in her place, that there would exist a power in the whole world which

should separate us. Oh! I would quit all, would fly all, would run to you, and give you my love, my honour, my life. No, no; I tell you she does not love you; and still more, I tell you, you do not love her."

"I not love Colombe! Did you say that, madame?"

"No; you do not love her; you deceive yourself. At your age people mistake for love the necessity of loving something. Oh! you might love me. I do not know this Colombe; she may be beautiful, pure, all that you wish, but these young girls do not know how to love. It is not your Colombe who would say to you what I have said, I, whom you disdain; she would have too much vanity, too much reserve. But my love is simple, and speaks simply. You despise me, and think that I forget my place as a woman, because I do not dissimulate. One day, when you know more of the world, when you have experienced the griefs of life, you will repent of your injustice and admire me. But I do not care for admiration; I wish to be loved. I repeat to you, Ascanio, if I loved you less, I could be false, skilful, and coquettish; but I love you too well, and wish to receive your love, not to steal it. Of what good will your love for this girl ever be to you? You will suffer, and that is all. I can serve you in many things. And I have suffered for you, and God will perhaps permit my surplus of sufferings to count for you; and then my riches, my power, my experience, I place all at your feet. I will spare you everything. In order to arrive at fortune or glory, an artist has often to stoop low, and become base. With me you will have nothing of that to fear. I will raise you, and with me you will be always the proud, noble, pure Ascanio."

"And Colombe, madame; is she not also a pure pearl?"

"My child, believe me," said the duchess, in a melancholy tone, "your pure, innocent Colombe, would give you an arid and monotonous life. You are both too divine; God has not made angels to be united to each other, but to make the wicked better!"

The duchess spoke these words with so eloquent an action, and a voice so full of sincerity, that Ascanio, in spite of himself, felt a tender pity.

"Alas! madame," said he, "I see that you love me well; I am much moved by it, but my love is before all."

"Ah! what you say is true. I prefer your disdain to the king's gentlest words. Oh! I love for the first time, I swear to you."

"Then you do not love the king, madame?" "No."

"But he loves you?"

"Mon Dieu!" cried Anne, seizing the young man's hand, "am I happy enough to find you jealous? Does the king annoy you? Listen. Until now I have been to you the duchess, rich, noble, and powerful, offering you to overturn thrones and crowns. Do you prefer the poor, simple, solitary woman with a white dress and a wild flower in her hair? Do you prefer that, Ascanio? If so, let

us leave Paris, the world, the court; let us fly to some corner of your beautiful Italy, under the trees of Rome, or near your beautiful Neapolitan gulf. I am ready. Oh, Ascanio! say, do you wish me to sacrifice a crowned lover for you?"

"Madame," said Ascanio, who felt his heart melt in spite of himself, at the flame of this great love, "my heart is too proud and too exacting; you cannot give me the past."

"The past! oh! you men are always cruel. Can an unlucky woman answer for her past, when, in almost every case, circumstances stronger than herself have made it for her? Suppose yourself carried away to Italy; when you returned in one, two or three years, would you be angry with Colombe, whom you love so much, for having obeyed her father, and married the Comte d'Orbec? Would you punish her, for her virtue, for having obeyed God's command? And if she had not the remembrance of you, if she had not known you; if, tired out with *ennui*, crushed with grief, forgotten for a moment by God, she had wished to have some idea of the paradise called love, of which the door had been closed upon her; if she had loved another who was not that husband, whom she never could love, then in your eyes she would be a lost woman; a woman who could never more hope for your love, because she would not have her past to give in exchange for it. Oh! I repeat, it is cruel, unjust——"

"Madame!"

"And who tells you that that is not my history? Listen to what I tell you; believe what I say. I repeat to you that I have suffered for two. Well! this woman who has suffered so much, God pardons, but you do not. You do not understand that it is grander to rise after a fall, than to pass near the abyss without seeing it, a bandage of happiness over your eyes. Oh! Ascanio, I believed you better than others, because you were younger, because you were handsomer——"

"Oh! madame!"

"Hold out your hand to me, Ascanio, and with one bound I will leap from the depth of the abyss. If you wish it, to-morrow I will have broken with the king, with the court, with the world. Oh! I am strong in love. And besides, I do not want to make myself out greater than I am; for believe me when I assure you that all these men are not worth one of your looks. But if you listen to me, dear Ascanio, you will let me keep my authority and exercise it for you. I will make you great, and you men always use love as a step to glory; you are all ambitious, sooner or later. As for the king's love, do not fear: I will turn it on some other, to whom he shall give his heart, while I shall continue to govern his mind. Choose, then, Ascanio; you shall be powerful through me and with me, or I will humble with you. Stay; just now, you know, I was on that chair, and the first men of the court at my feet; now you sit there, I will have it, and I will place myself at yours. Oh,

Ascanio, how happy I am here! Ascanio, how I love to look at you! You turn pale. Ah! if you would but tell me that you will love me one day."

"Madame! madame!" cried Ascanio, hiding his face in his hands and closing at once both eyes and ears, so fascinating did he feel the look and words of the syren to be.

"Do not call me madame, do not even call me Anne," said the duchess, pulling away his hands, "call me Louise. It is my name also, but one that no one yet has ever called me by. Ascanio, is it not a sweet name?"

"I know one sweeter."

"Ah! take care, Ascanio; if you make me suffer too much, perhaps I shall come to hate you as much as I now love you."

"Mon Dieu! madame, you overturn my reason. Am I delirious—have I a fever? If I say harsh words, pardon me; it is to wake myself. I see you there at my feet, you the adored, the beautiful, the queen. Such temptations must be sent to ruin one's soul. Yes, you were right; you are in an abyss, but instead of my drawing you out, you wish to draw me in. Ah! do not try my weakness so much."

"There is neither trial, nor temptation, nor dream, but a splendid reality, Ascanio, for I love you."

"You love me now; but soon you would repent of your love, and reproach me for all I had caused you to lose."

"Ah! you do not know me, if you think me weak enough to repent. Stay, will you have a guarantee?"

And sitting down before a table on which were pen, ink, and paper, Anne wrote some words rapidly.

"Take it, and doubt still, if you dare," said she.

Ascanio took it and read——

"Ascanio, I love you; follow me where I go, or let me follow you. "ANNE D'HEILLYS."

"Oh! it cannot be; my love would be a disgrace to you."

"A disgrace! I know no disgrace, I am too proud! my pride is my virtue."

"Ah! I know one more holy," cried Ascanio, with a last despairing effort. The duchess trembled with anger.

"You are an obstinate and cruel child, Ascanio," said she; "I would have spared you much suffering, but I see that grief alone can teach you. You will return to me, Ascanio, wounded and bleeding, and knowing then what your Colombe is worth, and what I am. I shall pardon you, for I love you; but between this and then terrible things shall happen. *Au revoir!*"

And Madame d'Estampes went away full of hatred and love; without even thinking of the lines that she had written in a moment of madness, and given to Ascanio.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DREAMING LOVE.

As soon as Ascanio was out of the presence of Madame d'Etampes, the influence that she had exercised over him disappeared. Colombe might love him since the duchess loved him; but had he been right to declare it so boldly, and make an enemy of the duchess for Colombe? He became bold, and resolved bravely to sound the heart of Colombe. If she really loved the Comte d'Orbec, then he would no longer resist the advances of Madame d'Etampes. She might do what she would with him. He would become ambitious and wicked. But he must doubt no longer. Ascanio arrived at this decision as he went along the quay, and watched the sun bathing in glory the black towers of Nesle. Arrived at the hotel, he did not hesitate, but, after fetching some jewels, he resolutely struck four blows on the door of the Petit-Nesle.

Dame Perrine was luckily close to the door, which she opened at once; but, seeing the apprentice, thought herself obliged to appear cold.

"Ah! it is you, M. Ascanio," said she. "What do you want?"

"I want to show some jewels to Mademoiselle Colombe, my good Perrine. Is she in the garden?"

"Yes, she is in her favourite walk. But wait for me, young man."

But Ascanio, who had not forgotten the way, walked on rapidly without heeding her.

"After all," said she, stopping, "I believe it is best to leave Colombe alone to choose her jewels. If, as is probable, she intends to buy me some little present, it is better that I should not be there. I will only come just as she has finished, and then of course I could not refuse."

We see that the good dame understood delicacy.

Colombe for the last ten days had thought of nothing but Ascanio; but she justified it to herself, with the excuse that she should never see him again. That evening, as usual, she was sitting on the bank, dreaming over the delicious hour passed there with him, when, raising her eyes, she uttered a cry. He was standing before her, looking at her in silence. He found her changed, but more beautiful than ever. Paleness and melancholy suited her ideal beauty; she appeared scarcely to belong to the earth. Thus Ascanio, thinking her more charming than ever, all the apprehensions which had for a time been dissipated by the love of Madame d'Etampes, returned upon him. How could this celestial creature ever love him?"

They were close to each other, these two beautiful children, who

had loved each other without telling it, and who had already made each other suffer so much. They might now in a minute leap over the space which separated them, explain all, and let their sentiments appear in a burst of joy. But they were both too timid for that: they must make a *détour* first, and Colombe stood mute and blushing, while Ascanio trembled before her. At last both spoke at once. He said, "Mademoiselle, you permitted me to show you some jewels,"—and she,—"I see with joy you have quite recovered, M. Ascanio."

Their sweet voices mingled, yet they heard each other perfectly, and Ascanio, emboldened a little by her smile, replied—

"You have then the goodness to remember that I was wounded."

"And we have been very uneasy about you, and astonished not to see you," continued Colombe.

"I intended to return no more." "And why not?"

The decisive moment had arrived; Ascanio was forced to lean against a tree, but summoning all his strength and courage, he said—

"I can confess it now; I loved you." "And now?"

This cry escaped Colombe; it would have dissipated every doubt of a person more experiencced than Ascanio.

"Now, alas!" said he. "I have measured the distance which separates us; I know that you are the happy *fiancée* of a noble comte."

"Happy!"

"What! you do not love the comte? Grand Dieu! speak; is he not worthy of you?"

"He is rich, he is powerful, and far above me; but have you seen him?"

"No, and I feared to ask; I thought he was young and charming, and that you loved him."

"He is older than my father, and he terrifies me," cried Colombe, hiding her face in her hands. Ascanio, full of joy, fell on his knees, with clasped hands and half-closed eyes, but a beaming smile on his lips.

"What is the matter, Ascanio?" said Colombe.

"Oh! Colombe! I love you, I love you."

"Ascanio!" murmured she, in a tone of tender reproach; but their hearts had mingled, and in an instant their lips met. Colombe repulsed him gently. They looked at each other in ecstasy.

"Then," cried Ascanio, "you do not love the Comte d'Orbec; you may love me."

"My friend," said Colombe, in a grave, sweet voice, "never before has any one kissed me, but my father once or twice on the forehead. I am an ignorant child, who knows nothing of life; but I felt by the thrill which your kiss caused in me, that it was my duty to belong to no one but you or Heaven. Anything else would be a crime; your lips have consecrated me your betrothed and your wife, and if my father himself should sav no, I will listen only

to the voice of God within me, which says, yes! Here, then, is my hand; it is yours."

"Angels in Paradise, listen and envy me," cried Ascanio. Ecstasy cannot be painted; let those who can remember do so. It is impossible to describe the words, the looks, the pressure of the hands of these two pure and beautiful children.

They recounted to each other all their past joys, griefs, and hopes. They had both suffered, and they recalled these sufferings with a smile; but when they came to speak of the future, they became serious and sad. According to divine laws, they were made for each other; but human laws would declare their union to be monstrous. What was to be done? How persuade the Comte d'Orbec to renounce his wife, or the provost of Paris to give his daughter to an apprentice?"

"Alas!" said Colombe, "I promised to belong only to you or Heaven: I fear it will be to Heaven."

"No, it shall be to me. Two children like us can do little; but I will speak to my dear master, Benvenuto Cellini. He is powerful, Colombe, and all that he wills to do, he does. He will give you to me; I do not know how he will do it, but I am sure he will accomplish it somehow. He loves difficulties. He will speak to François I.; he will convince your father. The only thing that he could not do, you have done, you love me. The rest must be simple, you see, my beloved; henceforth I shall believe in miracles."

"Dear Ascanio, if you hope, so do I; shall I do anything on my part? There is some one who has influence over my father. Shall I write to Madame d'Etampes?

"Madame d'Etampes!" cried Ascanio. "Mon Dieu! I had forgotten her."

Then very simply, and without affectation, he related how he had seen the duchess, that she loved him, and how, but an hour before, she had declared herself the mortal enemy of her whom he loved; but what then? Benvenuto's task would be a little harder, that was all. It was not an adversary the more that would frighten him.

"My friend," said Colombe, "you have faith in your master; I have faith in you. Speak to Cellini as soon as you can."

"To-morrow I will tell him all; he loves me so much that he will understand at once. But what is the matter, Colombe? You look quite sad."

"Ascanio, Madame d'Etampes is beautiful, and is loved by a great king. Has she made no impression upon you?"

"I love you."

"Wait here a minute."

She picked a fresh white lily, and said—

"When you are working at the lily of gold and jewels for this woman, look sometimes at this simple lily from the garden of Colombe."

And as coquettishly as Madame d'Etampes herself, she kissed the lily and gave it to him. At this moment Perrine appeared at the end of the walk.

"Adieu, and *au revoir!*" said Colombe."

The good dame approached.

"Well! my child," said she to Colombe, "have you well scolded the fugitive, and chosen beautiful jewels?"

"Here, Dame Perrine," said Ascanio, placing in her hand the box of jewels which he had brought, but not yet opened, Mademoiselle Colombe and I have decided that you shall choose yourself what you like best out of the jewels, and to morrow I will return for the others."

So saying he ran off, after a last look at Colombe. She stood dreamily by, while Perrine examined the marvels brought by Ascanio.

Alas! the poor child was rudely awakened from her sweet dreams, by a woman who presented herself, accompanied by one of the provost's men.

"Monseigneur le Comte d'Orbec, who will return the day after tomorrow, has sent me to wait upon Mademoiselle. I know all the newest fashions, and have received orders to make for Mademoiselle a magnificent brocade robe, as Madame d'Etampes is to present Mademoiselle to the Queen on the day of his Majesty's departure for Saint Germain, that is, in four days."

After the scene that we have just described to the reader, we may imagine the effect of this speech upon the mind of Colombe.

CHAPTER XIX.

IDEAL LOVE.

THE next morning very early, Ascanio having determined to place his destiny in the hands of his master, went to the room where Cellini worked every morning. But just as he was about to knock at the door, he heard Scozzone's voice, and thinking that she was probably standing to Cellini, retired discreetly, and went to walk in the garden.

However, Catherine was not standing, and she had never yet been allowed to enter the room; therefore Benvenuto's anger was terrible that morning, when, on turning round, he saw Catherine standing behind him. Her indiscreet curiosity, moreover, found little to satisfy it. Some drawings on the walls, a green curtain before the window, a statue of Hébé begun, and a collection of sculptor's tools, formed all the furniture of the room.

"What do you want, little serpent? what do you come here for?

Mon Dieu! you would pursue me to the infernal regions," cried Benvenuto.

"Alas! master," said Scozzone, in her gentlest voice, "I assure you I am not a serpent. I confess that I would follow you willingly, if it were necessary, even to the infernal regions, and I come here because it is the only place where I can speak to you privately"

"Well! be quick! what have you to say?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! Benvenuto," said Scozzone, perceiving the statue, "what an admirable figure! It is your Hébé; I did not know it was so much advanced: how beautiful it is!"

"Is it not?"

"Oh! yes, very beautiful. But who served you for a model? I have not seen any woman go out or come in," said Scozzone, anxiously.

"Be quiet, *petite;* it was assuredly not to speak about sculpture that you came here."

"No, master, it was about Pagolo. I have obeyed you, Benvenuto. He profited by your absence last night, to talk to me of his eternal love, and according to your wishes I listened to him."

"Ah! the traitor! what did he say to you?"

"Oh! it was enough to make one die with laughing, and I would have given anything for you to have been there. In order to give no cause for suspicion, he finished, as he talked to me, the gold clasp that you left him to do. 'Dear Catherine,' said he, 'I am dying with love for you; when will you take pity upon me? one word, I ask but for a word. See to what I expose myself for you; if I do not finish this clasp the master would suspect something, and if he did suspect anything, he would kill me without mercy; but I brave all for your beautiful eyes. Mon Dieu! this cursed work does not get on. And, Catherine, what good do you get from loving this Benvenuto? He cares no more for you; he has become indifferent to you, while I will love you with a love at once ardent and prudent. No one will know it, you will never be compromised, and you may reckon on my discretion under all circumstances. And,' added he, emboldened by my silence, 'I have found a safe and sure asylum where we might meet without fear.' Ah, you will never guess, Benvenuto, the hiding place that he had fixed upon. I give you a hundred guesses. It was only he that could have thought of such a thing; he wished to lodge our loves in the head of your great statue of Mars. We could get up to it, he said, with a ladder, and there was a pretty little room there, where no one could see us, and where we could have a magnificent view all over the country."

"The idea is grand," said Benvenuto laughing; "and what did you reply, Scozzone?"

"I replied by a burst of laughter which I could repress no longer, and which much disappointed Pagolo. He began then to be very touching, and to reproach me with having no heart, and for wishing to kill him; he went on so for half an hour at least."

"And what did you reply finally?"

"Just as you knocked at the door, at the moment he had placed on the table his finished task, I took his hand gravely and said, 'Pagolo, you have spoken like a jewel.' That was what made him look so stupid when you came in."

"You were wrong, Scozzone, to discourage him thus."

"You told me to listen, and I did listen. Do you think it is so very easy; if any harm should come of it——"

"You must not only listen, my child, but reply; it is indispensable to my plan. Speak to him first without anger, then with indulgence, and then with complaisance. When you have arrived at that point, I will tell you what to do."

"But it may go too far, I tell you."

"Be easy; I will appear at the right moment. You have but to trust me and follow my instructions exactly. Go now, *petite*, and let me work."

Catherine went out jumping and laughing at the trick which Cellini was about to play Pagolo.

However, Benvenuto, when she was gone, did not set to work as he had said, but, running to the window, he remained there in contemplation. A blow struck on his door aroused him.

"Thunder and lightning! who is there again? Thousand devils, can I not be left in peace?" cried he, furiously.

"Pardon, master," said Ascanio; "if I disturb you, I will retire."

"What, is it you, my child? No, you never disturb! What is it, and what do you want?" said Benvenuto, hastening to open the door.

"I interrupt your solitude and your work," said Ascanio.

"No, Ascanio, *you* are always welcome."

"Master, I have a secret to confide to you; a service to ask of you."

"Speak; do you want my purse, my arm, or my thoughts?"

"Perhaps I shall have need of all, dear master."

"So much the better; I am entirely at your service. I also have a confession to make to you; but speak first."

"Well, master——But grand Dieu! what is this?"

Ascanio had just noticed the figure of Hébé, and recognized in it, Colombe.

"It is Hébé," replied Benvenuto, with sparkling eyes, "it is the goddess of youth; do you think it beautiful, Ascanio?"

"Oh! miraculous! But these features! it is not an illusion."

"Indiscreet! since you half raise the veil, I will tear it down, and it appears that your confidence will only come after mine. Well! sit down, Ascanio; you shall read my heart as an open book. You have need of me, and I also need you to hear me, and when you know all, I shall be relieved from a great weight."

Ascanio sat down paler than the condemned who is about to hear his death warrant.

"You are a Florentine, Ascanio, and I have no need to ask if you know the history of Dante Alighieri. One day he saw pass in the street a child called Beatrice, and he loved her. This child died, and he loved her still, for it was her soul that he loved, and souls do not die; only he crowned her head with stars and placed her in Paradise. Ascanio, I had also my Beatrice, dead like the other and adored like her. It has been until now a secret between her and me. I am weak against temptations, but in all the impure passions that I have felt, my adoration has remained intact. The man threw himself carelessly into pleasure, but the artist remained faithful to his mysterious betrothals, and if I have done anything well, Ascanio; if inert matter, silver or clay, has taken form or life under my hands, if I have sometimes succeeded in putting beauty into marble and life into bronze, it is because my radiant vision has for twenty years sustained, counselled and enlightened me.

"But I do not know, Ascanio, whether there may not perhaps be differences between the poet and the goldsmith. Dante dreamed; I want to see. The name of Marie sufficed to him; I want the face of the Madonna. Now, tell me, Ascanio, do you believe that if my ideal as a sculptor had presented itself living to me on the earth, I should have been faithless to my other ideal, by giving it a place in my adoration? Do you believe that my celestial apparition would visit me no more, and that the angel would be jealous of the woman?"

"I ask you, Ascanio, and you will know one day why I ask you, rather than any other, and tremble as I wait for your answer, as though it were my Beatrice who was to reply to me."

"Master," said Ascanio, gravely, "I am very young to give advice on these high subjects, but I believe that you are one of those chosen men whom God protects, and that whatever you find on your path, He placed there for you."

"Well, Ascanio, I have found my dream, my ideal; she lives, I see her, Ascanio; the model of all beauty and all purity—of that perfection to which we artists aspire is near to me; I can admire her every day. This Hébé, which you think so beautiful, and which is really my *chef-d'œuvre,* does not satisfy me, for the original is a hundred times more beautiful, but I will attain to it. A thousand white statues, all like her, are already present to my mind. Now, Ascanio, would you like to see my inspiration? It must be near, for every morning when the sunlight rises on me above, this light shines from below. Look."

Benvenuto drew back the curtain, and pointed to the garden of the Petit-Nesle. There Colombe walked.

"How beautiful she is!" cried Benvenuto; "at dias and Michael Angelo never created anything so pure as th young and graceful head."

"Oh, yes, very beautiful!" murmured Ascanio, sinking down. There was a moment of silence, then Ascanio cried—

"But, master, what do you want to do?"

"Ascanio, she who is dead, never was and never can be mine; she is only a memory, and vague image in my life. But Colombe is nearer my heart. I dare to love her, and to tell her so; she shall be mine."

"She is the daughter of the Provost of Paris," said Ascanio, trembling.

"If she were a king's daughter, Ascanio, you know what my will can do; I have always attained all I wished, and never wished for anything more ardently. I do not know how I shall manage, but I am resolved that Colombe shall be my wife."

"Your wife! Colombe, your wife!"

"I will speak to our great king; I will people the Louvre with statues for him; I will cover his tables with bowls and candelabras; and when for all recompense I ask for the hand of Colombe, François will not refuse me. Oh! I hope, Ascanio, I hope. In three days, when the king goes to St. Germain, you shall come with me, and we will carry him the silver salt-cellar, which is finished, and the designs for the gates at Fontainebleau. He will admire, all will admire. Every week I will surprise him with something; I have never felt within myself more power of imagination; my love has made me young and fresh again. When François sees his wishes executed as soon as conceived, then he shall make me so rich and great that the provost himself will feel honoured by my alliance. I am half wild, Ascanio, at these ideas; I can no longer control myself. She is mine, dream of heaven! Embrace me, my child, now I have told you all. I can nourish my hopes—I feel so light-hearted. You will understand me some day. Embrace me, Ascanio."

"But, master, you do not think she loves you?"

"Oh! hush, Ascanio; I have thought of that till I have begun to envy you your youth and beauty. But whom could she love? Some court simpleton unworthy of her. Besides, be he who he may for whom she is destined, I am as good a gentleman as he, and have genius besides."

"They say the Comte d'Orbec is affianced to her."

"The Comte d'Orbec! So much the better! I know him. He is the king's treasurer; it is to him that I go for the gold and silver necessary for my work, or given to me by the king's bounty; an old scoundrel, sulky and worn out; there is no glory in supplanting such an animal. She will love me, Ascanio, because she will see herself understood, and adored, and immortalized. Besides, I have said, 'I will,' and each time that I have said that word, I repeat, I have succeeded. I shall go straight to my end. She shall be mine, I tell you, should I have to overturn the whole kingdom. But should any rival seek to oppose me, you know me, Ascanio, let him take care of himself; I will kill him with this hand, which now presses yours. But, mon Dieu! Ascanio, pardon me; egotist that I am, I forget that you also have a secret to tell

and a service to claim. Speak, then, dear child; for you also, what I will, I can do."

"You deceive yourself, master; there are some things that none but God can do, and I know now that I can reckon only on Him. I will then leave my secret between His strength and my weakness"—and Ascanio left the room. As for Cellini, he drew back the curtain, and bringing his work near to the window, began to model his Hébé, with a heart filled with present joy and future hope.

CHAPTER XX.

COLOMBE'S PRESENTATION.

The day arrived on which Colombe was to be presented to the queen. It was in one of the halls at the Louvre, that the whole court was assembled. After mass, they were to set off for St. Germain, and were only waiting for the king and queen, in order to go into the chapel. Most of the people were walking about and conversing; robes of silk and brocade rustled, swords clashed, tender or hostile looks were exchanged, and rendezvous made for love or for combat; in the splendid crowd were numberless beautiful faces, and a rich and amusing variety of costumes. If we could succeed in picturing to ourselves the elegant and laughing cavaliers, the lively and gallant ladies of Brantôme and of the Heptaméron, we should have some idea of the court of François, who said "a court without ladies is like a year without spring, and a spring without flowers." Now the court of François was an eternal spring, in which blossomed the most beautiful flowers in the world.

It was easy to perceive that there were two parties in the crowd: one, distinguished by lilac colours, was that of Madame d'Etampes; the other, which wore blue, was that of Diana de Poitiers: the secret partisans of reform belonged to the first party, the catholics to the second. In the last might be seen the flat and insignificant face of the dauphin; in the first, the fair clever face of Charles d'Orleans, his younger brother. These political and religious oppositions, complicated by the jealousies of women and artists, presented a sufficient collection of hatreds to account for the disdainful and menacing glances, which even courtly dissimulation could not hide.

The two enemies, Diana and Anne, were seated at different ends of the room, and yet each sarcasm took scarcely a second in passing from one to the other, and the answer brought back by the same couriers, returned as quickly.

Amidst all these noblemen, clothed in silk and velvet, walked about with a grave indifferent air, in his long doctor's robe,

Henri Estienne, who was secretly attached to the reformed party, while near him stood Pierre Strozzi, the refugee from Florence, pale and melancholy, who, leaning against a column, thought doubtless only of his country, to which he was never to return but as a prisoner, and where he would find repose only in the tombs.

There were Montmorency, and Poget the chancellor, talking together; there was François Rabelais, smiling and observant, while Friboulet, the king's favourite jester, rolled about among the company with his hump and his calumnies, profiting by his dress to snarl at every one.

Two groups kept themselves aloof from the rest; the one consisted of Ascanio and Cellini, the other of the Comte d'Orbec, Marmagne, M. d'Estourville and Colombe, who had begged her father not to mix with the crowd, which she saw for the first time, and which caused her nothing but terror. The Comte d'Orbec, through gallantry, would not quit his *fiancée*, whom the provost intended after mass to present to the queen. Ascanio and Colombe, though much troubled, had seen each other at once, and from time to time exchanged furtive glances. These two pure and timid children, brought up in retirement, would have felt lost and isolated in this elegant and corrupt crowd, had they not been able to see each other. They had not met since the day of their mutual confession. Ascanio had tried in vain to penetrate the Petit-Nesle, but when he knocked at the door, the new servant, sent by the Comte d'Orbec, had always presented herself instead of Perrine, and refused him admission. Ascanio was neither rich enough nor bold enough to gain over this woman. Besides which, he would have had nothing but bad news to communicate if they had met, since the confession which his master had made of his love for Colombe, would not only deprive him of his aid, hut would probably render it necessary to contend against him; left thus to his own resources, the young man naïvely determined to try and soften Madame d'Etampes, and to invoke all that he thought he had seen of grandeur, generosity and devoted tenderness in her, and to try and interest her in his sufferings. For this reason he had followed Benvenuto to the court. He mingled among the courtiers of Madame d'Etampes, and drew as close to her as he could. Turning round, she saw him.

"Ah! is it you, Ascanio?" said she, coldly.

"Yes, Madame la Duchesse. I accompanied my master Benvenuto here, and if I dare to approach you, it is to ask if you approve of the design that you had the goodness to order from me, and which I left the other day at the Hôtel d'Etampes."

"Yes, I found it very beautiful," said Madame d'Etampes, "and connoisseurs to whom I have shown it, quite agree with me; but will the execution be as perfect as the design, and will my jewels be enough?"

"Yes, madame, I hope so; nevertheless, I should have wished to put in the pistil a great diamond, which should tremble like a drop of dew; but that would be, perhaps, too great an outlay in a work intrusted to a humble artist like myself."

"Oh! we can manage that."

"A diamond of that size would cost 200,000 crowns, madame."

"Well, we will think of it. But, now," said the duchess, lowering her voice, "render me a service, Ascanio."

"I am at your orders, madame."

"Just now, I saw the Comte d'Orbec; find him, if you please, and tell him that I desire to speak to him."

"What, madame!" cried Ascanio, turning pale.

"Did you not say that you were at my orders?" replied Madame d'Etampes, haughtily. "Besides, you are interested in the interview that I wish to have with the Comte d'Orbec, and it may give you cause to reflect, if lovers ever reflect."

"I will obey you, madame," said Ascanio, fearing to displease her.

"Please to speak Italian to the comte; I have my reasons, and return with him."

Ascanio went away, and asked a young man with lilac ribands, if he had seen the Comte d'Orbec.

"There," replied he, "is the old ape, sitting near the provost of Paris, close to that lovely girl." This was Colombe, and as for the old ape, he appeared as repulsive to Ascanio, as a rival could desire. Then, to Colombe's great astonishment he drew near, and in Italian asked the comte to follow him to Madame d'Etampes. The comte excused himself to his *fiancée* and friends, and hastened to obey the duchess, followed by Ascanio, who, however, did not go away without a look at Colombe, who was quite troubled at the message and messenger.

"Ah! good morning, comte," said Madame d'Etampes; I am delighted to see you, for I have important things to tell you. Gentlemen," added she, turning to those around her, "we have still, doubtless, a good quarter of an hour to wait for their Majesties, and if you permit it, I will profit by the time to talk to my old friend the Comte d'Orbec." All the gentlemen near the duchess hastened away at this hint, and left her alone with the king's treasurer, in one of the vast window embrasures of that time. Ascanio was about to retire like the rest, but at a sign from the duchess he remained.

"Who is that young man?" said the comte.

"An Italian page, who does not understand a word of French, and you may speak before him as if we were alone."

"Well! madame, I have obeyed your orders blindly, without even seeking their motive. You expressed a desire to see my future wife presented to-day to the queen, and Colombe is here,

but, now that I have acted according to your wishes, I admit that I should like to understand them. Is it too much, madame, to ask for an explanation?"

"You are among the most devoted of my followers, d'Orbec, and luckily I can do much for you. Your place as treasurer is but the stone on which to build your fortune, comte."

D'Orbec bowed low.

"And now," continued she, "I must compliment you. I saw your Colombe just now, and she is really charming—rather *gauche*, but that is a charm the more. Nevertheless, I do not understand with what object you, the grave prudent man, caring but little, I should think, for freshness or beauty, contract this marriage;—I say with what object, for you must have one, you are not the man to act hastily."

"Diable! one must make an end; and then, the father has money to leave."

"But how old is he?" "About fifty-five or fifty-six."

"And you, comte?"

"Oh! about the same age; but he is broken."

"I begin to recognize you. I thought that you were above a vulgar sentiment, and that the charms of this little girl were not your temptations."

"Oh! no, madame; had she been ugly, I should have done the same; she is pretty, so much the better."

"That is right, comte; just now I despaired of you."

"And, now, madame ——?"

"Oh! I have fine dreams for you; I should like to see you in the place of Poget, whom I detest."

"What, madame! one of the highest dignities in the kingdom."

"Oh! are you not an eminent man, comte? But, alas! my power is so precarious, I am always on the brink of an abyss. Just now, I am very uneasy. The king has taken for a mistress the wife of some nobody, Féron. If this woman were ambitious we should be lost. Ah! I miss that little Duchesse de Brissac, whom I had given to the king—a weak and gentle woman, a mere child. She was not dangerous, poor Marie; she left all that was worth having to me. But we must distract the king's attention from this Ferronière. I, alas! have exhausted my whole arsenal of seductions; I am reduced to my last intrenchment, habit."

"How, madame?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! yes; I no longer occupy anything but his mind, his heart is elsewhere, and I want an auxiliary. Where to find her! a devoted sincere friend, of whom I could be sure. Seek for me, d'Orbec. If we were two, not rivals but allies, the one would govern François, the other the king, and France would be ours. And at what a moment, just as Charles V. is coming to throw himself into our toils! I will explain my designs to you, d'Orbec. But here is the king."

Such was the custom of Madame d'Etampes; she rarely explained: she left people to guess: she sowed ideas, and left avarice, ambition, and natural wickedness to work.

Thus the Comte d'Orbec, greedy for gain and honours, corrupt and base, had perfectly understood the duchess, for more than once Anne had glanced towards Colombe. As for Ascanio, his upright and generous nature could not fathom this iniquity and infamy, but he felt vaguely that this strange conversation hid something terrible.

The usher anounced the king and queen; in an instant every one stood up and took off their hats.

"Gentlemen," said François, "I must at once announce to you a great piece of news.—Our dear brother, the Emperor Charles V. is at present *en route* for France, if he has not already entered the kingdom. Let us prepare to receive him nobly. I need not recall to my nobility the obligations of hospitality. We showed, on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, that we knew how to receive kings. Within a month Charles V. will be at the Louvre."

"And I, gentlemen, thank you in advance for the reception you are about to give my royal brother," said the queen.

All replied by cries of "Long live the king, the queen, and the emperor!"

At this moment Triboulet rolled along, and advanced to the king.

"Sire," said he, "will you permit me to dedicate to your majesty a work that I am about to have printed?"

"With great pleasure," replied the king; "but I must know the name of the book, and something about it."

"Sire, it is to be called 'The Almanack of Fools,' and I have already written on the first page the name of the king of all fools past and to come."

"And who is this illustrious brother?" "Charles V., Sire."

"Charles V! And why so?"

"Because, after keeping you prisoner at Madrid, as he did, he is fool enough to cross your kingdom."

"But what if he passes through safely?"

"Then, I promise him to efface his name, and put another in its place."

"And whose shall that be?"

"Yours, Sire; for, in letting him pass, you will be the greater fool of the two."

The king laughed loudly, and the courtiers joined; only Eleonora grew pale.

"Well, then," said François, "put my name in at once, for I have given my word, and I will keep it. As for the dedication, I accept it, and here is the price of the first copy."

As he spoke, the king threw a purse to Triboulet, who caught it in his mouth, and went away grumbling like a dog with a bone

"Madame," said the provost, advancing with Colombe towards the queen, "will your majesty permit me to profit by this joyful moment, to present to you my daughter Colombe, who is to have the honour of being one of your majesty's maids of honour."

The good queen addressed some words of congratulation and encouragement to the blushing Colombe, whom the king, meanwhile, looked at admiringly.

"*Ma foi!* monsieur," said François, "do you know that it is high treason to have so long shut up and hidden such a pearl, which would so well adorn the crown of beauties which surround our queen? If you are not punished, M. d'Estourville, you may thank the mute intercession of those beautiful downcast eyes."

Then the king, followed by the whole court, passed on to the chapel.

"Madame," said the Duc de Medina Sidonia, offering his hand to Madame d'Etampes, "we will, if you please, let the crowd pass on, and remain a little behind, for I have a few important words to say to you."

"I am at your service, monsieur. Do not go away, M. d'Orbec; you may speak freely, M. de Medina, before this old friend, who is a second self, and before this young man, who only understands Italian."

"Their discretion is as important to you as to me, and if you are quite sure—now I will come to the point without *détour*. You see that his Majesty the Emperor has decided to cross France, nay, is probably now in it; he knows that he is among enemies, but he trusts to the chivalry of the king; you yourself counselled this confidence, Madame, and, I will confess frankly, that, more powerful than any minister, you have enough influence over François to make this advice, good or bad, a guarantee or a snare. But why should you turn against us? It is neither the interest of the state, nor your own."

"Go on, monseigneur, for you have not finished, I suppose."

"No, madame. Charles V. is the worthy successor of Charlemagne, and what a disloyal ally might demand from him as a ransom, he is ready to give willingly, and to leave unrecompensed, neither hospitality nor counsel."

"That would be to act at once generously and prudently."

"François has always ardently desired the duchy of Milan, madame. Well! this province, the source of eternal disputes between France and Spain, Charles V. is willing to yield up, for an annual sum."

"I understand the emperor's finances are low: we know it; the Milanais is ruined by war, and his majesty would not be sorry to pass over his debts from a poor to a rich creditor. I refuse, M. de Medina, for you know yourself that such a proposal is not reasonable."

"But, madame, overtures on this subject have been already made to the king, and he appeared delighted with the idea."

"I know it; but I refuse. If you can manage without me, so much the better for you."

"Madame, the emperor wishes strongly to have you on his side; and anything you may desire——"

"My influence is not merchandise, to be bought and sold."

"Oh! madame, who thought so?"

"Listen! you assure me that your king desires my support; and, between ourselves, he is right. Well! I ask less than he offers. This is what he must do: He must promise the duchy of Milan to François; then, once out of France, he shall remember the violated treaty of Madrid, and shall forget his promise."

"But, madame, that will be to declare war."

"Listen, M. de Medina. The king will cry out, and menace, no doubt. Then Charles must consent to erect the Milanais into an independent state, and give it freely to Charles d'Orleans, the second son of the king, and in that manner Charles will not increase the power of his rival. It seems to me that that is well worth a few crowns. As for what I wish personally, which you spoke of just now, if the emperor consents to my proposals, let him drop before me, at our first interview, a stone, more or less precious, which I will pick up, if it be worth the trouble, and will keep it in remembrance of the glorious alliance between the successor of the Cæsars and myself."

The Duchesse d'Etampes then leaned towards Ascanio, and whispered.

"All this is for you, Ascanio; to gain your heart I would ruin France. Well! monsieur," continued she, turning again to the ambassador, "what is your answer?"

"The emperor alone can decide on so important a subject; but I am inclined to believe that he will willingly accede to a proposal which seems to me so advantageous for us as to terrify me."

"I assure you that it is also advantageous for me. We women have our own politics; but I swear to you that my projects are in no way dangerous for you. How could they be so? Meanwhile, before I hear the resolution of Charles V., I shall lose no occasion of speaking against him, and of persuading the king to keep him prisoner."

"What, madame! is that our alliance?"

"Oh! monsieur, cannot a statesman like you, see that the essential thing is to avert all suspicion from me, and that to espouse your cause openly would be to ruin it. Let me appear to be your enemy; do you not know how powerful words are? If Charles V. refuse my treaty, I shall say, 'Sire, trust to my generous instincts as a woman, and do not recoil from just and necessary reprisals;' if he accepts, 'Sire, trust to my feminine skill, and resign yourself to a useful infamy.'"

"Ah! madame," said the duke, bowing, "what a pity you are a queen, you would have made such a perfect ambassador."

And he took his leave, enchanted at the turn the negotiation had taken.

"It is now my turn to speak openly, M. d'Orbec," said the duchesse; "now you know three things—firstly, that it is important to my friends and myself, that my power should be strengthened at this time; secondly, that in the future we are safe, for Charles d'Orleans will owe me gratitude; and thirdly, that your Colombe's beauty has struck his Majesty. Well! I address myself to a man superior to vulgar prejudices; you hold your fate in your own hands; will you succeed to Chancellor Poget? In other words, will you make Madame d'Orbec succeed Marie de Brissac?"

Ascanio made a movement of horror, which was not perceived by d'Orbec, who replied with an odious look—

"I wish to be chancellor."

"Good, then we are saved; but the provost?"

"Oh! you must find him also some good appointment, only let it be more lucrative than honorary; and then at his death I shall inherit it all."

Ascanio could contain himself no longer.

"Madame!" cried he, in a loud voice, and rushing forward. He had not time to finish, for the door opened, and all the court returned. Madame d'Etampes seized his hand, and, drawing him backwards, said in his ear, "Well! young man, do you now see how one may become a king's mistress, and where we are often led in spite of ourselves?"

The kind advanced, full of glee. Charles V. was coming, and there would be receptions, fêtes, and surprises. The whole world would have their eyes upon Paris and its king. He thought of it with almost an infantine joy. It was his nature to look at things on the brilliant, not the serious side, and to think always of display and effect. That day, the prospect of dazzling a rival made him quite happy.

