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“No pent-up Utica contracts our powers; For the whole boundless continent is ours.”

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FRANCIS OF VALOIS, OR THE CURSE OF ST. VALLIAIR. A TALE OF THE MIDDLE AGES.*

BY EDMUND FLAGG,

AUTHOR OF 'MARION DE LORME,' 'THE DUCHESS OF FERRARA,' 'MARY TUDOR,' 'BEATRICE,' 'THE BRIGAND,' &c. &c. &c.

A TALE of strange and terrible occurrence!—SPIRIT OF THE WOOD.

INTRODUCTORY.

“THEY unto whom we shall appear tedious are in nowise injured by us, because it is in their own hands to spare that labor which they are not willing to endure.”
HOOKER.

THE Era of the reign of Francis of Valois, the first of his name and his family on the throne of France, and the second in succession of the collateral branch of Valois-Orleans, was one of the most remarkable periods in the annals of Europe. It was an era remarkable not more for the splendor and importance of the events which it chronicles, than for that throng of illustrious personages by whose birth it was honored, and by whose achievements it was distinguished. If we search the page of History through, we shall fail to discover one period around which clusters such a brilliant galaxy of extraordinary men, whether we consider civil or political, ecclesiastical or military renown, as the early years of the sixteenth century. “It was the peculiar glory of that period,” says an elegant writer,† “to produce the most illustrious monarchs who have, at any one time, appeared in Europe. Leo, Charles, Francis, Henry and Solymán, were each of them possessed of talents which might have rendered any age, wherein they happened to flourish, conspicuous. But such a constellation of great princes sheds uncommon lustre on the sixteenth century. In every contest, great power, as well as great abilities, were set in opposition; the efforts of valor and conduct on one side, counterbalanced by an equal exertion of the same qualities on the other, not only occasioned such a variety of events as rendered the history of that period interesting, but served to check the exorbitant progress of any of these princes, and to prevent their obtaining such preëminence of power as would have been fatal to the liberty and the happiness of mankind.”

It was the era of the Monk of Wittenburg—the Peasant of Eisleben—it was the era of the Reformation; and well hath it been said, that, with the single exception of the advent of the Christian Faith, the Reformation of the sixteenth century was the most remarkable event in the annals of time. It came, after the long midnight of one thousand years, to publish again the Religion of the Cross—not with the lance and the battle-axe of the Crusader, nor with the blood-steeped scymeter of the False Prophet—not with the wild and horrid rites of the Priests of northern Europe, nor with the mystic and ma-

gical Cabala of the Oriental Illuminati—but with a weapon less terrific, and less bloody, yet more efficient and resistless—the sword of the spirit—the Gospel of Truth. It came to deliver a world from the iniquitous despotism of Church and State—to rebuild the shattered temple of Science, and to reanimate every department of Literature and the Arts. It came to liberate the nations of northern Europe forever from their worse than eastern bondage to the Papal See, and to loosen the moral manacles of the south; and it came to induce a revolution in the sentiments of mankind, the most wonderful that has ever taken place since the promulgation of Christianity. To this grand moral revolution, which, three centuries ago, had its origin in Saxony, from the most inconsiderable circumstances, may, indeed, be justly attributed all of those great civil, as well as religious, reformations which, from that epoch, crowd the page of history, down into our own times. It was but a prologue to that great drama which has since claimed the attention, and enlisted the powers, of modern Christendom. Its influences are experienced in every nation, and by every people; and while the present age acknowledges, ages yet to come will perceive and appreciate, the blessings it has bestowed.

Never have results so vast and so extensive resulted from a source seemingly so trivial. It was the single principle of liberty of thought, suggested to an obscure monk of Wirtemberg, in the loneliness of his cell, by the pages of his Bible, and by him promulgated to Europe and the world, which laid the substratum of all the momentous movements of succeeding centuries: and, if we do not injustice to his illustrious coadjutors, or ascribe to the efforts of one remarkable man, that which was but the spirit of the age, to Martin Luther may be attributed, not only the religious revolution in Germany of his own age, but the civil revolution in England in the next century, and with equal justice, that of France, as well as, under happier auspices, that of these North American States.