"Oh! Sire," cried Triboulet, in a doleful tone, "I come to make my adieux to you; your Majesty must resign yourself to lose me, and I deplore it for your sake as much as for my own. What will become of your Majesty without your poor Triboulet?

"What! you are going to leave me, just when there is but one buffoon for two kings."

"And two kings for one buffoon."

"But I will not have it, Triboulet; I order you to remain."

"Alas! then tell M. de Vielleville so; for I simply told him what people said about his wife, and he threatened to tear out my eyes first, and my soul after—if I had one, he impiously added. Your Majesty should have his tongue cut off for using such language."

"Be easy, my poor Triboulet; he who takes away your life shall be hung a quarter of an hour after."

"Oh! Sire, if it be all the same to you——" "Well?"

"Have him hung a quarter of an hour before; I prefer it."

All laughed, and the king more than any. Then, as he advanced, he met Pierre Strozzi.

"Signor Pierre Strozzi," said he, "I believe that long ago you asked for letters of naturalization; and it is a shame that, after having so valiantly combated for France in Piedmont, you should not yet belong to us. This evening M. le Maçon, my secretary, shall make out the necessary papers——. Ah! there you are, Cellini, and you never come with empty hands; what have you there? But wait a moment, it shall not be said that I am never to be in advance of you in generosity; M. le Maçon, you will also prepare letters of naturalization for my friend Benvenuto, and deliver them to him free of expense."

"I thank your Majesty; but, excuse my ignorance: what are letters of naturalization?"

"What!" cried le Maçon, "they are the greatest honour that the king can grant to a foreigner, for they make you a Frenchman."

"I begin to understand, Sire, and I thank you," said Cellini; "but, excuse me: I was already your Majesty's subject in heart; of what use are these letters?"

"Of what use?" cried François; "of this, that, now you are a Frenchman, I can give you the Grand-Nesle, which I could not do before. M. le Maçon, join the gift of the château to the letters. Do you see any use in them now, Benvenuto?"

"Yes, Sire, and I thank you a thousand times; and I even dare to hope that this favour of to-day is but the stepping-stone to an immense favour that I shall dare perhaps to ask on another."

"You know what I have promised. Bring me my Jupiter, and ask."

"Yes, your Majesty has a good memory, and I believe will keep your word. Yes, your Majesty may confer on me an immense boon, and already, by your generous instinct, you have made the accomplishment of this wish easier."

"All shall be done according to your desire; but, meanwhile, let me see what you have there."

"Sire, it is a silver salt-cellar."

"Show me quickly, Benvenuto."

The king examined attentively and silently the marvellous work presented to him by Cellini.

"What a pity!" cried he, at last.

"What! Sire?" cried Benvenuto, disappointed; "your Majesty is dissatisfied."

"Doubtless, monsieur. You have spoiled this beautiful idea by working it in silver; it should have been in gold. I am sorry for you, but you must do it over again.

"Oh! do not be so ambitious for my poor works."

"Benvenuto, I will have my salt-cellar in gold, and my treasurer

shall furnish you with one thousand golden crowns for it. You hear, M. d'Orbec; to-day, that no time may be lost! Adieu, Benvenuto; do not forget the Jupiter; adieu, gentlemen; remember Charles V."

And he went down the staircase to rejoin the queen, who had already entered her carriage. Benvenuto, after vainly seeking Ascanio, went out alone.

"Here is a good opportunity," said Marmagne; "I will tell my men."

CHAPTER XXI.

FOUR VARIETIES OF BRIGANDS.

BENVENUTO repassed the Seine hastily, took a little basket in his hand, and without waiting for Ascanio, nor for his workmen, who had gone to dinner, he set off for the house of the Comte d'Orbec. When he arrived there, the comte told him that he could not have the gold at once, as indispensable formalities were necessary—a notary to fetch, and a contract to draw up; and, knowing that Cellini was not patient, the comte accompanied his refusal with so much politeness that it was impossible to be angry; therefore, Benvenuto, believing it all true, resigned himself to wait. Only he determined to profit by this delay, to send for some of his workmen to help him to carry the gold. D'Orbec hastened to send a servant to the Hôtel-Nesle; then he began to converse with Cellini about his works, and on the favour shown to him by the king, in order to keep him patient.

It took some time to count out the gold, the notary was long in coming, and a contract is not drawn up in a minute; so that when all was finished, and Benvenuto was ready to return home, night was beginning to fall. He inquired of the domestic who had been sent to fetch his men, and the servant replied that they could not come, but that he would willingly carry the gold himself. Benvenuto's suspicions were awakened, and he refused the obliging offer.

He put the gold in his little basket, and passed his arm through the two handles; and as there was barely room for it, the basket was kept well closed, and easily carried. He had under his clothes a good shirt of mail, a short sword at his side, and a poignard in his belt, and he set off at a rapid pace. He noticed that some of the servants whispered together and then left the house, but they did not take the same road as himself.

At the present day, Benvenuto's way would have been very short, over the Pont des Arts, but at that time it was a journey; and he was obliged, on leaving the Rue Froid-Manteau, to go along the quay to the Châtelet, along the Pont aux Meuniers, to

cross the city by the Rue St. Barthèlmy, then over Pont St. Michel, and along the quay to the Grand-Nesle. It is not, therefore, astonishing that, in spite of all his courage, he felt uneasy for the considerable sum of money that he carried; and if the reader had preceded him for a few hundred feet, he would have seen that this uneasiness was not without cause.

About an hour before, four men, enveloped in large cloaks, had posted themselves on the quay St. Augustin, near the church, at which spot the quay was quite deserted. They talked in a low voice, and with hats pulled over their eyes. Two of them, called Ferrante and Fracasso, were the two men we have already seen with Marmagne, and their two companions, who gained their bread by the same honourable calling, were called Procope and Maledent. All four were demons in a fight.

"At all events, Fracasso," said Ferrante, "we shall not be hampered to-day with that fool of a viscount, and our swords can leave their scabbards without his calling out 'Retreat,' and forcing us to fly."

"Yes," replied Fracasso; "but since he leaves to us the peril of the combat, for which I thank him, he ought to leave us all the profit. By what right does he reserve five hundred crowns for himself? I know well that the other five hundred are a good sum—one hundred and twenty-five each, and I have often been reduced to kill a man for two."

"For two!" cried Maledent; "what a shame! it is spoiling the profession."

"Ah! Maledent, life has bad seasons; there are times when one would kill a man for a piece of bread. But to return to our subject. It seems to me, my friends, that two hundred and fifty crowns are better than one hundred and twenty-five. Suppose, after having killed our man, we were to refuse to give it up to Marmagne."

"My brother," said Procope, "that would be breaking our treaty, and we must be honest. Let us give the vicomte his five hundred crowns faithfully; but when he has got them, I do not see what is to prevent us from falling on him and taking them away again."

"Well said!" returned Ferrante; "Procope has honesty joined to imagination. But never mind the vicomte just now; let us think only of this goldsmith. It is necessary that there should be four of us, for greater security. He is not an ordinary man, as Fracasso and I observed the other day. Let us therefore attack him all four at once. Attention, *sang froid*, and firmness: it cannot be long before he comes; and beware of his Italian thrusts."

"I know what sword-thrusts are," said Maledent, disdainfully. "Once I penetrated by night, on personal affairs, into a Bourbonnais château. Surprised by daylight before I had quite finished, I took the resolution of hiding until the following night; and no place ap-

peared to me more fit than the armoury. It contained many trophies, helmets, cuirasses, armlets, and leg-pieces. I put on one of these suits of armour, and, with my vizor lowered, stood motionless on the pedestal."

"It is very interesting; go on, Maledent."

"I did not know that this cursed armour served for the sons to exercise on. But soon two great fellows about twenty entered, each of whom took a sword and began to strike with all their might upon me. Well, my friends, I did not stir under all their blows, but remained firm and upright, as though I were really composed of wood and iron, and fixed to my place. Luckily the fellows were not first-rate swordsmen. But at last their devil of a father came in, and, to show his sons how to raise a vizor, took a lance, and at the first blow uncovered my pale and troubled face. I thought myself lost."

"Poor friend!" said Fracasso.

"Bah! imagine that, seeing me so pale, they had the folly to take me for the ghost of their ancestor; so that father and sons fled away as though the devil were behind them. *Ma foi!* I did the same, on my side, quick enough."

"Yes, Maledent; but the essential part of our art is not to receive blows well, but to give them. The best is, when the victim falls without even uttering a cry. When I was in Flanders, I had to disembarrass one of my clients of four of his intimate friends who were travelling together. He wished to give me three comrades; but I said that I would do the job alone, or not at all. It was therefore decided that I should do as I liked, and that, if I killed four men, I should have pay for four. I waited for them in an inn which I knew they must pass. The landlord had formerly been one of us, but left us to turn innkeeper, which was a method of continuing to rob travellers without danger; so that, for a part of the profits, I easily persuaded him to enter into my plans. All being arranged, we waited for our four travellers, who soon arrived and dismounted, wanting to fill their stomachs and attend to their horses.

The landlord told them that his stable was so small that they must go in, one by one, or they would not have room to move. The first who entered stayed so long that the second became impatient, and went in after him; but as he also was a long time, another went in. The fourth man, however, began to feel uneasy at none of them reappearing.

"'Ah! I see what it is,' cried the host; 'they must have gone out by the back door.' These words encouraged the last man to join his companions and me, for, as you may imagine, I was hid in the stable; but, as it did not matter then, I left the the last man time to utter a little cry.—But our man does not come; I hope nothing has happened to him; it will soon be dark."

"Hush!" said Procope, "I hear steps; attention! it is our man."

"Good," murmured Maledent, casting around a furtive glance; "all is silent in the neighbourhood; all the better for us."

They became mute and motionless, and in the darkness nothing could be seen of their brown and terrible figures but their gleaming eyes, their hands on their rapiers, and their attitude of expectation; and they formed a group fit for the pencil of Salvator Rosa. It was indeed Benvenuto, advancing at a rapid pace; he had, as we have said, conceived some suspicious, and with his piercing eyes was looking into the distance. Used to darkness, he could see, twenty feet off, the four men come out of their corner, and before they were near him he had time to cover his basket with his cloak, and to draw his sword; and, with the *sang froid* which never abandoned him, he took care to keep his back to the church and face his assailants.

They attacked him quickly; it was not possible to fly, and useless to cry out, for the château was more than five hundred feet off. Quick as lightning a thought crossed his mind: evidently this was an ambush laid for him; if he could deceive them he was saved. He began, then, to laugh at their pretended mistake.

"Ah! what are you thinking of, my brave fellows?" cried he; "what do you expect to gain from an old soldier like me? Do you want my cloak? Or is it my sword which tempts you? Ah! wait a little! Take care of your ears, *sang Dieu!* If you want my good sword you must gain it; but, for robbers who do not seem young at their trade, you have not good noses."

So saying, he advanced instead of receding before them, but keeping his back to the wall, and only moving forward sufficiently to show the men that he had no gold on him. In fact, his words, and the ease with which he managed his sword, with a thousand crowns of gold on his arm, began to make the bravos doubt.

"Ah! can we be mistaken, Ferrante?" said Fracasso.

"I fear so. I think the other man was not so tall, or, if it be, he has not the gold; and that cursed vicomte deceived us."

"I, have gold? All the gold I have is the gilding on the hilt of my sword, and if you want that, my lads, you shall pay dearly for it, I warn you."

"The devil!" cried Procope; "he is really a soldier; no goldsmith could use his sword like that. Tire yourselves out if you please: I do not fight for glory."

And Procope retired grumbling, while the others, doubting, let Benvenuto advance, which he did without ceasing to use his sword.

"Come with me, my brave fellows," cried he; "accompany me to the entrance of the Pre-aux-Clercs, to the house of my sweetheart, who is waiting for me there; her father sells wine. The road is not very safe; I shall not be sorry to have an escort."

At this joke Fracasso went to rejoin Procope.

"We are fools, Ferrante," said Maledent; "that is not your Benvenuto."

"Yes, yes, it is!" cried Ferrante, who had just caught sight of the basket under Benvenuto's arm, as a movement pulled away his cloak a little. But it was too late. The hotel was only about fifty feet off, and Benvenuto cried in his powerful voice, "Help from the Hôtel de Nesle! help!" Fracasso and Procope had scarcely time to retrace their steps, before the door of the hotel opened, for the workmen were on the *qui vive*, expecting their master; Jehan, Simon le Gaucher, and Jacques Aubry rushed out, armed with pikes. At this sight the bravos fled.

"Wait, my little dears," cried Benvenuto "will you not escort me a little further? Oh! the stupids, who could not take a man alone and with a thousand crowns of gold on his arm."

Indeed, the brigands had only succeeded in giving Benvenuto a scratch on the hand, while Fracasso ran off howling, having in the last attack had his right eye knocked out—an accident which increased the melancholy cast of his countenance for the rest of his days.

"Now, my lads," said Benvenuto; "let us go to supper after all this. Come and drink to my deliverance; but I do not see Ascanio. Where is Ascanio?"

"I know," said Jehan. "Where is he, my boy?"

"At the bottom of the garden, where he has been walking for half an hour. Jacques Aubry and I went to talk to him, but he begged us to leave him alone."

"That is strange," said Benvenuto; "how is it that he did not hear my cry, and come to give me aid? Do not wait for me; and sup without me, my children. Ah! there you are, Scozzone."

"Oh! mon Dieu! what do I hear! that they tried to assassinate you."

"Yes, something like that." "Good heavens!"

"It is nothing, my good girl. Now carry up some of my best wine for these brave fellows. Take the keys of the cellar to Ruperta, Scozzone, and get some out."

"But you are not going out again?"

"No, be easy; I am only going into the garden to Ascanio: I have business to talk over with him."

Benvenuto walked towards the garden; the moon was rising, and he could see Ascanio distinctly; but, instead of walking, he was mounted on a ladder placed against the wall of the Petit-Nesle. Arrived at the top, he climbed over the wall, and disappeared on the other side.

Benvenuto passed his hand across his eyes like a man who can scarcely believe what he sees; then, taking a sudden resolution, he went to his little room, got on the window sill, jumped from there on the wall, and then dropped down into the garden quietly; it had rained in the morning, and the dampness of the earth dead-

ened the sound of his steps as he advanced cautiously along, listening, and soon he distinctly heard the sound of voices. He went towards the place whence they proceeded, and soon distinguished Colombe's white dress in the darkness. She was seated near Ascanio on the bank, and they were talking in a low voice: hidden by a clump of trees; Benvenuto approached and listened.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN AUTUMN NIGHT.

It was a beautiful autumn evening, calm and clear. The moon had chased away nearly all the clouds, and those which still remained were scattered far apart over the blue sky, which was glittering with stars. Around the group who listened and talked in the garden of the Petit-Nesle all was tranquil, but within their hearts all was troubled.

"My beloved Colombe," said Ascanio, while Benvenuto stood there cold and pale, "my cherished *fiancée*, what, alas! have I introduced into your life? When you shall hear all I have to tell, you will curse me for being the messenger of such news."

"You are wrong, Ascanio," said she; "whatever you may say to me, I shall bless you. I never heard the voice of my mother, but I think I should have listened to her as I do to you. Speak on, then, and even if you have terrible things to tell, your voice will console me a little for them."

"Call up, then, all your courage and strength."

He then recounted to her all that had passed between Madame d'Etampes and the Comte d'Orbec; he exposed this plot, mingled with treason against the kingdom and against a poor girl; he underwent the torture of explaining to this pure young girl, the cruel refinement of hate and ignominy which wounded love had inspired in the favourite. Colombe trembled and shuddered.

"My friend," said she, "I must reveal to my father this hideous plot against my honour. My father does not suspect our love, but he owes you his life, and will listen to you. Oh! be easy, he will separate my destiny from that of the Comte d'Orbec."

"Alas!"

"Oh! my friend!" cried Colombe, who understood the meaning of this exclamation; "how can you suspect my father? It is wrong, Ascanio. No, he knows nothing, suspects nothing, I am sure; and although he has never shown me any great tenderness, he would not with his own hand plunge me into shame and misfortune."

"Pardon me, Colombe; but your father is not accustomed to see misfortune in riches, and a title would, to him, cover the shame. He would rather see you the mistress of a king, than the wife of an

artist. I must hide nothing from you, Colombe; the Comte d'Orbec told Madame d'Etampes that he answered for your father."

"Is it possible! mon Dieu! Has such a thing ever been known, Ascanio, as a father to sell his child?"

"Yes, in every age and in every time, my poor angel; and above all in this age and in this time. Do not imagine the world to resemble your own soul. Yes, Colombe, the noblest names in France have lent their sanction to the dishonour of their wives and daughters; it is not uncommon at court, and your father, if he wants to justify himself, will not want illustrious examples; I ask your pardon, my beloved, for bringing your chaste and holy spirit into contact with these hideous realities, but it is necessary that I should point out the abyss into which they are hastening you."

"Ascanio! Ascanio!" cried Colombe, hiding her face upon the young man's shoulder, "does my father also turn against me? Oh! I am ashamed even to think of it. Where can I fly for refuge? Oh! to your arms, Ascanio; you must save me. Have you spoken to your master, that Benvenuto, so powerful, so good, and so great, as you say, and whom I love because you love him?"

"Do not love him, do not love him, Colombe!" cried Ascanio.

"And why not?"

"Because he loves you; because, instead of being a friend upon whom we can reckon, he is an enemy whom we have to combat, and the most terrible of all."

Then Ascanio recounted to Colombe how, at the moment when he was about to confide all to Benvenuto, he had stopped him by revealing his own love; how François had promised to grant him what he pleased after the Jupiter was finished, and that Benvenuto had determined to ask for the hand of Colombe.

"Mon Dieu!" cried Colombe, raising her beautiful eyes and white hands to heaven, "then we have only ourselves to depend upon, since every friend becomes an enemy. Are you certain of all this, Ascanio?"

"Alas! but too certain. My master is as dangerous to us as your father. Oh! he, my friend, my master, my protector, my father! and I am forced almost to hate him. And yet why should I, Colombe? Because he has felt what every one must feel who meets you, because he loves you as I love you! His crime is mine; only, Colombe, you love me and I am absolved. What can we do? Ah! for two days I have been interrogating myself, and I know not if I detest or love him. He loves you, it is true, but he has also always loved me so much, that my poor soul vacillates and trembles amidst all this trouble like a reed in a storm. Sometimes I think I will tell him of the designs of the Comte d'Orbec, and I hope that he will deliver us. But after that, when I shall have to tell him that his pupil is his rival, he will forget Ascanio and think only of Colombe; he will turn his eyes from the man that he loves, and look only at the woman that he loves still better; for I feel that between

you and him I should not hesitate. I feel that I should sacrifice without remorse my past to my future, earth to heaven. Why should he act differently? He is a man, and to sacrifice his love would be an act beyond humanity. We shall have to fight against each other; but how shall I resist him, feeble and defenceless as I am? Oh! Colombe, even if I should learn to hate him, whom I have loved so long and so much, I would not for the world make him endure the agony I felt the other morning when he declared to me his love for you."

Benvenuto, motionless as a statue behind the tree, felt big drops roll over his forehead, and his hand was pressed convulsively to his heart.

"Poor Ascanio! dear friend!" replied Colombe, "you have suffered much and have much still to suffer. However, let us await the future calmly: do not let us exaggerate our griefs; all is not lost. Let us strengthen each other to resist misfortune, and God will aid us. You would rather Benvenuto should have me than d'Orbec, would you not? But you would rather see me belong to God than to either. Well! if I cannot be yours I will be God's only, be sure of that, Ascanio. Your wife in this world, or your betrothed for the next. I promise you this, and will keep to it."

"Thanks, angel from heaven, thanks. Let us then forget this vast world around us, and centre our life in this little spot. Colombe, you have not yet told me that you love me."

"Oh! Ascanio, I love you! I love you!"

Benvenuto had no longer strength to stand up; he fell on his knees, and leaned his head against the tree.

"My Colombe," said Ascanio, "I love you, and something tells me we shall be happy. Oh! mon Dieu! when I am near you, the atmosphere of joy around makes me forget the griefs to which I shall have to return."

"And yet we must think of to-morrow; we must help ourselves, that God may help us. It is not right, I think, to leave your master in ignorance of your love; he might expose himself to danger, by thwarting Madame d'Etampes and the comte d'Orbec. It is not just; you must tell him all, Ascanio."

"I will obey you, dear Colombe, for a word from you is a command; besides, my heart tells me that you are right. But it will be a terrible blow to him. I judge by my own heart. And it is possible that his love for me may change into hatred; it is even possible he may dismiss me, and then how shall I, without friends or home, resist such powerful enemies as the Duchesse d'Etampes and the king's treasurer? Who will aid me to overturn the projects of those terrible associates? Who will assist me in this unequal warfare?"

"I," said a deep, grave voice behind them.

"Benvenuto!" cried Ascanio, without having need even to turn. Colombe uttered a cry, and rose quickly.

"Yes, it is I, Benvenuto Cellini; I, whom you do not love, mademoiselle; I, whom you love no longer, Ascanio, and yet who comes to save you both."

"What do you say?" cried Ascanio.

"I say that you must sit down again near me, for we must understand each other. You have nothing to tell me, for I have heard every word of your conversation. Pardon me for it; it is best that I should know all. You said some things sad and terrible for me to hear, but also some good, It is true, mademoiselle, that I would have disputed you with him; but, since you love him, all that is over: be happy; he has forbidden you to love me, but I will force you to do so, by giving you to him."

"Dear master!" cried Ascanio.

"You suffer, monsieur!" cried Colombe with clasped hands.

"Oh! thank you," cried Benvenuto, with eyes full of tears; "you see that, and he did not, the ingrate. Yes: I will not deny it; I do suffer. It is only natural, for I love you; but at the same time I am happy to be able to serve you; you shall owe all to me, and that will console me a little. You were wrong, Ascanio; my Beatrice is jealous, and permits no rival; it is you, Ascanio, who shall finish my Hébé. Adieu, my last and most beautiful dream."

Benvenuto spoke with effort, in a hard, dry voice. Colombe leaned over to him, and putting her hands into his, said softly—

"Weep, my friend, weep."

"You are right," cried Benvenuto, bursting into sobs. He remained thus for some time, and the tears, long repressed, soothed his strong nature. At last he said, "Excepting on the day I wounded you, Ascanio, and saw your blood flow, I have not wept for twenty years; but the blow was frightful. I suffered so much just now behind those trees, that for a minute I felt tempted to stab myself. What prevented me was, that you had need of me. Ascanio has twenty years of happiness to give you more than I should have had, Colombe. And then he is my child; you will be very happy together, and I shall rejoice as a father. Benvenuto will triumph over Benvenuto as over your enemies. It is our lot to suffer, and perhaps each of my tears may produce some beautiful statue, as from each of Dante's burst forth a sublime song. You see, Colombe, I return already to my old love, my cherished sculpture; she will never abandon me. You did well to make me weep: all the bitterness of my heart flowed away with my tears; I am still sad, but I will drive that away by serving you."

Ascanio took one of Benvenuto's hands and pressed it, while Colombe pressed the other to her lips.

"Come!" said he, smiling, "do not make me weak, my children. We will never speak again of all this; henceforth, Colombe, I will be your friend, your father—nothing more. Now let us talk of what we have to do, and of the dangers which menace you.

You are very young, you know nothing of life, and you hope to vanquish wickedness, cupidity, and all bad passions, with your smiles and your goodness; but I will be strong and cunning instead of you; God has created you for happiness and calm; I will endeavour to make you fulfil your destiny. Ascanio, anger shall not wrinkle your white forehead; grief, Colombe, shall not leave its trace upon your face. I will take you both in my arms, and carry you thus through the crimes and miseries of life, and deposit you safe and sound when we reach its joys. Only you must have a blind confidence in me; I have my own way of acting, brusque and strange, which might frighten you, Colombe. I am aware that I regard more the purity of my intentions, than the lawfulness of the means I employ. If I wish to model a beautiful statue, I do not think of the clay which soils my fingers; the statue finished, I wash my hands, and that is all. Let your delicate and timid soul leave to me, then, mademoiselle, the responsibility of my acts before God. I have strong enemies to fight against; the comte is ambitious, the provost avaricious, the duchess skilful, and all three are powerful. You are in their power, and two of them have claims on you; we shall have to employ cunning, if not violence. But you shall have nothing to do with it. Colombe, are you ready to close your eyes and let yourself be led? When I say, 'Do that' will you do it? 'Go there,' will you go?"

"What does Ascanio say?"

"Colombe, Benvenuto is good and great; he loves us, and pardons us, for the grief we have caused him; obey him, I beg of you."

"Order, master, and I will obey," said Colombe.

"Good, my child. I have but one thing to ask you, which may perhaps be repugnant to you; after that you will have but to wait and let me act; and, that you may have more confidence in me, I will tell you the history of my youth. Ascanio, I will tell you how my Beatrice became mingled with my existence; you shall know who she was, and then perhaps you will think less of my sacrifice in abandoning Colombe to you, when you find that I am only paying back to the child, the debt of tears contracted towards the mother—thy mother, a saint in paradise, Ascanio!"

"You have always told me, master, that some day I should hear the history."

"Yes, and the time is come. You will have more confidence in me, Colombe, when you know all the reasons that I have to love Ascanio."

Then Benvenuto began to recount, in his harmonious voice, under the stars of heaven, and in the silence of that balmy night, the following story.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STEPHANA.

TWENTY years ago, I was the age you now are, Ascanio, and I worked at the house of a goldsmith, called Raphaël del Moro. He was a good workman, and did not want for taste; but he was idle, and let himself be far too easily led into parties of pleasure, as long as he had any money. Often I remained at home alone to finish some piece of work, singing all the time; for in those days I sang like Scozzone. All the idlers of the town used to seek for occupation with Raphaël, for he had the reputation of being too easy to find fault with any one. This was not the way to grow rich; thus he was always in want, and soon became the poorest man, with the worst reputation, of any goldsmith in Florence.

I am wrong; there was one of his companions in worse repute than himself, and who yet was of a noble family. But it was not for the irregularity of his payments that Gismondo Gaddi was decried, but for his want of ability and sordid avarice. As everything confided to him was spoiled, at last no one but strangers entered his shop, so that Gismondo, in order to live, had recourse to lending money at enormous interest, to sons who were forestalling their future fortunes. This trade succeeded better than the other, for Gaddi was prudent and exacting. It is necessary to say that poor Raphaël del Moro, who was always in difficulties, borrowed of him.

Raphaël was full of gratitude for the inexhaustible good nature of Gaddi in lending to him, and Gaddi estimated an honest debtor, so that they became good friends. Del Moro was a widower, but had a daughter about sixteen, called Stephana. Perhaps, judging as a sculptor, she was not really beautiful, and yet you could not but look at her. In her forehead, too high, and not smooth enough for a woman, much thought was evident. Her large, soft, black eyes melted you as they turned upon you; she was pale, and rather sad looking, crowned with a coronet of abundant black hair, and her hands were fit for a queen.

She generally hung her head like a lily bent by the storm, and might have passed for a statue of Melancholy; but when she was roused, when her beautiful eyes grew animated, and she gave an order with outstretched arm, she looked like the archangel Gabriel. You are like her, Ascanio; but she was more frail. Del Moro, who feared his daughter almost as much as he loved her, used to say that he had buried only the body of his wife, and that her spirit lived in Stephana.

I was then an adventurous, wild, ardent young man. I loved

liberty, and my excitable disposition found vent in foolish quarrels and foolish loves. Nevertheless, I worked as I amused myself, eagerly, and was Raphaël's best workman, and indeed the only one who brought money to the house. But what I did well, was almost instinctively; I had assiduously studied the antiques, during entire days I had hung over the bas-reliefs and statues of Athens and of Rome, and the continual sight of these sublime sculptures had given me a purity of style; but I only imitated well, I did not create. Still, I was incontestably Raphaël's best workman; and his secret desire, as I afterwards learned, was that I should marry his daughter.

But I thought little of marriage, *ma foi!* I thirsted for independence, and open air; stayed whole days away from the house, and fought for a word, and fell in love at a glance. A fine husband I should have made.

Besides, the emotion that I felt when near Stephana did not at all resemble that which I experienced in company with the pretty women of the Porto del Prato, or the Borgo Pinto. She almost frightened me; and I should have laughed if any one had said that I loved her, other than as an elder sister. When I returned from any of my escapades, I did not dare to lift my eyes to hers; she was more than severe, she was sad. When, on the contrary, fatigue or zeal had kept me at home, I sought for Stephana, with her gentle look and sweet voice. The affection that I had for her was something serious and sacred; and, often amidst my noisy joys, the thought of her crossed my mind, and people asked me why I had become thoughtful. Sometimes, when I drew the sword or poignard, I pronounced her name as that of a saint; and I remarked that each time I had done so, I had come out of the combat without hurt.

As for her, it is certain that, cold and severe towards my idle companions, she was full of indulgence and goodness towards me. She sometimes came to sit in the studio, near her father, and as I bent over my work, I often felt her eye rest upon me. I was proud and happy at this preference, but without analyzing it; and if any of my companions, to flatter me, said that master's daughter was in love with me, I received it with so much anger and indignation, that they never renewed the subject.

An accident which happened to Stephana, showed me how deep a place she occupied in my heart. One day, when she was in the workshop, she did not withdraw her hand quickly enough, and an awkward workman, who was half tipsy, cut two of the fingers of her right hand with a chisel. The poor child uttered a cry, and then, to reassure us, began to smile, as she raised her bleeding hand. I believe I should have killed the man, if I had not been entirely occupied with her.

Gismondo, who was present, ran to fetch a neighbouring surgeon, who came and dressed the wound. He was so ignorant.

however, that gangrene appeared; and the donkey declared solemnly, that in spite of all his skill, Stephana would probably lose the use of her right arm.

Raphaël del Moro was too poor to consult another doctor; but I ran at once to my room, collected all my savings, and went to Giacomo Bastelli, the Pope's surgeon, and the most skilful practitioner in all Italy. At my prayers, and as the sum that I offered him was considerable, he came at once, exclaiming, "Oh! these lovers!" After examining the wound, he said that he would answer for her recovering the use of her hand in a fortnight, but that it was necessary to cut away the gangrened part. Stephana begged me to be present at the operation, in order to give her courage, although I wanted it myself; M. Giacomo gave dreadful pain to Stephana, who could not repress her groans. They went to my heart; these great instruments, torturing those little fingers, tortured me also. I rose and begged M. Giacomo to suspend the operation, and wait for me, for ten minutes. I went down to the workshop, and, inspired by a good genius, made an instrument so fine and delicate that it cut like a razor, and answered so well that the poor patient felt little more pain. In five minutes it was over; and a fortnight after, she gave me to kiss, the hand she said I had preserved for her.

Stephana was not happy, for her father's irregularities and improvidence distressed her; her only consolation was religion; and often, when I entered a church, I saw her weeping and praying in a corner. In all the embarrassments into which her father's carelessness often threw her, she would have recourse to me, with a confidence which charmed me. She would say to me, with the simplicity of a noble mind, "Benvenuto, I beg you to pass the night at work to finish this bowl, for we have no money."

Soon I got into the habit of submitting all my works to her, and she counselled me with wonderful judgment; solitude and grief seemed to have elevated her thoughts. I remember one day, when I showed her the design of a medal that I had to engrave for a cardinal, and which represented Jesus Christ walking on the sea, and holding out his hand to Peter, with this inscription, "*Quare dubitasti?*"

"The figure of our Saviour is perfectly beautiful," said she, after looking long at it; "and, if it were Apollo or Jupiter, I should have nothing to say against it. But Christ is more than beautiful, he is divine; this face is perfect in the lines, but where is the soul? I admire the man; but do not find the God. Remember, Benvenuto, that you are not only an artist, you are a Christian. I have often dreamt that I saw Jesus holding out his hand to me, and saying, also, 'Why didst thou doubt?' Ah! Benvenuto, your face is less beautiful than that which I saw. There should be at once the sadness of the father who punishes, and the clemency of the king who pardons."

"Wait, Stephana," said I, to her.

I effaced what I had done, and in a quarter of an hour I had sketched another face.

"Is that it?" said I.

"Oh! yes," replied she, with tears in her eyes, "it is thus that my Saviour has appeared to me in my hours of distress. Well! Benvenuto, I recommend you always to think, before taking the wax in your hands. You have the power; seek for the expression; let your fingers be only the servants of your mind."

Such was the advice this child of sixteen gave me. When I was alone, I meditated over her advice, and found how good it was. Thus she elevated and enlightened my mind.

Mon Dieu! how charming youth is! and how powerful its souvenirs are! Colombe, Ascanio, this beautiful evening that we are passing together, recalls to me those that I passed near Stephana; she looking at the heavens, and I at her. It is twenty years ago, and it seems to me but yesterday; I extend my hand, and seem to feel hers. Only by seeing her pass in her white dress, calm used to descend upon my soul; and often when we parted we had not exchanged a word, and yet I carried away from the mute interview, all sorts of beautiful and good thoughts, which left me better and wiser. All this came to an end, like all earthly happiness.

Raphaël del Moro owed his neighbour Gismondo Gaddi two thousand ducats, which he could not pay. This idea drove the honest man to despair. He wished at least to save his daughter, and confided to one of the workmen his design of giving her to me, doubtless that he might speak to me of it; but he happened to be one of the fools whom I had rebuked for speaking about Stephana's love for me.

"Renounce that project, master," said he; "it will not succed, I can tell you."

The goldsmith was proud; he thought I despised him on account of his poverty, and said no more on the subject. Soon after, Gaddi came to ask for his money. Raphaël begged for time.

"Give me your daughter's hand," said he, "and I will give you a receipt for the whole."

Raphaël was delighted. Gaddi was considered avaricious, brusque, and rather jealous, but he was rich; and what the poor esteem and envy, is riches. When Raphaël spoke of this proposal to his daughter she did not reply, but that evening she said to me—

"Benvenuto, Gismondo Gaddi has asked me in marriage, and my father has consented."

So saying she left me, and in a kind of frenzy I rushed out of Florence, and wandered about the fields. During that whole night, sometimes running like a madman, sometimes lying on the grass weeping, a thousand wild thoughts passed through my mind.

"Stephana the wife of Gismondo!" cried I. "This idea, which

makes me shudder, overwhelms and terrifies her also, no doubt, and as, doubtless, she would prefer me, she makes a mute appeal to me. Certainly I am furiously jealous; but have I the right to be so? Gaddi is gloomy and violent; but what woman would be happy with me? Am I not also passionate, whimsical, restless, always engaged in dangerous disputes and unholy loves? Can I control myself? No, never, while my blood runs so fast through my veins: I shall have always my hand on my dagger, and my foot out of the house. Poor Stephana! I should make her weep and suffer, and should see her pale and withered; I should hate myself, and, perhaps at last, her also, as being a living reproach. She would die, and I should have killed her. No, I feel that I am not made for the calm and pure joys of home; I want liberty, excitement, everything sooner than the peace and monotony of happiness. I should break that delicate and fragile flower, should torture that dear life by my behaviour, and my own heart by my remorse. But will she be more happy with Gismondo Gaddi? Why should she marry him, we were all so happy together? Stephana knows that an artist's life does not suit with the strict ties and the necessities of a household: I should renounce all my dreams of glory, my art, which feeds on liberty. O Dante Alighieri! Michael Angelo! how you would laugh to see your pupil rocking his children, or asking pardon of his wife. No, let me be courageous for myself, and generous to Stephana; let me remain alone with my dreams and my destiny."

You see, my children, that I do not make myself out better than I was. There was much egotism in my determination, but also much sincere affection for Stephana.

The next day I returned to the studio tolerably calm. Stephana was also calm, but paler than ever. A month passed thus. One evening she said to me—

"In a week, Benvenuto, I shall be the wife of Gismondo Gaddi."

I looked at her; she looked sad, and her hand was pressed to her heart.

Her smile was sad enough to make one weep, and she looked at me with grief, but without reproach. Thus she stood for a moment—and then entered the house.

I was never to see her again in this world. Once more I ran out of the town, but I did not return; I went on till I came to Rome. There I stayed five years; my reputation began to be formed, I was honoured with the friendship of the Pope, had duels, love, and success in art: but I was not happy, something seemed wanting to me. I never slept without seeing in my dreams the pale and sad face of Stephana. At the end of these five years, I received a letter sealed with black. I have read it so often, that I know it by heart. This is it:—

"Benvenuto, I am about to die! Benvenuto, I loved you! Hear what my dreams were· I knew you well; I felt the power that is in

you, and which will make you great some day. Your genius, which was painted on your noble forehead, in your ardent eyes, and your passionate gestures, imposed grave duties upon her who should be your wife. I was willing to accept them, and would have been more than your wife; I would have been your sister—your mother. Your noble existence I knew belonged to the whole world, and I should have insisted only on the right of consoling you in your *ennuies* and griefs. You should have been free. Alas! I had become so accustomed to your frequent absences, to all the exigencies of your fiery nature, and all the caprices of your stormy soul. The eagle soars long before he settles! But when you awoke from the feverish dreams of your genius, I should have recovered my Benvenuto, he that I love, he who would have belonged to me alone. I would never have reproached you with your hours of forgetfulness; they would have contained no injuries to me. As for myself, knowing you to be jealous, like every noble nature, I should have remained, when you were absent, far from all eyes, in the solitude that I love, waiting for you and praying for you. This would have been my life.

"When I saw that you abandoned me, submissive to the will of God and to yours, I closed my hands and fulfilled my duty; my father ordered me to contract a marriage which would save his reputation, and I obeyed. My husband has been hard, severe, and pitiless; not content with my docility, he exacted of me a love which it was impossible that I could feel for him, and he punished me in brutalities for my involuntary regrets. I resigned myself, and have been, I trust, a worthy wife; but always very sad, Benvenuto. God recompensed me by giving me a son, and the kisses of my child have for four years kept me from feeling outrages, blows, and, at last, poverty; for, wishing to gain too much, my husband ruined himself, and died a month ago from grief. May God pardon him, as I do!

"I am about to die in my turn, worn out with suffering, and I bequeath my son to you, Benvenuto. All is for the best, perhaps. Who knows if my woman's weakness would have enabled me to sustain the part I had laid out for myself as your wife? He, my Ascanio, (he is like me,) will be a more resigned companion, and will love you. I am not jealous of him. Do for my child what I would have done for you. Adieu! my friend; I loved you, and I love you even at the gates of eternity. Adieu! be great, I am going to be happy; think sometimes of the heaven where I shall be.

"Your STEPHANA."

Now Colombe, Ascanio, will you have confidence in me, and are you ready to act as I advise you?"

The two listeners replied with a mutual, yes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOMICILIARY VISITS.

THE day following that on which this history was related by the light of the stars, the studio of Benvenuto presented its accustomed aspect, he working at the gold salt-cellar, the material of which he had so valiantly disputed with the four bravos; Ascanio modelling the lily of Madame d'Etampes; Jacques Aubry lying idly in an easy chair, asking a thousand questions of Benvenuto, who never answered him, and Catherine engaged with her needle, while her gay song enlivened them all. Hermann and the other workman hammered, or chiselled.

The Petit-Nesle was far from being so tranquil; Colombe had disappeared. All was in confusion; Perrine uttered loud cries, and the provost, who had been sent for, was trying to discover, amidst the lamentations of the good dame, some hint by which to discover his lost daughter.

"You say, Dame Perrine, that it was yesterday evening, just after my departure, that you saw her last," said he.

"Alas! yes, monsieur. Mon Dieu! the poor dear child seemed a little sad; she went to take off all her fine court dress, and put on a simple white one. Then she said to me, 'Dame Perrine, the evening is beautiful, I will go and take a walk in the garden.' It was about seven o'clock; madame," continued Perrine, pointing to the lady's maid, "had gone to her room, doubtless to prepare some of those beautiful dresses she makes so well, and I was sewing down stairs. I do not know how long I worked; it is possible that my poor eyes closed in spite of myself, and that I slept a little. However, about ten o'clock I got up and went to the garden to look for Colombe. I could find no one, so I thought she had gone to bed without disturbing me; the dear child had done it a thousand times. Merciful heavens! who could have thought! Ah, monsieur! I feel sure she has been carried away, not gone with a lover; I brought her up in such principles——"

"And this morning?" cried the provost, impatiently.

"This morning, when I saw she did not come down—Holy Virgin help us——"

"To the devil with your litanies," cried M. d'Estourville. "Relate simply, and without all that nonsense."

"Ah, M. le Prevôt, you cannot hinder me from weeping until she is found again. This morning, uneasy at not seeing her—for she was always an early riser—I went to knock at her door, and as she did not reply, I opened it. The bed had never been slept in. Then I cried out, I called, I raved—and you will not let me weep."

"Dame Perrine," said the provost, severely, "have you allowed any one to come here in my absence?"

"Any one here!" cried the housekeeper, who felt her conscience prick her. "Did you not forbid it, monsieur; and when did I ever transgress your orders? Any one here!"

"This Benvenuto, for example, who dared to admire my daughter."

"He would have rather tried to reach the moon; I should have given him a pretty reception."

"Then you have never admitted a young man into the Petit-Nesle?"

"A young man! why not the devil?"

"Who, then," said Pulcherie, "was that handsome young fellow, who has ten times come to knock at the door since I have been here, though I have always shut it in his face?"

"A handsome young man! Perhaps you mean the Comte d'Orbec. Oh no, I remember; you mean Ascanio. You know him, monsieur; the lad who saved your life. Yes, indeed, I gave him my silver buckles to mend. A mere boy! Besides, let these walls say if he has ever been in here."

"Enough!" said the provost. "If you have betrayed my confidence, Perrine, I swear that you shall pay for it. I will go to this Benvenuto; Heaven knows how he will receive me, but I will try."

Benvenuto, contrary to his expectation, received the provost most graciously. Seeing his *sang froid*, and his willingness, M. d'Estourville did not dare even to mention his suspicions. But he said that his daughter Colombe having been foolishly frightened the evening before, had run wildly away, and, perhaps unknown to Benvenuto, had taken refuge in the Grand-Nesle, and he feared she had fainted there. He lied as stupidly as possible, but Cellini listened to all his stories courteously, and pretended to believe everything. Still more, he pitied the provost, declaring that he should be happy to restore a daughter to a father who had always shown her so much tenderness and affection; and, as proof of his sincerity, he offered to assist the provost in his researches in the Grand-Nesle, or elsewhere.

The provost, half convinced, commenced, followed by Benvenuto, a scrupulous investigation of the Grand-Nesle, of which he knew every corner, so that he did not leave a door unopened or a cupboard unexplored. He then passed into the garden, the arsenal, the cellar, the stable, and examined every place rigorously. During this search Benvenuto aided him, offering him the keys, and pointing out to him any place which he passed over. Lastly, he advised him to leave a sentinel in each room in case the fugitive should glide from one to the other.

After having searched for two hours, M. d'Estourville, certain that he had left no corner unexplored, and confounded by his host's

civility, quitted the Grand-Nesle with a thousand thanks and excuses to Benvenuto.

"If you wish to renew your search at any other time," replied he, "my house is open to you, as when it was your own."

The provost thanked Benvenuto; and as he did not know how to return this politeness, he praised his gigantic statue of Mars. Benvenuto made him walk round it, and notice its gigantic proportions: it was sixty feet, high and nearly twenty in circumference at the base.

M. d'Estourville retired much disappointed. He was convinced, since he had not found his daughter, that she must have taken refuge in the city, and that was large enough to embarrass even the head of the police. Besides, had she been carried away, or had she fled? Was she the victim of violence, or had she gone voluntarily? He hoped, if the first, that she would escape; if the second, that she would soon return. So he waited as patiently as he could, only constantly questioning Dame Perrine, who always denied that she had received any one; and indeed, neither she nor M. d'Estourville ever thought of suspecting Ascanio.

That day and the next passed without news, and then the provost set all his agents to work, which he had not done before, being unwilling to publish the event. All researches, however, were fruitless.

Certainly he had never experienced a father's love for his child; but his pride suffered instead of his heart, and he thought with rage of the fine match his daughter would lose, and of the sarcasms with which the court would receive the news of his misfortune.

It was necessary to communicate the news to the Comte d'Orbec, who grieved at it like a merchant whose goods have diminished in value, but not otherwise. The comte was a philosopher, and he promised his worthy friend, that if the thing did not become too much noised abroad, the marriage should still take place; and, as he was a man who knew how to profit by opportunities, he put in a few words relative to the project of Madame d'Etampes. The provost was dazzled by the honours which he might have attained to; his grief redoubled, and he cursed the ingrate who fled from such noble destinies. They agreed to speak to no one of Colombe's flight but to Madame d'Etampes, who was too intimate a friend, and too much interested, to be kept in ignorance. She took the affair much more to heart than either of the others had done, for she knew Ascanio's love for Colombe; she knew also that he had overheard her plot, and thought that, seeing the honour of her he loved menaced, he might have carried her off in despair. But still, he had told her himself that Colombe did not love him, and she, therefore, would not lend herself to the plan. She fancied also that Ascanio had hardly boldness enough to act without her; yet, in spite of these reasonings, her instinct as a jealous woman told her that it was at the Hôtel de Nesle that Colombe must be sought

for. But she could not acquaint her friends with her reasons for this conviction, for then she must have confessed her love for Ascanio, and that, in the imprudence of her passion, she had revealed to the young man her designs upon Colombe. She assured them only that she was much deceived if Benvenuto was not the culprit, Ascanio the accomplice, and the Grand-Nesle the asylum. In vain did the provost swear that he had examined it all; she had her own reasons, and continued so obstinate, that she instilled fresh doubts into the mind of the provost, who yet was certain that he had searched well.

"I will send for Ascanio and question him," said the duchess.

"Oh, madame! you are too good."

She dismissed them, and began to consider the best excuse for summoning the young man, when Ascanio was announced. He entered, looking cold and calm; the duchess looked at him as though she would read to the bottom of his heart, but he did not seem even to notice it.

"Madame," said he, bowing, "I come to show you your lily, almost finished; it only wants the drop of dew which you promised me."

"Well! and your Colombe?" said Madame d'Etampes, in reply.

"If it be of Mademoiselle d'Estourville that you speak, madame," replied Ascanio, gravely, "I beg you never more to pronounce her name before me. Yes, madame, I implore you let this subject never be renewed between us."

"Ah! anger," said the duchess.

"Whatever may be the sentiment which animates me, and should I even fall into disgrace with you, madame, I shall dare to refuse henceforward any conversation with you on this subject. I have sworn to myself that it shall remain dead and buried in my heart."

"Am I then wrong?" thought the duchess, "and had Ascanio nothing to do with her flight? Has the little girl followed, willingly or unwillingly, some other ravisher, and, lost to my ambitious projects, will she serve by her flight the interests of my love?"

Then aloud: "Ascanio, you beg me not to speak of her; will you let me speak of myself? You see I yield to your first request; will this second subject be equally disagreeable to you?"

"Pardon me if I interrupt you, madame," said the young man; "but the goodness with which you grant my first request, emboldens me to prefer another. Although of noble family, I am but a poor obscure lad, brought up in the seclusion of a goldsmith's workshop, and from this artistic cloister I saw myself all at once transported into a brilliant sphere, mixing with the destinies of kingdoms, having powerful lords for enemies, a king for a rival, and what a king, madame! François I., one of the most powerful princes in Christendom. All at once, I have been thrown among illustrious people; have loved without hope, and been loved with-

out returning it. And who loved me? Grand Dieu! you, one of the most beautiful and noble ladies of the court. All this has troubled, overwhelmed, and crushed me. I am terrified, like a dwarf who awakes among giants; I have no longer a clear idea; I am lost among terrible hatreds, implacable loves, and glorious ambitions, madame; let me breathe, I beg; permit the shipwrecked man to recover himself—the convalescent to regain his strength; time, I trust, will restore me. For pity's sake, madame, see in me to-day only the artist, who comes to see if his lily pleases you."

The duchess fixed on Ascanio a look full of astonishment; she had not supposed that this lad could speak at once so gravely, severely, and yet poetically; she felt herself constrained to obey him, and, speaking only of her lily, gave Ascanio praises and advice, promising that she would endeavour soon to send the great diamond to finish his work. Ascanio thanked her, and took leave of her with many expressions of gratitude and respect.

"Can this be Ascanio?" said Madame d'Etampes, when he was gone; "he seems ten years older. What gives him this imposing gravity? Is it suffering, or is it happiness? Is he sincere, or is he counselled by that cursed Benvenuto, and only playing a part?"

She placed people to watch Ascanio, but they made no discovery. At last she advised the provost and the comte to make another search unexpectedly in the Hôtel-Nesle.

They obeyed; but, though surprised in the midst of his work, Benvenuto received them as graciously as before. He related to the comte the ambush which had been laid for him, on the day when he left his house laden with gold, the very day on which Mademoiselle Colombe had disappeared. He was happy, he said, to be at home to receive them, for in two hours he was about to set off for Romorantin, where François I. had appointed all the artists to go and meet Charles V., who was now only two or three days' journey from Paris.

"If he quits Paris with all the escort," said the comte, in a low voice, "it is probably not he who has carried off Colombe, and we have nothing more to do here."

"I told you so before we came."

However, they commenced another rigorous search. Benvenuto accompanied them for some time, and then begged leave to go and complete his preparations for departure. He returned to his studio, distributed their work to all, begged them all to obey Ascanio in his absence, spoke some low words in Italian to his pupil, and then prepared to leave the hotel.

At that moment Scozzone came to him and took him aside.

"Do you know, master," said she, "that your departure places me in a very difficult position?"

"How so, my child?" "Pagolo loves me more and more."

"Ah! truly." "And never ceases talking of his love."

"And what do you answer?"

"Why, according to your orders, I said we should see; it might arranged."

"Very well."

"What! very well! But do you know, Benvenuto, that he kes it all seriously, and that I am really contracting engagements with the young man? It is now a fortnight since you told me what to do, is it not?"

"Yes, I believe so; I hardly remember."

"But I have a better memory. Now, during the first five days I tried gently to persuade him to conquer himself, and to try not to love me. The five following days I listened in silence; it was your wish. These last five days I have been reduced to speaking of my duties to you, and begging him to be generous, when he pressed for a confession of my love."

"Ah! well, now listen. During the first three days of my absence, let him fancy that you love, in the next three confess it."

"What! you tell me to do that?" cried Scozzone, wounded.

"Be easy! What have you to reproach yourself with, since I authorize you to do it."

"Mon Dieu! nothing, I know; but still, placed thus, between your indifference and his love, God knows, I may end by loving him."

"Bah! in six days! Have you not strength to remain indifferent for six days?"

"Well! at least do not stay away for seven."

"Have no fear, my child; I will return in time. Adieu, Scozzone!"

"Adieu, master," she replied, pouting, weeping, smiling, all at once.

While Benvenuto was giving these last instructions to Scozzone, the provost and d'Orbec returned. Left free, they had continued their researches with a sort of frenzy; had explored granaries and cellars, sounded the walls, and overturned furniture; ardent as creditors, patient as hunters, they had retraced their steps a hundred times, and examined the same place twenty times over, and had discovered nothing.

"Well, gentlemen!" said Benvenuto to them, as he mounted on horseback, "you have found nothing, have you? So much the worse. I understand how painful the affair must be to two feeling hearts like yours; but in spite of the interest that I feel in your griefs, and the desire that I have to aid you, I must go. Receive, therefore, my adieus. If you wish to revisit the Grand-Nesle in my absence, do so without ceremony; I have given orders to admit you. I trust on my return to hear that you have recovered your dear child, and you, M. d'Orbec, your beautiful betrothed."

So saying, he set off at full gallop.

"You see we were fools," said the Comte d'Orbec; "if he had carried off your daughter, he would not have set off for Romorantin with the court."

CHAPTER XXV.

CHARLES V. AT FONTAINEBLEAU.

It was not without much hesitation and anguish that Charles V. entered that land of France, in which everything was hostile to him, whose king he had maltreated, and whose dauphin he was accused of having poisoned. Europe expected from Francis I. terrible reprisals, when his rival placed himself voluntarily in his power. Charles had, however, devoted friends at the court of France, and thought he could trust to three guarantees, the ambition of Madame d'Etampes, the chivalry of the king, and the Constable de Montmorency. We have seen the duchess's motives for wishing to serve him; as for the constable, the Spanish alliance was a monomania with him; he fancied that in it lay the safety of France, and, provided he satisfied Charles V., he cared little for any one else.

The king had a blind confidence in Montmorency; for the haughty rudeness and inflexible obstinacy of the minister, seemed to him to be skill and integrity, and he listened to him with a deference equal to the fear inspired in those of a lower class, by this terrible repeater of paternosters and oaths.

Charles V. therefore reckoned on the friendship of the constable, but still more on the chivalry and generosity of his rival, who said, "My kingdom has no toll like a bridge, and I do not sell my hospitality." And Charles knew that he could trust to the word of the gentleman king.

Nevertheless, when the emperor really entered the French territory, he could not conquer his apprehensions and fears; and although the king's two sons came to meet him, and all along his journey he was overwhelmed with honours, he trembled lest all this appearance of cordiality hid some snare. He came to the fêtes with an unquiet and pre-occupied face, and as he advanced, became more and more sad and gloomy.

Each time that he entered a town, he asked himself, when listening to the harangues and viewing the triumphal arches, if that town was to be his prison; then he would murmur to himself, "It is neither this nor that town—it is all France which is my prison, and all these smiling courtiers are my gaolers." And hourly grew the fierce anxiety of this tiger, who believed himself caged, and saw bars everywhere.

One day when they were out riding, Charles d'Orleans, a charming but frolicsome youth, jumped up behind the emperor, and, seizing him round the body, cried, "You are my prisoner!" The emperor turned as pale as death, and nearly fainted. At Chatelle-

rault, the poor imaginary captive met Francis I., who gave him a brotherly welcome, and the next day, at Romorantin, presented to him all his court, the valiant and brave nobility, the glory of the country, the artists and poets, the glory of the king. Fêtes and surprises recommenced, the emperor smiled on all, but secretly fretted over his imprudence. From time to time, in order to prove his liberty, he left the place where he had slept at day-break, and saw with pleasure that no one stopped him; but still he thought he might be watched from far. Sometimes, as if by caprice, he suddenly altered the route which he had prescribed, to the despair of François, whose grand ceremonies were all deranged. When he was only two days' journey from Paris, he recalled with terror what Madrid had been to the king of France, and thought that the capital would be selected as the safest prison. He therefore begged the king to take him at once to Fontainebleau, of which he had heard so much. This overturned all the plans of François, who was, however, too hospitable to let his disappointment appear, and he hastened to send the queen and her ladies to Fontainebleau.

The presence of his sister Leonora, and the confidence that she had in her husband's good faith, calmed the emperor's fears a little. Nevertheless, Charles was never at his ease with François; he could not understand or sympathise with the hero of the middle ages. The day after the emperor's arrival, there was a chase in the forest of Fontainebleau. This, which was one of François's great pleasures, was only a fatigue to Charles. Nevertheless, he eagerly seized this new opportunity of seeing if he was a prisoner; he let the chase pass, and wandered away, but, seeing himself alone amidst the forest, free as the wind which whistled through the branches, or as the birds in the air, he became once more reassured, and began to feel almost gay. However, he had a slight return of disquietude, when at the rendezvous he saw François coming towards him, animated by the ardour of the chase, and holding in his hand the bloody spear.

"Come! my good brother! a little gaiety!" cried he, taking Charles's arm at the door of the palace, and drawing him into the gallery, filled with paintings by Rosso and Primaticcio. "Mon Dieu! you are as gloomy as I was at Madrid. But then, confess, dear brother, I had some reason to be so, for I was your prisoner; while you are not only my guest, but free and on the eve of a triumph. Rejoice then with us, if these fêtes are not too trivial for a great politician like you; at all events, you can think that you are about to mortify those Flemish beer-drinkers. Or rather, forget the rebels and amuse yourself among your friends. Does not my court please you?"

"It is admirable, my brother, and I envy you. I also have a court: you have seen it, it is grave and severe, a gloomy assemblage of statesmen and generals, like Lannoy, Pescara, and Antonio de Leyra. But you have, besides your warriors and your states-

men, besides your Montmorency and your Dubellay, besides your learned men, your artists and poets, Marat, Primaticcio, Benvenuto, and then your beautiful women, Marguerite de Navarre, Diana de Poitiers, Catherine de Medicis, and so many others, that I begin to think, my dear brother, that I would exchange my gold mines for your flowers."

"Ah! among all these flowers you have not yet seen the most beautiful," said François.

"No, and I am full of anxiety to see this marvel. Ah! brother, you have the most beautiful kingdom in the world."

"But you have the most beautiful country, Flanders; and the most beautiful duchy, Milan."

"You refused the one last month, and I thank you; but you covet the other, do you not?" added the emperor, sighing.

"Ah! cousin, let us not speak of serious things to-day; after the pleasures of war, there is nothing I prefer to a fête."

"The truth is," replied Charles, "that the Milanais is close to my heart, and it would be a great grief to me to give it to you."

"Say to restore it to me; the word would be more just, and would perhaps soften your regrets. But now let us amuse ourselves, and speak of business another time."

"Given or restored, you will have none the less one of the most beautiful places in the world; for you will have it, it is a decided thing, and I will keep my engagements to you, as faithfully as you do yours towards me."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" cried François, beginning to grow impatient, "what have you to regret? are you not king of Spain, emperor of Germany, count of Flanders, lord, by influence or by the sword, of all Italy, from the foot of the Alps to the extremity of the Calabrias."

"But you have France."

"You have India and its treasures; you have Peru and its mines."

"But you have France."

"You have an empire so vast, that the sun never goes down upon it."

"But you have France. What would your Majesty say if I coveted this pearl of kingdoms as you covet Milan?"

"My brother, as they say in your country, 'Do not touch the Queen,' so I say, do not touch France."

"Oh! mon Dieu! are we not cousins and allies?"

"Doubtless, and I hope that henceforward nothing will break this alliance."

"I hope so also. But I cannot answer for the future, and prevent, for instance, my son Philip from quarrelling with your son Henri."

"The quarrel would not be dangerous to us, if a Tiberius succeeds to an Augustus."

"What matters the master?" cried Charles. "The empire will always be the empire; the Rome of the Cæsars was still Rome, when the Cæsars were no longer Cæsars but in name."

"Yes, but the empire of Charles V. is not like that of Octavius," cried François, beginning to grow warm. "Pavia was a fine battle, but not quite an Actium; then Octavius was rich, and despite your treasures of the Indies and mines of Peru, your finances are exhausted. No one will lend you money, and your troops were obliged to pillage Rome for a living; and now that Rome is pillaged, they revolt."

"And you," cried Charles, "have alienated your royal domains, and are forced to countenance Luther, that the German princes may lend you money."

The discussion grew animated, the old hatred began to blaze up, François was nearly forgetting hospitality, and Charles prudence, when the king of France first remembered that he was at home.

"Ah! *eù! ma foi!* my good brother," cried he suddenly, with a laugh, "I believe we were getting angry; I told you that we ought not to speak of serious things, but leave them to our ministers, and keep friendly with each other. Come, we will settle at once that you shall have all the world except France."

"And excepting the Milanais, my brother, for that is yours," said Charles, perceiving the imprudence he had been guilty of; "I promised it to you, and I renew my promise."

As he spoke, the door opened, and Madame d'Etampes appeared. The king went to meet her, and, leading her up to the emperor—

"My brother," said he, "do you see this beautiful lady?"

"Not only I see her, but I admire her!"

"Well! do you know what she wants?"

"Is it one of my kingdoms? I will give it to her."

"No, it is not that."

"What is it, then?"

"She wishes that I should retain you in Paris, until you abandon the treaty of Madrid, and ratify, by deeds, the promises you have made to me."

"If the advice is good, you must follow it," replied the emperor, bowing, as much to hide the paleness which spread over his face, as through courtesy.

There was no time to say more, for the door opened, and all the court entered the gallery.

Charles, seeing Montmorency enter, whom he regarded as his most firm ally, approached, and began talking to him and the Duc de Medina.

"I will sign all you wish, constable," said the emperor; "prepare me an act of cession of the duchy of Milan, and by St. Jacques, although it is one of the brightest gems in my crown, I will sign the renunciation of it."

"A paper!" cried the constable, warmly; "what does your

Majesty mean? No writing—your word only, Sire. Did your Majesty come here on the faith of a writing, and do you believe that we have less confidence in you than you had in us?"

"You are right, M. de Montmorency," replied the emperor, holding out his hand. "Poor dupe!" continued he, to himself, as the constable turned away; "and he calls himself a politician."

"But the king, Sire?" said Medina.

"The king is too proud of his greatness not to be sure of ours. He will foolishly let us go, and we will prudently make him wait. To adjourn is not to break one's promise."

"But Madame d'Etampes?"

"Oh! as for her," said the emperor, touching a magnificent ring which he wore on his left hand, "I must have an interview with her."

Meanwhile the duchess was laughing at Marmagne about his exploits.

"Is it about your people that this Benvenuto repeats this wonderful history?" said she; "attacked by four men, and having only one arm to defend himself, he made them escort him home. Were you among these polite gentlemen, vicomte?"

"Madame," replied Marmagne, confused, "that account is not exactly true."

"Oh! he may ornament a little in details, I doubt not, but the facts are true."

"Madame, I promise you that I will have my revenge."

"Well! Cellini has won the two first matches."

"Yes, thanks to my absence, of which my men took advantage to fly."

"Oh!" said the provost, "I advise you, Marmagne, to give it up; you are not lucky with Cellini."

"In that case we must console each other, my dear provost; for if we add the loss of the Grand-Nesle to that of your daughter, his neighbourhood does not seem to have been a fortunate one to you."

"M. de Marmagne," cried the provost, violently, "you shall answer for these words."

"Gentlemen!" said the duchess, "do not forget that I am present; you are both wrong, and need not reproach each other. M. de Marmagne, you must unite against the common enemy, and not give him the joy of seeing the vanquished destroy each other. Well! since men and their strength fail with this Cellini, let me try if a woman's wit will find him equally invincible. I have always thought allies an embarrassment, and have loved to make war alone. The perils are greater, but one has to share the honours with no one."

"The impertinent fellow!" said Marmagne; "see with what familiarity he speaks to our great king. Would not one say that he was a noble, instead of a miserable chiseller?"

Indeed, François and Cellini were talking with that familiarity to which the great ones of the earth had accustomed the artist.

"Well! Benvenuto," said the king, "how goes on the Jupiter?"

"I am preparing for his casting, Sire."

"And when will this great work be completed?"

"As soon as I return to Paris, Sire."

"Take our best men, Cellini; neglect nothing to make the operation succeed. If you have need of money, come to me."

"You are the most generous king in the world, Sire; but, thanks to your liberality, I am rich. As for the operation, about which your Majesty is good enough to interest yourself, I will trust only to myself for its execution; I distrust your French workmen; not that I doubt their skill, but their willingness to place it at the disposal of an Italian artist. And I confess to you, Sire, that I attach too much importance to the success of my Jupiter, to let any one touch it but myself."

"Bravo, Cellini! that is spoken like a true artist."

"Then, Sire, I wish to have the right to claim the fulfilment of your Majesty's promise."

"That is just; if we are content, we are to grant you a boon; we have not forgotten. Besides, there were witnesses."

"Your Majesty cannot tell how valuable that promise has become to me."

"It shall be kept. But the hall is thrown open. To table, gentlemen."

And François and Charles led the way. The two sovereigns were placed facing each other: Charles between the queen and Madame d'Etampes, and François between Marguerite de Navarre and Catherine de Medicis. The repast was gay, and the viands exquisite. François, quite in his element, laughed and amused himself, and Charles overwhelmed Madame d'Etampes with compliments and attentions. At dessert, the pages brought round, as usual, basins for the guests to wash their hands in. Madame d'Etampes took the golden one destined for Charles, and, placing one knee on the ground, presented it to the emperor. He dipped his fingers in it, and, as he did so, dropped, with a smile, the precious ring of which we have spoken.

"Your Majesty has lost your ring," said she, dipping her delicate fingers in, and presenting it to him.

"Keep it, madame," said he, in a low voice, "it is in such beautiful hands that I cannot take it back again; let it go to the account of the duchy of Milan."

The duchess smiled; the pebble had fallen at her feet, but it was worth a million.

As they were passing from the dining-room, Madame d'Etampes stopped Benvenuto.

"M. Cellini," said she, giving him the ring, "here is a diamond which you will give, if you please, to your pupil Ascanio, to finish my lily; it is the drop of dew which I promised him."

Cellini started, for he recognized the ring as one that he had himself mounted for the pope, and carried for him to the emperor. For Charles to give such a jewel to Madame d'Etampes there must be some secret alliance between them.

While Charles V. continues to pass his nights and days in alternate fits of confidence and distrust, while he plots and intrigues, let us cast a glance over the Grand-Nesle and see what is passing there.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MONK.

The whole place was in commotion, for the monk, the old fantastic guest of the ruins on which the hotel had been built, had returned during the last three or four days. Dame Perrine had seen him walking by night in the gardens of the Grand-Nesle, clothed in his long white robe, and with a noiseless step. How it happened that she had seen him at three o'clock in the morning, we cannot reveal without being frightfully indiscreet; but we are historians, and our readers have the right to know the most secret details of the lives of our personages.

Dame Perrine was now, of course, left absolute mistress of the Petit-Nesle; she found herself a queen, but a very solitary one, so that she was dying of *ennui* all day, and of fear all night. She therefore begged Ruperta to allow her to visit her, which permission was cordially granted. In visiting her female neighbour she became acquainted with her male ones. Dame Perrine was about thirty-five, and called herself twenty-nine. She was still plump, fresh, and good-looking; therefore her entrance into the studio made some commotion among the ten or twelve workers there, who all worked hard, loved wine, play, and the fair sex. Before long, three of our old acquaintances were smitten; these were the little Jehan, Simon le Gaucher, and Hermann the German. As for Ascanio, Jacques Aubry, and Pagolo their affections were engaged elsewhere.

Jehan loved after the fashion of Cherubino; he was in love for the sake of being in love, and Dame Perrine was a woman of too much sense to be taken by such a will-o'-the wisp flame. Simon offered a more certain future, and promised a more durable attachment; but Perrine was a very superstitious person. She had seen him make the sign of the cross with his left hand, and she remembered that he would have to sign the marriage contract in the same manner, and she was convinced that such a signature must lead to misfortune. She therefore, without explaining her reasons, received his advances in such a way as to extinguish all hope.

There remained Hermann. Ah! that was quite a different thing. He was neither a lad like Jehan, nor an unfortunate like Simon; there was something honest and candid-looking about him, which pleased Dame Perrine. And he, instead of using his left hand for his right, used both so energetically that he seemed to have two right hands. He was also a magnificent man, according to vulgar ideas. But Hermann was extremely naïve, and therefore the first batteries of Perrine, her mincings and smiles, failed completely before the native timidity of the honest German. He contented himself with staring at her with open eyes. Then she proposed walks in the garden, and always chose Hermann for her cavalier. This made him secretly very happy, and his heart beat four or five times more in a minute when Perrine leaned on his arm; but, either that he experienced some difficulty in pronouncing French, or that he loved better to listen than to speak, Perrine seldom succeeded in drawing more from him than the two phrases, "Good morning, mademoiselle," and "Adieu, mademoiselle," pronounced with an interval of two hours between, the one when he gave her his arm, the other when he relinquished it. Now, although this title of mademoiselle pleased Perrine mightily, and although it was very agreeable to talk for two hours without fear of interruption, still, she would have preferred a few words by which she might have judged of the progress she had been making in his heart.

But this progress, if not expressed in words, was none the less real; the flame burned in the heart of the honest German, and, fanned by the constant presence of Perrine, became a perfect volcano. He began also to perceive her preference for him, and only waited for a little more certainty, to declare himself. Perrine comprehended this. One day, as she took leave of him, he became so agitated that she thought she was really doing a good work in pressing his hand. He replied by a similar demonstration, but, to his great astonishment, Perrine uttered a loud cry. Hermann, in his excitement, had not thought of his strength; he had given a strong grasp to show the violence of his love, and had nearly crushed the hand of the poor woman. Hermann stood stupified; but she, fearing to discourage his first advances, smiled, and said, "It is nothing, dear M. Hermann."

"A thousand pardons, Matemoizelle Berrine," said he; "but it is that I love you so much, and I pressed as strongly as I love. A thousand pardons."

"Granted, dear M. Hermann. Your love, I hope, is an honest love, for which a woman need not blush."

"O Tieu! Matemoizelle Berrine, it is, but I have not yet dared to speak of it, but now it has come out, I love you very much."

"And I, M. Hermann, think I may tell you, for I believe you to be a worthy young man, incapable of compromising a poor woman—Mon Dieu! how shall I say it?——"

"Speak, speak!"

"But I may be wrong to confess it."

"No, no, you are not. Speak!"

"Well! I confess that I have not remained indifferent to your passion."

The German was full of joy.

Now, one evening when the Juliet of the Petit-Nesle had conducted her Romeo back to the door of the Grand-Nesle, she perceived on her return the white apparition of which we have spoken, and which, in her opinion, could only be the monk. It is needless to say that she had returned full of fear, and locked herself into her room.

The next day, all the studio were acquainted with the fact that Perrine had seen the monk; some believed and some laughed at the idea, among the latter of whom was Ascanio. Perrine promised in the evening to relate the terrible legend of the monk.

When the time arrived, they all assembled in the second court of the Grand-Nesle. The auditory consisted of Hermann, Ruperta, Pagolo and Scozzone, who were seated side by side, Jacques Aubry, Jehan, and Simon.

"Now, Matemoizelle Berrine," said Hermann, "will you recount to us your history of the monk."

"Yes, and I must warn you that it is a terrible history, which perhaps it is hardly good to relate at this hour; but as we are all pious people, though there are some amongst us who are incredulous, and as, besides, M. Hermann is strong enough to put to flight Satan himself if he were to present himself, I will begin."

"Pardon, matemoizelle; but if Satan comes, you must not reckon upon me; I will fight with men as much as you like, but not with the devil."

"Well, I will fight him if he comes," cried Jacques Aubry, "so go on, Dame Perrine, and have no fear."

"Is there a woodcutter in your story?" said Hermann.

"A woodcutter! no, M. Hermann, why?"

"Because, in the German stories there is always a woodcutter. But never mind, I dare say it is a fine story, so go on."

"Know then, that in the place where we now are, before the Hôtel de Nesle was built, there was a community of monks, composed of the finest men possible: the shortest among them was as tall as M. Hermann."

"Peste!" cried Jacques Aubry.

"Hold your tongue, chatterbox," said Scozzone.

"The prior, named Enguerrand," continued Perrine, "was an especially magnificent man. They had all black shining beards, and black sparkling eyes; but the prior's beard was blacker and his eyes more sparkling than any one's; they were all austerely pious, and possessed such harmonious voices that people came from miles round to hear them chant."

"It is very interesting," said Jacques.

"It is marvellous," said Hermann.

"One day," continued Dame Perrine, "they brought to the prior a handsome young man, who wished to enter the monastery as a novice; he had no beard as yet, but he had large black eyes, and his long hair was like jet, so that he was admitted without difficulty. He called himself Antonio, and his voice was delicious. When he sang on the following Sunday, all the listeners were enchanted; and yet, there was something in his voice that troubled you and awakened ideas more mundane than heavenly.

"His conduct was exemplary, and he served the prior with incredible zeal. All that any one could reproach him with, was his absence of mind, and that his looks always followed the prior wherever he went. Don Enguerrand said to him, 'What are you looking at, Antonio?'

"'At you, my father.'

"'Look at your book of prayers, Antonio.'

"And again, 'What are you looking at, Antonio?'"

"'At you, my father.'"

"'Look at the image of the Virgin, Antonio.'"

"Soon Don Enguerrand began to perceive that he was more troubled than formerly with bad thoughts. Never before had he sinned more than seven times a day, which is, you know, the number allowed to saints: sometimes not more than four or five times; but now the number of his daily faults mounted to ten, twelve, and sometimes even to fifteen. He prayed, he fasted, he afflicted himself, the worthy man! It was all labour lost: his sins went on increasing. At last they mounted up to twenty. Poor Enguerrand did not know what to do, and remarked, (a circumstance which might have consoled some, but which afflicted him still more,) that his most virtuous monks were subject to the same influence, an influence strange and incomprehensible; so that their confessions, which used to last about half-an-hour, now occupied hours. They were obliged to put off the supper hour.

"Soon a rumour, which had for the last month agitated the country, reached the monastery; the lord of a neighbouring château had lost his daughter. She had disappeared just as Colombe has done, only, I am sure, that Colombe is an angel, and Antonia was possessed by a demon. The poor gentleman had searched high and low for the fugitive; there only remained the monastery to visit, and he asked permission of Don Enguerrand to search there.

"The prior consented with the best grace in the world. Bah! all researches were useless, and the old lord was about to retire, more despairing than ever, when the monks passed by to go to the chapel. As the last passed, the visitor cried out, 'God of Heaven! it is Antonia! It is my daughter!'

"Antonia, for it was really she, turned very pale.

"'What are you doing here in this holy dress?' said her father.

"'My father, I love Don Enguerrand."

"'Leave this convent instantly, unhappy girl,' cried her father.

"'I will never leave it alive,' said she. And in spite of her father's cries, she rushed into the chapel after the monks, and took her accustomed place.

"The prior remained petrified; the lord, furious, wished to rush after her, but Enguerrand begged him not to sully the holy place by such a scandal, and to wait for the end of the service. The father consented, and followed Don Enguerrand into the chapel. The anthems were about to be sung, and the organ was pealing majestically. A voice admirable, but bitter and terrible, was heard; it was that of Antonia, who had been chosen to sing the responses. Suddenly Antonia uttered a frightful cry, like a laugh of the accursed, and fell pale and stiff upon the floor of the chapel. When they raised her she was dead."

"Jesus Maria!" cried Ruperta.

"Poor Antonia," said Hermann. All the rest kept silence, for even over the incredulous the tale had some power; but Scozzone wiped away a tear, and Pagolo crossed himself.

"When the prior," continued Perrine, "saw the envoy of the devil thus destroyed by the anger of God, he believed himself, poor dear man, delivered for ever from the snares of the tempter; but he reckoned without his host, since he had imprudently exercised hospitality to one possessed of a demon. Thus, on the following night, just as he was going to sleep, he was awoke by a sound of chains; he opened his eyes and saw the door open of itself, and a figure, clothed in the white robe of a novice, approach his bed; it cried, 'I am Antonia! Antonia, who loves you. And God has given me power over you, because you have sinned, if not in deed, at least in thought.' And each night at twelve o'clock the implacable vision returned, until at last Enguerrand undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and died, by God's grace, as he was kneeling before the Holy Sepulchre.

"But Antonia was not satisfied. She used to visit every monk in turn (for there was not one which had not sinned more or less), and wake them from their sleep, crying, 'I am Antonia.' When you walk in the street of an evening, if a grey or white monk follows your steps, hasten home, for it is Antonia seeking a prey.

"The monastery was destroyed to give place to this château, and it was thought that the monk was got rid of; but it seems she loves the place. At intervals she has reappeared; and now, God forgive us, once more; may God preserve us from her snares."

"Amen!" said Ruperta, signing herself.

"Amen!" said Hermann, shuddering.

"Amen!" said Jacques Aubry, laughing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT ONE SEES BY NIGHT FROM THE TOP OF A POPLAR.

THE next day, which was the one on which the court was to return from Fontainebleau, Ruperta announced that she had, in her turn, a revelation to make. The same audience was assembled at the same hour, and in the same place. Benvenuto had written that he should remain two or three days more, in order to prepare the hall in which his Jupiter was to be displayed, and the provost being at the Châtelet, the two households enjoyed perfect liberty.

The following is the tale that Ruperta had to relate. Dame Perrine's story had run so much in her head, that when she went to her room she was trembling, lest, in spite of the holy relics hung around her bed, the shade of Antonia should come to visit her. She locked her door, but that was a poor precaution; Ruperta knew too much about phantoms not to be aware that they could make their way through locked doors. Her windows were without shutters, and it so happened that the curtains had been sent to the wash. She looked under her bed, searched the drawers, and did not leave a single corner unvisited; for she knew that the devil takes up but very little room when he comes without his horns and his tail. Did not Asmodeus live ever so long in a bottle? The room was perfectly quiet, and there was not the least trace of the phantom monk. She therefore went to bed rather tranquillized, but still she left her lamp burning. Scarcely was she in bed, when, turning her eyes towards the window, she saw a gigantic shadow, which hid from her the light of the stars. She trembled with fear, and was about to cry out, when she remembered the colossal statue of Mars just before her window, and she now plainly saw that that was the cause of the shadow. Again reassured, she determined to go to sleep; but sleep, that treasure of the poor, often envied by the rich, is at no one's call, and, capricious, disdains those who invite him, to visit whom he likes, and to knock at the doors of those who do not expect him.

Ruperta wooed it long in vain; but about midnight she fell asleep. About two hours after, the lamp, the oil being all consumed, grew feeble, and then went out. At that moment Ruperta was dreaming a terrible dream. She thought that, returning one evening from visiting Perrine, she had been followed by the monk, but luckily she had recovered, contrary to the custom of dreamers, her youthful activity, and had run away so quickly that the monk, although he appeared to glide rather than to walk, had only arrived in time to have the door closed in his face. She had then, still in her dream, heard him complaining and knocking at the door; but

as may be imagined, she did not go to open it, but, lighting her lamp, flew up stairs, and, entering her room, got into bed. But just as she did so, she perceived the head of the monk, who was trying to get in at the window, against which she heard the sound of his nails. No sleep could hold against such a dream, and she awoke with hair standing on end, and, in spite of herself, she turned her frightened eyes to the window. Then she uttered a terrible cry, for she saw the head of Mars with fire coming from his eyes, nose, and mouth.

At first she thought that she was still asleep and dreaming, so she pinched herself till the blood came; she repeated three paters and two aves, and still the monstrous vision did not disappear. In despair she seized her broom-handle, and struck with all her force upon the ceiling, for Hermann slept above her, and she hoped that, awoke by this appeal, he would come to her assistance. But it was in vain; Hermann gave no sign of existence. Then she changed her plan, and struck upon the floor to awaken Pagolo, who slept below, but equally uselessly; she then tried the side wall, for on that side Ascanio slept, but this produced no more effect than the others. It was evident that none of the three were in their rooms, and, more and more frightened, she hid her head under the clothes.

She waited for an hour, or perhaps two; but, as she heard no sound, she began to recover herself, and slowly removed the clothes from off her face. The vision had disappeared, the fire was extinct, and all was dark.

Nevertheless, she could sleep no more that night.

This was Ruperta's story, and it must be confessed that it produced even more sensation than the one of the day before, particularly on Hermann and Perrine, Pagolo and Scozzone. The two men tried to excuse themselves for not having heard Ruperta, but in such an embarrassed manner, that Jacques Aubry burst out laughing. As for Perrine and Scozzone, they did not speak, but turned alternately red and pale.

"Then, Dame Perrine," said Scozzone, who recovered herself the first, "you say that you saw the phantom monk in the garden of the Grand-Nesle?"

"As plainly as I see you, my child."

"And you, Ruperta, you have seen the head of Mars on fire?"

"I see it still."

"Then," said Dame Perrine, "the cursed ghost has chosen the head of the statue for his domicile, and as, after all, a phantom must walk sometimes, like other people, at certain hours he descends, and when he is tired goes back again, and this horrible false god, Mars, gives shelter to the frightful monk."

"Do you really think so?" said Hermann.

"I am sure of it, M. Hermann."

"It makes my flesh creep, upon my honour."

"Then you believe in ghosts?" said Jacques Aubry.

"Yes, I do."

Jacques shrugged his shoulders, but he determined to fathom the mystery; and it was easy for him, who came in and out of the house as he liked. He determined, therefore, to stay at the Grand-Nesle until ten o'clock that evening; then he would take leave of everybody, and pretend to go out, instead of which he would remain within the walls, and climb to the top of a poplar, and there, hidden among the branches, watch for the phantom. All took place as he had planned; no one followed him, and he was soon at the top of a tree, which overlooked both the Grand and Petit-Nesle.

Meanwhile, it was a grand evening at the Louvre, of which all the windows were lighted up. Charles V had at last made up his mind to quit Fontainebleau, and risk himself in the capital. There a splendid fête awaited him; there was dancing and supper; gondolas lighted by coloured lamps, and filled with musicians, glided over the Seine, and stopped in front of that famous balcony from whence, thirty years later, Charles IX. fired on his people, while boats laden with flowers conveyed from one side to the other the guests who came from the Faubourg St. Germain to the Louvre.

Among these guests was the Vicomte de Marmagne. He, as we have said, was a large man, with a red and white complexion, who pretended to be very successful among the fair sex. On this evening he fancied that a certain pretty little countess, whose husband was with the army in Savoy, had looked kindly at him: he had danced with her, and fancied, again, that she pressed his hand. Finally, when she left the palace he imagined, from the glance that she cast at him, that, like Galatea, she only fled in order to be pursued. Marmagne therefore followed her; and, as she lived towards the top of the Rue Hautefeuille, he went on towards the Grand-Nesle, and was going along the quay, in order to reach the Rue St. Andrè, when he heard footsteps behind him.