The grand principle of the reformation of Luther was *Freedom*: freedom of mind and of conscience—freedom of the individual and freedom of the people—freedom from the thralldom of ecclesiastical tyranny, and freedom from the despotism of secular domination. The platform on which the reformer planted himself was this: each man has a right—natural, inalienable, and undoubted—of which he can no more divest himself than he can be divested by another—each man is bound, by the duty which he owes to his God, to his country, to his fellow-man, and to his own conscience—to exercise liberty of thought—to use his own unbiassed sense of right and of wrong, and to be free, and continue free, from all trammels of conscience and the will.

This, in religion, says an eloquent writer, whose sentiments we but echo, this in religion was the “Declaration of Independence,” and, for its defence, stood forth the bold band of reformers, resolved to sustain it or to perish in the attempt. Sustained it was—sustained it has been; and, though full many a mountain-wave of blood and of desolation has rolled over its noble proportions, and, for a time, has seemed almost to have obliterated them in a chaos of ruin, yet, there it still stands—fixed, immovable, firm—and there it will stand forever.

Well, then, may we say, in the language of one whom from memory we quote*—“The period of the Reformation was a second age of Apostles and Martyrs; another age of Christian Fathers. The last

* Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1843, by J. Winchester, in the Clerk's Office of the Southern District of New-York.

† Robertson, to whom this chapter is indebted for many of its historical facts.

* Grimke,

of the Romans had perished in the dungeons of Theodoric, but a spirit more than Roman animated the bosom of the monk of Saxony. Around him circled a host of kindred spirits—not as the satellites of his glory, or of his power; but each one in himself a brilliant luminary—a star of the first magnitude—beaming with no borrowed radiance, blazing forth in beauty and in splendor from the depths of that firmament—an inferior, yet a constituent orb, in the constellation of the Reformers." Well, too, may the age of the Reformation be styled the era of miracles, when we consider it, as it was, an age fruitful in all that is great and good—all that is divine and noble; in a fortitude which quailed not at the thunders of the Vatican, and in that proud spirit which could smile alike at the menace of the Monarch, and the terrible malediction of the Pontiff.

The monument of the Reformers is a noble one. It will exist so long as the mind of man is free. It is not of marble nor of brass; for the rolling years would pass over it, and it would crumble and decay. Like the mausoleum and the column of another era, it would moulder. Time's iron finger would be busy on its surface and at its base; and soon, in the stillness of ages, it would fall, and not a vestige remain to mark to coming generations the spot where it had stood. But, it is a monument more durable in its structure, and more noble in its proportions—a monument erected in the reverence of mankind. Around its summit lingers a halo of imperishable glory; and at its base is the gratitude of civilized man!

But the sixteenth century gave birth to another Reformer besides Luther—a man not inferior to the Augustinian friar in all that constitutes the founder of a faith, and who, with Luther, has ever since divided the world of Christendom. It was the era of Ignatio Loyola, and of the instituting of that ecclesiastical order, which, under the name of Jesuitism, for nearly three hundred years, continued its rule over kingdoms and dynasties, with an authority despotic and terrible, as it was dark and mysterious. Nor is the iron arm of that tremendous influence yet broken, or its power entirely passed away.

Ignatio Loyola was a Biscayan gentleman and a brave soldier. In resisting the triumphant march of the troops of Francis, under the gallant Andrew de Foix, de L'Esparre, in the conquest of the kingdom of Navarre, he received a dangerous wound while defending the citadel of Pampeluna. The fortress fell, and, during the lingering process of a cure, as a prisoner of war, his sole resource to beguile the weary hours, was the perusal of the miraculous Lives of the Saints of the Catholic Church.

"The effect of this," says the historian, "on a mind naturally enthusiastic, but ambitious and daring, was to inspire him with such a desire of emulating the glory of these fabulous worthies, as led him into the wildest and most extravagant adventures, which terminated at last in instituting the order of Jesuits, the most political and best regulated of all the monastic orders, and from which mankind has derived more advantage, and received greater injury, than from any other of those religious fraternities."