It was nearly one in the morning, and, the moon being in her last quarter, the night was rather dark. Now, among the qualities with which Marmagne was endowed by nature, courage, as we know, had no great place. He began to be uneasy at the sound of these steps, which seemed to echo his own, and, wrapping himself closer in his cloak, and instinctively putting his hand to his sword, he quickened his pace.

Yet this did not avail him; for the steps which followed him increased their speed also, and he felt that he would quickly be joined by his companion if he did not take to a run. He was about to decide on this extreme step, when to the sound of footsteps was added that of a voice.

"*Pardieu!* monsieur," it said; "you do well to hasten your steps, for it was here, as perhaps you know, that my worthy friend Benvenuto, the sublime artist, who is now at Fontainebleau, and

little suspects what is now passing in his own house, was attacked; but as we are going the same way, apparently, we might walk together, and if we meet any robbers, they will think twice before attacking us. I offer you, then, the security of my company, if you will grant me the honour of yours."

At the first words Marmagne had recognized a friendly voice, and at the name of Benvenuto Cellini, he remembered the young man who had once before given him such useful information about the Grand-Nesle, and he slackened his pace, for the society of Jacques Aubry offered him not only the certain advantage of an escort, but also the possibility of extracting some new information from him which might be useful to his hatred. He therefore greeted him in a friendly manner.

"Good evening, my young friend," said he; "what were you saying about that dear Benvenuto, whom I hoped to have met at the Louvre, and who has remained at Fontainebleau?"

"Ah!" cried Jacques, "what a chance! It is you, my dear Vicomte—de— you forgot to tell me your name, or else I have forgotten it. You come from the Louvre? Was it fine, animated, grand? You are going on some good adventure, are you not, breaker of hearts that you are?"

"*Ma foi!*" said Marmagne, conceitedly, "you are a sorcerer. Yes, I come from the Louvre, where the king spoke very graciously to me, and where I should be still, had not a certain countess signed to me that she preferred solitude to all that bustle. And you, whence do you come?"

"I!" cried Aubry, bursting out laughing. "*Ma foi!* I have seen such droll things. Poor Benvenuto! Oh! on my word, he did not deserve that."

"What has happened to him?"

"Well, you must know that I come from the Grand-Nesle, where I have passed two hours perched on a branch of a tree like a parroquet."

"Diable! the position was not pleasant."

"Never mind! I do not regret the cramp that it gave me, for I have seen such things, my dear fellow, such things that only to think of them makes me roar with laughter."

And he laughed in so jovial and hearty a manner that Marmagne, without knowing what it was about, laughed with him. Naturally, however, he stopped the first, and then said—

"Now, my young friend, that I have laughed with you, may I not hear what these things are which have amused you so much? You know that I am one of Benvenuto's faithful friends, although I have never met you there, as my occupations leave me little time to give to the world; and this little, I confess, I love to dedicate to the ladies. But I am none the less interested in that dear Benvenuto. Tell me, then, what is passing at the Grand-Nesle in

his absence. It interests me, I swear, more than I can express to you!"

"But it is a secret."

"A secret from me, who love Benvenuto so much, and only to-day was praising him to the king!" cried Marmagne, in an injured tone.

"If I were sure you would not repeat it to any one, my dear—— what the devil is your name? I would tell you, for I confess that I am as anxious to tell my story as the reeds of king Midas were to tell theirs."

"Tell me, then."

"You will not repeat it to any one?"

"Not to any one, I swear."

"On your honour?" "As a gentleman!"

"Imagine, then—but first, do you know the story of the phantom monk?"

"Yes, I have heard of it; a phantom which haunts the Grand-Nesle."

"Just so; well, then I can go on! Imagine that Perrine——."

"The guardian of Colombe."

"Just so. It is evident you are a friend of the house. Well, then imagine that Perrine, in a nocturnal walk which she was taking, fancied that she saw the phantom monk in the gardens of the Grand-Nesle, and Ruperta—you know Ruperta?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well, Ruperta saw fire in the eyes, nose, and mouth of the statue of Mars which you have seen in the garden."

"Yes, a real *chef-d'œuvre.*"

"Yes, *chef-d'œuvre* is the word. Well, it was settled between these two, that these apparitions were connected, and that the demon who walked about at night in the disguise of a monk, went afterwards to shelter himself in the head of Mars—a worthy asylum for a fiend like him—and there was burned by such terrible flames, that they came out through the eyes, mouth, and nose."

"What the devil are you telling me?" said the vicomte, not knowing whether Aubry was speaking seriously or in joke.

"A ghost story, that is all."

"And can a clever fellow like you believe in such follies?"

"No, I do not believe in them; and that is why I passed the night on a poplar, to find out what this demon was which disturbed the whole household. I pretended to leave the Grand-Nesle; but instead of doing so, I glided in the dark to the poplar on which I had fixed, and in five minutes, was planted among its branches, just on a level with the head of the god Mars. Now, guess what I have seen."

"How can I guess?"

"No; only a sorcerer could guess such things. Firstly, I saw the great door open—you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"I saw the door open, and a man look out. It was Hermann, the great German. When he was sure that the place was solitary, and he had looked all round, except up in the tree, which you may be sure he never thought of, he came out, and, going straight to the door of the Petit-Nesle, knocked three times. At this signal, a woman came out and opened the door. It was Perrine, who, it seems, likes to walk by starlight with our Goliath."

"Really, oh! the poor provost."

"Wait, wait, that is not all. I was looking after them, when, all of a sudden, I heard a window open, and I saw Pagolo, (who would have believed it, with his protestations, his paters, and his aves,) who, after having looked about as cautiously as Hermann, climbed over the balcony, slid down the gutter, and gained the window—guess of whose room, vicomte?"

"How should I know? Of Ruperta?"

"Oh! yes! No, only of Scozzone, Benvenuto's beloved model, a charming brunette."

"That is really droll. Is that all you saw?"

"Wait, wait; I have kept the best till the last; wait, we have not come to it yet."

"I am listening: it is excessively amusing."

"Wait a little; I was looking at Pagolo risking his neck, when I heard another noise almost at the foot of the tree on which I was. I looked down and saw Ascanio stealing from the casting-house."

"Ascanio! Benvenuto's beloved pupil?"

"Himself, my dear fellow. Well! trust to appearances again!"

"And for what did he come out?"

"Ah! that is just what what I asked myself, but I soon saw; for, after looking round, like the rest, to see that no one was near, he brought out a long ladder, which he placed against the two shoulders of the god Mars, and on which he mounted. As the ladder was just on the side opposite to me, I lost sight of him for a time, when, as I was wondering what he could be doing, I saw the eyes of the statue lighted up."

"What are you saying?"

"The simple truth; and I confess that if I had seen it unprepared, I should have been not a little startled. As it was, I suspected that it was Ascanio who was causing this light."

"But what could Ascanio be doing at that hour in the head of the statue?"

"Just what I asked myself, again; but, as there was no one to reply, I determined to find out for myself. I looked with all my eyes, and managed to see, through the eyes of the statue, a female figure, dressed in white, at whose feet Ascanio was kneeling as respectfully as before a Madonna. Unluckily she had her back turned towards me, so that I could not see her face; but I saw her neck. Oh! what pretty necks phantoms have, my dear vicomte—

a neck like a swan, and as white as snow. However, Ascanio looked at her with so much adoration, that I was convinced that it was a real woman. What do you think of that, my dear fellow? is it not a good idea, to hide your mistress in the head of a statue?"

"Yes, yes, it is original," said Marmagne, laughing and reflecting at the same time; "very original indeed. And you have no idea who this woman can be?"

"On my honour, not the least; and you?"

"Nor I either. And what did you do when you saw all this?"

"I began to laugh, so that I lost my balance, and if I had not held on by the branch, I should have fallen to the ground. Then as I had nothing more to see, I came down and returned home, laughing all the time, till I met you. Now, give me some advice. You are a friend of Benvenuto; what should I do about all this? As for Perrine, that is not my business: the good lady is old enough to take care of herself; but as to Scozzone, and the Venus who lives with Mars, that is a different thing."

"And you wish for my advice as to what you should do?"

"Yes, on my honour; I am much embarrassed, my dear——I always forget your name."

"My advice is, then, to keep silence. So much the worse for those people who let themselves be cheated. Now, my dear Jacques Aubry, I thank you for your amiable society and amusing conversation; but we have arrived at the Rue Hautefeuille, and, confidence for confidence, this is where my lady love lives."

"Adieu, my excellent friend," said Jacques Aubry, pressing the vicomte's hand. "Your advice is wise, and I will follow it. Now, good luck to you, and may Cupid watch over you."

The two companions then separated, Marmagne going up the Rue Hautefeuille, and Jacques Aubry to the Rue Toupée, on his way to the Mede la Harpe, at the extremity of which he had fixed his domicile.

The vicomte had lied to the imprudent Aubry, in declaring that he had no suspicion who the lady could be, whom Ascanio was worshipping.

His first idea was, that it could be no other than Colombe; and the more he reflected, the more he felt sure he was right. Now, as we have said, Marmagne hated equally the provost, d'Orbec, and Benvenuto; he therefore found himself in an uncomfortable position, for he could not injure one without serving the other. He knew, however, that Madame d'Etampes took an interest in finding Colombe, and he thought that the revelation might restore to him the favour which he had lost by his want of courage; he resolved, therefore, the next day to present himself to her and acquaint her with what he had heard. By one of those lucky chances which often serve the wicked, there was no one with the duchess but the provost and the Comte d'Orbec. The vicomte bowed respectfully,

and was received by the duchess with one of those smiles peculiar to herself, in which was mingled at once, pride, disdain, and patronage.

"Well, M. d'Estourville," said he, "has the prodigal child returned?"

"Again?" cried M. d'Estourville, red with anger.

"Oh! do not be angry, my worthy friend," replied Marmagne; "I say that, because if you have not caught your Colombe, I know where she has built her nest."

"You!" cried the duchess, with an expression of pleasure; "where is it? speak quickly, my dear Marmagne."

"In the head of the statue of Mars, which Benvenuto has in his garden."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARS AND VENUS.

MARMAGNE was right; and it really was the head of the Colossus which sheltered Colombe. Mars lodged Venus, as Jacques Aubry had said. But, arrived at this point, it is necessary, for perfect clearness, to go back a little.

When Cellini had finished the story of Stephana, a momentary silence succeeded. Ascanio tried to recall to himself the pale features of the woman, who, hanging over his cradle, had often awoke him when a child, by the tears which fell on his rosy face. As for Colombe, she looked tenderly at this Benvenuto, whom another woman, young and pure like herself, had loved so much; she found his voice almost as sweet as Ascanio's, and between these two men, who both loved her, she instinctively felt herself as much in safety as a child on its mother's knees.

"Well," said Benvenuto, at last, "will Colombe confide herself to the man to whom Stephana confided Ascanio?"

"To you, my father, and you, my brother, I abandon myself blindly, that you may preserve me for my husband," said Colombe, giving a hand to each.

"Thanks, my beloved, for believing in him," said Ascanio.

"You promise, then, to obey me in all things," said Benvenuto.

"In all things."

"Well, listen, my children; I have always been convinced that what man wills, he can accomplish, if God does not fight against him. In order to save you from the Comte d'Orbec, and from infamy, and to give you to my Ascanio, I have need of time, Colombe, and in a few days you were to marry the comte. The important thing is, first, to retard this impious union; is it not, Colombe, my daughter? There are times in this sad life when it is necessary to commit a fault in order to prevent a crime. Will

you be brave and firm? Will your love, which has so much purity and elevation, have a little courage also? Reply."

"Ascanio must answer for me; it is for him to dispose of me," said she, turning smilingly towards the young man.

"Be easy, master, Colombe will be courageous."

"Then, will you, Colombe, sure of our honour and your own innocence, quit this house boldly, and follow us?"

Ascanio made a movement of surprise; Colombe looked from one to the other, then rising, said simply, "Where must I go?"

"Colombe," cried Benvenuto, touched by so much confidence, "you are a noble creature, and yet Stephana had made me hard to please. All depended on your answer. We are saved now; but there is not a moment to lose. This hour is critical; God gives it to us, let us profit by it; give me your hand, Colombe, and come."

Colombe lowered her veil, and followed. Benvenuto had the key of the door of communication between the two houses, which he opened noiselessly. At the door Colombe stopped, and said in a moved voice, "Wait a little!"

And on the threshold of that house which she was about to quit, because it no longer afforded her a safe asylum, she knelt down and prayed. Doubtless she prayed God to pardon her father for the step he had driven her to take. Then she arose, calm and strong, and followed Cellini. Ascanio, with troubled heart, followed in silence, contemplating lovingly her white form as she moved along. They traversed the garden of the Grand-Nesle, while the songs and laughter of the workmen struck on their ears.

Arrived at the foot of the statue, Benvenuto quitted them for a moment, went to the foundry, and soon reappeared with a long ladder, which he placed against the statue. The moon lighted up the whole scene, as Benvenuto placed one knee on the ground before Colombe, and said—

"My child, put your arms round me, and hold tight."

Colombe obeyed without a word, and Benvenuto raised her as easily as a feather.

"Let the brother," said he, to Ascanio, "permit the father to carry up his beloved daughter."

And the vigorous goldsmith, with his precious burden, ascended the ladder with the utmost ease. Through her veil, Colombe, her charming head lying on his shoulder, watched his manly and benevolent face, and felt herself penetrated with a truly filial confidence, which she, poor child, had never felt before. As for Cellini, such was the powerful will of this man of iron, that he carried her without his hand trembling, or his heart beating more quickly than usual; he had commanded it to be calm, and it was calm.

When they arrived at the neck of the statue, he opened a little door and entered the head, and there he put down Colombe. The interior of this colossal head of a statue nearly sixty feet high,

formed a little room, about eight feet in diameter, and six feet high, into which air and light penetrated by the eyes, nose, mouth, and ears; it had been formed by Cellini, when working at the head, and he used to leave his instruments there, so as not to have the trouble of carrying them up and down. Often, also, he brought his breakfast with him, and eat it upon a table in the middle of this singular room. At last he had become so pleased with the idea, that he had placed a bed there, in which he used to take his siesta. It was, therefore, not wonderful that he thought of this sure hiding place for Colombe.

"It is here that you must stay, Colombe," said he; "and you must, my dear child, resign yourself to come down only at night. Wait in this asylum, under the protection of God, and of our love, the result of my efforts. Jupiter," added he, smiling, as he thought of the king's promise, "will finish what Mars has begun. You do not understand me, but I know what I mean. We have Olympus for us, how should we not succeed? Come, smile a little, Colombe, if not on the present, at least for the future. I tell you to hope; have confidence in me and in God. I have been in a harder prison than yours, and my hope bore me up. From this time, until the day of success, you will see me no more. Your brother Ascanio, less suspected and watched than myself, will come to see you, and will watch over you, and I charge him to transform this workshop into a holy cell. Remember, courageous and confiding child, you have now done all you had to do, and the rest regards me. Now listen to me. Whatever may happen, in whatever despairing position you may be, or seem to be, when, even at the foot of the altar, you have only the terrible 'yes,' to say, which is to unite you to the Comte d'Orbec, do not doubt your friend, Colombe; do not doubt your father, my child; count upon God, and upon us; I will arrive in time, be certai Will you have this faith and this firmness?"

"Yes," said the young girl, in a firm voice.

"That is well; now I leave you in your little solitude; when all the world is asleep, Ascanio shall come and bring you what you require. Adieu, Colombe."

He held out his hand to her, but the young girl presented him her forehead to kiss, as she had been used to do to her fa her. Benvenuto started, but, passing his hand before his eyes, and conquering at once his thoughts and his passions, he pressed upon her brow the most paternal of kisses, murmuring, "Adieu, dear daughter of Stephana."

He then descended promptly to Ascanio, who was waitin for him, and they both went to join the workmen. A new, strange life now began for Colombe. Her aerial chamber was furnishe in the following manner: she had already, as we know, a bed and a table; Ascanio added a low velvet chair, a Venice glass, a libra composed of religious books, which Colombe herself asked for,

a crucifix marvellous in its execution, and a silver vase—both Benvenuto's work—and the latter of which was every day filled with fresh flowers. This was all that the cell would hold.

Colombe generally slept by day, as Ascanio advised her to do, lest some movement should betray her; she rose with the light of the stars and the song of the nightingale, kneeled on her bed before her crucifix, and remained long absorbed in fervent prayer; then made her toilette, dressed her long beautiful hair, and sat down to dream, until she heard the ladder placed against the statue, and Ascanio knock at her little door. She opened to him, and he stayed with her until midnight, when, if the night was fine, Colombe descended and took her nocturnal promenade. Then Ascanio went in for a few hours' sleep, and a little before dawn returned to see his beloved, and bring her provisions for the next day, which, thanks to Cellini's assistance, he was enabled adroitly to purloin from the larder. Then began charming conversations, lovers' souvenirs, projects of husband and wife: sometimes, also, Ascanio remained in silent contemplation before his idol, and she let herself be looked at with a smile.

Colombe, the pure and good young girl, was also gay and happy; there were, therefore, besides the times when they dreamed, others when they laughed—days, or rather nights, when they played like children; but it was not these which seemed to pass the quickest. Never did a word from Ascanio startle the young and timid girl who called him brother. They were alone—they loved each other, but they respected their love like a divinity. As soon as the sun began feebly to gild the roofs of the houses, Colombe, to her great regret, sent away her friend; but, as Juliet dismissed Romeo, recalling him ten times, one or the other had always forgotten something important. However, at last he was obliged to go, and Colombe, until noon, remained alone, dreaming and listening to the birds. For these little birds she placed every morning, in the mouth of the statue, some crumbs of bread, and, soon growing familiar, they would remain there, and pay Colombe with songs for the repast she had given them. There was even a hardy goldfinch who hazarded himself in the room, and ate from the young girl's hand, morning and evening. Then, as the nights began to get cold, he let the young girl catch him, and he slept in her bosom all night, and at dawn, when he began to sing, Colombe kissed him and gave him to Ascanio to restore to liberty.

Thus passed Colombe's life in the head of the statue. Two events alone troubled these peaceful hearts, and these were the two visits of the provost.

Once Colombe was awakened with a start, by hearing her father's voice! it was no dream, he was in the garden below her, and Benvenuto was saying—

"Oh! that Colossus, M. d'Estourville is the statue of Mars,

which his Majesty had the goodness to order for Fontainebleau—a little bijou sixty feet high, as you see."

"It is very grand and very beautiful; but, pass on, that is not what I came to seek."

"That would be too easy to find," replied Benvenuto; and they passed on.

Colombe on her knees, with extended arms, could scarcely refrain from crying to her father, "My father, I am here." The old man was seeking his daughter, weeping for her perhaps, but the thought of the Comte d'Orbec, and the odious projects of Madame d'Etampes, of all that Ascanio had heard, controlled her impulse. She did not experience this sensation at the second visit, for the hateful voice of the comte mingled with that of her father, and she heard him say—

"This is a strange statue, and built like a house. If it resists the winter, the swallows will build there in the spring."

That same morning, Ascanio had brought her a letter from Cellini. "My child," it said, "I am obliged to leave you, but be easy; I leave all prepared for your deliverance and your happiness. A king's word guarantees me success; you know the king never breaks his word. From to-day your father will be absent also. Do not despair; I have now had nearly the time I required. I tell you again, dear child, were you on the threshold of the church, were you kneeling before the altar, and ready to pronounce the words which bind for ever, still trust in Providence.

"Adieu, your father,

"Benvenuto Cellini."

This letter, which filled Colombe with joy, had the unlucky effect of inspiring the poor children with a dangerous security. Youth does not know moderate sentiments: it jumps from despair to extreme confidence; for it the heaven is always big with tempests, or resplendent with azure. Assured doubly, by the absence of the provost, and the letter of Cellini, they neglected former precautions, and gave more to love and less to prudence; Colombe no longer guarded her movements so carefully, and was seen by Perrine, who luckily took her for a ghost; but Ascanio lighted the lamp without drawing the curtains, and the light was perceived by Ruperta. All this excited Aubry's curiosity, and he, in his indiscretion, revealed the secret to the very people from whom it should have been concealed.

To return to the Hôtel d'Etampes. When they asked Marmagne how he had made this precious discovery, he would tell nothing. The truth was too simple, and did too little credit to his penetration; he preferred letting it be believed that all was owing to his own cunning. The duchess was radiant; she held at last the little rebel who had given her so much anxiety. She wished to go herself to the Grand-Nesle, to be witness of the triumph of her friends. Besides, after what had happened they could no longer leave the

young girl at the Petit-Nesle; she would take charge of her, and bring her home with her, and she would know how to take care of her.

"The affair has been kept very quiet," said she, to the provost; "you, d'Orbec, are not a man to mind a child's escapade. Therefore, I see nothing that need interfere with the marriage, or with our plans."

"No, madam," said d'Estourville, enchanted.

"On the same conditions, duchess?" said d'Orbec.

"Doubtless, my dear comte. As for Benvenuto, author or accomplice of this abduction, we shall be able to revenge ourselves upon him."

"But I heard, madame," said Marmagne, "that the king, in his artistic enthusiasm, had promised him, if his Jupiter pleased him, to grant him everything he wishes."

"Be easy; I am preparing a little surprise for him on that day, for which he is not prepared. Trust all to me."

Soon the provost, d'Orbec, and Marmagne, preceded by men at arms, arrived at the door of the Hôtel-Nesle, followed at a little distance by Madame d'Etampes, who, full of impatience, waited on the quay.

It was the dinner-hour of the workmen, and Ascanio, Pagolo, little Jehan, and the women were alone at the Grand-Nesle. Benvenuto was not expected until the next evening, and Ascanio received the visitors, according to his orders, without opposition, and with perfect politeness. The provost and his friends went straight to the foundry.

"Open this door for us," said d'Estourville to Ascanio.

The young man's heart sank with a terrible presentiment; but, afraid to give rise to suspicions by hesitation, he gave up the key.

"Take that great ladder," said the provost to his men. They obeyed, and, guided by M. d'Estourville, went straight to the statue. Arrived there, the provost himself placed the ladder against it, and prepared to ascend, but Ascanio, pale with anger and terror, placed his foot on the first step.

"What do you want, gentlemen?" cried he; "this statue is the *chef-d'œuvre* of the master; the care of it is confided to me, and the first who shall lay a hand on it, I warn you, is a dead man."

As he spoke, he drew from his belt a poignard, so fine and so sharp, that at a stroke it would pierce through a golden crown. The provost ordered his men to seize Ascanio: he made a desperate resistance, and wounded two of them; but what could he do alone against eight? He was overpowered, bound, and gagged, and the provost began to mount the ladder, followed by two of his men, for fear of surprise.

Colombe had seen and heard all, and had fainted when she saw Ascanio fall. In this condition her father found her, but, more angry than uneasy, he seized her in his arms and descended; then

they all returned to the quay, the men leading Ascanio, whom d'Orbec looked at attentively. Pagolo stood by and said nothing; Jehan had disappeared; Scozzone alone, understanding nothing of what had passed, tried to bar the door, crying, "Why this violence, gentlemen? Why carry away Ascanio? Who is this woman?"

But at that moment Colombe's face was turned towards her, and she recognized the original of the Hébé. She stood aside, then, pale with jealousy, and let them pass without another word.

"What does this mean? and why have you maltreated this young man?" said Madame d'Etampes, seeing Ascanio bound, pale, and bleeding. "Unbind him at once."

"Madame," said the provost, "this young man offered a desperate resistance to us, and wounded two of my men; he is an accomplice, doubtless, and I think it right he should be secured."

"Besides," said d'Orbec, in a low tone, "he is so like the Italian page whom I saw at your house, and who was present at our conversation, that if he did not speak the language—which you assured me he did not understand—I should think it was he."

"You are right, M. le Prévôt," said the duchess, quickly; "the young man might be dangerous, so make sure of him."

"To the Châtelet with the prisoner," said the provost.

"And we, gentlemen," said the duchess, when they had placed the still fainting Colombe by her side, "to the Hôtel d'Etampes."

An instant after, the gallop of a horse resounded on the quay. It was Jehan going full speed to announce the news to Benvenuto. As for Ascanio, he entered the Châtelet without having seen the duchess, or knowing the share she had taken in the event which ruined all his hopes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TWO RIVALS.

Madame d'Etampes, who had so much desired to see Colombe, had at last her wish gratified, for the poor child lay fainting before her. During the whole route, the jealous duchess never ceased to look at her. Her eyes, full of anger at seeing her so beautiful, examined every feature, counted every one of the perfections of the pale young girl now in her power. They were together—these two women who disputed the same heart: the one disliked but powerful; the other feeble but loved; one with her *éclat*, the other with her youth; one with her passion, the other with her innocence.

Although Colombe had fainted, she was scarcely the paler of the two. Doubtless this contemplation hurt the pride and destroyed

the hopes of the duchess ; and while, as if involuntarily, she murmured, "They did not deceive me; she is beautiful—very beautiful," the hand which held Colombe grasped her so convulsively, that it drew the young girl from her swoon, and she opened her eyes, crying, "Oh! you hurt me."

Madame d'Etampes loosened her grasp; but Colombe lay gazing at her in astonishment, unable to rally her ideas. After a little while she said—

"Who are you, madame, and where are you taking me?" Then recoiling, "Ah! you are the Duchess d'Etampes; I remember."

"Hold your tongue," said Anne, imperiously. "We shall soon be alone, and then you can wonder and cry at your ease."

These words were accompanied by a cold and haughty look; but it was a feeling of her own dignity which restrained Colombe, and she remained absolutely silent until they arrived at the Hôtel d'Etampes. Arrived there, at a sign from the duchess she followed her into the oratory.

When the two rivals found themselves thus face to face, each looked steadily at the other, but with very different expressions of countenance; Colombe was calm, for she trusted in God and in Benvenuto; Anne was furious at this tranquillity; but this fury did not yet burst forth. At last she said, but in a tone which, in spite of the gentleness of the words, left no doubt of the bitterness of the thoughts—

"Well, my young friend, you are restored to paternal authority. It is well; but first let me compliment you on your bravery; you are bold for your age, my child."

"That is because God is with me," replied Colombe, simply.

"Of what God do you speak, mademoiselle? Of the god Mars, doubtless," replied the duchess, impertinently.

"I know but one God, madame, the eternal protector; the God who ordains kindness in good fortune, and humility in grandeur. Woe to those who do not recognize my God, for some day he will refuse to recognize them."

"Good, mademoiselle; your situation is a fine one for moralizing: but I presume you wish to excuse immodesty by impudence."

"Really, madame, I do not seek to excuse myself to you, being still ignorant by what right you accuse me. When my father interrogates me, I shall reply respectfully, though sadly. If he reproaches me, I shall try to justify myself; but until then, Madame la Duchesse, permit me to be silent."

"I understand; my voice annoys; you would prefer being alone, to think of him you love."

"No sound, however disagreeable, can prevent me from thinking of him, above all when he is unhappy."

"You dare to acknowledge that you love him?"

"That is the difference between us, madame; you love him without daring to avow it."

"The imprudent girl! I believe she braves me," cried the duchess.

"Alas! no," said Colombe, gently, "I do not brave you; I only reply because you force me. Leave me alone with my thoughts, and I will leave you alone with your projects."

"Well! since you constrain me, child—since you believe yourself strong enough to fight against me—since you avow your love, I will avow mine, and, at the same time, I will avow my hate. Yes, I love Ascanio, and I hate you. I care not what I say to you, for whatever you repeat, no one will believe. Yes, I love Ascanio."

"Then I pity you, madame, for Ascanio loves me."

"Yes, it is true he loves you; but by fascination, if I can—by falsehood, or crime, if necessary—I will steal that love from you. I am Anne d'Heillys, Duchesse d'Etampes."

"Ascanio, madame, will love her who loves him the best."

"Oh! listen to her!" cried the duchess, exasperated; "would not any one think that her love was alone in the world, and that no other can be compared to it."

"I do not say that, madame. Since I love thus, another heart may feel the same; only I doubt if your heart be the one."

"And what, then, will you do for him—you, who boast of a love which I cannot attain to? What have you sacrificed for him? An obscure life and the *ennui* of solitude."

"No, madame, my tranquillity."

"To what have you preferred him? To the ridiculous love of the Comte d'Orbec."

"No, madame, to my filial obedience."

"What have you to give him? Can you make him rich, powerful, and feared?"

"No, madame, but I hope to make him happy."

"With me it is different; I sacrifice for him the tenderness of a king; I lay riches, titles, and honours at his feet; I give him a kingdom to govern."

"Yes," said Colombe, smiling, "all hut love."

"Enough!" cried the duchess, violently, as she felt herself losing ground.

There was an instant's silence, and Madame d'Etampes' anger seemed gradually to disappear; a milder expression spread itself over her face, and she returned to the combat.

"Come, Colombe," said she, "if any one were to say to you, 'Sacrifice your life for him,' what would you say?"

"Oh! I would give it willingly."

"And I also!" cried the duchess, passionately. "But your honour," cried she, "would you also sacrifice that?"

"If by honour you mean reputation—yes; if you mean virtue—no."

"Then he is not your lover." "Madame, he is my betrothed."

"Oh! she does not love him!" cried the duchess; "she prefers to him the word honour."

"If any one said to you, madame," said Colombe, irritated in spite of her gentleness, 'Renounce for him your titles and your grandeur; sacrifice the king to him'—not secretly, that would be too easy, but publicly; if they said to you, 'Anne d'Heillys, Duchesse d'Etampes, give up your palace, your riches, your courts for his obscure studio?'"

"I should refuse for his own sake," replied the duchess, unable to lie before the truthful girl.

"You would refuse?" "Yes."

"Ah! you do not love him!" cried Colombe; "you prefer to him honours, chimeras."

"But when I tell you that it is for his own sake that I wish to keep my rank; when I tell you that it is that he should partake these honours. All men love that, sooner or later."

"Not Ascanio."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Anne again, furiously, and stamping her foot.

Thus the cunning and powerful duchess could obtain no advantage over the young girl, whom she had thought to frighten at the mere sound of her voice. To her angry and ironical questions, Colombe had replied with a calmness and a modesty which disconcerted Madame d'Etampes. She changed her tactics, therefore, and not being able to bend her rival, tried to surprise her.

Colombe, on her side, was in no way frightened at the duchess's explosion of wrath; she simply took refuge in silence. But the duchess, in pursuit of her new plan, approached her with a charming smile, and taking her hand affectionately—

"Pardon me, my child," said she, "but I believe I was carried away; do not be angry with me; you have so many advantages over me, that it is natural I should be jealous. Alas! you find me, doubtless, a wicked woman, as others do. But, in truth, it is my destiny, and not my own work. Pardon me, then; there is no reason, because we both love Ascanio, that we should hate each other. You, whom he loves, should be indulgent. Let us be sisters; let us talk together openly, and I will try to efface from your mind the unhappy impression that my mad anger has doubtless left there."

"Madame!" said Colombe, withdrawing her hand with an instinctive movement of repulsion. Then she added, "Go on, I am listening."

"Oh!" replied Madame d'Etampes, as if she perfectly understood the reserve of the young girl, "be easy, little savage; I do not ask your friendship without offering you a guarantee. In order that you may know me well, I will tell you a little about my life. My heart little resembles my history; and we poor women, who are called great ladies, are often calumniated. Ah! they should pity, instead of slandering us. Thus, you, for example, my child, how do you think of me—as a lost woman, do you not?"

Colombe did not reply.

"But if I am," continued Madame d'Etampes, "whose fault is it? You, who have been happy, Colombe, should not despise those who have suffered; you, who have lived in a chaste solitude, do not know what it is to be brought up for ambition; for to those for whom this torture is destined, like the victims crowned with flowers, they show only the brilliant side of life. We are not taught to love, but to please. Thus, from my youth up, my thoughts were turned towards trying to please the king; the beauty which God gives a woman in order that she may exchange it for a true love, they forced me to exchange for a title: of each charm they made a snare. Well, tell me, Colombe, what could a poor child do, taken at an age when she did not know right from wrong, and told that wrong was right? Therefore, when others despair of me, I do not despair of myself; God will pardon me, perhaps, for no one warned me. What could I do alone, feeble and without support? Deceit and falsehood have henceforth been my whole life. However, I was not made for this; and the proof is, that I love Ascanio, and, in loving him, have been at once ashamed and happy. Now, tell me, dear and pure child, do you understand me?"

"Yes," replied Colombe, deceived by this appearance of candour.

"Then you will have pity upon me. You will let me love Ascanio from far off, without hope, and thus I shall not be your rival; and in return, I, who know the world, its snares and its deceits, will replace the mother you have lost; I will guide you—I will save you. Now, you see that you may trust me. My past I have told you; my present is the shame of being publicly the mistress of the king; my future is my love for Ascanio, not his for me; you have told me, and I have often told myself, that he will never love me, but my love will purify me. Now it is your turn to speak, to be frank, and to tell me all. Tell me your history, dear child."

"My history, madame, is very short, and very simple," replied Colombe: "it is comprised in three loves—I have loved, do love, and ever shall love, God, my father, and Ascanio. Only my love for Ascanio was first a dream, is now a suffering, but in the future a hope."

"Well!" said the duchess, repressing her jealousy and her tears, "but do not confide by halves, Colombe. What are you going to do now? How can you, poor child, fight against two wills as powerful as those of your father and the Comte d'Orbec?—without counting the king, who has seen you and who loves you?"

"Oh! mon Dieu!"

"But as this passion was the work of your rival, the Duchess d'Etampes, your friend, Anne d'Heillys, will deliver you from it; do not let us think of the king, but of your father and the comte.

Their ambition is not so easy to overcome as the passing fancies of François."

"Oh! do not be good by halves, madame," cried Colombe; "save me from them also."

"I know but one method," cried the duchess, appearing to reflect.

"What is it?" asked Colombe.

"You will be frightened; you will not do it."

"Oh! if it only wants courage, speak."

"Come here and listen to me," said the duchess, drawing Colombe affectionately towards her. "Above all, do not be frightened at my first words."

"Is it, then, very terrifying?"

"You are of a rigid and spotless virtue, little one; but we live, alas! in a time, and in a world, in which this charming innocence is but a danger the more, for it delivers you up defenceless to your enemies. Well, make an effort over yourself; descend from the lofty heights of your dream, and lower yourself to realities. You said just now that you would sacrifice your reputation for Ascanio. I ask not so much; immolate only the appearance of fidelity to his love. To try to fight alone against your destiny—to dream, you, the daughter of a gentleman, of a marriage with a goldsmith's apprentice, is folly. Believe the counsels of a sincere friend; do not resist them, let them lead you; remain in your heart the *fiancée* of Ascanio, but give your hand to the Comte d'Orbec. If you bear his name, that is all that his ambition exacts, and once the Comtesse d'Orbec, you will easily defeat his infamous projects; you will have but to raise your voice and complain; while now, who would listen to you? No one. I myself cannot aid you against a father's authority, while, if it were but to defeat your husband's plots, I would set to work. Reflect on this: to be mistress, obey—in order to become independent, seem to give up your liberty. Then, strong in the thought that Ascanio is your real husband, and that a union with any other is a sacrilege, you will do what your heart dictates; your conscience will be silent, and the world will absolve you."

"Madame, madame!" cried Colombe, rising, "I do not know if I understand you rightly, but it seems to me that you are counselling infamy."

"What do you say?"

"I say that virtue is not so subtle, madame; that your sophisms make me blush for you; that, under the apparent friendship which covers your hatred, I see the snare which you have laid for me. You wish to dishonour me in the eyes of Ascanio, because you know that he would cease to love a woman whom he despised."

"Yes," cried the duchess, no longer able to contain herself, "I am tired of wearing a mask. Ah! you will not fall into the snare? Well, then, you shall fall into the abyss into which I

shall thrust you. Whether you will or not, you shall marry d'Orbec."

"In that case, the violence of which I should be the victim would be my excuse, and, if I yield, I shall not have profaned the religion of my heart."

"Then you will try to struggle?"

"By every means in the power of a young girl. I warn you that I will say no until the end; if you put my hand into that man's hand, I will say no; if you drag me to the altar, I will say no; kneeling before the priest, I will still say no."

"What matter? Ascanio will believe you consented to the marriage to which you were forced."

"Therefore I trust not to be forced into it."

"On whom do you count for aid?"

"On God above, and on one man here below."

"But since that man is a prisoner?"

"He is free, madame."

"Who is he then?" "Benvenuto Cellini."

The duchess stamped with rage at hearing the name of her enemy; but, before she could answer, a page entered and announced the king. The duchess flew from the room, and went with a smile on her lips to meet François, after having ordered her servants to watch Colombe.

CHAPTER XXX.

BENVENUTO AT BAY.

An hour after the imprisonment of Ascanio, and the carrying away of Colombe, Benvenuto Cellini rode slowly along the Quai des Augustins; he had just quitted the king and court, whom he had much amused all the way by a thousand anecdotes, mingled with the recital of his own adventures; but, now left alone, he fell into thought. He dreamed of the casting of his Jupiter, on which depended his glory as an artist, and the happiness of his dear Ascanio; the bronze fermented in his brain before it boiled in the furnace. Outwardly, however, he was calm.

When he arrived before the door of the hotel, he stopped a minute, astonished not to hear the sound of the hammers; the château was black and silent, as if no one inhabited it; he knocked twice without getting an answer, but at the third blow Scozzone came.

"Ah! here you are, master," said she; "why did you not come two hours sooner?"

"What has happened, then?"

"The provost, the comte, and the Duchesse d'Etampes came here."

"Well!"

"They searched, and found Colombe in the head of Mars."

"Impossible!"

"The Duchesse d'Etampes carried off Colombe with her, and the provost took Ascanio to the Châtelet."

"Ah! we have been betrayed!" cried Benvenuto. Then, as this man's first movement was always for vengeance, he got off his horse and flew into the studio, crying, "All here! all!" An instant after, all the men were assembled. Then each one had to undergo an interrogatory; but each one was ignorant, not only of the place of Colombe's retreat, but of the means by which she had been discovered; even Pagolo, on whom the master's suspicions had fallen, completely cleared himself. Seeing that on this side there was nothing either to revenge or to learn, Benvenuto made up his mind with his usual rapidity; and after having assured himself that his sword was at his side, and that his poignard glided easily in the scabbard, he ordered every one to remain at his post, so as to be ready in case of need, and went rapidly into the street.

This time, his face and all his movements bore traces of the greatest agitation; a thousand thoughts, projects, and griefs dashed through his brain. Ascanio failed him, just as he was most necessary; for, in the casting of his Jupiter, he required the assistance of the whole of his workmen, and Ascanio was the most intelligent of all. Colombe was carried away, and, surrounded by enemies, might lose courage. That serene and sublime confidence, which had been a rampart to the poor child against evil thoughts and perverse designs, might, perhaps, abandon her among so many enemies and threats. In the midst of all this, one remembrance came to him. When he had once spoken to Ascanio of the possibility of some great vengeance on the part of the duchess, Ascanio had replied with a smile, "She will not dare to attack me, for with a word I could ruin her." Benvenuto had wished to know this secret; but the young man had replied, "At present, master, it would be a treason: wait until it shall be only a defence." Benvenuto had appreciated this delicacy, and had waited; but now he must see Ascanio: that was the first thing to be done.

Benvenuto, therefore, went straight to the Châtelet. The wicket was opened, and a man asked who he was.

"I am Benvenuto Cellini."

"What do you want?"

"I want to see a prisoner, who is shut up here."

"What is his name?" "Ascanio."

"Ascanio is a secret prisoner, and cannot be seen by any one."

"And why so?"

"Because he is accused of a crime punishable by death."

"All the more reason that I should see him."

"You reason singularly, M. Cellini," said a voice from behind, "and not in the fashion of the Châtelet."

"Who laughs when I ask for something?" cried Benvenuto.

"I, Robert d'Estourville, Provost of Paris. Each to his turn, M. Cellini; every struggle has two parts to it; you gained the first, I the second. You illegally took my hotel; I legally have taken your apprentice. You would not give up the one, neither will I the other. Now, you are brave and enterprising, and you have an army of devoted companions; so, my taker of citadels, my scaler of walls, my breaker in of doors, come and take the Châtelet! I am waiting for you."

And the wicket was closed. Benvenuto uttered a cry and rushed at the door; but in spite of his efforts, the door did not move.