Loyola, ambitious of becoming the founder of an order of Ecclesiastics, applied for the sanction of Paul III., who then filled the papal throne. The petition was referred to a committee of Cardinals, who represented the institution as both useless and hazardous; but, when Loyola proposed, in addition to the vows of poverty, and chastity, and monastic obedience, to impose a fourth vow of undeviating and entire subservience of the order to the Holy See, the prudent pontiff no longer hesitated to accept the acquisition of a powerful body of men, at a time when every monastery in Europe was shaken by the denunciations of the Reformers.

The order was instituted—Loyola was its first General, and, in less than fifty years, it was more relied on by its friends, and more dreaded by its foes, than was any other fraternity in the Catholic Church.

And never, in the annals of our race, has there existed a despotism so terrible as that of the head of this mysterious society over its members; or of those members, even in the darkness of their lonely cells, over the subjects of the Romish faith throughout all the nations of the earth.

At that same era, on the throne of England, sat Henry Tudor, the eighth of his name, and not the least noted, by reason of his vices and his abilities, among the British monarchs. Uniting in his own person the long conflicting titles of York and Lancaster—the white rose, colorless with the loss of blood, and the red rose, crimson with ensanguined floods in which it had been drenched—the most opulent prince of the age, by reason of his father's parsimony and management; he was possessed to the full of all the power he assumed, and which amply warranted his self-bestowed title—"The Arbitrator of Europe."

In this connection, the mind cannot but revert to another remarkable character of that age and that nation—the proud and the aspiring prelate Wolsey—an individual whom, whether we consider for the profundity of his judgment, his seemingly intuitive knowledge of man in every rank and every nation, his indomitable perseverance, or his untiring industry; his profuse prodigality, or his rapacious avarice; his unbounded ambition, or his presumptuous pride; the elegance of his conversation, or the polished refinement of his manners; his wisdom, or his learning; his rapid and wonderful rise from the lowest grade in society to a station rarely attained by a subject, or his sudden and irretrievable fall—certainly presents one of the most extraordinary names, not merely on the chronicles of the sixteenth century, but in the history of the race of mankind.

And there was at that time another Ecclesiastic, of higher rank, indeed, but possessed of hardly more sway in the affairs of Europe, remarkable alike for the similarity and dissimilarity of his character and his destiny to that of Cardinal Wolsey. Like Wolsey, he was proud; but he was a descendant of one of the proudest families of the age—with all of Wolsey's learning, and taste, and refinement, he lacked much of Wolsey's wisdom, and judgment, and knowledge of man; with all of Wolsey's perseverance, he had but little of his industry; with all of his profuseness, none of his rapacity.

Leo the Tenth was the polished and elegant son of the Medici—that proud and powerful not more than perfidious and blood-stained house, which, while for years it graced the ducal chair of the Florentine state, by its splendor and magnificence, disgraced the age in which it flourished by its foul and unnatural enormities. As the merchant-princes of Florence, they effected not more by their wealth and their liberality—their learning and their taste, to signalize their name and their native city, than by their monstrous crimes, and their unprincipled ambition, they rendered the one almost infamous and the government of the other almost an anarchy.

The character of Leo partook of all the excellencies and some of the vices of his princely house. Renowned alike for the brilliancy of his political abilities, and for the accomplishments of his scholarship; for his polished manners, and his unusual love and patronage of the arts, he could hardly be expected to remain an uninterested and inactive spectator of those portentous events of which his pontificate was signalized; and he has rendered his name renowned not more by the exercise of his papal power in crushing the heresy of Luther, than by his imperial authority in mediating between those fiery spirits, Francis of Valois and Charles of Spain. The foresight, the prudence of Leo, in the exertion of his temporal power, have not been more admired, than has his unwise and ruinous policy, in the administration of the affairs of his spiritual realm, been condemned.

To the ill-advised measures of Leo himself may, no doubt, be referred, if not the actual occurrence of the defection from the Romish church during his reign, at least its rapid precipitation. It is a circumstance not unworthy of notice, that the undue indulgence of the extraordinary devotion of this pontiff to the Fine Arts, originated the first impulse to the Reformation of Luther.