"Go on, my friend," cried the provost, from the other side; "you will but make a noise, and if you make too much, beware of the watch. The Châtelet is not like the Hôtel de Nesle; it belongs to the king, and we shall see if you are more master of France than he is."

Benvenuto looked round him, and saw on the quay a great post which two men of ordinary strength could hardly have lifted. He went straight to it, and raised it on his shoulder with the greatest ease. But, scarcely had he done so, than he reflected that if he forced this door, he should find a guard within, and that this mode of action would probably lead to his being put in prison also, at the moment when so much depended upon him. He therefore let the post fall, which, by the effect of its own weight, entered some inches into the earth.

Doubtless the provost was looking through some window; for Benvenuto heard another laugh. He ran away, in order not to yield to temptation, and went to the Hôtel d'Etampes.

All was not, perhaps, lost, if he could but see Colombe; Ascanio might have confided to his betrothed the secret which he had refused to tell to his master.

The door was open, so he crossed the court and entered the ante-chamber, where he saw a lackey in a gay livery—a sort of colossus—six feet high, and four broad.

"Who are you?" said he to Benvenuto. Under any other circumstances Benvenuto would have returned a violent answer to the insolent look and question; but Ascanio's safety was concerned, and he restrained himself.

"I am Benvenuto Cellini, the Florentine goldsmith," replied he.

"What do you want?" "To see Mademoiselle Colombe."

"She is not visible." "And why not?"

"Because her father has given her in charge to Madame d'Etampes, to watch over her."

"But I am a friend."

"All the more reason that you should be suspected."

"I tell you I must see her," cried Benvenuto, growing warm.

"And I tell you, you cannot."

"And the duchesse, is she not visible either?" "No."

"Not for me?" "For you less than for any one."

"Then, you have orders not to admit me?"

"Exactly; you have just hit it."

"Do you know that I am a singular man," cried Benvenuto, with one of those terrible laughs, which generally preceded his bursts of anger; "and that I enter where I am ordered not to enter."

"And how do you do that?"

"When there is a door, and a fellow like you before it," replied Benvenuto, acting as he spoke, "I knock down the fellow and break in the door." And with a blow of his fist he sent the man rolling four feet off; and with a kick from his foot burst open the door.

"Help! help!" cried the man; but Benvenuto passed on. He found himself, however, confronted by six other valets. In any other circumstances, armed as he was with sword and dagger, Benvenuto would have fallen upon them all, and no doubt quickly dispersed them; but this act of violence, in the house of the king's favourite, might have had terrible consequences. For the second time, then, contrary to his habit, reason prevailed over anger; and, sure at least of seeing the king, where he could always enter, he retraced his steps, and went to the Louvre.

This time, although he resumed his tranquil air and walk, it was evident that it was but apparent; large drops stood on his forehead, and he suffered all the more from his anger, because he tried his best to overcome it. Nothing could be more trying to this violent nature than delay, and the miserable obstacle of a closed door, coupled with the rude refusal of an insolent lackey. Benvenuto would have given anything if some one would but have elbowed him; and as he walked he looked fiercely round, with a glance which seemed to say, "If there is any miserable wretch tired of his life, let him address himself to me, I am his man."

A quarter of an hour after, Benvenuto entered the Louvre, and, stopping in the hall, asked to speak to his Majesty. He wished to tell all to François I., make an appeal to him, and if he did not succeed in procuring Ascanio's liberation, at least to procure leave to see him; he had been thinking all the way of what he should say, and, as he did not want for eloquence, had been quite satisfied with his own intended speech. Indeed, all this movement, these terrible news, so suddenly learned, these obstacles which he had not been able to overcome, had kindled the blood of the irascible artist; his heart beat violently, his temples throbbed, and he was scarcely conscious himself of the state of excitement in which he was.

"The king is not visible," replied the page.

"Do you not know me?" cried Benvenuto. "Perfectly."

"I am Benvenuto Cellini, and the king is always visible to me."

"It is just because you are Benvenuto Cellini, that you cannot enter."

Benvenuto remained stupified.

"Ah! is it you, M. de Scames?" said the page to a courtier who had just arrived; "enter, enter, Comte de la Faye; enter, Marquis des Prés."

"And I," cried Benvenuto, in a rage.

"You! The king said just now, as he entered, 'if that insolent Florentine presents himself, let him know that I will not see him, and advise him to be patient, if he does not wish to compare the Châtelet with the Fort St. Ange."

"Oh! patience! come to my aid," murmured Benvenuto; "for I am not accustomed to be made to wait by kings. The Vatican equalled the Louvre, and Leo X., Francis I.; and I never waited at the Vatican; but I understand: the king has been visiting Madame d'Etampes, and she has prejudiced him against me. Patience, for the sake of Ascanio, for the sake of Colombe."

But, in spite of his resolution to be patient, Benvenuto was obliged to lean against a column, for his heart swelled, and his legs almost failed him. This last insult wounded not only his pride, but his friendship, and his soul was full of bitterness and despair. However, he quickly recovered himself, and, shaking back his hair, which had fallen over his face, he went out with a firm and decided step, and all those who looked at him, did so with a kind of respect.

But if Benvenuto appeared calm, it was thanks to the great power that he possessed over himself, for in reality he was more troubled than a stag at bay. A cloud passed over his eyes, and he scarcely knew where he was going to. It was the third time within an hour that he had been turned back—he, the favourite of kings, princes, and popes. He to whom all doors were wont to fly open, had had them closed three times in his face. And yet, in spite of this triple affront, he dared not give way to his anger; he must dissimulate until he had saved Ascanio and Colombe. The crowd which passed by him, careless, peaceful, or busy, seemed to him to read on his forehead the insults he had received.

"Well!" cried he at last, raising his head, "in vain they try to crush the man: the artist will rise up. Come, sculptor, let them repent in admiration of thy works; come, Jupiter, prove that you are still not only the king of gods, but the master of men."

And as he spoke, he took his way to the old royal residence of the Tournelles, now inhabited by the constable Anne de Montmorency. Here the impatient Benvenuto had to wait an hour before he could penetrate to the soldier minister, who was besieged by a crowd of courtiers and petitioners; but at last he was introduced

to the constable. Anne de Montmorency was a man tall, and scarcely bent by age, cold and stiff, with a quick eye and a brusque manner; he scolded eternally, and was never seen in a good temper. He would have regarded it as a humiliation to be seen laughing. How this morose old man had been able to please the amiable and gracious François I., can only be explained by the law of contrasts; François had the art of sending away content even those whom he refused; the constable, on the contrary, constantly offended those whose requests he granted. With a mind not far removed from mediocrity, he inspired confidence in the king, hy his military inflexibility and his dictational gravity.

When Benvenuto entered, Montmorency was, according to his usual custom, walking up and down the room. He replied to Benvenuto's bow, and then, stopping and fixing upon him one of his usual piercing looks—

"Who are you?" said he. "Benvenuto Cellini."

"Your profession?"

"The king's goldsmith," replied the artist, astonished that his first answer had not prevented the second question.

"Ah! yes, true," growled the constable, "I recognize you. Well! what do you want? That I should give you an order? If so, you have lost your time, I can tell you. On my word, I understand nothing of the present mania for art. It seems like an epidemic, which no one has escaped but myself. No; sculpture is not at all to my taste; so go to some one else, and good evening. Oh! mon Dieu! do not look in despair; you will not want for courtiers who wish to ape the king, or ignoramuses who like to be thought connoisseurs. As for me, I keep to my trade, which is war. I think a good peasant woman, who gives us a boy for a soldier every year, worth far more than the sculptor who wastes his time in making men of bronze."

"Monseigneur," said Benvenuto, who had listened to this long tirade with a patience which astonished himself, "I do not come to speak to you of what concerns art, but honour."

"Ah! that is quite a different thing. Speak quickly; what do you want?"

"You remember, monseigneur, that the king once said to me, in your presence, that on the day when I should bring to him my statue of Jupiter in bronze, he would grant me any favour that I might ask, and that he charged you, monseigneur, and the chancellor Poget, to recall to him his promise, in case he should forget."

"I remember."

"Well! monseigneur, the time is approaching when I shall beg of you to have a memory for the king."

"Is that what you come to ask, monsieur?" cried the constable; "is it in order to beg me to do what I ought to do, that you disturb me?"

"Monseigneur!"

"You are an impertinent fellow; learn that Anne de Montmorency does not need to be told how to be an honest man. The king told me to remember for him, and it is a precaution that he ought to take oftener. Well! I will do so, even if it be disagreeable to him. Adieu! M. Cellini, I have others to see."

So saying, the constable turned his back on Benvenuto, and made signs for another to enter. Benvenuto bowed to the constable, whose brusque frankness did not displease him, and, still animated by the same fever, pushed on by the same ardent thoughts, he proceeded to the chancellor Poget, who lived not far off, at the porte St. Antoine.

He presented a most complete contrast, both physically and morally, to Montmorency. He was polished, cunning, and wily; and, buried in furs, one seemed to see nothing of him but a bald head, clever and restless eyes, thin lips, and a white hand. He was, perhaps, as honest as the constable, but less frank.

Here again Benvenuto had to wait half an hour; but he was getting accustomed to it.

"Monseigneur," said he, when he entered, "I come to recall to you a promise which the king made to me in your presence, and of which he made you not only the witness, but the guarantee."

"I know what you mean, M. Benvenuto," said Poget, "and I am ready, if you wish it, to remind his Majesty of this promise, but I must warn you, judicially speaking, you have no right, as such an engagement is of no value before any tribunal; and therefore, if the king grants your request, it will be through his grace and honesty as a gentleman."

"I understand it so, monseigneur," said Benvenuto, "and beg you only to remind his Majesty, leaving the rest to him."

"Within these limits, my dear sir, I am quite at your service."

Benvenuto quitted the chancellor more tranquil, but still much excited. He felt in himself a more than human strength, and seemed scarcely to belong to this world. In this mood he returned to the Hôtel de Nesle. All the apprentices were waiting for him, as he had ordered.

"To the casting of the Jupiter, my children!" cried he, and flew to the studio.

"Good morning, master," said Jacques Aubry, who had just entered, singing gaily. "But what is the matter here? you all look as grave as judges."

"To the casting!" continued Benvenuto, without replying to Jacques, "that is everything—merciful God, give me success!—ah! my friend," turning to Jacques, "ah! my dear Jacques, what sad news awaited me on my return, and how they have profited by my absence."

"What is the matter, master?" cried Jacques, becoming uneasy at Cellini's evident agitation.

"Quick, lads! bring some dry fir wood. You know I have plenty laid in. The matter, Jacques, is that my Ascanio is in prison at the Châtelet, that Colombe, the provost's daughter, whom he loved, this charming young girl, is in the hands of the Duchesse d'Etampes, her enemy; they found her in the statue of Mars, where I had hidden her. But we will save her. Well! Hermann, where are you going? the wood is not in the cellar, but in the timber yard."

"Ascanio arrested! Colombe carried off!" cried Jacques.

"Yes, some infamous spy must have watched the poor children, and told a secret which I had hidden even from you. If I do but discover him! But that is not all! the king will not even see me, whom he used to call his friend. Trust to the friendship of men! It is true kings are not men; so that I presented myself uselessly at the Louvre; I could neither see nor speak to him. Ah! my statue will speak for me! Get ready the mould, my friends, and lose no time. This woman who insults poor Colombe! That wretched provost, who mocks at me! That gaoler, who tortures Ascanio! Oh! the terrible visions that I have had to-day, my dear Jacques. I would give ten years of my life, to any one who could penetrate to the prisoner to speak to him, and bring back to me the secret by which to overcome this proud duchess; for Ascanio knows a secret which has this power, and he would not tell it to me, he is so noble. But, never mind! Stephana, fear not for your child, I will defend him with my last breath; I will save him. Yes, I will save him. Oh! where is the traitor who betrayed us? I would strangle him with my own hands. Oh! let me live but three days more; for I feel as though this fire were consuming me. Oh! if I were to die before my Jupiter was finished! To the casting, my lads, to the casting!"

At the first words of Benvenuto, Jacques had grown frightfully pale, for he suspected that he was the cause of all; and, as Benvenuto continued, this suspicion was changed into certainty.

Then, doubtless, some project entered his mind; for he disappeared in silence, while Cellini ran to the foundry, followed by his workmen, crying like a madman, "To the casting, my lads!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE DIFFCULTY WHICH AN HONEST MAN EXPERIENCES IN GETTING PUT INTO PRISON.

Poor Jacques Aubry left the Grand-Nesle in despair; there was no doubt of it that he had inconsiderately betrayed Ascanio's secret. But who had betrayed him? Certainly not that worthy

gentleman, whose name he did not know. It must be that fellow Henriet, unless it were Robin, or Charlot, or Guillaume. Poor Aubry lost himself in conjectures. The fact is, that he had confided the event to a dozen intimate friends, among whom it was not easy to find the delinquent; but still, he himself was the real traitor, the infamous spy of whom Benvenuto had spoken. Instead of shutting up in his inmost heart the secret surprised from a friend, he had told it in twenty places, and had by his cursed tongue caused the ruin of Ascanio. He tore his hair, gave himself blows with his fists, called himself every bad name, and could not find any invective strong enough to describe his odious conduct.

His remorse became so poignant that, for the first time in his life, Jacques began to reflect. After all, when his head was bald, his breast black and blue, and his conscience in pieces, Ascanio would not be delivered, and he must endeavour to repair the evil he had done, instead of losing time in despairing.

He remembered Benvenuto's words, that he would give ten years of his life to any one who should speak to Ascanio, and obtain from him the secret by which the duchess might be overcome. The result of Jacques' reflections was, that he must penetrate into the Châtelet. Once there, he would find some means of seeing Ascanio.

But Benvenuto had uselessly tried to enter as a visitor, and Jacques had not the vanity even to think of succeeding where he had failed. But if it was impossible to enter as a visitor, it must be easy, Jacques thought, to enter as a prisoner; he would do so, then, and when he had seen Ascanio, he would come out again, and go to Benvenuto, rich with the precious secret, not to claim the offered ten years of his life, but to confess his crime and beg for pardon.

Enchanted with the richness of his imagination, and proud of the extent of his devotion, he proceeded to the Châtelet.

"Let me see," thought he, as he went along; "in order not to commit any new follies, let me try to understand the whole affair, which does not seem to me to be easy. The story certainly appears to be as entangled as Gervaise's thread, when she gives it me to hold, and I try to kiss her. Let me remember everything. Ascanio loved Colombe, the provost's daughter. Well! as the provost wished to marry her to the Comte d'Orbec, Ascanio carried her off; then, not knowing what to do with her, he hid her in the head of Mars. The hiding-place was marvellous, and it wanted an animal like——Well, let me go on. It appears that, from my story, the provost found his daughter and carried her off, double brute that I am! Yes; but here it becomes embroiled; what has the Duchesse d'Etampes to do with all this? She detests Colombe, whom every one else loves. Why? Ah! I have it. Some jokes of his companions—Ascanio's embarrassment! Ah! Madame d'Etampes has taken a fancy to Ascanio, and naturally hates her

rival. Jacques, my friend, you are a great wretch, but an intelligent fellow. Yes; but how does Ascanio come to hold in his hands that which would ruin the duchess? And what has the king to do in all this, and who is Stephana? Why does Benvenuto call every moment upon the name of Jupiter, which is rather a heathen invocation for a Catholic? The devil is in it, if I understand it. Light must be sought for in Ascanio's cell; therefore the essential thing is to get there." So saying, Jacques Aubry, arrived at his destination, knocked vehemently at the door of the Châtelet. The door opened, and a male voice asked him what he wanted; it was that of the gaoler.

"I want a cell in your prison," replied Jacques, in a gloomy voice.

"A cell!" cried the man, in astonishment.

"Yes, a cell; the blackest and deepest is better than I deserve."

"And why so?" "Because I am a great criminal."

"And what crime have you committed?"

"Ah! what crime?" thought Jacques, who had never thought of preparing a suitable crime, and of whom, in spite of the compliments he had addressed to himself an instant before, rapidity of imagination was not the forte.

"What crime?" repeated he. "Yes, what crime?"

"Guess," said Jacques. Then he added to himself, "This fellow must know more about crimes than I do; he shall make me a list, and I will choose."

"Have you committed murder?" continued the gaoler.

"Oh no!" cried Jacques, whose conscience revolted from being taken for a murderer; "for what do you take me?"

"Have you stolen?"

"Stolen! oh, *par example!*"

"But what have you done, then?" cried the gaoler, impatiently. "Say what crime you have committed."

"But when I tell you I am a wretch; that I have merited the wheel—the gibbet."

"The crime?" repeated the gaoler.

"The crime! Well, I have betrayed friendship."

"That is not a crime," said the gaoler; "good evening;" and he closed the door.

"Not a crime! what is it, then?" And Jacques began to knock afresh.

"What is it now," cried a third voice.

"It is a madman, who wishes to enter the Châtelet," said the gaoler.

"If he is mad, his place is not here, it is at the asylum."

"The asylum!" cried Jacques, making off as fast as he could; "that would not suit me. It is the Châtelet that I want to enter. Besides, they only send beggars to the asylum, not people like me, with thirty sous in their pockets. And that miserable gaoler, who

pretends that to betray your friend is not a crime! Thus, in order to have the honour of being admitted into prison, one must have murdered or stolen. But now I think of it; Gervaise!" and he burst out laughing. "My crime is found; I shall have seduced Gervaise. It is not so, but it might have been."

And Jacques Aubry took his way to the house of the young girl, ran up the sixty steps leading to her lodging, and rushed into her room, where, in a coquettish *negligè*, the charming grisette was ironing her collars.

"Ah!" cried she, "how you frightened me!"

"Gervaise! my dear Gervaise!" cried Jacques, advancing towards his mistress with open arms, "you must save my life, my child."

"Wait a bit," cried Gervaise, using her iron as a buckler; "what do you want, monsieur? It is three days since I saw you."

"I was wrong, Gervaise, and I am a wretch. But the proof that I love you is, that I run to you in my distress. I repeat to you, Gervaise, you must save me."

"Yes, I understand; you got drunk in some public-house, and got into a dispute. You are pursued; they want to put you in prison, and you come to ask for shelter from poor Gervaise. Go to prison, monsieur, go to prison, and leave me in peace!"

"My little Gervaise, all I want is to go to prison, and those wretches will not let me."

"Oh! mon Dieu! Jacques!" cried the young girl, with a movement full of tender compassion, "are you mad?"

"They said I was mad, and wanted to send me to the asylum, while it is to the Châtelet that I want to go."

"You want to go to the Châtelet, and why? They say that once you are in, no one knows when you will come out again."

"And yet I must enter; there is no other method of saving him."

"Saving whom?" "Ascanio."

"What, that handsome young man, the pupil of your friend Benvenuto!"

"Himself, Gervaise. He is in the Châtelet, and by my fault."

"Mon Dieu!"

"So that I must find him and save him."

"And why is he at the Châtelet?"

"Because he loved the daughter of the provost, and has seduced her."

"Poor young man! What! do they put people in prison for that?"

"Yes, Gervaise. Now you understand. He kept it hidden; I discovered her hiding place, and like a simpleton—a wretch—a villain—I told everybody."

"Except me," cried Gervaise; "just like you."

"Did I not tell you, Gervaise?"

"Not a word. You chatter to others, never to me. When you come here, it is to kiss me, to drink, or to sleep—never to talk. Learn, monsieur, that a woman loves to chat."

"Why! what are we doing just now, Gervaise—are we not talking?"

"Yes, because you have need of me."

"It is true you can do me a great service."

"What is it?" "You may say that I have ruined you."

"And so you have."

"I!" cried Jacques, in astonishment.

"Alas! yes, monsieur, by your fine words and false promises."

"My fine words and false promises!"

"Yes. Did you not tell me that I was the prettiest girl in the quartier?"

"I say it still."

"You said that if I did not love you, you would die of despair."

"You think I said that; it is odd, but I do not remember it."

"While, on the contrary, if I loved you, you would marry me."

"Gervaise, I never said that—never." "You did, monsieur."

"Never, never, Gervaise. My father made me take an oath as Hamilcar did Hannibal."

"What is it?" "To die a bachelor."

"Oh!" cried Gervaise, calling up, with that marvellous facility which women have for weeping, tears to aid her words, "Ah! that is like all of you. Promises cost nothing; and then, when the poor girl has yielded, you remember no more about it. Thus, I swear in my turn, that it is the last time I will let myself be deceived."

"You will do well, Gervaise."

"When one thinks that there are laws for thieves and robbers, and none against bad fellows who ruin poor girls!"

"There are, Gervaise."

"There are?"

"Doubtless, since they sent that poor Ascanio to the Châtelet for it."

"And they did well," replied Gervaise, "and I wish you were with him."

"Eh! mon Dieu! that is all that I want; and, as I told you, I count on you for that."

"On me?" "Yes."

"You laugh at me, ingrate."

"I do not laugh; I say that if you had courage——"

"To do what?" "To accuse me before the judge."

"Of what?"

"Of having seduced you; but you will never dare."

"How! I not dare to tell the truth?"

"You will have to swear, Gervaise." "I will do it."

"Then all is right," cried Jacques, joyfully. "I was afraid you would not; for an oath is a serious thing."

"I am ready to swear this very instant, and I will send you to the Chatâlet, monsieur."

"Good."

"And you shall rejoin your Ascanio." "That is capital."

"And you will have time to repent together."

"That is all I want."

"Where is the lieutenant of police?"

"At the Palais de Justice."

"I will go there."

"Let us go together, Gervaise."

"Yes, together, then no time will be lost."

"Take my arm, Gervaise."

"Come along, monsieur," said the grisette.

They then went together towards the Palais de Justice, as they were accustomed to go on a Sunday to the Pré-aux-Clercs, or to Montmartre. However, as they advanced towards the Temple of Themis, as Jacques poetically called the place in question, Gervaise's step visibly slackened, and she had some trouble to mount the stairs, and at the door of the room her limbs failed her altogether; Jacques felt her lean heavily on his arm.

"Why, Gervaise!" said he, "is your courage failing you?"

"No, but a lieutenant of police is very intimidating."

"Oh! he is only a man, like another."

"Yes, but to tell him such things." "Well!"

"But to swear them!" "You will swear?"

"Jacques, are you quite sure it is true?"

"Pardieu! did you not tell me so an hour ago?"

"Yes, that is true; but it is singular that I seem to see things in a different light from what I did an hour ago."

"Now you are giving way; I knew how it would be."

"Jacques, my friend, take me home."

"Gervaise, that is not what you promised me."

"Jacques, I will reproach you no more. I loved you because you pleased me, and that was all."

"Ah! this is what I feared; but now it is too late."

"How too late?"

"You came here to accuse me, and you must do it."

"Never, Jacques; you did not deceive me: it is I who was a coquette."

"Well!" "Jacques, take me home."

"No, no," cried Jacques; and he knocked at the door.

"What are you doing?" cried she.

"You see; knocking at the door." "Enter," cried a voice.

"I will not enter," cried Gervaise, struggling to free her arm from that of Jacques.

"Enter," said the voice again, rather louder.

"Jacques, I will cry out."

"Come in," was repeated, and the door opened. "What do you want?" continued a thin man, dressed in black, the sight of whom made Gervaise tremble from head to foot.

"Mademoiselle comes to lay a complaint against a bad fellow who has deceived her."

And he pushed Gervaise into the black, ugly room, and the door closed behind her. Gervaise uttered a feeble cry, half of terror, and fell, rather than sat down, on a seat close to the wall. As for Jacques, lest the young girl chould recall him, or run after him, he fled through the corridors, and ran to the Pont St. Michel, by which Gervaise would have to pass on her return.

Half-an-hour after, he saw her reappear.

"Well!" cried he, running to meet her, "what has passed?"

"Alas!" cried Gervaise, "you have made me tell a great story; but I hope God will pardon me for it, in consideration of the motive."

"I take it on me," said Aubry. "Come, what passed?"

"How do I know? I was so ashamed that I hardly remember anything. All that I know is, that the lieutenant of police questioned me, and that I answered, sometimes yes, and sometimes no; but I am not at all sure that I answered properly."

"Have they my address, at any rate, that they may find me?"

"Yes, I gave it to them."

"That is well; I trust the rest will be all right."

And after having reconducted Gervaise home, and consoled her as well as he could, Jacques went to his own room full of faith in Providence. The next morning he received a summons to appear before the lieutenant of police; and although this fulfilled his wishes, yet he felt a shudder run through his veins on receiving it. But let us hasten to say, that the certainty of seeing Ascanio again, and the desire of saving the friend whom he had ruined, soon chased away this little weakness. The summons was for twelve o'clock, and it was now but nine; so he ran to Gervaise, whom he found not less agitated than on the previous evening.

"Well!" cried she.

"Look," cried Jacques, showing triumphantly the paper, covered with hieroglyphics, which he held in his hand. Here it is!"

"For what hour?" "For noon. That is all I could make out."

"You will not forget that you made me accuse you?"

"I am willing to declare it to you in writing."

"Then you are not angry with me for having obeyed you?"

"On the contrary, I am grateful."

"Whatever may happen?" "Whatever may happen."

"If, in my trouble, I said anything wrong, you will pardon me."

"Not only I will pardon you, my dear Gervaise, but I pardon you in advance."

"Ah!" said Gervaise, sighing, "it was with such words you deceived me."

About a quarter to twelve, Jacques took leave of Gervaise, and ran all the way to the lieutenant's office.

"Enter," cried the same voice. Jacques did not wait for a second invitation, but went in with a smile on his lips.

"What is your name?" said he. "Jacques Aubry."

"What are you?" "A student."

"Have you any occupation?" "I seduce young girls."

"Ah! it was against you that a complaint was laid yesterday—by—Gervaise-Perrette-Popinot. Good! sit down and wait for your turn."

Jacques sat down and waited. Five or six people of different ages and sexes were waiting also, and as they had arrived first, they passed in before him; some returned alone—doubtless those against whom no charge was proved; others came out escorted by one or two men. Jacques envied all those; they were going to the Châtelet, where he had such a desire to go also.

At last Jacques Aubry was called for. Jacques rose and ran in with a joyful air. There were two men in the room—one even taller, blacker, dryer, and leaner than the other, which Jacques Aubry, five minutes before, would have thought impossible; this was the registrar; the other, fat, little, and round, with a smiling mouth and laughing eye, was the lieutenant. Jacques felt inclined to seize the judge's hand, he felt so warm towards him.

"Indeed, you have all the look of a *roué*," said the magistrate; "come, monsieur, take a chair."

Jacques did so.

"Now," said the lieutenant, "let us see the deposition of the plaintiff."

The registrar handed him the paper relating to Jacques.

"The complainant is Gervaise-Perrette-Popinot."

"Just so," said Jacques.

"Minor," continued the lieutenant; "nineteen years old."

"Oh! oh!" said Jacques. "So she declares."

"Poor Gervaise!" murmured Jacques; "she was quite right to say that she was so troubled that she did not know what she was saying; she told me she was twenty-two. Well, let that pass."

"Thus, then," laughed the lieutenant, "you are accused of having seduced a girl under age. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" responded Jacques.

"With aggravating circumstances."

"Diable!" thought Jaques, "I should like to know them."

"As the plaintiff remained for six months insensible to all the prayers and seductions of the accused——"

"Six months! I think there is an error," said Jacques.

"It is so written," said the lieutenant, in a tone which admitted of no reply.

"Well, let it pass; but really Gervaise was right to say——"

"She said that Jacques Aubry, exasperated by her indifference, menaced her——"

"Oh, oh!" cried Jacques.

"Oh! oh!" repeated the lieutenant. "But," continued he, "the said Gervaise-Perrette-Popinot was so bold and courageous, that the accused begged pardon and professed repentance."

"Poor Gervaise!" murmured Jacques; "what was she thinking of?"

"But," continued the lieutenant, "this repentance was only feigned; unluckily, however, the plaintiff, in her innocence, believed in it, and had the imprudence to accept a collation offered to her by the accused, when the said Jacques Aubry mingled in her water——"

"In her water?"

"Yes! the plaintiff declares that she never drinks wine. The said Jacques Aubry mingled in her water an intoxicating drink."

"The devil!" cried Jacques; "what are you reading there?"

"The deposition of the plaintiff."

"Impossible!" "It is so written," said the lieutenant.

"Well!" thought Jacques, "the more guilty I am, the more sure I shall be to rejoin Ascanio at the Châtelet. Go on, then, monsieur."

"You confess, then?" "I do."

"Ah! rogue!" cried the lieutenant, bursting into a laugh.

"So that the poor Gervaise, not having her senses about her, at last confessed to her seducer that she loved him."

"Ah!"

"Happy fellow!" murmured the lieutenant, with sparkling eyes.

"But," cried Jacques, "there is not a word of truth in it all."

"You deny it?" "Entirely."

"Write," said the lieutenant, "that the accused declares himself not guilty of any of the crimes imputed to him."

"One moment! one moment," cried Jacques, who remembered that if he denied his guilt, he would not be sent to prison

"Then you do not deny?"

"I confess that there is some truth in it—not in the details, but in substance."

"Oh! since you have confessed the intoxicating draught, you may confess the rest," said the lieutenant.

"Yes," said Jacques, "since I have confessed that—yes, I confess all, but——"

"That is not all," said the lieutenant. "What! not all."

"The unhappy Gervaise perceived that she was a mother."

"Ah! this time it is too strong."

"You deny the paternity?" "The paternity, and the fact itself."

"Write that the accused denies, and let inquiry be made upon this point."

"One moment," cried Aubry, again fearing that, if Gervaise was convicted of falsehood, the whole thing would fall to the ground; "did Gervaise really say what you have just read?"

"She said it, word for word."

"Well, then, if she said it, I suppose it must be true."

"Write that the accused confesses himself to be guilty on all the heads."

The registrar wrote it down.

"Pardieu!" said Jacques to himself, "if Ascanio has been a week in the Châtelet for having simply made love to Colombe, they will give me three months; however, it was best to make sure. However, I compliment Gervaise. Peste! Joan of Arc was nothing to her."

"Then," said the lieutenant, "you confess all the crimes of which you are accused?"

"Yes, monsieur, and others too, if you like. I am very guilty, monsieur, so do not spare me."

"Impudent knave!" murmured the lieutenant, in the tone in which a comedy uncle speaks to his nephew. Then he lowered his great red face, and began to reflect, and after a few minutes—

"Write," said he, "that as the said Jacques Aubry, student, has confessed to having seduced the girl Gervaise-Perrette-Popinot by fine promises and a false semblance of love, we condemn the said Jacques Aubry to a fine of twenty sous, to take care of the child, if it be a boy, and to pay all expenses."

"And the prison?" cried Aubry.

"What! the prison?"

"Yes, the prison; do you not send me to prison?" "No."

"Not to the Châtelet, like Ascanio?"

"Who is Ascanio?"

"He is a pupil of Benvenuto Cellini's."

"What did he do?" "Carried off a young girl."

"What young girl?"

"Mademoiselle Colombe d'Estourville, daughter of the Provost of Paris."

"Well?"

"Well, I say it is an injustice, since we have both committed the same crime, to make a difference in our punishment. You send him to prison, and condemn me to a fine of twenty sous. There is no more justice in the world."

"On the contrary, it is because there is justice that it has been decided thus."

"How so?"

"Doubtless, there is honour, my young fellow; the honour of a noble lady is estimated at a prison; that of a grisette is worth

twenty sous. If you wished to go to the Châtelet, you should have addressed yourself to a duchess."

"But it is frightful! abominable! immoral!"

"My dear fellow, pay your fine and go away."

"I will not pay my fine, and I will not go away."

"Then I must have you taken to prison until you have paid."

"That is all I want."

The lieutenant called two guards.

"Conduct this fellow to the Grands-Carmes."

"To the Grand-Carmes! Why not to the Châtelet?" cried Jacques.

"Because the Châtelet is not a prison for debtors, but a royal fortress; and you must have committed some great crime to get in there. The Châtelet, indeed!"

"Oh! if you will not send me to the Châtelet, I will pay."

"Then there is nothing else to say. Go, gentlemen of the guard; the young man will pay."

Jacques Aubry took out his money, and laid down the required sum, which was counted by the long man in black, and pronounced to be correct.

"Then make off, young fellow," said the lieutenant; "justice has others to attend to besides you."

Jacques Aubry saw that there was nothing more to be done, and retired in despair.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH JACQUES AUBRY RISES TO EPIC PROPORTIONS.

"Ah, *par example!*" said Jacques Aubrey, as, after leaving the Palais de Justice, he went along the Pont aux Moulins, towards the Châtelet, "I shall be curious to know what Gervaise will say when she hears that her honour is estimated at twenty sous. She will say that I have been indiscreet, and will be ready to tear my eyes out. But what do I see there?"

What he saw, was a page belonging to the amiable vicomte, to whom he was in the habit of confiding his secrets.

"Ah, *pardieu!* that is excellent," said Jacques. "My friend whose name I do not know, and who appears to me to have influence at court, might get me sent to prison; it is Providence that sends me his page, to tell me where to find him; for I know neither his name nor address."

And in order to profit by what he regarded as a gracious interposition of Providence in his behalf, Jacques Aubrey advanced towards the page, who, on recognizing him, let fall the stones with which he was playing, and waited for him with that saucy air which

is the characteristic of the corporation to which he had the honour to belong.

"Good morning, Mr. Page," cried Aubry, as soon as he thought the lad could hear him.

"Good morning," replied the boy. "What are you doing here?"

"*Ma foi!* If I must tell you, I was seeking for what I believe I have found—the address of my excellent friend, the comte, the baron, the vicomte—your master."

"Do you want to see him?" "As soon as possible."

"Then you will be gratified, for he has gone to see the provost."

"At the Châtelet?" "Yes, and he will soon come out."

"He is very lucky to go into the Châtelet whenever he likes; but is he, then, a friend of M. Robert d'Estourville—the comte—the vicomte——?"

"Vicomte——"

"Vicomte of what?" said Jacques, desiring to profit by this opportunity of learning his friend's name.

"The Vicomte de Mar——"

"Ah!" cried Jacques, interrupting the page, as he saw the vicomte himself appear at the door. "Ah! dear vicomte, here you are, then. I was looking for you."

"Good morning," said Marmagne, evidently ill pleased at the meeting. "I should have been delighted to talk to you, but unluckily I am in a hurry, so, adieu."

"One moment," cried Jacques, seizing his arm; "you shall not go away like that! Firstly, I have a great service to ask of you."

"You!"

"Yes, I; and you know friends should help each other."

"Friends!"

"Certainly; are you not my friend? for what constitutes friendship? Confidence. Now, I am full of confidence in you: I tell you all my own affairs, and even those of others."

"And you never have had cause to repent it."

"Never, with you; but it is not so with all the world. There is in Paris a man whom I am seeking, and, with God's help, I shall meet him some day."

"My dear fellow," said Marmagne, who strongly suspected who the man was, "I told you I was in a great hurry."

"But wait to hear the service you can render me."

"Then be quick."

"You stand well at court, do you not?" "My friends say so."

"You have some influence, then?" "My enemies find it out."

"Well, my dear comte—my dear vicomte, I want you to—get me into the Châtelet."

"In what capacity?" "Simply as a prisoner."

"As a prisoner! that is a singular ambition, *ma foi!*"

"It is mine."

"And for what reason do you wish to enter the Châtelet?" said

Marmagne, who suspected that this singular desire hid some new secret, which he might possess himself of.

To any other person I would not tell it," replied Jacques, "for I have learned to my cost, or rather to that of poor Ascanio, that it is necessary to he silent. But with you it is quite a different thing: I have no secrets from you."

"Then speak quickly."

"Will you get me put into the Châtelet if I do?"

"Yes, at once."

"Well, my friend, only imagine that I had the imprudence to confide to others what I told you about the charming young girl in the head of the god Mars."

"Well!"

"The wild careless fellows have spread the story, so that it reached the ears of the provost, and as the provost had lost his daughter, he guessed that it was she who had chosen this retreat. He told d'Orbec and the Duchesse d'Etampes, and they all came to the Grand-Nesle, while Benvenuto was away, carried off Colombe, and put Ascanio into prison."

"Bah!"

"Yes, it is true. And who do you think was the mover in it all, a certain Vicomte de Marmagne."

"But," interrupted the vicomte, rather uneasy at this constant repetition of his name, "you do not tell me the reason that you wish to enter the Châtelet."

"Can you not guess?" "No."

"They have arrested Ascanio." "Yes."

"And taken him to the Châtelet?" "Well!"

"But they do not know—no one does know, but Benvenuto, the duchess, and I, that Ascanio possesses a certain letter—some secret which might ruin the duchess. Now, do you understand?"

"I begin to comprehend; hut explain further."

"You understand, vicomte, I wish to enter the Châtelet, and communicate with Ascanio, take his letter or receive his secret, return to Benvenuto and concoct with him some plan for making Colombe's virtue and Ascanio's love triumph, to the great confusion of the Marmagnes, the d'Orbecs, the provost, the duchess, and the whole clique."

"It is very ingenious," said Marmagne. "Thanks for your confidence; you shall not have cause to repent it."

"Then you promise me your influence?" "What for?"

"To get me into the Châtelet, as I said." "You may count on it."

"At once?" "Wait here for me."

"Where I am?" "Yes."

"And you go——" "To get the order to have you arrested."

"Ah! my friend, my dear baron, my dear comte. But tell me your name, in case I should have need of you."

"That is needless; I will return directly."

"Yes, do; and if, on your way, you meet that cursed Marmagne, tell him——" "What?"

"That I have made a vow that he shall die by my hand."

"Adieu," cried the vicomte; "wait here for me."

"*Au revoir*, I will wait for you. Ah! you are a true friend, a man one can trust; and I should like to know——"

"Adieu, monsieur," said the page, who had stood aside during the conversation.

"Adieu, gentle page," said Aubry; "but before you go, do me a service."

"What is it?"

"Who is that noble lord to whom you have the honour to belong?"

"He with whom you have just been talking?" "Yes."

"And whom you call your friend?" "Yes."

"And you do not know his name?"

"No. He is a well known man, is he not?" "Certainly."

"Influential?"

"Yes; he is always with the king and the Duchesse d'Etampes."

"And you say he is called?"

"The Vicomte——but he is calling me."

"The Vicomte de——?" "Marmagne."

"Marmagne! Is he the Vicomte de Marmagne?" "He is."

"Marmagne! the friend of the provost, of d'Orbec, and of Madame d'Etampes?" "The same."

"And the enemy of Benvenuto Cellini?" "Just so."

"Ah!" cried Aubry, as a sudden flash of light illumined the past. "Marmagne! Ah! I understand now."

And as he was without arms, by a rapid movement he seized the short sword of the page, drew it from the sheath, and rushed in pursuit of Marmagne, crying, "Stop!" At the cry, Marmagne turned, but, seeing Jacques running after him, sword in hand, guessed that he was discovered. There were but two alternatives, to fly or to wait. Now, Marmagne was certainly not brave enough to wait, neither was he quite coward enough to fly. He chose a medium course, and rushed into a house of which the door was open, hoping to close it after him; but unluckily the door was fastened back to the wall by a chain, which he could not unfasten, so that Aubry arrived in the courtyard before he had time to reach the staircase.

"Ah! Marmagne, cursed spy! stealer of secrets! ah! it is you. At last I know you! Draw, wretch, draw."

"Monsieur," replied Marmagne, trying to look grand, "do you think the Vicomte de Marmagne will do Jacques Aubry, student, the honour to cross swords with him?"

"If he does not, Jacques Aubry will have the honour of passing his sword through the body of the Vicomte de Marmagne."

And, in order to leave no doubt on the mind of him whom he

menaced, Jacques placed the point of his sword against the breast of the vicomte, who felt the point of the steel through his doublet.

"Help, help! murder!" cried Marmagne.

"Oh! cry as much as you like; you will have ceased to cry before they come. The best thing you can do is to defend yourself. So draw, vicomte, draw."

"Well, since you will have it, you shall," said Marmagne.

As we know, Marmagne was not naturally brave; but, like all other gentlemen in that chivalric time, he had received a military education, and was reckoned rather clever with his sword. Certainly, some said that Marmagne had spread the report, to keep himself from disagreeable affairs. However, being so vigorously pressed by Jacques, he drew his sword. But Jacques Aubry's skill was uncontested among the students at the University, and the clerks of his acquaintance. Therefore, each found that they had a formidable adversary. But Marmagne had one great advantage; for Aubry had only the page's sword, which was six inches shorter than his master's; it did not much matter for the defence, but was a great inconvenience in attacking. Indeed, Marmagne had but to present the point of his sword at Jacques' face, (being much taller than he was,) to keep him constantly at a distance, and all Jacques' efforts to attack were fruitless. Marmagne, by simply bringing his right leg back to his left, was out of reach, and, indeed, his sword had already touched Aubry two or three times, while his blows all fell in the air. Aubry understood that he was lost if he continued this plan; so, adopting a new one, he continued to parry; but gaining ground insensibly, inch by inch, then, when he thought himself near enough, he exposed himself, as if by unskilfulness. Marmagne, seeing it, made a thrust, which Aubry, on his guard, parried, and then, profiting by his adversary's sword being raised two inches above his head, glided in and thrust so rapidly and so vigorously, that the little sword disappeared up to the hilt in the vicomte's breast.

Marmagne uttered one of those piercing cries which announce a grave wound, turned pale, let his sword drop, and fell backwards. Just at that moment, some of the patrol, attracted by the cries of Marmagne and the crowd that was gathering round the door, ran in, and, as Jacques had his still bloody sword in his hand, arrested him. He tried at first to resist; but as the chief cried loudly, "Disarm that fellow, and lead him to the Châtelet," he gave up his sword and followed the guard towards the much-desired prison, admiring the chance which granted him at once two things which he desired, revenge on Marmagne and admission to the Châtelet.

This time they made no difficulty at receiving him into the royal chateâu. As it was at that time very full, there was a long discussion between the gaoler and the inspector, as to where he should be lodged: at last they seemed to agree, and, signing to Jacques to follow him, the gaoler went down thirty-two steps, opened a door, pushed him into a dark cell, and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DIFFICULTY THAT AN HONEST MAN EXPERIENCES TO GET OUT OF PRISON.

JACQUES remained for an instant quite confused by the rapid transition from light to darkness. He knew not where he was—whether near to, or far from, Ascanio; in the corridor along which he came, besides the door which was opened for him, he had only perceived two others; but his first end was attained—he was under the same roof as his friend.

However, as he could not remain for ever in the same place, and as at the other end of the cell, that is to say, about fifteen feet before him, he perceived a faint light coming through an air-hole, he stretched out his leg carefully, with the intention of gaining the highest part of the cell; but at his second step the floor seemed to fail him, he descended rapidly two or three steps, and, unable to resist the impulse thus received, would certainly have broken his head against the wall, when his feet caught in something, and he fell, thereby escaping with a few contusions. The obstacle which had involuntarily rendered him this service, uttered a groan.

"Pardon me," said Jacques, rising, "for it seems that I have walked over some one, which I certainly would not have done could I have seen clearly."

"You have walked," said a voice, "over what, sixty year's ago, was a man, and which is now about to become a corpse."

"Then," said Jacques, "my regret is all the greater for having disturbed you at a moment when you were doubtless occupied, like a good Christian, in settling your accounts with God."

"My accounts are settled, M. l'ecolier; I have sinned like a man, but I have suffered like a martyr, and I hope that God, in weighing my faults and my griefs, will find that the griefs overbalance the sins."

"So be it: I trust so with all my heart," said Aubry. "But if it does not fatigue you too much, my dear companion—I say my dear, because I presume you bear me no malice for the little accident to which I owe the pleasure of your acquaintance—will you tell me how you knew that I was a student?"

"Because I saw it by your costume, particularly by the ink-bottle hanging at your waist, just where a gentleman wears his dagger."

"You saw by my dress and ink-bottle? Ah! my dear companion, you told me that you were near death."

"I hope I have arrived at last at the end of my ills; I trust to go to sleep this night on earth and awake in heaven."

"I do not oppose that in any way," replied Jacques; "but I must remark that your present situation is hardly one in which people generally joke."

"What do you mean by joking?"

"What! you tell me that you recognised me by my costume, and by my ink-bottle, when I cannot even see my own hands."

"That is possible; but when you have been fifteen years in a prison, as I have been, you will see in the dark as well as you now do in daylight."

"I would rather the devil should tear my eyes out, than that they should be subjected to such an apprenticeship. Fifteen years! you have been fifteen years in prison?"

"Fifteen or sixteen; perhaps more, for I have long ceased to count days or measure time."

"But you must have committed some dreadful crime, to be so pitilessly punished."

"I am innocent."

"Innocent! ah! my dear companion, I have already told you it was not a time for joking."

"And I told you that I was not joking."

"But it is still less a time to lie, as joking is a simple *jeu d'esprit* which offends neither heaven nor earth, while lying is a mortal sin which compromises the soul."

"I have never lied."

"You are innocent, and you have been fifteen years in prison?"

"More or less."

"Ah! and I who am innocent also.

"Then, may God protect you. The guilty may hope for pardon, the innocent, never."

"Your observations are full of wisdom, my dear friend; but do you know that they are not at all reassuring?"

"I speak the truth."

"But you must have done something; tell me all about it?"

And Jacques, who was beginning to distinguish objects, took a stool, and, placing it in a corner of the cell, by the bed of the dying man, sat down, and established himself in this improvised easy chair as comfortably as he could.

"Ah! you keep silence, my dear friend. You have no confidence in me, and I understand that fifteen years in prison have rendered you suspicious. Well, I am called Jacques Aubry; I am twenty-two years old, and am a student, as you have seen—so you say, at least. I had motives, which concern no one but myself, for wishing to enter the Châtelet, where I have been about ten minutes, and I have had the honour of making your acquaintance. That is my entire life; and now, that you know me as well as I know myself, speak in your turn, my dear companion."

"My name is Etienne Raymond."

Etienne Raymond! I never heard it."

"Firstly, you were a child when it pleased God that I should disappear from the face of the earth; besides, I held so small a place in it, and made so little stir, that no one perceived my absence."

"But what did you do? what were you?"

"I was the confidential servant of the Constable de Bourbon."

"Oh! oh! and you betrayed the state, like him; then I wonder no longer."

"No, I refused to betray my master—that was all."

"Tell me about it?"

"I was at Paris, at the hotel of the constable, while he inhabited his castle of Bourbon l'Archambant. One day, the captain of his guards brought me a letter, ordering me to give to the messenger a little sealed packet, which I should find in the duke's bed-chamber, at the bottom of a little chest of drawers which stood by the bed. I led the captain to the room, found the packet, and gave it to the messenger, who set off at once. An hour after, some soldiers, led by an officer, appeared, and ordered me in their turn to open to them the duke's bed-room, and lead them to a chest of drawers at the head of the bed. I obeyed, but they searched uselessly; what they sought for was the packet carried off by the duke's messenger."

"Diable!" cried Aubry, who began to take a deep interest in the situation of his companion in misfortune.

"The officer uttered terrible menaces, to which I replied only that I did not know of what they were speaking; for if I had told them about the duke's messenger, they might have ridden after him and caught him."

"Peste!" said Jacques; "you acted like a good and honest servant."

"Then the officer consigned me to two guards, and, accompanied by two others, returned to the Louvre. At the end of half an hour he returned with an order to conduct me to the Château of Piene-en-Seise, at Lyons; they put irons on my legs, tied my hands, and placed me in a carriage with a soldier on each side of me. Five days after, I was shut up in a prison, which, I must say, was far from being as sombre and rigorous as this; but still, a prison is always a prison, and I have at last become accustomed to this, as I did to the others."

"Hum!" said Jacques, "that shows that you are a philosopher."

"Three days and three nights passed," continued Etienne Raymond, "but during the fourth night, I was awakened by a slight noise; I opened my eyes, my door turned on its hinges, and a veiled female entered accompanied hy the gaoler, who placed a lamp on the table, and, at a sign from my visitor, went humbly out. Then she approached my bed and raised her veil; I uttered a cry."

"Who was it, then?"

"It was Louise de Savoie herself, the Duchesse d'Angoulême in person; the Regent of France, the mother of the king."

"Ah! and what did she want with a poor devil like you?"

"She came to seek for the packet which I had given to the duke's messenger, and which contained love letters, which the imprudent princess had addressed to him whom she now persecuted."

"Oh!" murmured Jacques, "this is a history which strongly resembles that of the Duchesse d'Etampes and Ascanio."

"Alas! all histories of princesses in love resemble each other," replied the prisoner, who seemed to have ears as quick as his eyes; "but woe to obscure people who find themselves mixed up with their affairs."

"Prophet of ill! what do you say? I also am mixed up in the story of a princess in love."

"Well, if it be so, say adieu to daylight, and adieu to life."

"Go to the devil with your predictions from another world; I have nothing to do with it at all. It is not I who am loved, but Ascanio."

"Was it I who was loved?" said the prisoner; "I, of whose very existence they had been ignorant until then? No; I found myself placed between a barren love and a fertile vengeance, and I was crushed between them."

"*Ventre-mahom*!" cried Aubry; "you are not enlivening, my worthy man. But let us return to the princess; for, just because your story makes me tremble, it interests me."

"It was, as I told you, the letters that she wanted. In exchange for these letters, she promised me honours, dignities, and titles; to get these letters back, she would have extorted 400,000 crowns from another Semblancy, were he also to pay for his complacence on the scaffold. I told her that I had not got the letters, and knew nothing about them. Then to bribes succeeded menaces; but I could no more be intimidated than seduced, for I had told the truth: I had given them to the messenger of my noble master. She went away furious, and I was a year without hearing any more about it. Then she returned, and the same scene was renewed.

"It was now my turn to beg, and I entreated her to let me out. I adjured her in the name of my wife and my children; all was useless—I must give up the letters or die in prison.

"One day I found a file in my bread. My noble master had remembered me; but doubtless, exiled and fugitive as he was, he could not deliver me, either by force or by interest. He sent one of his servants to France, who bribed the gaoler to give me this file and say who it came from. I filed one of the bars of my window, made a rope with my sheets, and let myself down; but at the bottom I vainly sought the ground with my feet: then I let myself drop, calling upon God; I broke my leg in falling, and the patrol found me fainting on the ground. They carried me then to the Château of Châlons-sur-Saone, where I remained two years,

and then my persecutor re-appeared. It was still the letters she wanted. This time she brought a torturer with her, who administered the question. It was useless cruelty; I could tell nothing, for I knew nothing, but that I had given the letters to the duke's messenger.

"One day, at the bottom of my jug of water, I found a purse full of gold. It was again my master, who had remembered his miserable servant.

"I corrupted a gaoler, or rather, the wretch pretended to be corrupted. At midnight, he opened the door of my prison to me. I went out. I followed him through the corridors. Already I felt the fresh air—already I believed myself free, when soldiers fell upon us, and bound us both. My guide had pretended to be touched by my prayers, so as to gain my gold; then he had denounced me, to gain the reward promised to betrayers. They brought me here, and here, for the last time, Louise de Savoie appeared to me, followed by the headsman.

"The prospect of death would not do more than menaces, promises, and torture had done. They tied my hands, a rope was passed through a ring, and then round my neck. I made always the same answer, adding, that to kill me would be to accomplish my own wish, for that I was wearied with this life of captivity. Doubtless this stopped her, for she went away, followed by the headsman.

"Since then, I have never seen her. What has become of my noble duke—what of the cruel duchess, I know not; for, since that time, about fifteen years, I have not exchanged a word with a single human being."

"They are both dead," said Aubry.

"Both dead! my noble duke dead! He must have been still young—not more than fifty-two. How did he die?"

"He was killed at the siege of Rome, and probably—" Jacques was going to add, "by one of my friends;" but he checked himself, fearing to create a coldness between him and the old man. Jacques was becoming prudent.

"Probably——?"

"By a goldsmith called Benvenuto Cellini."

"Twenty years ago, I should have cursed the murderer; now I bless him from the bottom of my heart. And have they given my noble duke a tomb worthy of him?"

"I should think so; they erected one to him in the Cathedral of Gaëta, and it bears an epitaph which states that, in comparison with him who sleeps there, Alexander the Great was a good-for-nothing, and Cæsar a stupid."

"And the other?" "Who?"

"My persecutor." "Dead also, nine years ago."

"Ah! one night, in my prison, I saw a shade kneeling and pray-

ing. I cried out, and the shade disappeared. It was she, who came to ask pardon of me."

"Then, you believe that, before dying, she was pardoned?"

"I hope so, for the good of her soul."

"But then, they should have set you at liberty."

"I am so insignificant, that, among greater events, I must have been forgotten."

"And do you, when about to die, pardon her in your turn?"

"Raise me, young man, and let me pray for both."

And the dying man, raised by Jacques, mingled in his prayer, his protector and his persecutor—he who had remembered him in his affection, and she who had never forgotten him in her hate. The prisoner was right. The eyes of Jacques Aubry were becoming accustomed to the darkness; he was able to distinguish the figure of the dying man. He was a handsome old man, rendered thin by suffering, bald, and with a white beard; one of those heads of which Domenichino dreamed when he painted his confession of St. Jerome.

When he had prayed, he uttered a sigh and fell back; he had fainted.

Jacques Aubry thought him dead. However, he ran to the water bottle, took some water in the palm of his hand, and threw it on his face. The dying man recovered consciousness.

"You have done well to aid me, young man;" said he, "and this is your recompense."

"What is it?" "A poignard."

"A poignard! And how does such a thing come into your hands?"

"One day the gaoler, in bringing me my bread and water, placed his lantern on the stool which stood near the wall. In this wall was a projecting stone, and on this stone some letters engraved with a knife. I had no time to read them, but I scratched up some earth with my hands, and, making it into a kind of paste, took off the impression of the letters, and read, '*Ultor.*' What means this word?—'Avenger?' I returned to the stone, and tried to shake it. It moved, and by dint of patience, by twenty times repeating the same efforts, I at last tore it from the wall. I plunged my hand into the hollow left, and found there this poignard. Then the desire for liberty, which had been almost extinct, returned to me, and I resolved, with this poignard, to make a passage into some neighbouring cell, and there, with the help of whoever I might find, concoct some plan of escape. Besides, even if I failed, it was an occupation: and when you have been, like me, fifteen years in a prison, young man you will see what a terrible enemy time is."

Aubry shuddered.

"And did you put your project into execution?"

"Yes, and more easily than I could have imagined. I have been

here so long, that no one thinks of my escaping; perhaps every one has forgotten even where I am. The constable and the regent being dead, who now would know the name of Etienne Raymond?"

Aubry felt a cold perspiration on his forehead, at the thought of this forgotten existence.

"Well?" asked he.

"Well, for more than a year I have been working, and I have managed to make a hole under the wall, through which a man can pass."

"But what did you do with the earth which you dug out?"

"Spread it over the ground, and it has mingled with the other earth."

"And where is the hole?"

"Behind my bed. For ten years no one has ever thought of changing its place. The gaoler never comes here more than once a day. When he had gone, when the doors were shut, and I could no longer hear the sound of his footsteps, I drew away my bed, and set to work; before the hour of the next visit I replaced it, and laid down on it. The day before yesterday, I lay down to rise no more: my strength was exhausted; to-day my life is closing. You are welcome, young man; you will help me to die, and you will be my heir."

"Your heir?" cried Aubry, in astonishment.

"Yes; I leave you this poignard. You smile. What gift more precious can be left to a prisoner? for it is, perhaps, liberty."

"You are right, and I thank you. But the hole, where does it lead to?"

"I had not yet arrived at the other side, but I was very near. Yesterday I heard the sound of voices in the neighbouring cell."

"Diable!"

"And I believe that a few hours' work will complete it."

"Thanks."

"Now, I would wish to see a priest."

"It is impossible that they can refuse such a favour to a dying man."

He ran to the door without stumbling this time—for his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness—and knocked with feet and hands. A gaoler appeared.

"What do you want, and why do you make such a noise?" said he.

"The old man with me is dying, and asks for a priest—you will not refuse him?"

"Hem! I do not know what these old men want with priests. However, I will send him one."

Ten minutes after the priest appeared, carrying the holy viaticum, and preceded by two sacristans, of whom one carried a cross, and the other a bell. The confession was a solemn spectacle; the confession of this martyr, who had nothing to reveal but the crimes of others, and who, instead of asking pardon for himself, prayed

for his enemies. Although Jacques Aubry was not easily affected, he fell on his knees, and remembered the prayers of his childhood, which he believed he had forgotten.

When the prisoner had finished his confession, it was the priest who bowed before him and asked him for his blessing.

The old man gave a radiant smile, extended one hand over the head of the priest, the other towards Aubry, and fell back with a deep sigh. It was his last. The priest went out as he had come, accompanied by the two children of the choir; and the cell, which had been lighted up for a moment by the trembling light of the tapers, returned to its former obscurity. Jacques Aubry was left alone with the dead. It was sad company, more particularly from the reflections to which it gave birth. This man, who was lying there, had entered prison innocent, and had remained there fifteen years, and had left it when Death, the great liberator, came to release him. For the first time, the joyous student found himself face to face with sombre and intense thought; for the first time he sounded the vicissitudes of life, and the calm depths of death.

Then he began to think of himself, innocent also, but, like this man, drawn in by the whirlpool of passions. Ascanio and himself might disappear as Etienne Raymond had done, and who would think of them?

Gervaise, perhaps; Benvenuto, certainly. But the first could do nothing but weep; and the second, by demanding so earnestly the letter from Ascanio, acknowledged his own powerlessness.

And, for his only chance of safety, there remained to him the inheritance of the dead man; an old poignard, which had already failed to do anything for its two first masters. Jacques Aubry had hidden it in his clothes, and he put his hand quickly to feel if he still had it. At that moment the door opened; they came to carry off the corpse.

"When will you bring my dinner?" said Jacques; "I am hungry."

"In two hours."

Then Jacques was left alone in his cell.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN HONEST THEFT.

Aubry passed these two hours seated on his stool, and without moving; his active thoughts kept his body in repose. At the appointed time, the gaoler reappeared with bread and water; that was what they called a dinner in the Châtelet.

Jacques remembered what the dying man had said, that the door of the prison was only opened once every twenty-four hours, but

yet he remained a long time seated in the same place, fearing lest the events of the day should have induced some change of habits. Soon he saw, thanks to his air-hole, that night was coming on. It was a well filled day that had just passed. In the morning the scene with the judge, at noon the duel with Marmagne, at one o'clock the prison, at three the death of the prisoner, and now his first attempts at deliverance. A man does not count many such days in his life.

Jacques rose slowly, went to the door to listen if any one was coming, then, taking off his doublet, lest it should show marks of earth, pulled away the bed, and found the hole of which his companion had spoken. He glided like a serpent into this narrow gallery, which was about eight feet deep, and which, after going under the wall, mounted on the other side. At the first blow that Jacques struck, he perceived from the sound that he was really near the end—to an outlet into some place. Where, he must have been a sorcerer to tell.

He continued his work as noiselessly as possible, and only coming out of his hole from time to time, to strew the earth over his cell—the earth which would otherwise have choked up the passage.

While he worked, Ascanio dreamed of Colombe. He also was in the Châtelet. He also had been thrown into a cell. However, whether by chance, or by the duchess's recommendation, this cell was a little less naked, and consequently more habitable than that of Jacques. But what mattered to Ascanio a little more or less of comfort? His cell was still a cell, his captivity a separation. He wanted Colombe—she who was more to him than daylight, life, or liberty. Colombe with him in the cell, and it would have seemed to him an enchanted palace.

The last week of the poor boy's life had been so sweet to him. Thinking of Colombe by day, and near her at night, he had given himself up to happiness, and had discarded all disquietude for the future. And now he was in a cell, alone, far from Colombe, who was perhaps also shut up—perhaps a prisoner in some convent, from whence she would come out only to enter the chapel where she was to meet the husband whom she would be forced to accept. Two terrible passions watched at the door of the prison of these poor children—the love of Madame d'Estampes at that of Ascanio, and the ambition of the Comte d'Orbec at that of Colombe.

Ascanio was sad and downcast; his was one of those tender natures which requires to lean upon a stronger one; one of those frail and graceful flowers which bend in the least storm, and only rise in the vivifying rays of the sun.

Thrown into a prison, Benvenuto's first care would have been to examine the doors, sound the walls, and make the floor resound, to assure himself if none of them offered to his lively and active mind some means of escape. Ascanio seated himself on his bed, let his head fall on his breast, and murmured the name of Colombe.

To escape by any means from a cell, the walls of which were six feet thick, was an idea that never occurred to him.

His cell, as we have said, was a little less bare, and a little more habitable than that of Jacques; there was in it a bed, a table, two chairs and an old mat; besides, on a piece of stone, built out for that purpose, burned a lamp. It was a cell for the privileged. Also, instead of the bread and water, which they brought once a day to our scholar, Ascanio enjoyed two repasts, not quite execrable, an advantage which was partly neutralized by the disagreeableness of seeing his gaoler twice a day. Ascanio cared little for all this; his was one of those delicate organizations which seem to live upon perfume and dew. Always plunged in thought, he eat a little bread, drank a few drops of wine, and thought of Colombe, whom he loved, and of Benvenuto, in whom he hoped.

Up to that time, Ascanio had troubled himself little with the details of life; Benvenuto lived for both; Ascanio did but breathe, dream of art, and love Colombe. He was like the fruit which grows on some vigorous tree, and receives from it all its strength. And even now, however bad his situation was, if, at the moment of his arrest, he had been able to see Benvenuto, and if he could have pressed his hands and said, "Be easy, Ascanio, I am watching over you and Colombe," his confidence in his master was so great, that, sustained by this promise, he would have waited without uneasiness for the time when the doors should be opened to him, sure that they would open, in spite of bolts and bars.

But he had not seen Benvenuto, who perhaps would not hear for some time that his cherished pupil, the child of his Stephana, was a prisoner; it would take a day to let him know, even if any one thought of doing it, another day to return to Paris, and in two days, the enemies of the lovers might do much. Therefore Ascanio passed the whole night which followed his arrest without sleep, sometimes walking about, then throwing himself on his bed, on which, by an attention which proved that the prisoner had been particularly recommended, white sheets had been placed. During all the first day and night, and the next morning, nothing new took place. About two o'clock, as well as the prisoner could judge, he heard voices near him; it was an indistinct murmur, in which it was impossible to distinguish anything, but evidently caused by human beings. Ascanio listened, the sound came from one corner of his cell. He silently applied his ear to the wall, and found that the noise came from below; he therefore had neighbours, who were evidently separated from him only by a wall or a thin flooring. About two hours after the sound ceased, and all became quiet.

Towards night he heard a different sound; it was no longer voices, but blows struck upon stone. It came from the same spot, was incessant, and seemed gradually drawing nearer. However preoccupied Ascanio might be, this sound seemed to him to merit attention; and he remained looking towards the spot, and, in spite of

his last sleepless night, did not think of sleep. It was not the hour for ordinary work: it must be some prisoner working at his escape. Ascanio smiled sadly at the idea that, when the poor wretch reached him, he would but have changed his prison.

At last the sound drew so near, that Ascanio ran to his lamp, seized it, and went with it to the spot whence it proceeded; nearly at the same moment the earth rose, and in doing so, gave passage to a human head. Ascanio uttered a cry of astonishment, then one of joy, to which another replied. The head was that of Jacques Aubry. A minute after, thanks to Ascanio's aid to his visitor, the friends were in each other's arms. We may imagine that the first questions and answers were somewhat incoherent; but at last they began to get a little order in their ideas. Ascanio had little to tell, and all to hear. Jacques told him all he knew; how he had entered the Hôtel de Nesle at the same time as Benvenuto; how he had learned the news of Ascanio's arrest, and the carrying off of Colombe; how Benvenuto had run to his studio, crying out, "To the casting!" and how he himself had run to the Châtelet. He knew nothing more of what had taken place at the Hôtel de Nesle. Then he recounted his own disappointment when they would not put him in prison, his visit to Gervaise, her denunciation to the judge, his summons—which had resulted only in a fine of twenty sous, a sum so humiliating to Gervaise; then, his rencontre with Marmagne, just as he began to despair of getting into prison; and, lastly, all that had passed in the cell up to the minute of his perceiving Ascanio through the opening he had made. After this the friends embraced once more.

"And now," said Jacques, "listen, Ascanio, for I have no time to lose."

"But, first tell me of Colombe; where is she?"

"I do not know; but I believe with Madame d'Etampes."

"Madame d'Etampes! her rival!"

"Then, what they said of the duchess's love for you, is true."

Ascanio coloured, and stammered some unintelligible words.

"Oh! do not blush for that," cried Jacques. "Peste! a duchess; and a duchess who is the mistress of a king. It is not to me that such good fortune would arrive. But, to return to business."

"Yes," said Ascanio, "to return to Colombe."

"Nonsense! Colombe; it is about a letter." "What letter?"

"A letter which Madame d'Etampes wrote to you."

"And who told you that I possessed such a letter?"

"Benvenuto Cellini." "Why did he tell you?"

"Because he wants the letter: it is necessary to him, and I determined to give it to him; and all I have done has been solely to obtain it."

"But what does he want with it?"

"Ah! *ma foi!* I do not know. That was not my business.

He said, 'I must have that letter;' and I said, 'Good, you shall have it.' I got sent to prison in order to procure it, and I promise to deliver it to Benvenuto. Well! what is the matter?"

For Ascanio's face had grown clouded.

"My poor Jacques," said he, "you have taken all this trouble in vain."

"How so? Have you it no longer?"

"It is here," said Ascanio, showing the pocket of his doublet.

"That is right; then give it to me for Benvenuto."

"This letter shall not quit me, Jacques."

"And why not?"

"Because I do not know what use Benvenuto would make of it."

"Use it to save you."

"And to ruin the duchess, perhaps;—Aubry, I cannot ruin a woman."

"But she is ruining you; she detests you—no, I am wrong; she adores you."

"And you wish that in return——"

"But it is just as if she hated you; it is she who has done all this."

"How, all?"

"Yes; it is she who had you arrested, and Colombe carried off."

"Who told you so?"

"No one; but who could it have been?"

"The provost, d'Orbec, or Marmagne, to whom you confess you told all."

"Ascanio! Ascanio!" cried Jacques, in despair, "you are ruining yourself."

"I would rather be ruined than commit a baseness."

"But it cannot be base, since Benvenuto wishes to do it."

"Listen, Jacques, and do not be angry at what I am about to say. Were Benvenuto here in your place, and were he to say to me, 'It is Madame d'Etampes who had you arrested, who carried off Colombe, who holds her in her power, and will force her to her will, and I can only save Colombe by the aid of that letter,' I would make him swear not to show it to the king, and I would give it to him. But Benvenuto is not here, and I have no certainty that this persecution comes from the duchess. This letter would be badly placed in your hands, Jacques; pardon me, but you confess, yourself, how hair-brained you are."

"I swear to you, Ascanio, that this day has aged me ten years."

"This letter you might lose, or, with an excellent intention, make a rash use of it; Aubry, it shall stay where it is."

"But, my friend, remember that Benvenuto has said that this letter only can save you."

"Benvenuto will save me without that; he has the king's pro-

mise to grant him a favour on the day on which his Jupiter shall be cast, and that was why he cried, 'To the casting;' it was to save me."

"But if the casting failed?"

"There is no danger," said Ascanio, smiling.

"But it happens sometimes, to the most skilful workmen in France, they tell me."

"The most skilful workmen in France are mere students compared to Benvenuto."

"But how long will this casting last?" "Three days."

"And to bring the statue before the king?"

"Three days more."

"Six or seven in all; and before then Madame d'Etampes may have forced Colombe to marry d'Orbec."

"Madame d'Etampes has no rights over Colombe, and Colombe would resist."

"No; but the provost has rights over her as his daughter, and the king as his subject; and if they order?"

Ascanio grew frightfully pale.

"If, when Benvenuto procures your release, Colombe is already the wife of another, of what use will your liberty be?"

Ascanio pressed one hand to his head, while the other clasped the letter in his pocket; but just as Aubry thought he was about to yield, he shook his head and murmured, "No, no; to Benvenuto alone. Let us speak of something else."

And he pronounced these words in a tone which indicated that resistance was for the present useless.

"Then, my friend," said Aubry, taking a sudden resolution, "if we are to speak of other things, to-morrow will do just as well. As for me, I confess that I am tired with my troubles by day, and work by night, and should not be sorry to rest a little. Therefore, I will return to my cell. When you want to see me again, call. Meanwhile, put that mat over the hole which I have made, that they may not discover our communication; good night. And as night brings counsel, I trust to find you more reasonable to-morrow morning."

And without listening to anything that Ascanio said, or to his efforts to retain him, he plunged head first into his hole, and climbed back to his cell. As soon as he had quite disappeared, Ascanio placed the mat as directed, and entirely closed up the communication.

Then he threw his doublet on one of the two chairs, that with the table and the lamp, composed his furniture, and threw himself on his bed; and anxious as he was, fatigue of body overpowered distress of mind, and he soon fell asleep.

As for Aubry, instead of following Ascanio's example, although he also had great need of sleep, he sat down on his stool, and began to reflect deeply, which, as the reader knows, was contrary

to his general custom. He sat thus for about half an hour; then rose slowly, and, with the air of a man whose mind is made up, advanced towards his hole, into which he glided again, but this time as silently as possible; so that when he arrived at the other end, and raised the mat with his head, he perceived with joy that the operation had not awakened his friend.

This was all that he wanted; then, with the utmost care, he came slowly out of his subterranean gallery, approached the chair on which Ascanio's doublet lay, holding his very breath, and, with an eye fixed on the sleeper, and an ear open to every sound, took from the pocket the precious letter so coveted by Benvenuto, slipped into the envelope a note from Gervaise, which he folded in precisely the same manner as the duchess's letter, so that, until Ascanio opened it, he would still believe that he had the missive of the beautiful Anne d'Heilly. Then, with the same silence, he regained the hole, crept into it, drew the mat back to its place, and disappeared, like a ghost down one of the trap-doors of the opera.

It was time; for he had hardly re-entered his cell, when he heard Ascanio's door turn on its hinges, and his friend's voice exclaiming, like a man suddenly awakened, "Who is there?"

"I," replied a sweet voice, "fear nothing; it is a friend."

Ascanio, half-clothed, as we have said, rose at the sound of a voice that he thought he recognized, and by the light of the lamp saw a veiled female. She approached slowly, and raised her veil; it was the Duchesse d'Etampes.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT THE LETTER OF A GRISETTE MAKES AS MUCH FLAME WHEN BURNED, AS THAT OF A DUCHESS.

THERE was, on the expressive face of Anne d'Heilly, a mixture of compassion and of sadness, by which Ascanio was deceived, and which confirmed him, even before the duchess had opened her mouth, in the idea that she was entirely innocent of the catastrophe which had overwhelmed Colombe and himself.

"You here, Ascanio!" said she in a melodious voice; "you, to whom I would give a palace, I find in a prison."

"Ah! madame," cried he, "it is then true that you are innocent of our persecutions?"

"Did you suspect me for an instant, Ascanio? Then you had reason to hate me, and I can but grieve in silence at being so misunderstood."

"No, madame, no; they told me that it was you who conducted the whole, but I would not believe it."

"Well! Ascanio, you do not love me, I know; but at least with you, hatred does not lead to injustice. You are right, Ascanio; not only I was not the moving party, but I was ignorant of the whole. It was the provost, who, having learned all, I know not how, came to tell all to the king, and obtained from him the order to arrest you, and retake Colombe."

"And Colombe is with her father?" "No, she is with me."

"With you, madame; and why with you?"

"She is very beautiful, Ascanio," murmured the duchess, "and I understand that you should prefer her to all the women in the world, even although the most loving of them offered you the richest of duchies."

"I love Colombe, madame, and you know that love is before all the riches of the earth.

"Yes, Ascanio, all such things are secondary to your love. For a time I trusted that your passion for her was but an ordinary love, but I was wrong. Yes, I now see," added she, with a sigh, "that to separate you longer would be to oppose the will of God."

"Ah! madame!" cried Ascanio, clasping his hands, "God has given you the power to aid us; be great and generous, and make the happiness of two children who will love and bless you all their lives."

"Oh! yes," said the duchess, "I am conquered, Ascanio, I am ready to protect and defend you; but, alas! it is perhaps even now, too late."

"Too late! what do you mean?" cried Ascanio.

"Perhaps, Ascanio, by this time I am ruined myself!"

"Ruined! how madame?" "For having loved you."

"For having loved me! ruined for me!"

"Yes, imprudent that I am, for having written to you."

"How so? I do not understand, madame."

"You do not understand that the provost has ordered, with the king's consent, a search in the Hôtel de Nesle. This search will be principally in your room; for they will seek for proofs of your love for Colombe."

"Well!"

"If in your room they find the letter, that in a moment of madness I wrote to you—if it is placed before the eyes of the king, whom I was willing to betray for you, you may imagine that all my power will fall in an instant. Do you not then see that I am ruined, and can do nothing for either you or Colombe?"

"Oh! madame, tranquillize youself, there is no danger; the letter is here, and has never quitted me."

The duchess breathed more freely, and the expression of her face changed from anxiety to joy.

"It has never quitted you, Ascanio! and what sentiment is the cause of its having been so happy?"

"To prudence, madame!"

"To prudence! I was deceived again, and yet I should have been quite sure. To prudence! Well!" continued she, making an effort over herself, "since I have but to thank you for prudence, Ascanio, do you think it very prudent to keep here with you, whom they may search at any moment, a letter which must, if found, render me unable to protect you and Colombe; I, the only person who can save you?"

"Madame," said Ascanio, in his sweet voice, and with that melancholy which all pure minds feel when forced to doubt, "I am ignorant if your desire to save Colombe and me, is at the bottom of your heart, as it is on your lips, or if the wish alone to get back your letter, which, as you have said, might ruin you, has alone brought you here, and if once you have it in your power you will not again become our enemy; but I do know that the letter belongs to you, and that, when you reclaim it, I have no right to withhold it."

So saying, Ascanio rose, went straight to the chair on which his doublet lay, and drew out a letter, of which the duchess immediately recognized the envelope.

"Here, madame," said he, "is the paper so much desired by you, and which might be hurtful to you. Take it—tear it—destroy it! I have done what I ought; do in your turn what you ought to do."

"Ah! you have truly a noble heart," cried the duchess, carried away by the genuine impulse, which is found sometimes at the bottom of the most corrupted hearts.

"Some one is coming, madame," cried Ascanio.

"You are right," said she; and as the sound of steps drew near, she quickly extended her hand towards the lamp, and the paper was destroyed in a moment. She held it until the flame nearly reached her fingers, and when it fell, it was in ashes on the ground. At this moment the provost appeared at the door.

"They told me you were here, madame," said he, looking uneasily from Ascanio to the duchess, "and I hastened down to place myself at your orders. Have you any need either of me or of my people?"

"No, monsieur," said she, with a joyful expression of countenance, which she could not conceal; "but I thank you none the less for your good will. I came only to interrogate this young man whom you had arrested, and to assure myself if he were really as guilty as they said."

"And the result of this examination?" asked the provost, in a slightly ironical tone.

"Is that he is not, and therefore I recommend indulgence towards him. Meanwhile, the poor boy is very badly lodged; can you not give him another room?"

"It shall be attended to to-morrow, madame; you know that with me your wishes are laws. Have you any others to express, or will you continue your interrogatories?"

"No, I know all that I want to know." And the duchess left the cell, after casting on Ascanio a look of mingled gratitude and passion. The provost followed them, and the door closed behind them.

"*Pardieu!*" murmured Jacques Aubry, who had heard every word of the conversation, "I was just in time."

Indeed, Marmagne's first care, on recovering consciousness, had been to let the duchess know that he had received a wound which might be mortal, but before dying he wished to reveal to her a secret of the highest importance. She came, and then Marmagne told her that he had been attacked and wounded by a student called Jacques Aubry, who was seeking to enter the Châtelet in order to find Ascanio, and bring back to Cellini a letter in Ascanio's possession.

At these words the duchess understood all, and, cursing the passion which had carried her beyond the bounds of prudence, she had run to the Châtelet, had obtained admission to Ascanio's cell, and there had played with him the scene we have just described, and which had had, as she thought, the desired result, although she had not altogether duped the prisoner. Jacques, as he said, had been just in time. But only half his work was done, and the most difficult part remained behind. He held the letter which had so narrowly escaped destruction, but, in order that it should be worth anything, it must be, not in his hands, but in those of Benvenuto. Now Jacques was a prisoner, and he had learned from his predecessor that it was not so easy to leave the Châtelet when you were once in it. He was, then, like the cock who found a pearl, in great embarrassment as to what he should do with his riches.

To escape by violence was impossible. Armed with his poignard, Jacques might have killed the gaoler who brought him his meals, and taken his keys and his clothes; but Jacques' excellent heart turned from this method, besides which, it did not offer sufficient certainty. There were ten chances to one that he would be recognized, searched, despoiled of his precious letter, and put back into his cell.

To employ skill was still more uncertain; the cell was eight or ten feet under ground, and enormous bars of iron crossed the air-hole, through which entered the only rays of light which ever entered. It would take months to detach one bar; then, if this were done, the fugitive would only find himself in some court yard with unscaleable walls, where he would be found the next morning. There remained only corruption; but, thanks to the fine inflicted by the judge, the prisoner's whole fortune consisted only of ten sous, a sum insufficient to tempt the worst gaoler of the worst prison, and which certainly could not be offered to the keeper of a royal fortress. Jacques was therefore, we are forced to admit, cruelly embarrassed. From time to time, an idea presented itself to

his mind, but this idea doubtless entailed grave consequences; for each time that it returned, Jacques' face grew gloomy, and he uttered sighs which proved that the poor lad was sustaining a violent internal conflict; so violent and prolonged, indeed, that Jacques never once thought of sleep, but passed his night walking up and down the cell. It was the first time that he had ever remained awake to think; formerly, it had always been to drink, play, or make love. At daybreak he uttered a sigh more lamentable than any of the others, and threw himself on his bed.

Scarcely had he done so, however, when he heard steps on the staircase; they approached, the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and two men appeared on the threshold; they were the lieutenant of police and his clerk. Jacques felt pleased at recognizing two acquaintances.

"Ah! ah! my young man," said the lieutenant, "it is then you whom I find here, and you managed to get into the Châtelet. *Pardieu!* what a fellow you are! you ruin young girls, and wound young lords. But, take care! the life of a gentleman is worth more than the honour of a grisette, and you will not be let off this time for twenty sous."

However formidable the judge's words were, the tone in which they were pronounced a little reassured the prisoner. This man with the jovial face, into whose hands he had happened to fall, appeared as if nothing fatal could proceed from him. Certainly it was different with his clerk, who shook his head approvingly at each menace uttered by the judge. It was the second time Jacques had seen these two men together; and, however preoccupied he was with his own situation, he could but think what a strange chance had brought together two individuals so totally opposed, both in look and in character.

The examination commenced. Jacques Aubry hid nothing; he said, that having recognized in the Vicomte de Marmagne, a gentleman who had already betrayed him two or three times, he had snatched the page's sword and had defied him; that Marmagne had drawn also, that they had fought, and that the vicomte had fallen. He knew no more.

"You know no more?" said the judge. "Peste! that is quite enough, and particularly as the vicomte is one of the great favourites of Madame d'Etampes."

"Diable!" cried Jacques, growing anxious; "is the affair so very bad as you say?"

"Worse, my dear fellow, worse; for I am not in the habit of frightening people. But I warn you, that if you have any arrangements to make——"

"Arrangements to make!" cried the student; "what, monsieur! do you think my life in any danger?"

"Certainly. What! you attack a gentleman in the open street; you force him to fight, you pass your sword through his body, and

then ask if your life is in danger? Yes, my dear friend, in great danger."

"But such rencontres happen every day, and I do not see that any one is punished."

"Yes, between gentlemen, my young friend! Oh! when it pleases two gentlemen to cut each other's throats, it is their privilege, and the king has nothing to say; but if common people begin to fight with gentlemen, as they are twenty times more numerous than the gentlemen there would soon be none left."

"And how many days do you think my trial will last?"

"About five or six."

"What! is that all?"

"Yes, the facts are clear; there is a man dying, and you confess you killed him; however," added the judge, looking more bland than ever, "if two or three days more would be agreeable to you——"

"Very agreeable."

"Well, then, we will lengthen it out, and gain time. You are a good fellow, after all, and I shall be glad to do any thing for you."

"Thank you."

"And now," said the judge, rising, "have you anything to ask?"

"I should like to see a priest." "You can see one."

"Well, then, monsieur, beg them to send me one."

"I will do so. I trust you bear no rancour, my young friend."

"On the contrary, I am grateful."

"Monsieur," said the clerk, drawing near to Jacques, "will you grant me a favour?"

"Willingly; what is it?"

"You have perhaps friends, or relations, to whom you intend to leave what you possess?"