When Leo the Tenth was elevated to the papal throne, he found the revenues of the church well-nigh exhausted by the ambitious schemes of his two immediate predecessors. To gratify his passion for the arts—to aggrandize his ancient and aspiring family—to reward, agreeably to the impulse of his munificent spirit, men of genius, of learning, and of taste—to complete that wonder of architectural design, the Church of St. Peter—to maintain the offices of the papal court in a style of magnificence congenial to his refined and elegant habits; to do all these things, demanded coffers far less exhausted than were those of the Vatican; and various were the devices of priestly astuteness to supply the deficiency. Among these was the sale of indulgences; and, in an hour fatal alike to his own peace, and to the welfare of the Romish church, was affixed to the empowering bull the signature of the courtly, but mistaken, pontiff.

Against this blasphemous assumption of a power which casuistry can hardly prove to pertain even to Omnipotence itself, stood forth Luther; and the issue thus made between the peasant and the prince; the layman and the paramount, ceased only with the death of the latter; although it is more than problematical, that, had a temper so obstinate and so irritable, as was that of the German, been subjected from the commencement of that rupture to the mild, the yielding, the persuasive courtesy of the most polished Italian of the age, instead of being roused to fury by the unmannered violence and the savage threats of men like Tetzels, and Eccius, and Cajetan, and Prierias, his opposition would have stopped short of those daring

denunciations, which he at length sent forth, but of which, at first, he had never dreamed.

The events of Leo's life were striking, and those of his death were hardly less so. News being brought him of a series of rapid and brilliant successes of the imperial forces in Italy over the troops of Francis, he was seized with a fever of joy, which, in a few days, in the vigor of an advanced age, and in the height of his renown, terminated his earthly existence.

There was, at that era, in Italy, another individual, who sat upon no throne, and was illustrious by no title—on whose brow glittered no diadem and no triple-crown, and whose hand wielded neither key nor sceptre—who was distinguished by no adventitious aids of rank or of family—on whose broad escutcheon were blazoned no armorial bearings nor heraldic insignia to declare the aristocracy of his origin; unpatronized by the smiles of the great, and unsupported by the favors of royalty—aggrandized by no influence of amassed or hereditary wealth—sustained by the chicanery of no political corruption, and the priestly policy of no ecclesiastical cabal—who, yet, by the naked supremacy of moral and intellectual worth commanded and exercised a sway, and signalized his name by achievements, of which the proudest son of the ducal house of Florence might have well been proud, in the zenith of its flower!

That man was Andrew Doria, a native of the Republic of Genoa, a skilful seaman, an ardent patriot, and as bold a captain as ever unsheathed a blade.

To the heroism and the patriotism of this gallant officer as Admiral of the Gallies, was due the deliverance of Genoa and Naples from the domination of foreigners, when the sovereigns of France and of Spain had made the sunny plains of Italy a battle-field on which to settle their aspiring claims to supremacy, though drenched with the best blood of its unfortunate people. His, too, was that rare and glorious magnanimity, of which all history affords us but a few illustrious examples—to decline the proffered sovereignty of a land which his wisdom and his valor had made free. A private citizen, respected, honored, beloved, he lived on to an advanced age; and, when at length he died, he was distinguished in the monuments of his countrymen and on the pages of their annals by that proudest of appellations: "*The Father of his Country and the Preserver of her liberties.*"

It was in the latter years of the life of the venerable Doria, when the limited power with which he had been so gladly intrusted, and which he had so mildly exercised, seemed about becoming hereditary, by reason of the ambitious aspirations of his son, that a revolt from his rule broke out, originating in a jealousy of the power and distinction of the family of a man, who but twenty years before had been a common mariner.

The leader, the originator, the life and the spirit of this conspiracy, was John Lewis Fiesco, Count of Lavagna, the wealthiest, the haughtiest, and the loftiest birth of all the Genoese nobles. History tells us, that "he possessed in an eminent degree, all those qualities which win upon the heart, which command respect, or secure attachment. He was graceful and majestic in person; of a generosity that anticipated the wishes of his friends, and exceeded the expectations of strangers; of an insinuating address, gentle manners, and glowing ability." And, yet, beneath this winning exterior, he concealed all those qualities which fit men for the darkest deeds; insatiable ambition, indomitable courage, and a vital scorn of subordination.