"Friends! I have but one, and he is in prison like myself. Relations! I have but distant cousins. Go on, monsieur."

"Monsieur, I am the poor father of a family."

"Well!"

"Well! I have never been lucky, although I have always fulfilled my duties with strict honesty. All my fellow clerks get before me."

"And why so?" "Ah! I will tell you; they are lucky."

"Indeed!"

"But why are they lucky?" "That is just what I ask you."

"And I will tell you. They are lucky"—the clerk lowered his voice—"because they have the rope of a man who has been hanged in their pocket. Do you undertand?"

"No."

"How slow you are! You will make a will, I suppose?"

"A will! what for?"

"Diable! that your heirs may not quarrel. Well, put in your

will, that you authorize Marc Boniface Grimoneau, clerk of the lieutenant of police, to claim from the hangman an end of the cord."

"Ah!" said Aubry, in a choking voice, "I understand."

"And you grant my request?" "Certainly."

"Young man, remember your promise. Many have made me the same; but some died intestate, others wrote my name wrong, so that I was cheated; others, who were guilty, monsieur—really guilty, on my word—were acquitted, and went to be hung somewhere else, so that I really despaired, until you fell into our hands."

"Well! monsieur, this time be at ease; if I am hung, you shall have what you want."

"You will be hung, monsieur; there is no doubt."

"Grimoneau," called the judge.

"Here I am, monsieur; then it is all settled?"

"Quite settled."

"On your word?" "On my word."

"Well!" murmured the clerk, "this time I think I am safe. I will go and announce the good news to my wife and children."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT TRUE FRIENDSHIP WILL PUSH DEVOTION EVEN TO MARRYING.

AUBRY, left alone, fell once more into reflections more profound than ever; and we must confess that there had been, in his interview with the lieutenant, ample food for reflection. However, we must say, that whoever could have read his thoughts, would have found that the situation of Ascanio and Colombe took the first place in his meditations. He remained thus about half an hour, when the door of his cell opened again, and the gaoler appeared on the threshold.

"Is it you who asked for a priest?" growled he.

"Certainly, it was I."

"Devil take me if I know what you all want with a cursed monk. You cannot leave a poor man five minutes' peace. Come, enter, my father," said he, drawing back, to make room for the priest, "and be quick."

Then he reclosed the door, still grumbling, and left the priest and the prisoner together.

"Was it you who wished to see me, my son?" asked the priest.

"Yes, my father."

"You desire to confess?"

"No, not exactly I desire to consult you on a point of conscience."

"Speak, my son; and if my feeble light can guide you——"

"It was just to ask counsel of you that I sent for you."

"I will listen."

"My father, I am a great sinner."

"Happy, at least, is he who acknowledges it."

"But that is not all; not only I am a great sinner, but I have drawn others into sin."

"Is there any reparation to be made?"

"I believe there is. She, whom I led into sin, was an innocent young girl."

"Then you seduced her?" "Yes, my father."

"And you wish to repair your fault?" "I wish to do so."

"There is but one method."

"I know it well, and that is why I remained so long undecided. If there had been two ways I would have chosen the other."

"Then you wish to marry her?"

"No, I will not lie; no, my father, I do not desire it, but I resign myself to it."

"A purer and more devoted sentiment would be better."

"What would you have, my father? Some people are born to marry, and others to remain bachelors. Celibacy was my vocation, and it required, I assure you, nothing less than the circumstances in which I find myself——"

"Well, my son, as you might repent of your good intentions, I should say the sooner the better."

"And how soon can it be?"

"Well, as it is a marriage *in extremis*, we will have all necessary dispensations, and I think that the day after to-morrow——"

"Well, then, the day after to-morrow," said Jacques with a sigh.

"But she, the young girl, will she consent?"

"To what?" "To the marriage."

"*Pardieu!* she will consent with gratitude; she does not get such offers every day."

"Then there will be no impediment?" "None."

"Your relations?" "Are absent."

"Hers?" "Unknown."

"What is her name?" "Gervaise-Perrette-Popinot."

"Will you authorize me to carry the news to her?"

"If you will take the trouble, my father, I shall be very grateful."

"This very day she shall be told."

"Tell me, my father, could you carry a letter to her?"

"No, my son; we, who are devoted to the service of the prisoners, have vowed to carry no message from them to any one until after their death. When that time has arrived I will do all you wish."

"Thank you, but that will be useless. I will confine myself to the marriage."

"You have nothing else to say to me?"

"Nothing, but that if any one doubts the truth of what I affirm, they will find with the lieutenant of police a complaint laid against me by Gervaise."

"Trust to me to smooth all difficulties," replied the priest, who fancied that Jacques did not proceed with enthusiasm, but only yielded to necessity; "and in two days from this time——"

"In two days?"

"You will have restored honour to her from whom you have taken it."

"Alas!" murmured Jacques, with a deep sigh.

"My son, the more a sacrifice costs us, the more agreeable it is to God."

"*Ventre mahom*, then God ought to think much of this. Go, my father."

Indeed, it was not without a fierce struggle that Jacques had formed this resolution; as he had said to Gervaise, he had inherited the paternal antipathy to marriage, and it had required nothing less than his friendship for Ascanio, and the idea that his imprudence had been his ruin, to bring him to the degree of self-denial that he was about to exercise. But, perhaps the reader will ask, what had the marriage of Aubry and Gervaise to do with the happiness of Ascanio and Colombe? and how, by marrying her, could he save his friend? In that case, I shall say to the reader that he has very little penetration. It is true that he might reply that he is not required to have it. Let him, then, take the trouble to read on to the end of the chapter, which he might possibly have passed over but for this caution.

When the priest was gone, Jacques, from the impossibility of drawing back, became more calm. All resolutions, even terrible ones, have that effect; the mind, which has combated, reposes itself, and the heart becomes apathetical. Jacques, therefore, remained comparatively tranquil until the moment when, hearing a slight noise in Ascanio's room, he fancied it was the gaoler bringing him his breakfast, and that he was safe from disturbance for some hours. Consequently, after letting some minutes elapse, during which no sound was heard, he entered his passage, and, as before, raised the mat with his head. Ascanio's cell was plunged in the most profound darkness. Aubry called in a low voice, but no one replied; the cell was empty.

Jacques' first sentiment was one of joy. Ascanio was free, and if free, he had no need——But almost immediately he remembered the recommendation he had heard given by the duchess, to place Ascanio in a better room. They had attended to it, and the noise that he had heard was his friend being moved.

Jacques' hope, therefore, vanished as quickly as it came. He

let the mat fall, and returned to his cell. All consolation was taken away, even the presence of the friend for whom he was sacrificing himself.

He was tired of reflecting, and he determined to sleep; so, throwing himself on his bed, he was soon sunk in a profound slumber. He dreamed that he was condemned to death and hung; but, although by the carelessness of the hangman, the rope having been badly greased, the hanging had remained incomplete, he had none the less been buried; until the clerk, who wished for an end of the rope, came to take it, and, opening his grave, restored him to life and liberty. Alas! it was but a dream, and when he awoke, he was still a prisoner and his life in danger.

The whole evening, night, and the next day, passed without Jacques having received any visit but from his gaoler. He tried to question him, but could not obtain a single word in answer. In the middle of the night Jacques was awoke by hearing his door open. However sound asleep a prisoner may be, he always awakes at the sound of an opening door. Jacques sat up.

"Get up and dress yourself," said the gaoler, in his rough voice; while behind him glistened in the light of the torch the halberds of two guards of the provost.

The second injunction was needless; for, as the bed was possessed of no covering, Jacques had laid down in his clothes.

"Where are you going to take me?" said Jacques.

"You are very curious."

"I should like to know." "No talking, but follow me."

All resistance was useless, so Jacques obeyed. The gaoler marched first, Jacques came next, and the two guards brought up the rear. Jacques looked around uneasily, for he feared a nocturnal execution. In about ten minutes he found himself in the room which he had passed through on entering; but, instead of opening the gates to him, which he had half hoped for a moment, his guide opened a door and led him into a court-yard. Jacques' first impulse, on feeling the fresh air and seeing the sky again, was to draw a deep breath; he did not know when he might do it again.

Then he perceived, at the other side of the court-yard, the pointed windows of a chapel, and began to understand what was about to happen. Our veracity forces us to confess that his heart sank; but the remembrance of Colombe and Ascanio, and the greatness of the action he was about to perform, sustained him. He advanced, therefore, with a firm step to the church, and there he found the priest at the altar, and Gervaise waiting in the aisle. The governor of the Châtelet was also there.

"You have asked to make reparation to this young girl before dying," said he; "your request is granted."

A cloud passed over Jacques' eyes; but he thought of the letter of Madame d'Etampes, and took courage.

"Oh! my poor Jacques," cried Gervaise, throwing herself into his arms; "oh! who would have thought this hour, so much desired by me, should arrive in such circumstances."

"My dear Gervaise," said Jacques, "God knows best; we must submit to His will."

Then, gliding into her hand the precious letter—

"For Benvenuto, and to his own hand," said he.

"Ah!" said the governor, approaching quickly, "what are you saying?"

"Only telling Gervaise that I love her."

"As she will have probably no time to find out the contrary, protestations are useless; approach the altar and be quick."

Gervaise and Aubry advanced without another word towards the priest, who was waiting for them. Both fell on their knees, and the mass began.

Jacques wished to exchange a few words with Gervaise, who, on her side, longed to express her gratitude to him; but two guards, placed near them, watched every gesture and word. It was very lucky that they had been allowed to exchange this one embrace, by the aid of which the letter had passed from Jacques to Gervaise. Had that moment been lost, Jacques' devotion would have been useless.

Doubtless the priest had received his instructions, for he cut short his discourse; perhaps, also, he thought that paternal and conjugal recommendations were useless to a man who was to be hung in two or three days. The ceremony over, the benediction given, Gervaise and Aubry thought that they should get a *tête-à-tête*; but they were mistaken; in spite of all the tears of Gervaise, the guard separated them, and they could but exchange glances. Then they were led off in opposite directions, and Jacques returned to his cell. On entering, he uttered the deepest sigh he had yet uttered. He was married.

Thus did this new Curtius, through devotion, throw himself into the gulf of matrimony.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CASTING.

Now, with our reader's permission, we will return to the Hôtel de Nesle. At the cries of Benvenuto, his workmen had followed him to the foundry. All knew him at his work; but never had they seen so much ardour in his face, or such flashes from his eyes; whoever at that moment could have moulded him, as he was about to cast the Jupiter, would have endowed the world with the most beautiful statue that genius could imagine.

All was ready; the wax model, clothed in its coating of earth, was waiting, all bound with iron, in the kiln, for the important moment. The wood was all arranged, and Benvenuto applied the light to four different places; and, as the wood was fir which had been long drying, the fire rapidly gained every part of the furnace, and the mould soon became the centre of an immense fire. Then the wax began to come through the crevices, and workmen dug a great trench around the furnace for the melted metal to run into; for Benvenuto would not have a moment lost; and as soon as the model was baked, he wished to proceed with the casting. A day and a night the wax flowed from the mould, during which time the men watched in turns, like the sailors on board ship. Benvenuto also watched, walking round and round the furnace, encouraging the workmen and feeding the flame. At last he saw that all the wax had flowed away, and that the mould was perfectly baked: this was the second part of his work; the last was the casting of the bronze, and the breaking of the mould.

When the mould was finished, the workmen, who could not understand this superhuman strength and furious ardour, tried to persuade Benvenuto to take some hours' rest; but those hours would be added to the captivity of Ascanio and the persecutions of Colombe, and he refused. He seemed to be made of the same metal as the bronze, of which he was about to form his statue.

Therefore he surrounded the mould with strong ropes, and by the aid of levers, prepared for the purpose, raised it with all possible care, carried it over the trench, and let it down slowly to the height of the furnace; then he steadied it by rolling round it the earth dug from the trench, which he placed in layers, adding pipes of baked clay. All these preparations took up the rest of the day. Night came; it was forty-eight hours since Benvenuto had slept, or even sat down. The workmen begged, and Scozzone scolded, but Benvenuto would listen to no one; a magical strength seemed to sustain him, and he replied to supplications and scolding only by assigning to each man the work that he had to do, in the hard, dry tone, which a general uses in commanding his soldiers.

Benvenuto wished to begin the casting at once; the energetic artist, who had always seen all obstacles yield before him, now exercised his power over himself: overwhelmed with fatigue, devoured with care, and burned up with fever, he commanded his body to act, and the iron frame obeyed; while the rest were forced to retire, one after the other, as in a battle one sees the wounded soldiers quit their ranks and go to the hospital.

The furnace was ready; Benvenuto had had it filled with bars of copper placed one over the other. He lighted it as he had done the other; but, as the resin flowed from the wood, the flames rose so much higher than any one expected, that they caught the wooden roof of the foundry. At the sight, and, above all, the heat of this flame, all but Benvenuto and Hermann ran off; but these

two were sufficient for everything. Each of them took a hatchet, and began to cut down the wooden pillars which sustained the roof, and the whole fell burning. Then they pushed the burning pieces into the flames, and, as the heat grew intense, the metal began to melt.

But now Benvenuto found his strength exhausted; it was nearly sixty hours since he had slept, and twenty-four since he had eaten, and all that time he had been the soul and chief agent of every operation. But fever was gaining on him; he became deadly pale, and in that atmosphere, so heated that no one could stay by him, he felt his limbs tremble and his teeth chatter, as though he were among the snows of Lapland. His companions perceived his state, but he tried to deny it still; for, to this man, to yield, even to necessity, seemed shameful.

Luckily the fusion was nearly finished, the most difficult part of the work was done; the rest was mechanical and easy to execute. He called Pagolo; Pagolo was not there. However, at the cries of his companions he came; he had, he said, been praying for the successful issue of the casting.

"This is not time to pray," said Benvenuto, "it is the time to work. Listen: I feel as though I were dying; but whether I die or not, my Jupiter must live. Pagolo, my friend, I trust it to you, certain that if you will, you can finish it as well as myself. Pagolo, the metal will soon be ready; when it is red, let Hermann and Simon each strike a blow on the two plugs of the store. Then the metal will run, and if I am dead you will tell the king that he promised to grant me a favour, and that you come to claim it in my name; and that favour is—Oh! mon Dieu; I no longer remember. What did I want to ask of the king? Ah! yes; Ascanio—Seigneur de Nesle—Colombe, the daughter of the provost—d'Orbec—Madame d'Etampes—Ah! I am going mad!"

And Benvenuto fell tottering into the arms of Hermann, who carried him like a child into his room, while Pagolo gave his orders as to the work. Benvenuto was right, he was soon delirious. Scozzone, who had doubtless been praying with Pagolo, ran to give him aid; but Benvenuto never ceased to cry, "I am dying; Ascanio! Ascanio! what will becomc of Ascanio?"

Indeed, a thousand wild visions passed through his brain; Ascanio, Colombe, Stephana, came like spectres before him, and among them all, Pompeo the goldsmith, all bloody, as he was when he killed him. Past and present were mingled in his brain. Sometimes it was Clement VII. who retained Ascanio in prison; sometimes it was Cosmo I. who tried to force Colombe to marry d'Orbec. Then he addressed himself to the Duchess Leonora, believing her to be the Duchesse d'Etampes; he begged, he menaced. Then he laughed in the face of the poor weeping Scozzone; he told her to take care that Pagolo did not break his neck running over the cornices like a cat. To these moments of

agitation succeeded intervals of prostration, during which he seemed to be dying. This lasted for three hours, and Benvenuto was in one of these torpors, when all at once Pagolo entered the room, pale, agitated, and crying out—

"May the holy Madonna assist us, for all is lost now, and no aid can come to us except from Heaven."

Half-dying and exhausted, as Benvenuto was, these words reached his ears, and penetrated his heart. The veil which covered his intelligence was torn, and he raised himself on his bed, crying out—

"Who says that all is lost, while Benvenuto lives?"

"Alas! I, master," said Pagolo.

"Double wretch! it is then ordained that you should incessantly betray me. But Heaven and the Madonna, whom you invoked just now, are at hand to punish traitors, and sustain good men."

At this moment they heard the men's voices crying, "Benvenuto! Benvenuto!"

"Here he is!" replied the artist, rushing into the room, pale, but with recovered strength and reason. "Here he is! and woe to those who have not done their duty."

In two bounds Benvenuto was at the furnace, where he found all the men whom he had left so full of ardour, stupified and downcast. Hermann himself seemed dying with fatigue, and was forced to lean against one of the pillars which had been left standing.

"Now, listen to me," cried Benvenuto, in a terrible voice, which fell among them like thunder. "I do not yet know what has happened; but I am sure it is remediable. Obey, then, now that I am present; but obey passively, without a word or a gesture, for the first who hesitates, I will kill. So much for the unwilling. To the rest, I will only say, the liberty and happiness of your companion, Ascanio, whom you love so much, depends upon our success."

So saying, he approached the furnace to judge, himself, of the event. The wood had failed, and the metal had grown cold; Benvenuto saw directly that it was reparable; doubtless, Pagolo had slackened his surveillance, and during that time the heat of the furnace had diminished. It was necessary to restore heat to the flame, and liquefaction to the metal."

"Wood!" cried Benvenuto, "wood! seek for it everywhere; run to the bakers, pay anything for it; bring the last shaving in the house. Break in the doors of the Petit-Nesle, if Dame Perrine will not open them; get wood from everywhere." And as he spoke, Benvenuto seized a hatchet, and attacked two posts which still remained standing, and when they were down pushed them into the fire; at the same time the men came from all sides laden with wood.

"Now," said Benvenuto, "will you obey me?"

"Yes, yes!" cried all, "in all you order, as long as a breath of life shall remain in us."

"Then, pick out the oak, and only throw that in first; it makes the quickest flame, and, consequently, will remedy the ill the soonest."

Soon the oak fell by handfuls into the furnace, until Benvenuto cried out "Enough!" His energy had animated them; all his orders, his gestures, were understood, and executed in a moment. There was only Pagolo, who from time to time murmured between his teeth—

"You try to do impossibilities, master; it is tempting God."

Cellini replied only with a look, which seemed to say, "Be easy, all is not over between us." Soon the metal began to melt again; and in order to hasten it, Benvenuto threw, from time to time, some lead into the furnace, stirring up all with a long bar of iron; so that, to use one of his own expressions, the dead metal began to return to life. At this sight Benvenuto was joyous, felt neither fever nor weakness; he also was resuscitated. At last the metal began to boil, and then Benvenuto opened the orifice, and ordered them to strike two blows, which was immediately done; but, as if this gigantic work was to be a combat of Titans, when the plugs were drawn, Benvenuto perceived not only that the metal did not flow rapidly enough, but also, that there was scarcely enough. Then, struck by one of those sublime ideas which occur only to artists, he cried out, "Let half of you remain here, and the other half follow me."

And, followed by five of them, he flew to the house, and a minute after reappeared, charged with vessels of silver and bronze, ingots, and half-finished works. Each threw his precious burden into the furnace, which devoured all in an instant—bronze, lead, silver, and marvellous workmanship—with the same indifference with which it would have devoured the artist himself, had he been there instead.

Thanks to this increase of fusible matter, the bronze became perfectly liquid, and, as if it repented of its momentary hesitation, began to flow freely. There was a moment of anxious suspense, which became absolute terror when Benvenuto perceived that all the bronze did not arrive at the orifice of the mould; he felt then with a long stick, and found that the bronze was over the head of the Jupiter. Then he fell on his knees and thanked God; the work was terminated which was to save Ascanio and Colombe; now, he only prayed that it might be perfect. This was what could not be known until the next day.

The night was one of such great anxiety, that Benvenuto, tired as he was, scarcely slept. And when he did so, it was not repose; visions disturbed him. He saw his Jupiter, that master of the skies, that king of the Olympian beauties, twisted like his son

Vulcan. In his dream he could not understand it. Was it the fault of the mould, or of the casting? Was it he who had been in fault, or had destiny been too strong for him? His heart beat violently, and he awoke with the perspiration on his brows. For some time he still doubted, unable to separate the dream from the reality. At last he remembered that his Jupiter was safe in the mould; he recalled all the precautions that he had taken, and he felt sure that he had accomplished, at once, a good work and a good action. Then, more calm and tranquil, he fell asleep again, under the weight of his great fatigue, only to be pursued by another dream, as wild and senseless as the first. The day came, and with daylight Benvenuto shook off drowsiness, and in a minute was up and dressed, and in another at the foundry. The bronze was evidently hotter than it should be, to be exposed to the air, but Benvenuto was in too great a haste to know what he had to hope, or to fear, to wait any longer, and he began to uncover the head. When he put his hand on the mould he was so pale, that he looked as though he were going to die.

"You are still ill, master," said a voice, which Benvenuto recognized as that of Hermann. "You would do better to stay in your bed."

"You are wrong, Hermann, my friend," said Benvenuto, quite astonished to see Hermann up so early, "my bed was killing me. But how do you come to be up at this hour?"

"I was walking," said Hermann, colouring up to his eyes—"I am fond of walking. Shall I help you, master?"

"No, no; no one shall touch this mould but myself. Wait!"

And he began by uncovering the head of the statue. By a miraculous chance, there was just the necessary quantity of metal; and if Benvenuto had not acted on the idea of throwing in his silver and his bronze, the head would have been wanting. Happily the head was there, and marvellously beautiful. This encouraged Benvenuto to uncover successively the other parts of the body. Little by little the mould fell like a shell, and at last the Jupiter appeared, from head to foot, majestic, as should be the king of Olympus. In no part had the bronze failed, and when the last piece of clay fell, a cry of admiration burst from all the workmen, who had assembled, one by one, around Cellini. To this cry Benvenuto replied with a proud smile.

"Ah! we will see if the King of France will refuse the first favour asked of him, by the man who has accomplished such a statue."

Then, as if repenting his first movement of pride, which, however, was quite in his nature, he fell on his knees, and, joining his hands, gave thanks to God.

As he was finishing his prayer, Scozzone ran to tell him that Madame Jacques Aubry asked to speak to him in private, having a letter from her husband, which she was to give to him alone.

Benvenuto made Scozzone repeat the name twice, being ignorant that Jacques had a wife. Nevertheless he went, leaving all his companions glorifying in the glory of their master. However, on looking more closely, Pagolo discovered a fault in the heel of the statue, an accident having prevented the bronze from flowing freely to the bottom of the mould.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JUPITER AND OLYMPUS.

On the very same day, Benvenuto sent word to François I. that his statue was cast, and asked him on what day it pleased the King of France to see the King of Olympus. François replied that he and his cousin the emperor were to hunt at Fontainebleau on the following Thursday, and that on that day he could send his statue to the grand gallery at the château. It was evident from this dry answer, that Madame d'Etampes had strongly prejudiced the king against his former favourite artist. But Benvenuto, whether from pride, or from confidence in God, smiled and said, "It is well." On Monday morning he placed his Jupiter in a cart, and mounting on horseback, accompanied it himself. The artist and his work arrived at Fontainebleau at ten o'clock on Thursday.

Looking at Benvenuto, it was evident that there was in his soul a sentiment of noble pride and radiant hope. His artist's concience told him that he had executed a *chef-d'œuvre*, and his honest heart, that he had done a good action; therefore he was doubly joyful, and carried his head high, like a man who had no fear. The king would see his Jupiter, and find it beautiful; Montmorency and Poget would recall to him his promise, and as the emperor and the whole court would be there, François could not but keep his word.

Madame d'Etampes, with almost as much joy, was cherishing her plans. She had triumphed in the first check Benvenuto had received when he had presented himself at the Louvre; but there remained the promise, and this, at any price, she must guard against. She had therefore preceded Benvenuto to Fontainebleau by one day, and had made her arrangements with that profound feminine ability, which, in her, almost amounted to genius.

The moment Benvenuto entered the gallery, he recognized both the blow, and the hand which had struck it. This gallery, resplendent with pictures by Rosso, in themselves certain to distract attention from any *chef-d'œuvre*, had been filled during the last three days with statues, sent from Rome by Primaticcio. The marvels of ancient sculpture, the types consecrated by the admiration of twenty centuries, were there, crushing all rivalry. Ariadne, Venus,

Hercules, Apollo, Jupiter himself—dreams of genius—formed a god-like assembly, which it seemed impious to approach—a sublime tribunal, whose judgment every artist must dread. A new Jupiter placed by the side of the other, Benvenuto challenging Phideas, seemed a sort of profanation, from which, confident as he was in his own merits, the artist shrank.

Add to this, that the immortal statues had usurped all the best places and that there remained for the poor Jupiter of Cellini, an obscure corner. Benvenuto saw all this at a glance, as he stood sadly at the door of the gallery. "M. Antoine le Maçon," said he to the king's secretary, who stood by him, "I must carry away my Jupiter; the disciple cannot attempt to rival his masters—the child his ancestors; my pride and my modesty equally forbid it."

"Benvenuto," replied the secretary, "believe in a sincere friend; if you do that, you will ruin yourself. I tell you, between ourselves, that such a proof of discouragement, which would be taken as a confession of inability, is what is hoped for. It would be useless for me to make your excuses to the king; he is impatient to see your work, and would listen to nothing, and, urged on by Madame d'Etampes, would withdraw his favour from you altogether. It is not with the dead, but the living, that your struggle is dangerous."

"You are right, monsieur, and I thank you for reminding me that I have not now the right to listen to my selflove."

"That is well. But Benvenuto, listen again: Madame d'Etampes is too charming to-day not to have some perfidy in her head; she has carried off the emperor and the king for a walk in the forest, with so much gaiety, and such irresistible grace, that I fear she means to keep them until nightfall."

"Do you think so?" cried Benvenuto, turning pale; "I should be ruined; for my statue, in a false light, would lose half its beauty."

"Let us hope that I am mistaken, then," said Maçon.

Cellini waited with a painful anxiety, he placed his statue in the best position in his power; but he could not disguise from himself, that by a half light it would appear mediocre. The hatred of the duchess had been as active as the genius of the sculptor.

Benvenuto looked despairingly at the sun as it approached the horizon, and listened eagerly to every sound from without, but all in vain. Three o'clock struck, and the intention of Madame d'Etampes was evident. Benvenuto sank on a chair quite overwhelmed; all his long feverish struggle was to end in shame and disappointment. He looked gloomily at his statue, around which the shades of evening were falling, and of which the lines already looked less pure. All at once an idea from heaven struck him; he rose, called Jehan, whom he had brought with him, and, as no sound announced the approach of the king, he ran quickly to a joiner in the town, and in an hour, with his aid, he constructed a low wooden pedestal,

furnished with four balls which worked in sockets. He trembled now, lest the court should return; but at five o'clock his work was finished, night had fallen, and the castle had not yet received its guests. Madame d'Etampes must be triumphing, wherever she was. Benvenuto had soon placed the statue on the pedestal, which was scarcely perceptible. The Jupiter held in his left hand the world, and in his right, which was raised a little above his head, the lightning, which he seemed about to launch. Amidst the flames of the lightning, Benvenuto now hid a wax light.

He had scarcely finished these preparations, when the trumpets announced the king's return. Benvenuto lighted the wax taper and placed little Jehan behind the statue, by which he was entirely hidden, and with a beating heart awaited the king.

Ten minutes after, the doors opened and François appeared, leading in Charles V. The dauphin, dauphine, the King of Navarre, and the whole court followed; the provost, d'Orbec, and Colombe, came last. She looked pale and downcast; but as soon as she perceived Cellini, she raised her head and a smile full of confidence lighted up her face. Cellini replied with a look which seemed to say, "Be easy; whatever happens, do not despair; I am watching over you."

As they advanced, Jehan, at a sign from his master, pushed the statue gently forward, and it rolled on its castors in advance of all the ancient statues, to meet the king. The soft light of the wax taper fell from above, and produced an effect more agreeable than daylight.

Madame d'Etampes hit her lips.

"It seems to me, Sire," said she, "that the flattery is rather strong, and that the king of the earth should have gone to meet the king of the skies."

The king smiled, but it was easy to see that this flattery did not displease him; according to his habit, he forgot the workman in the work; he walked straight up to it and examined it silently, for a long time. Charles V., who, although he had one day picked up Titian's brush for him, was more a politician than an artist, and the courtiers all waited to hear the king's opinion before they pronounced their own. There was a moment of anxious silence, during which Benvenuto and the duchess exchanged glances of profound hatred. Then all at once the king cried—

"It is beautiful! very beautiful! and I confess that it surpasses my expectations."

All now burst out into compliments, and the emperor the most loudly.

"If artists were gained like cities," said he to François, "I would instantly declare war to conquer this one."

"But," cried Madame d'Etampes, who was furious, "we have not yet seen those beautiful ancient statues which are further

off, and yet they are doubtless worth more than these modern things."

The king then approached the ancient sculptures; but, lighted imperfectly by the torches, they certainly produced a less fine effect than the Jupiter.

"Phidias is sublime," said the king; "but there may be a Phidias in the time of François I. and of Charles V., as there was in the time of Pericles."

"Oh! we should see this Jupiter by daylight," said Anne, bitterly; "to seem is not to be, and a trick of light is not art. Besides, what means this veil? does it hide some defect? tell us truly, M. Cellini."

It was a very light drapery, thrown over the statue in order to give it more effect. Benvenuto had, until then, stood motionless and silent by his statue; but at the words of the duchess he smiled disdainfully, darted flames from his black eyes, and tore away the veil with a vigorous hand. He expected to hear her burst into a passion. But suddenly, and by the incredible power which she possessed over herself, she smiled, and, extending her hand graciously to Cellini, who stood in amazement, she said, in the tone of a spoiled child—

"Well! I was wrong; you are a great sculptor; pardon me my criticisms; give me your hand, and let us henceforth be friends." Then she added, in a whisper, "Think of what you are about to ask. Let it not be the marriage of Ascanio and Colombe, or, I swear to you, you are all lost together."

"And if I ask for anything else, will you second me?" replied Benvenuto, in a low tone.

"Yes, I swear to you; anything else you may ask, the king shall grant."

"I have no need to ask the marriage of Ascanio and Colombe, for you will ask that, yourself."

The duchess smiled disdainfully.

"What are you whispering about?" said François.

"Madame la Duchesse had the goodness to recall to me, that your Majesty had promised to grant me a favour, if you were content," replied Benvenuto.

"And this promise was made before me and before the chancellor Poget," said Montmorency, advancing. "Your Majesty even told us to recall it to you."

"Yes, constable," cried the king, good-humouredly, "in case I forgot; but I remember perfectly. I promised Benvenuto to grant him what he liked, when his statue should be cast. Is that right, constable? Have I a good memory, chancellor? Now, Cellini, I am at your service, only praying you to think less of your own immense merit, than of our limited power; however, w make no reservations, but for our crown and our mistress."

"Then, Sire," said Cellini, "since your Majesty is so well disposed towards me, I will simply ask for the pardon of a poor scholar, who quarrelled on the Quai de Châtelet with the Vicomte de Marmagne, and in defending himself passed his sword through the vicomte's body."

Every one was astonished at the moderation of the request, and the duchess most of all; she looked at Benvenuto in amazement.

"*Ventre mahom!*" said François; "I heard the chancellor say that it was a hanging case."

"Oh!" cried the duchess, "I intended, Sire, to speak to you myself for the young man. I have had news of Marmagne, who is better, and he says that he sought the quarrel, and that the student—what is his name, M. Benvenuto?"

"Jacques Aubry, madame."

"That he, Jacques Aubry, was not to blame; therefore, Sire, grant Benvenuto's request at once, lest he should repent of having asked so little."

"Well, Cellini, what you desire shall be done," said François; "and as he who gives quickly, gives twice, let the young man be set at liberty to-morrow. You hear, my dear chancellor?"

"Yes, Sire, and will obey!"

"As for you, Benvenuto, come on Monday to see me at the Louvre, and we will occupy ourselves with certain details which my treasurer has lately neglected with regard to you."

"But, Sire, the *entrée* to the Louvre——."

"Well, well; he who gave orders, can countermand them. It was a war measure, and now we are all friends."

"Well, Sire," said the duchess, "since your Majesty is in the mood for granting favours, will you also grant me one, although I have not cast you a Jupiter?"

"And what is it? Speak, duchess, and believe that the solemnity of the occasion can add nothing to my desire to please you"

"Well, Sire, will your Majesty do M. d'Estourville the favour of signing, next Monday, the marriage contract of my young friend Mademoiselle Colombe, with the Comte d'Orbec?"

"That is not a favour to you, but a pleasure to myself; so I still remain your debtor."

"Then, Sire, it is agreed, for Monday." "Yes."

"Madame," said Benvenuto, in a low voice, "do you not regret that, for such a solemnity, the beautiful lily ordered from Ascanio is not finished?"

"Doubtless, I shall regret it; but there is no help for it; Ascanio is in prison."

"Yes, but I am free; I will finish it and bring it to madame."

"Oh! on my honour! if you do that, I shall say you are a charming man."

And she held out her hand to Benvenuto, who, with the most gallant air in the world, pressed his lips upon it.

At that moment a cry was heard.

"What is that?"

"Sire, I ask pardon of your Majesty," said the provost, "it is my daughter taken ill."

"Poor child!" thought Benvenuto, "she believes I have betrayed her."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MARRIAGE OF REASON.

BENVENUTO wished to leave the same evening; but the king begged him so much to remain, that he was forced to defer his departure until the following morning. Besides, with his usual rapidity, he had settled to bring about, on the morrow, the *dénouement* of an intrigue long before commenced. It was quite a separate business from that of Colombe and Ascanio, and one of which he wished to disembarrass himself.

He remained, then, that evening to supper, and the next morning to breakfast, and it was nearly noon, when, having taken leave of the king and Madame d'Etampes, he set off on his journey, accompanied by little Jehan. Both were well mounted; but, contrary to his usual custom, Cellini rode slowly, and it was evident that he wished to enter Paris only at some given time.

Indeed, it was seven in the evening when he dismounted at the Rue de la Harpe. Yet more; instead of going direct to the Hôtel de Nesle, he knocked at the door of one of his friends, called Guido, a Florentine doctor; and when assured that he was at home, and could give him supper, he ordered Jehan to go home alone, and say that he would not return until the next day, telling him, at the same time, to be ready to open when he should knock.

Before sitting down to supper, Cellini asked his host if he knew an honest and clever notary, who could come and draw up a contract for him. He named his son-in-law, and sent to fetch him.

Half-an-hour after he arrived, and Benvenuto rose immediately from table, shut himself up with him, and had a marriage contract drawn up, with the names left in blank. Then he paid the notary, put the contract in his pocket, borrowed from his friend a sword, just the length of his own, put it under his cloak, and took his way to the Hôtel de Nesle. On arriving at the door, he struck a single knock; but, light as it was, the door was opened immediately by little Jehan, who was on the watch.

Cellini questioned him; the workmen were at supper, and did not expect their master until the next day. Cellini ordered him to tell no one of his arrival and went to Catherine's room, of

which he had a key, entered softly, hid himself behind some tapestry, and waited.

A quarter of an hour after, light steps were heard on the staircase, the door opened, and Scozzone entered with a lamp in her hand, reclosed the door, and sat down on an arm chair, placed so that Benvenuto could see her face. To his great astonishment, this face, formerly so joyful, had become sad and melancholy. The fact was, that Scozzone experienced some remorse. When she believed that Benvenuto loved her, she was gay and happy, and as long as, in her dreams, had floated like a golden cloud the hope of becoming one day his wife, she had kept herself up to the height of this prospect, and had become purified through love; but as soon as she perceived that what she had believed to be a passion on Benvenuto's part was but a caprice, she had redescended, step by step; Benvenuto's smile, which had been so powerful over her, was far away, and her soul had, a second time, lost its freshness. While her childish gaiety left her, her old nature returned to her. A wall, newly painted, retains its colour in the sunshine, but loses it in the rain; Scozzone, abandoned by Cellini for some one unknown, only remained true to him through a remnant of pride. Pagolo had long made love to her, and she spoke of it to Benvenuto, hoping to awaken his jealousy. This last attempt had failed; Cellini, instead of growing angry, had laughed, and instead of forbidding her to see Pagolo, had ordered her to receive him. Henceforth she felt herself entirely lost, abandoned her life to chance, with her old indifference, and allowed herself to be blown about like a faded leaf, by the breath of events.

Then Pagolo triumphed over her indifference; after all, he was young, and, but for his hypocritical air, good looking; he was in love, and incessantly told her so, while Benvenuto had completely ceased to do so. These words, "I love you," are the heart's language, which, more or less ardently, it must speak to some one.

Thus, in an hour of idleness, of vexation—of illusion, perhaps—Scozzone had told Pagolo that she loved him; she had said so, with Benvenuto's image still in her heart, and with his name on her lips. Then she thought that, perhaps one day, Benvenuto, tired of his new love, would have returned to her, and finding her constant, in spite of his own orders, would have recompensed her for her devotion—not by marriage, the poor girl had lost that delusion—but by some return of his old love. These were the thoughts which made her pensive and remorseful. However, as she sat dreaming, a step was heard on the staircase, and almost immediately a key was introduced into the lock, turned rapidly, and the door opened.

"How did you come in—who gave you that key?" cried Scozzone, rising. "There are but two keys to this door; I have one, and Cellini the other."

"Ah! my dear Catherine," said Pagolo laughing, "you are capricious. Sometimes you will open your door, and sometimes you will not; then, when any one tries to enter by force, you threaten to cry out, and call for help."

"Oh! tell me that you stole that key from Cellini; tell me that he does not know that you have it; for if he gave it to you himself, I shall die of grief and shame."

"Tranquillize yourself, my beautiful Catherine," said Pagolo, reclosing the door. "Benvenuto does not love you, it is true; but he is like those misers who have a treasure of which they make no use themselves, but allow no one else to approach. Therefore the goldsmith has become a locksmith. See if I do not love you, Catherine, since my hands, accustomed to pearls and diamonds, have consented to handle ignoble iron. It is true that the ignoble iron was the key of paradise."

At these words Pagolo wished to take Catherine's hand, but, to Cellini's great astonishment, (for he saw all,) she repulsed him.

"Well!" said Pagolo, "how long is this whim to last?"

"Listen, Pagolo!" said Catherine, in a tone so sad that it pierced Benvenuto's heart. "I know well that when a woman has once yielded, she has no right to draw back again; but if he, for whom she has been so weak, is a generous man, and she tells him that she meant then what she said, but that she deceived herself, it is that man's duty, believe me, not to abuse her momentary weakness. Well, I tell you that, Pagolo; I yielded, and yet I did not love you; I loved Cellini. Despise me, you can, you ought; but torment me no more."

"What! after the time that you made me wait for the favours that you reproach me with, you believe that I will quietly release you from the engagements into which you voluntarily entered into with me. No; and when I think that you would do all this for Benvenuto—for a man double your age or mine—a man who does not love you, who despises you——"

"Stop! Pagolo, stop!" cried Scozzone, red with mingled shame, anger, and jealousy, "it is true he does not love me now, but he did love me once, and he still esteems me."

"Well, then, why did he not marry you as he promised?"

"Promised! never. If he had promised, he would have kept his word. I wished to mount so high, and began to hope through that wish; then, unable to restrain myself, I boasted of my hope, as though it were a reality. No, Pagolo," continued Catherine, placing her hands in his with a sad smile, "Benvenuto never promised me."

"Well, then, see how ungrateful you are, Scozzone!" cried Pagolo, seizing the young girl's hand. "I, who offer you all that Benvenuto, by your own confession, never even promised—I, who am devoted to you, you repulse, while he who betrayed you, you say you still love."

"Oh! if he were here, Pagolo, you would remember that you betrayed him through hatred, and you would be ready to sink through the earth."

"And why so?" said Pagolo, bold, as he thought Benvenuto at a distance. "Has not every man the right to make himself loved by a woman, provided she belongs to no one else? If he were here, I would say to him, 'You abandoned and betrayed Catherine—poor Catherine who loved you so much. She was in despair at first, then she found near her a good and worthy lad, who appreciated her value, who loved her, who promised her what you never did—to marry her. He inherited your rights, and she belongs to him.' Well, Catherine, what would your Cellini have to reply?"

"Nothing!" said a manly voice behind Pagolo; "absolutely nothing."

And a vigorous hand falling at the same time upon his shoulder, froze his eloquence, and threw him backwards upon the floor, as pale and as trembling as he had been bold a minute before.

The picture was singular: Pagolo, on his knees, pale and frightened; Scozzone, half rising, motionless and mute like a statue of astonishment; and lastly, Benvenuto, standing up, with crossed arms, a sheathed sword in one hand, and a naked one in the other, looking half ironical, half menacing.

There was a minute of terrible silence, Pagolo and Scozzone remaining overwhelmed by the terrible frown of the master.

"Treason!" murmured Pagolo.

"Yes, treason on your part, wretch."

"Well!" said Scozzone, "you asked for him, Pagolo; here he is."

"Yes," said the apprentice, ashamed of being thus treated before the woman he wished to please; "but he is armed and I am not."

"I bring you arms," said Cellini, throwing the sword which he held in his left hand at Pagolo's feet. Pagolo looked at it, but did not move.

"Pick it up; I am waiting," said Cellini.

"A duel!" cried Pagolo, whose teeth chattered with terror; "am I able to fight with you?"

"Well!" said Cellini, passing his sword from one hand to the other, "I will fight with the left hand, and that will make us equal."

"Fight with you, my benefactor! with you to whom I owe everything! Never!" cried Pagolo.

A smile of profound contempt passed over Benvenuto's face, while Scozzone did not endeavour to conceal her disgust.

"You should have thought of that, before carrying off from me the woman whom I had confided to your care and that of Ascanio. Now, your memory has returned too late. On your guard! Pagolo."

"No, no," murmured the coward, still on his knees.

"Then, if you refuse to fight like a brave man, I will punish you as a guilty one."

And he returned his sword to the sheath, and, without his face betraying one sentiment of anger or of pity, he advanced with a slow, direct step towards the apprentice. Scozzone rushed between them with a cry, but Benvenuto, without violence, but with a movement as irresistible as though a bronze statue had extended its arm, put the young girl on one side, who fell half fainting upon her chair. Benvenuto still advanced on Pagolo, who drew back until he reached the wall. Then Benvenuto, placing the point of his poignard upon his throat, said—

"Recommend your soul to God, for you have but five minutes to live."

"Pardon! do not kill me! pardon!" cried Pagolo.

"What!" said Cellini; "you know me, and, knowing me, you seduced my mistress; I know all, I have discovered all, and you hope that I shall pardon you. You jest, Pagolo, you jest!"

And Benvenuto burst out laughing himself, but with a terrible laugh, that made the apprentice shudder even to the marrow of his bones.

"Master! master!" cried Pagolo, feeling the point of the poignard on his throat, "it was not me, it was her; she led me on."

"Treason, cowardice, and calumny! I will one day make a group of these three monsters," said Benvenuto, "and it shall be hideous to see. She who led you on, wretch! do you forget that I was there and heard all?"

"Oh! Benvenuto," murmured Catherine, with clasped hands, "you know he lies in saying that."

"Yes, I know it, as he lied when he said he was ready to marry you. But be easy; I will punish this double falsehood."

"Yes, punish me," cried Pagolo, "but mercifully; do not kill me."

"You lied when you said she had led you on."

"Yes, I lied; I was the guilty person, but I loved her madly, and you know, master, to what love will lead."

"You lied when you said you were ready to marry her."

"No, no, there I spoke the truth."

"Then you really love Scozzone?"

"Yes, I love her," cried Pagolo, who felt that his only chance of appearing less guilty in the eyes of Cellini, was to throw the blame on the violence of his passion.

"And you protest that you did not lie when you promised to marry her?"

"Yes, master."

"You would have made her your wife?"

"Yes, if she had not belonged to you."

"Well, then, take her—I give her to you."

"What! you jest, do you not?"

"No, I have never spoken more seriously."

Pagolo cast a glance on Benvenuto, and saw that in a moment the judge would change into the executioner.

"Take that ring off your finger, Pagolo, and pass it on Catherine's," continued Benvenuto.

Pagolo took it off, and Benvenuto signed to Scozzone to approach.

"Extend your hand, Scozzone," said he.

She obeyed, and Pagolo put on the ring.

"Now," said Benvenuto; "after the betrothal, let us pass on to the marriage."

"To the marriage!" murmured Pagolo. "One cannot be married thus: it wants a notary, a priest."

"It wants a contract," said Benvenuto, drawing one from his pocket, "and here is one all prepared; there are but the names to insert."

And placing it on the table, he held out a pen to Pagolo, saying, "Sign, Pagolo, sign."

"I have fallen into a snare," murmured Pagolo.

"Ah! what does that mean?" said Benvenuto in a terrible tone. "Where is the snare? Did I make you enter Scozzone's room? Did I counsel you to tell her you would marry her? Well, marry her, and when you are her husband, our parts will be changed. Then if I come to visit her, it will be for you to threaten and me to fear."

"Oh! cried Catherine, passing from extreme terror to wild gaiety, and laughing heartily at this notion, "How droll that would be!"

Pagolo, beginning to recover from his terror, and reassured by Scozzone's laughter, began to look things more coolly in the face, and to see that Cellini had been working on his fears to bring him to a marriage which he by no means desired; and he began to fancy that by a little firmness he could escape it.

"Yes," said he; "I confess it would be very amusing, but it will never be."

"What!" cried Cellini, as much astonished as a lion would be to see a fox turn against him.

"No," cried Pagolo; "I would rather die; kill me."

Scarcely had he pronounced the words than Cellini rushed towards him; but Pagolo, seeing the dagger gleam, jumped aside so quickly that it just grazed his shoulder, and buried itself two inches in the wood-work behind him.

"I consent!" cried he. "Cellini, I consent! I am ready;" and while Cellini pulled the dagger out of the wall, he ran to the table and signed.

"Thanks, Pagolo," said Scozzone, wiping away her tears, and

repressing a slight smile; "thanks, my dear Pagolo, for the honour that you consent to do me; but listen: just now you would not have me, now I will not have you. I do not say it to mortify you, but I do not love you, and I prefer to remain as I am."

"Then," said Benvenuto, coolly, "since you will not have him, Catherine, he shall die."

"But," said she, "since it is I who refuse him?"

"He must die; it shall never be said that a man outraged me and remained unpunished."

"Catherine," cried Pagolo, "in Heaven's name have pity on me! Catherine, I love you! Catherine, I will always love you. Sign, be my wife; I implore it on my knees."

"Decide, Scozzone," said Benvenuto.

"Oh!" said Catherine, pouting; "oh! to me who have loved you so much—who had such different dreams, you are very severe; are you not master? But, mon Dieu!" cried the wild girl, passing once more from sadness to mirth, "look, Benvenuto, how piteous that poor Pagolo looks. Oh! do not look so doleful, Pagolo, or I shall never consent to become your wife. Oh! really, how droll you look like that."

"Save me first, Catherine," said Pagolo; "then afterwards we will laugh if you like."

"Well, my poor lad, since you wish it so much."

"Oh! yes, I wish it."

"You know what I have been, and what I am."

"Yes, I know," cried Pagolo.

"I do not deceive you." "No."

"You have no regrets?" "No, no."

"Then so be it. It is very odd; I never expected to be your wife."

And then she took the pen and signed in her turn, below the signature of her husband.

"Thanks, my little Catherine," cried Pagolo; "you will see how happy I will make you."

"And if he breaks this promise," said Benvenuto, "wherever I may be, write to me, Scozzone, and I will come and recall it to him."

So saying, Cellini put his dagger slowly back into the sheath, took up the contract, folded it, and put it into his pocket, and, addressing Pagolo in an ironical tone, said—

"And now, friend Pagolo, although Scozzone and you are duly married before men, you are not so before God, and your union will not be sanctified by the church until to-morrow. Until then, your presence here would be contrary to all laws human and divine. Good evening, Pagolo."

Pagolo became pale as death; but, as Benvenuto pointed imperiously to the door, he went.

"No one but you would have any fears now," cried Catherine, laughing wildly. "Listen, however, my poor Pagolo; I let you go because it is right; but reassure yourself, I swear to you by the

Holy Virgin, that when you are my husband, every man, even Benvenuto himself, will find me a true wife."

Then when the door was closed—

"Oh! Cellini," cried she, "you give me a husband, but you deliver me from his presence to-day. You owed me that compensation."

CHAPTER XL.

RECOMMENCEMENT OF HOSTILITIES.

THREE days after the scene that we have just described, one of a different nature was in preparation at the Louvre. The Monday had arrived—the day fixed on for the signing of the contract—Benvenuto left the Hôtel de Nesle, and, with a troubled heart, but a firm step, proceeded to the Louvre, and mounted the great staircase. In the waiting-room he found the provost and d'Orbec talking in a corner with a notary. Colombe, white and motionless as a statue, was seated on the other side. They had evidently placed her there, that she might hear nothing, and the poor child, with drooping head and downcast eyes, had remained where she was placed. Cellini passed near, and murmured, "Take courage, I am here."

Colombe recognized his voice, and raised her head with a cry of joy. But, before she had time to speak to her protector, he had vanished into the next room. Nothing less than these words could have reanimated the courage of Colombe, for the poor child had believed herself abandoned, and consequently ruined. M. d'Estourville had dragged her there half dead; and, in spite of her faith in God and in Benvenuto, at the moment of setting out, she had felt so despairing, that, forgetting all pride, she had begged Madame d'Etampes to let her enter a convent, promising to renounce Ascanio if they would but spare her the Comte d'Orbec. The duchess, however, cared for no half victories; it was necessary, in order to attain her end, that Ascanio should believe in the infidelity of her he loved, and she harshly repulsed the prayers of poor Colombe. Then the poor girl had risen, and, remembering that Benvenuto had told her to remain firm, even at the foot of the altar; with a courage which, however, often gave way, she had allowed herself to be taken to the Louvre, where at noon the king was to sign the contract

There her strength had once more failed her, for she had but three hopes: Benvenuto, to touch the king's heart by her prayers, or to die of grief. But Benvenuto had come, and had told her to hope, and all her courage returned.

Cellini, on entering the king's room, found only Madame

d'Etampes there, which was just what he wished: he would have asked to see her, had she not been there. She, believing the fatal letter to have been burned by herself, felt convinced that she had nothing to fear, but yet thought, with terror, of the perils of her love. Made up of pride and passion, her dream had been to make Ascanio happy and great; but she had discovered that, although of noble birth, he aspired to no other glory than that of his art. If he hoped for anything, it was for the pure form of a vase or statue, if he cared for pearls or diamonds, it was to make, by his skill in setting them, flowers as beautiful as those the heaven waters with its dew; titles and honours were valueless to him, unless earned by his own talent or personal reputation. At the first storm, this delicate plant would be destroyed with all its flowers and promise of fruit. Perhaps, through apathy or indifference, he might be led into her projects, but, a pale and melancholy shade, he would live only on his souvenirs. Ascanio, in fact, appeared to the duchess such as he was, a charming and exquisite nature, but only on condition of remaining in a pure and calm atmosphere. He was just the man for her love, but not for her ambition.

Such were the reflections of the duchess, by which her brow was clouded when Benvenuto entered. The two enemies looked at each other with an ironical smile, and the glance exchanged between them showed that each was prepared for a terrible struggle.

"Well," thought Anne, "this is an antagonist worth conquering—an adversary worthy of me. But, to-day there is too great certainty against him, to make it glorious to gain the victory."

"Decidedly, Madame d'Etampes," thought Cellini, "you are a clever woman, and many a struggle with a man has given me less trouble; therefore I shall come to the combat prepared at all points."

There was a moment's silence, and then Madame d'Etampes said—

"You are exact, M. Cellini. It is at noon that his Majesty is to sign the contract, and it is now a quarter to eleven. It is not, therefore, the king who is behind-hand, but you who are too soon."

"And I am happy to be too soon, madame, since it procures me the honour of a *tête-à-tête* with you, an honour which I should have solicited, had not chance so favoured me."

"What! Benvenuto, have reverses converted you into a flatterer?"

"Not my own, madame, but those of others. I have always possessed the rather uncommon virtue of being the courtier of disgrace, and here is the proof, madame."

As he spoke, Cellini drew from under his cloak Ascanio's lily, which he had finished that morning. The duchess uttered a cry of surprise and joy; never had so marvellous an ornament met her eyes, never had any of the flowers found in the enchanted gardens

of the Thousand and One Nights, so dazzled the eyes of a peri or a fairy.

"Ah!" cried she, extending her hand, "you promised it to me, Benvenuto, but I confess that I did not expect it."

"And why not believe my promise, madame?" said he, laughing; "you wronged me, madame."

"Oh! if you had promised me a piece of revenge instead of a favour, I should have felt more certain of its fulfilment."

"And who tells you that this is not both together?" said Benvenuto, still keeping possession of the lily.

"I do not understand you."

"So you think it makes a good effect, mounted as a dew-drop?" said Benvenuto, showing to the duchess the diamond, which trembled at the bottom of the cup of the flower, and which, as we know, she had received as a munificent bribe from Charles V.—as earnest money of the treaty which was to detach Milan from France.

"You speak in enigmas, my dear Cellini; unluckily the king will soon arrive, and I have no time to solve them."

"I will give you the key, then. It is an old proverb, '*verbe valant, scripta manent,*' which means, what is written is written."

"That is just where you are wrong; what was written is burned; do not think, therefore, to intimidate me like a child, but give me my lily."

"One moment, madame; but first I must warn you that it is a talisman in my hands, which would lose its virtue in yours. It is still more precious than you think. Where the world sees but a jewel, we artists hide an idea. Shall I show you this idea, madame? Nothing more easy, it is but to push this secret spring. The stalk, as you see, opens, and at the bottom of the chalice is found, not a destroying worm, such as visits natural flowers, but something similar, or perhaps worse, the dishonour of the Duchesse d'Etampes, written by her own hand."

As he spoke, Benvenuto pushed the spring, opened the stem, and drew out a note. This he slowly unrolled and held it open before the duchess, who turned pale with anger and terror.

"You did not expect that, did you, madame?" continued Benvenuto, coolly refolding the note and replacing it in the lily. "If you knew my habits, you would be less surprised; a year ago, I hid a ladder in a statuette, and a month ago, a young girl in a statue; now, what could I put in a flower? not more than a letter, but I did that."

"But," cried the duchess, "that wretched letter I burned with my own hands; I saw the flame, and touched the ashes."

"Did you read the letter before you burned it?"

"No, no; fool that I was, I did not read it."

"It is a pity, for you would be convinced now, that the letter of a grisette makes as much flame as that of a duchess."

"Then that base Ascanio deceived me."

"Oh! madame, stop; do not dare even to suspect that young and pure mind, who, however, if he had deceived you, would but have employed against you the same arms that you used against him. But he did not deceive you; he would not purchase his own life, nor even that of Colombe, by a deception. No, he was deceived himself."

"And by whom?"

"By a lad, a student; he who wounded your friend, the Vicomte de Marmagne—a certain Jacques Aubry, of whom you have heard."

"Yes, Marmagne told me that that student, Jacques Aubry, was trying to reach Ascanio, and get the letter from him."

"And then you went to visit Ascanio; but students are active, as you know, and ours had been in advance of you. He entered his friend's cell, and left it just as you entered it."

"I saw nothing of him."

"No: one cannot think of looking everywhere; if you had thought of it, you might have lifted a mat, and have discovered a hole which communicated with the next cell."

"But Ascanio?"

"When you entered, he was asleep, was he not?" "Yes."

"Well! during his sleep, Aubry, to whom he had refused to give this letter, took it from the pocket of his doublet, and put one of his own letters in its place. Deceived by the envelope, you thought you were burning the letter of a duchess, and only burned that of Mademoiselle Gervaise-Perrette-Popinot."

"But this Jacques Aubry, who wounds gentlemen, shall pay dearly for his insolence; he is in prison and condemned."

"He is free, and greatly owes his liberty to you, madame."

"How so?"

"Do you not remember the poor prisoner, whose pardon you joined me in asking from the king?"

"Oh! fool that I was!" cried the duchess, biting her lips. Then, looking at Benvenuto, "and on what condition," said she, "will you give up that letter to me?"

"I believe you guess, madame."

"Tell me."

"You will ask the king for Colombe's hand for Ascanio."

"Oh!" cried Anne, with a forced laugh, "you little know the Duchesse d'Etampes, monsieur, if you believe that my love will give way before your menaces."

"You have not reflected before answering, madame."

"I keep to my answer, however."

"Allow me to sit down, madame, and talk openly to you for a little while. I am but a humble sculptor, and you are a great duchess; but let me tell you, that in spite of the distance which separates us, we are made to understand each other. Do not

assume your queenly airs, they are needless; my intention is not to insult you, but to enlighten you, and your pride need not be roused."

"You are a singular man, really," said Anne, laughing in spite of herself. "Speak on, I will hear you."

"I was saying, then, Madame la Duchesse, that, in spite of the difference in our positions, we were made to understand each other. You exclaimed, when I spoke to you of renouncing Ascanio, the thing appeared to you absurd and impossible; and yet, madame, I have given you the example."

"The example?"

"Yes; as you love Ascanio, I loved Colombe."

"You!"

"Yes; I loved her as I had never loved but once before; I would have given my life, my soul for her, and yet I have relinquished her to Ascanio."

"A very disinterested passion!" said the duchess ironically.

"Oh! do not make my grief a subject for raillery, madame; do not mock my anguish. I have suffered much; but I saw that Colombe was no more made for me than Ascanio is for you. Listen, madame; we are both of us exceptional and strange natures; we each serve a sovereign and monstrous idol, whose worship has raised us above the common. For you, madame, it is ambition; for me, art. Now, our divinities are jealous, and govern us everywhere and at all times. You loved as a duchess, I as an artist; you persecuted—I suffered. Do not think I do not appreciate you, and admire your energy, and sympathise with your boldness. Let the vulgar think what they will; it is great to overturn a world to make a place for him you love. I recognize in it a strong passion, and I admire characters capable of these heroic crimes; but I prefer those higher still. Now, though I loved Colombe, I felt, madame, that my proud and wild nature was little suited to her pure and angelic soul. She loved Ascanio, my gentle and good pupil; my rough and powerful mind would have frightened her. Therefore, with a loud voice I commanded my love to be silent, and, as it resisted, I called to my aid my divine art, and between us we overcame the rebel love, and felled it to the earth. Then Sculpture, my true mistress, touched me with her burning lips and I felt consoled. Do, like me, madame—leave these children to their loves, and do not trouble them in their heaven. Our domain—yours and mine—is earth, with its griefs, its combats, and its delights. Seek a refuge in ambition against suffering, ruin empires for amusement, play with kings for your pleasure. It will be well done. I will clap my hands and approve; but do not destroy the peace and joy of these poor innocents, who love each other with so pure a love."

"Really, M. Benvenuto, you are an extraordinary man."

"As you are an extraordinary woman," said Benvenuto, laughing.

"Perhaps so; but it seems to me that extraordinary women love better than extraordinary men, for they do not exercise superhuman abnegation, but fight for their lovers tooth and nail to the last."

"Then you persist in refusing Colombe to Ascanio?"

"I persist in loving him for myself."

"So be it. But since you will not yield with a good grace, I warn you that I have a rough hand, and may make you cry out a little in the *mêlée*. You have reflected, have you not? You still refuse your consent to the union of Colombe and Ascanio?"

"Most decidedly."

"Good; then to our posts, for the battle is about to commence."

At that moment the door opened and an usher announced the king.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MARRIAGE OF LOVE.

FRANÇOIS I. appeared, leading in Diana de Poitiers, with whom he had been visiting his son, who was ill. He believed Benvenuto and Madame d'Etampes to be perfectly reconciled, and, seeing them together, saluted both with a smile.

"Good morning, my queen of beauty; good morning, my king of art," said he; "of what were you talking together? you both look very animated."

"Oh! mon Dieu! Sire, we were talking politics," said Benvenuto.

"And on what subject were you exercising your sagacity?"

"That which at present occupies all minds, Sire."

"What! the duchy of Milan?" "Yes, Sire."

"Well, what did you say about it?"

"We were of different opinions; one of us said that the emperor might easily refuse you the duchy, after promising it, and pass it over to your son Charles."

"And which of you said that?"

"I believe it was Madame d'Etampes."

The duchess became as pale as death.

"If the emperor did that, it would be an infamous piece of treachery," cried François; "but he will not do it."

"In any case, if he does not," said Diana, mingling in the conversation, "it will not be so, people say, for want of having had the advice given to him."

"And by whom? *ventre mahom!* by whom?" cried François.

"Mon Dieu! do not be angry, Sire," said Benvenuto; "we said it just for the sake of talking—simple conjecture. Madame la Duchesse and I are poor politicians. Madame, although she has little need, is too much a woman to think of anything but her

toilette; I, Sire, am too much an artist to care for anything but art."

"The truth is, dear Cellini," said François, "that you have each too great a position even to envy others, or to covet even the duchy of Milan. Madame la Duchesse is a queen, through her beauty; you, a king, through your genius."

"A king!"

"Yes, king; and if you have not, like me, three lilies in your arms, you have one in your hand, which appears to me more beautiful than any of those which ever opened in the warmest sunshine, or the finest field of heraldry."

"This lily is not mine, Sire; Madame d'Etampes ordered it from my pupil Ascanio; only, as he could not finish it, I, knowing the desire that madame had to possess so rich an ornament, set to work and finished it, desiring earnestly to make of it a symbol of the peace that we swore the other day at Fontainebleau, before your Majesty."

"It is a marvel!" said the king, extending his hand for it.

"Is it not, Sire?" said Benvenuto, withdrawing the lily; "and it is only just that the duchess should pay magnificently the young artist whose *chef-d'œuvre* it is."

"That is my intention," said the duchess. "I reserve for him a recompense which might make a king envious."

"But you know, madame, that that recompense, precious as it may be, is not the one that he wishes for. You know we artists are capricious; and often what a king might envy, we look at with a disdainful eye."

"Nevertheless," said Madame d'Etampes, pale with anger, "he must be content with it; for I have already told you, M. Benvenuto, I can give him no other reward."

"Well, confide his wishes to me, Benvenuto," said the king, again extending his hand for the lily; "and if the thing be not too difficult, we will try to manage it."

"Look at the lily attentively, Sire," said Benvenuto, putting the stalk of the flower into the king's hand; "examine all the details, and your Majesty will see how great a recompense such a work merits."

So saying, Benvenuto fixed his piercing glance upon the duchess; but she had so much power over herself as not even to change colour, when she saw the lily pass into the king's hand."

"It is really miraculous," said the king. "But where did you find this magnificent diamond which completes it."

"It was not I who found it, Sire, it was Madame la Duchesse, who furnished it to my pupil."

"I did not know you had this diamond, duchess; where does it come from?"

"Probably, like other diamonds, Sire, from the mines of Guzarat, or Golconda."

"Oh!" said Benvenuto, "there is a history attached to this diamond, and if your Majesty would like to hear it, I will tell it to you. This diamond and I are old acquaintances, Sire, for it is the third time that it has come into my hands. I first put it in a tiara for our holy father, the Pope, where it produced a marvellous effect; then, on an order from his holiness, Clement VII., I mounted it on a missal, which he was about to present to the emperor Charles V; then the emperor, wishing to have it constantly with him, doubtless as a resource in case of need, had this diamond, which is worth more than a million, set by me, as a ring. Did not your Majesty remark it on his hand?"

"Yes, indeed, I remember," cried François, "on the day of our first interview at Fontainebleau, he wore it. How did it come into your possession, duchess?"

"Yes," cried Diana de Poitiers, with sparkling eyes, "how did a diamond of that value pass from the emperor's hands to yours?"

"If such a question were addressed to you, madame," said the duchess, "the answer would be easy, always supposing that you confide certain things to any one else but your confessor."

"You do not reply to the king's question, madame."

"Yes," said François; "how did it come into your hands?"

"Ask Benvenuto, Sire; he will tell you," said the duchess, defiantly."

"Speak then, at once."

"Well! Sire," said Benvenuto, "I must confess that the sight of this diamond produced strange suspicions in my mind. Now, as you know that at that time Madame d'Etampes and I were enemies, I should not have been sorry to learn some nice little secret, which might have ruined her in your Majesty's eyes. Therefore, I set to work and found out——"

"What?"

Benvenuto threw a rapid glance on the duchess, and saw that she was smiling. This strength of resistance in her character pleased him, and he resolved to prolong the combat, instead of terminating it at once; like an athlete, who feels sure of his victory, but, who, having found a worthy adversary, wishes to display all his strength and skill.

"I learned then, Sire," continued he, "that she had simply bought it of the Jew, Manasses. Yes, Sire, know that your cousin the emperor has expended so much money on his route, that he is obliged to pawn his jewels, and that Madame d'Etampes, with a royal magnificence, picks up what the imperial poverty cannot keep."

"Ah! *ma foi!* that is very pleasant," cried François, doubly flattered in his vanity as a lover and his jealousy as a king. "But, beautiful duchess, you must have ruined yourself to make such a purchase, and it must be our care to repair the injury to your finances. Remind us that we are your debtors to the value of this

diamond, for it is really so beautiful, that, as it did not come to you from the hand of an emperor, it must from that of a king."

"Thanks, Benvenuto," whispered the duchess; "I begin to believe, as you say, that we are made to understand each other."

"What are you saying?" said the king.

"Oh! nothing, Sire; only excusing myself to the duchess for my suspicions, which she is willing to pardon, and which is all the more generous of her, as, besides my first suspicion, this lily had given rise to another."

"And what was that?" cried François; while Diana, whom her hatred had prevented from being the dupe of this comedy, looked triumphantly at her rival. The Duchesse d'Etampes saw that she had not yet finished with her indefatigable enemy, and a cloud of fear passed over her face, but quickly disappeared, and she profited by the pre-occupation into which his words had thrown the mind of François, in order to try and take the lily, which the king still held, but Benvenuto passed between them.

"Oh! this one, I confess, is so infamous, that I do not know whether I ought not to be ashamed of it, and whether it would not be adding to my crime to have the boldness to confess it. Therefore, without an express order from your Majesty, I shall never dare——".

"I authorize you, Cellini," said the king.

"Well, then, I confess, with my artist's pride, that I was astonished to see Madame d'Etampes charge the apprentice with a commission that the master would have been proud and happy to have undertaken. Do you remember my apprentice Ascanio, Sire? He is a young and charming lad, who might stand for Endymion, I assure you."

"Well!" cried the king, whose brows began to contract with a growing suspicion. This time it was evident, that, in spite of her power over herself, Madame d'Etampes was in agony. She knew well that though François might have pardoned the treason towards the king, he certainly would not the infidelity to the lover. However, apparently regardless, Benvenuto went on—

"I thought then of the beauty of my Ascanio, and I thought—pardon, ladies, for any impertinence towards you, but I am used to the Italian princesses, who in love, I must confess, are but feeble mortals—I thought that a sentiment very different from love of art——"

"Monsieur!" cried François, "think of what you are about to say."

"I begged pardon in advance for my boldness."

"I am witness, Sire," said Diana, "that it was you who commanded him to speak, and now that he has begun——"

"It is always time to stop," said the duchess, "when one is about to tell lies."

"I will stop if you wish, madame; you know that you have but a word to say."

"Yes, but I wish that you should go on. You are right, Diana; there are things which must be investigated to the bottom," said the king.

"My conjectures were at this point, when a discovery opened a new field for them."

"What?" cried at once the king and Diana.

"Sire," said the duchess, "you have no need to hold this lily in your hand in order to hear this long story. Your Majesty is so accustomed to hold a sceptre, and with a firm hand, that I fear you will break this fragile lily."

And, as she spoke, she extended her hand to take the lily, with one of her own charming smiles.

"Pardon, madame," said Cellini, "but the lily plays so important a part in my story, that in order to demonstrate my words——"

"Oh! if the lily bears so important a part in the story," cried Diana, snatching it by a movement quick as thought from the king's hand, "then Madame d'Etampes is right; for if the story be what I suspect, it is better in my hands than in the king's, for by a sudden movement which his Majesty might not be able to repress, he might break it."

Madame d'Etampes grew frightfully pale; she seized Benvenuto's hand, and opened her lips as if to speak, then reclosed them and let his hand fall.

"Say what you have to say," murmured she, through her closed teeth; but added, in a voice so low as only to be heard by him, "if you dare."

"Yes, speak, and take care of what you are about to say," cried the king.

"And you, madame, think of the effect of your silence," whispered Benvenuto.

"We are waiting," said Diana, impatiently.

"Well, Sire, you have only to imagine that Ascanio and Madame la Duchesse corresponded."

The duchess looked to see if there were no dagger with which she might strike the speaker.

"Corresponded!" cried the king.

"Yes, corresponded; and, what is still more strange, the subject of the correspondence between Madame la Duchesse d'Etampes and the poor apprentice, was LOVE."

"The proofs, monsieur; you have proofs, I hope," cried the king, furiously.

"Oh! mon Dieu, yes, Sire; your Majesty may be sure that I should not have given utterance to such suspicions, had I not had proofs."

"Then give them to me at once, since you have them."

"When I say that I have them, I am wrong; your Majesty had them just now."

"I!" "And Madame de Poitiers has them now."

"I!" cried Diana.

"Yes," replied Benvenuto; who, amidst the king's anger, and the hatred and terror of the two greatest ladies of the court, preserved the most perfect *sang froid*, "for the proofs are in that lily."

"In the lily!" cried the king, taking the flower back again, and examining it with an attention in which, this time, the love of art had no share.

"Colombe shall not marry d'Orhec," whispered the duchess.

"That is not enough, madame, she must marry Ascanio."

"Never!"

Meanwhile the king was turning the fatal lily about in his fingers, with an anxiety and anger all the more painful that he did not dare to express them openly.

"The proofs in this lily!" said he; "I see nothing."

"Because your Majesty does not know the secret of opening it."

"There is a secret! show it to me then at once, or else——"

François made a movement as if he were about to break the flower; the two women uttered a cry, and he stopped.

"Oh! Sire, it would be a pity," said Diana, "it is such a lovely ornament! Give it to me, and I answer for it, if there be a secret, I shall find it out."

And her slender and agile fingers, rendered still more cunning by hatred, ran up and down the lily, feeling every crevice or projection, while the duchess, ready to faint, watched with wild eyes her attempts, which for a minute were fruitless. At last, either by luck, or by a rival's intuition, she touched the right place and the flower opened.

The two women uttered a simultaneous cry, and the duchess flew forward to snatch the lily from Diana's hands; but Benvenuto kept her back with one hand, while with the other he showed her the letter, which he had drawn from its hiding-place, while a rapid glance on the lily showed her that the opening was empty.

"I consent to all," said she, quite crushed and unable to contend longer.

"You swear by the Bible?" "I swear."

"Well, monsieur," cried the king, impatiently, "where are these proofs? I see only an opening skilfully contrived in the lily, but with nothing in it."

"No, Sire, there is nothing."

"But there might have been something," said Diana.

"Madame is right."

"Monsieur," cried the king; "do you know that it may be dangerous to continue this pleasantry longer, and that people more powerful than you have repented of playing with my anger?"

"Therefore, I should be in despair were I to incur it, Sire," re-

plied Cellini; "but nothing here is calculated to excite it, and your majesty has not, I hope, taken my words seriously. Should I have dared so lightly to prefer so grave an accusation? Madame d'Etampes can show you the letters which this lily contained, if you are curious to see them. They speak really of love, but of the love of my poor Ascanio for a noble young lady—a love which at first seemed wild and impossible; but my Ascanio, imagining, like a true artist, that this beautiful lily was worth nearly as much as a beautiful girl, addressed himself to Madame d'Etampes as to a providence, and made this lily his messenger. Now you know, Sire, that a providence can do all things, and you will not, I think, be jealous of this one, since in doing good she associates you in her efforts. This is the key of the enigma; and if the mystery with which I surrounded it has offended your Majesty, I trust you will forgive me when you remember the gracious familiarity to which your Majesty has always admitted me."

This speech changed the aspect of the scene. As Benvenuto spoke, the brow of Diana grew dark and that of Madame d'Etampes gay, and the king recovered his smiles and good humour. When Benvenuto had finished—

"Pardon me, my beautiful duchess," said he, "for having suspected you for a moment. What must I do to repair my fault and merit my pardon?"

"Grant to madame the request that she is about to make," said Benvenuto.

"Speak for me, M. Cellini, since you know what I desire," said the duchess, with a better grace than he had expected.

"Well, Sire, since madame wishes me to be her interpreter, know that her desire is, that you should exercise your powerful authority in the loves of my poor Ascanio."

"Oh!" cried the king, laughing, "I consent with all my heart crown the loves of the gentle apprentice. What is the lady's name?"

"Colombe d'Estourville, Sire."

"Colombe d'Estourville!"

"Sire, let your Majesty remember that it is madame who asks. Come, madame, and join your prayers to mine," added Benvenuto, showing a corner of his letter, "or the king will believe that you only ask out of complaisance for me."

"Is it true that you desire this marriage, madame?" said François.

"Yes, Sire, I wish it—much."

"But how do I know that the provost will accept as a son-in-law a man without name or fortune?"

"Firstly, Sire," said Benvenuto, "the provost, as a faithful subject, will have, we may be sure, no other will than that of his sovereign. Besides, Ascanio is not without name; he is called Gaddo—Gaddi, and one of his ancestors was podestat of Florence. He is a goldsmith, it is true; but in Italy, to practise art is no

derogation. Besides, even if he were not noble by family, as I have been bold enough to write his name on the letters patent which your Majesty sent to me, he would be noble through that. Ah! do not think that that is a sacrifice on my part; to recompense my Ascanio, is to recompense me. Thus, Sire, he is Seigneur de Nesle, and I shall not let him want for money; he can, if he likes, abandon art and purchase a company of lances, or a place at court."

"And we will take care," said the king, "that your generosity does not exhaust your purse."

"Thus then, Sire?"

"Well, then, here's to Ascanio Gaddo Gaddi, Seigneur de Nesle," said the king, laughing, for the exculpation of Madame d'Etampes had put him in a good temper.

"Madame," whispered Cellini, "you cannot leave the Seigneur de Nesle in the Châtelet."

Madame d'Etampes called an officer, and said to him in a low voice, some words ending with, "in the king's name."

"What are you doing, madame?" said the king.

"Madame d'Etampes is sending for the bridegroom, sire," said Cellini.

"Where to?"

"Where madame, who knew the king's goodness, had told him to await your decision."

A quarter of an hour after, the door of the room where Colombe, the provost, the Comte d'Orbec, the Spanish ambassador, and nearly the whole court, were waiting, was opened, and the usher cried, "the king!" François entered, leading Diana de Poitiers, and followed by Benvenuto, who had on one arm the Duchesse d'Etampes, and on the other Ascanio, who were, one as pale as the other. All the courtiers were astonished, and Colombe nearly fainted. The astonishment redoubled when François, making room for the sculptor to pass before him, said aloud—

"M. Benvenuto, take our place for the time, and speak as though you were king, and as king you shall be obeyed."

"Take care, Sire," replied the goldsmith; "for, in order to keep up your character, I shall be magnificent."

"Go on, Benvenuto," said François, laughing; "each trait of magnificence would be a flattery."

"That is right, Sire; that puts me at my ease, and I will praise you as much as I can. Now, do not forget, all who hear me, that the king speaks through my mouth. You, gentlemen," continued he, turning to the notaries, "have prepared the contract, which his Majesty will deign to sign. Write in the names of the parties."

The two notaries took their pens and prepared to write the names into the two copies of the contract, of which one was to remain in the royal archives and the other with them.

"On the one side, a noble young lady, Colombe d'Estourville."

"Colombe d'Estourville!" repeated the notaries.

"On the other, the very noble and powerful Ascanio Gaddi, Seigneur de Nesle."

"Ascanio Gaddi," cried the provost and d'Orbec.

"A workman!" continued the provost, turning to the king.

"Ascanio Gaddi, Seigneur de Nesle," repeated Benvenuto, "to whom his Majesty grants letters of naturalization, and the place of superintendent of the royal castles."

"If your Majesty orders it, I must obey," said the provost, "but——"

"On which consideration," continued Benvenuto, "his Majesty grants to M. Robert d'Estourville the title of chamberlain."

"Sire, I am ready to sign," said d'Estourville.

"Mon Dieu! is it not a dream?" murmured Colombe.

"And I," cried d'Orbec.

"As for you," said Cellini, continuing his royal functions, "as for you, Comte d'Orbec, we forgive you the inquest which we might order into your conduct. Clemency is a royal virtue, as well as generosity, is it not, Sire? But here are the contracts; let us sign, gentlemen."

"How well he plays the king!" cried François, happy in his holiday. Then he handed the pen to Ascanio, who signed tremblingly, and passed it on to Colombe, whom Diana had led forward. The hands of the two lovers met, and they nearly fainted. Madame d'Etampes signed next, then the provost, and last of all, Cellini wrote his name firmly and distinctly. Yet it was not he who had made the least sacrifice.

After this was over, the Spanish ambassador approached the duchess.

"Our plans hold good?" said he.

"Oh! mon Dieu! do what you like," said she, "I care not."

Benvenuto now approached François, and bending one knee to the ground, said, "Now, Sire, after having ordered as a king, I come to pray to your Majesty as a humble and grateful subject. Will your Majesty grant me one last favour?"

"Speak, Benvenuto," said François, who was in the mood for granting, "what do you wish?"

"To return to Italy, Sire."

"What does that mean? quit me while you have so much to do for me? I cannot allow it."

"Sire," replied Benvenuto, "I will return; I swear to you. But let me go, let me revisit my country, I need it for a time. I do not speak of my own sufferings, but I do suffer, and only my native air can heal my wounded heart. You are a great and generous king, whom I love. I will return, Sire; but permit me first to go and cure myself in the sun. I leave you, Ascanio, and Pagolo; they will suffice for you until my return: and when I have

felt the kiss of the breath of Florence, my mother, I will return to you, my king, and death alone shall separate us."

"Go, then," said François, sadly; "art should be free as the swallows."

Then the king held out his hand, which Benvenuto kissed with all the ardour of gratitude.

Before he retired, Benvenuto approached the duchess.

"Are you very angry with me, madame?" said he, gliding into her hands the fatal note—a magic talisman with which he had worked impossibilities.

"No," said she, quite glad to hold it at last; "and yet you beat me by means——"

"Oh!" said Benvenuto, "I threatened you; but do you think I would have used it?"

"Mon Dieu!" cried the duchess; "see what it is to have thought you like myself."

The next day, Ascanio and Colombe were married at the chapel of the Louvre; and, in spite of all the rules of etiquette, they obtained leave for Jacques Aubrey and his wife to be present. It was a great favour, but we must confess that the poor scholar had merited it.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE.

A WEEK after, Hermann married Dame Perrine, who brought him as a dowry twenty thousand francs, and the certainty that he would be a father; and let us say that this last consideration weighed more with the worthy German than the twenty thousand francs.

On the evening of the marriage of Ascanio and Colombe, Benvenuto, in spite of all entreaties, set off for Florence. During his stay there, he cast his statue of Perseus, which is still one of the ornaments of the square of the Old Palace, and which was perhaps his greatest work, because it was accomplished in his greatest grief.

THE END.

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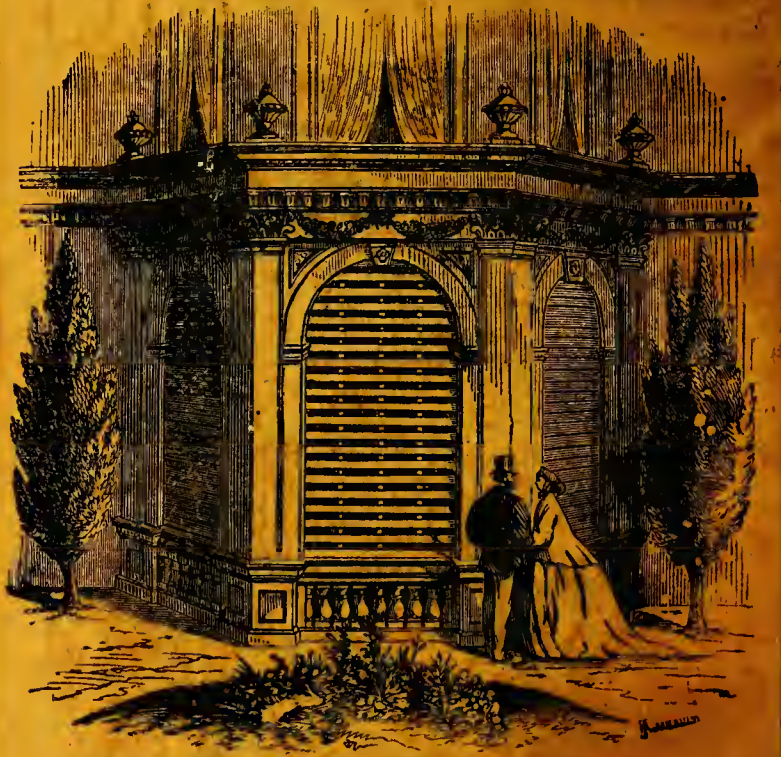

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