It was under the influence of these passions, roused to frenzy as they were, by envy of the power of the venerable Doge and wrath at the aspirations of his son, that the young Fiesco, having imparted his feelings and his purposes to several of the most ambitious of the Genoese nobles, resolved with them to assassinate the Dorias, to subvert the government, and to place the Count of Lavagna in the ducal chair of Genoa.

To consummate a scheme so hazardous and so extensive, and which has well been termed "one of the boldest actions on the page of history," demanded time and deliberation. The better to conceal his dark design, Fiesco appeared absorbed in all the amusements and dissipations of that dissipated city, while at the same time he contrived and carried on to their execution his terrible plans, with a secrecy which defied detection, and an address which disarmed distrust.

At length arrived the long-looked-for day. It was the second day in the year 1547. The morning was devoted by Fiesco to his usual intercourse with his associates, and never had he appeared more gay and free. The evening was occupied by a visit to his intended victims; and, if they could detect nothing of his dark designs in his

handsome and unembarrassed countenance, he could read nothing of the distrust or presentiment of their impending doom in theirs.

At night Fiesco was in his palace, and its illuminated apartment were thronged. Every one had been suffered, throughout the day to enter its gates; but no one had been suffered to leave them. The crews of his galleys, and every vassal he could claim, had been quietly introduced within the walls, and all the most noble citizens of Genoa had been bidden to a banquet. But no banquet was there—no wine-cup was filled—no health was pledged—no entertainment was spread. Instead of the glitter of plate was beheld the flash of steel; and the rattle of armor fell startlingly on the ear in place of the clash of dishes. Men gazed into each other's pale countenances with astonishment, and curiosity, and apprehension; for, of all that vast and heterogenous throng, but few could tell the object of such a strange assemblage, and none could divine its result.

At length, at the height of a suspense which was rapidly verging into terror, Fiesco appeared. Eloquently—earnestly did he explain to the amazed listeners the purpose for which they had been bidden, and the design which he contemplated.

When he had finished his impassioned harangue, he was greeted with a thunder of applause; and in all that vast old hall was heard not a whisper of dissent or disapprobation. To enter at once on the accomplishment of the daring scheme of Fiesco was resolved by acclamation.

But the most trying scene in all this terrible drama now remained for the ambitious yet fond-hearted Fiesco. It was, for the first time, to communicate his dark purpose to his wife—the beautiful and accomplished daughter of one of the noblest houses in Italy—and to say to her *farewell!* The tumult of voices and the tramp of armed men had reached her in her distant apartment; and now, terrified and foreboding, she besought him, with tears and entreaties, to pause in his purpose. His only reply was, "We meet to-morrow as rulers of Genoa, or we meet no more on the earth."

One hurried embrace—and Fiesco was gone.

To seize the gates of the city—to gain command of the avenues and fortresses—to surprise the harbor and obtain possession of the galleys, and to carry the ducal palace by assault, was a work of but a few hours to a band of conspirators so numerous, so well-appointed, and so determined.

Success crowned every attempt. The son of Doria fell with an hundred wounds; and the venerable Doge, at infinite hazard, found safety only in flight.

And then, at that instant of triumphant hope and gratified ambition, the conqueror *perished!* Ingloriously and strangely, he passed away! In the darkness of the night, stepping from one galley to another, he lost his footing, and his heavy armor carried him in a moment to the bottom of the sea!

At the dawn of the next day's morning there was order again in Genoa. Not a conspirator was to be seen. Here and there, a shattered gate, or a stain of blood upon the *pave*, reminded one of the uproar of the preceding night, but all else was as quiet and as peaceful as if all had been only the imagining of a horrible dream.

In reviewing the recital of this celebrated revolt, as recorded by Cardinal de Retz at the early age of eighteen, and which caused Richelieu to predict his future and dangerous eminence, we find ourselves at a loss at which to be the most astonished—the hardihood which prompted an attempt so desperate—the consummate address with which it was carried into execution, or its tragical issue at its moment of victory, in the untimely and singular fate of its projector. The tale constitutes one of the wildest romances in the annals of the middle ages, and is well adapted to the drama by which it has been so ably appropriated.

But the illustrious men of the sixteenth century were not restricted to the western side of that line which at that period divided the Christian from the Parquim. Almost at the same moment that Charles of Spain ascended the imperial chair of Maximilian, Solyman, surnamed the Magnificent—the most able, enterprising, and accomplished of all the lords of Asia, succeeded to the Ottoman throne. Among the nations of Europe, the Turkish Sultan was chiefly celebrated as a conqueror; and it will be deemed sufficient to maintain the justness of his claim to this distinction, that he was always viewed, both by Charles and by Francis, as a formidable rival, whose good offices it was indispensable to propitiate. But, by the annals of his own empire, Solyman First is renowned as an able lawgiver, as well as a brave warrior; and, as a ruler, not more enterprising than he was wise.

There were at that remarkable period other men, who, although moving in orbits less distinguished than those whom we have named.

yet may not with propriety be viewed as stars of secondary magnitude, when we consider the influence of their characters and talents, and the splendor which their renown reflects upon their age, and the respective nations in which they lived. Among these may be mentioned the names of Zuinglius and Erasmus—of Melancthon, and the Duke and Elector of Saxony—of Bayard, the Chevalier, and of Beza, the translator of the Psalms—of Ximenes, the wise counsellor of Charles, and of his tutor, the Lord of Chievres, the accomplished William of Croye—of Guicciardini, who sustained the sieges and achieved the successes which he recorded; and the last of the Troubadours, Clement Marot.

It was the era, too, of many of the most remarkable discoveries and inventions, which have ever rendered an age illustrious; in so much that we know not which to view as most extraordinary, when we consider their origin, their character, and their effects—the results of the *explorations* of the followers of Columbus and Gama, or the practical application of the *invention* of Faust. The former have laid open a *new world* to mankind; the latter has proven a fulfillment of the Syracusan's vision to move the *old*. We are at a loss, too, which to regard as most remarkable, the achievements of that era in discovery, invention, conquest, and revolution, or the personages to whom it gave birth.

We come now to speak of the two great actors in the magnificent drama of the first half of the sixteenth century—those individuals by whose movements were directed, and on whose policy were dependant, to a greater or a less extent, the destinies of all the states and all the dignitaries of Europe: whose conflicting interests acted as the grand centrifugal and centripetal forces in the vast system of politics which at that time existed, to whose permanent power the lesser orbs in that firmament were entirely subservient—who were the “two great lights” to rule the day and the night, or rather, twin suns in the political sky of Christendom. Those individuals, were Francis of Valois and Charles of Spain.

Of the character and the career of the latter, it is unnecessary, at present, to say more, than that he was the first son of Philip, the handsome Archduke of Austria, and the unhappy Joan of Arragon; and that, for brilliant powers in the cabinet and in the field—as a general, as a statesman, and as a ruler, few monarchs have ever filled a throne with the ability and the dignity of Charles the Fifth. Few monarchs, too, have advanced by such rapid and powerful strides as he did to extensive dominion, and with an unvarying continuity of good fortune, which almost justified the superstitious reliance on the auspicious “star of Austria,” under whose influences, whether benign or baleful, he had his birth: and the resignation of that power at its height may be viewed as yet more wonderful than the good fortune which attended, or the capacity which conduced to its attainment.

But, illustrious as was the young monarch of Spain, he had a rival not unworthy of his fame, and so intimately is the history of Charles associated with that of the monarch, who, for twenty-eight years, was his competitor for the supremacy of Europe, that to recite the leading events in the career of one, it would be impossible not to make constant allusion to the achievements of the other.

In reviewing the annals of ages, as of nations, we sometimes meet with individuals, who seem to concentrate in their own characters, the distinguishing peculiarities of the eras in which they flourished. If a remark like this is true of any of the heroes of history, it is pre-eminently true of Francis the First, of France. By the men of his own time, not less than by the chroniclers of his career, has this accomplished monarch been regarded as an embodiment of the romance and the chivalry of the sixteenth century. By the historian of that era we are told, that “Francis was ambitious to distinguish himself by all the qualities of an accomplished knight, and endeavored to imitate the enterprising genius of chivalry in war, as well as its pomp and courtesy during peace; and that the fame which the French monarch acquired by these splendid actions, so far dazzled his more temperate rival, that he departed on some occasions from his usual prudence and moderation, and emulated Francis in deeds of prowess or of gallantry.”

Elegant in his person, graceful in his manners, accomplished in conversation, eloquent in the cabinet, undaunted in conflict, of a liberality which amounted to profusion and a gallantry which degenerated into vice; ambitious, impetuous, fervid, he was regarded by his contemporaries as the mirror of chivalric perfection, and “the very mould of form.” Historians concur in the declaration that he was humane, beneficent, and generous; that he possessed dignity without pride, affability without meanness, and courtesy without deceit. Easy of access, all who formed his acquaintance respected and

loved him; and charmed and dazzled by the winning courtesy of “the most accomplished and amiable man in France,” they murmured not at his deficiencies as a monarch.

To Francis, also, belongs the illustrious title of *Father of Letters*, an appellation which has rendered his name no less honored among posterity, than his chivalric virtues rendered him the idol of his age. In the honors, the offices, and the confidence which he bestowed on the learned, and the encouragement which he extended to science and the arts, he was rivalled only by the munificent and courtly Leo. Scholars in other countries, among whom were the elegant Erasmus, and the amiable Melancthon, were invited to Paris. Topics, on which he desired information, were given to men of learning, who read to him subsequently, at his hours of leisure and during his meals, the productions of their genius. He instituted a college—he founded a press—he augmented the royal library and made a collection of manuscripts—he caused the laws of his realm to be published in French, instead of the barbarous Latin before in use; while the palaces of Fontainebleau and the Louvre, and others of the most magnificent structures of the time, are monuments of his taste in the arts, and his encouragement of their professors.

In the reign of Francis, also, may we date the commencement of that courtesy and elegance, and that free intermingling of the sexes, for which the French court has ever since been renowned. The licentious gallantry of the times, however, to which the example of Francis lent but too much encouragement, must be considered as dearly purchased by any amelioration or increased amenity of manners. Another stain upon the reign of this monarch, was his uncalled for cruelty against heretics to the Catholic church. To check the progress of the opinions of Luther in his dominions, many of his subjects, and his own sister, the queen of Navarre, having manifested for the new doctrines favorable feelings, he permitted six of these unhappy beings to be burned before his palace.

It has been well said of Francis, that, but for his unbounded ambition—his generosity, his courtesy, and his love of letters might have rendered France happy. Living at the era of the revival of learning, and when the spirit of invention and discovery were fully awakened by the triumphs of the preceding century, the zeal and munificence of Francis were admirably adapted to give him distinction by their encouragement. It was in the latter years of his reign that, under his auspices, Jacques Cartier sailed on a voyage of discovery from St. Malo, the result of which was the addition of Canada to the crown of France.

The birth-place of Francis was the village of Cognac on the banks of the Charente, and more distinguished for that event and for the excellent *brandy* which has long formed its principal staple of exportation, than for any other circumstances of which we are aware. His father was Charles of Orleans, Count of Angouleme; his mother, the celebrated Louise of Savoy. On the decease of Louis XII., by whom he had been married to Claude, his eldest daughter, Francis ascended the throne of France on the first day of the year 1515, in the twentieth year of his age.

Burning for distinction, and resolved to sustain the claims of his house on the duchy of Milan, the ambitious prince was hardly on the throne, before he commenced his warlike preparations. His coffers were rapidly filled by a series of measures as impolitic as they were arbitrary; a powerful army was marshalled for the field; upon his mother, Louise of Savoy, was devolved the regency of his kingdom, and his first campaign commenced. Against him were confederated the Emperor Maximilian, Ferdinand of Arragon, Leo the Tenth, Sforza, Duke of Milan, and the Swiss by whom Sforza had been established on the ducal throne. By the Swiss were held all the passes of their native Alps; but the ardor and indomitable perseverance of the French troops either found or made other avenues through this barrier to Italy; and, at length, having triumphed over every obstacle, both of nature and of art, they found themselves on the banks of the Po. Their first act was to take by surprise one thousand cavalry of the papal forces there encamped, and utterly ignorant of their approach.

At the head of his chivalric troops Francis soon entered the Milanese, and, on the plains of Marignano, only one league from the capital, met with the first resistance, in a powerful army of Swiss.

It was about four in the afternoon of September 13. 1515, that the hostile nations found themselves marshalled against each other in battle array. The Swiss were addressed by the eloquent Cardinal of Sion, and, although but two hours of daylight yet remained, immediately rushed onward to the attack. The conflict was dreadful. The chronicles of warfare record scarcely another instance of an

engagement so obstinate. Long after darkness had fallen over the combatants, the fight raged on. At the head of his Black Bands of Suabia, wherever the conflict was fiercest—wherever the carnage was most fearful, there was the brave young monarch of France.

At dawn the battle was renewed; and, through all that day until late at night, it raged on. At length, the Switzers were routed, leaving ten thousand of their countrymen on the field with six thousand and dead bodies of their foes. In the midst of the slain, covered with blood and wounds, Francis received knighthood by the accolade of Chevalier Bayard!

The conduct of the young monarch in this his first battle is said to have been wonderfully intrepid. Late on the night when the conflict commenced, he threw himself on the carriage of a cannon for a few moments of rest, until the day should dawn. In the van of every charge floated the black plumes of his morion; his voice rang out like a trumpet above the roar of battle; horse after horse was killed beneath him, and when the fight had closed, and the shout of victory went up from his triumphant troops, he fell senseless to the earth, covered with contusions, and dripping with gore.

To the matchless prowess of Francis, and the martial skill of the Constable, Charles of Bourbon, is ascribed the victory of the day; and the aged Marshal Trivulzio, who had witnessed eighteen pitched battles, is said by history to have declared upon the bloody field, that "they were all of them mere child's play compared with this Fight of the Giants!"

The result of this victory was favorable to the aspirations of Francis in the highest degree. The whole Milanese was at once surrendered to his power, and the Duke Maximilian Sforza, abdicating his authority, retired into France, there to pass peacefully the remainder of his days. Genoa, warned by the fate of Milan, at once declared for the conqueror; and Leo, in behalf of the papal states, hastened to proffer terms of peace, and to grant his concordat shortly after, at Bologna. A year afterwards Chievres, the tutor of Charles of Spain; and Gouffier, tutor of Francis, met as plenipotentiaries of their illustrious pupils, and signed the treaty of Noyon, the leading articles of which were the restoration of Navarre to Francis, and the betrothal of his eldest daughter, Louise, an infant of but one year, to Charles!

Thus far the star of Francis has continued in the ascendant. Fortune from his birth has smiled upon him. Monarch of the bravest and most polished court—accomplished in all the arts of peace and of war—the object of woman's love and of man's admiration—honored at home and respected abroad—Francis of Valois, in the second year of his reign, was the brightest star in the regal constellation of the age.

From that period to the death of the Emperor Maximilian, a period of ~~these years~~ the name of the French prince but seldom occurs in the chronicles of the times. At this auspicious climacteric in the career of Francis our review of his biography closes, and our tale begins.

THE FICTION embodied in the succeeding pages is founded on scenes in one of the dramatic poems of Victor Hugo, entitled "*Le Roi d'Amuse*." In November, 1832, it was produced at the Theatre Français. Next morning it was condemned by a ministerial order. Its denunciations of royal license, though three centuries old, were deemed hazardous to the safety even of a citizen king!

E. F.

MARIETTA, Nov., 1842.

CHAPTER I....THE FETE.

"Roll on, roll on, dark chariot of the storm,
Whose wheels are thunder! The rack'd elements
Can furnish forth no tempest like the war
Of passions in one weak and erring heart!"

The music, and the banquet, and the wine—
The garlands, the rose-odors, and the flowers—
The sparkling eyes, and flashing ornaments—
The white arms, and the raven hair—the braids
And bracelets; swan-like bosoms, and the necklace,
An India in itself, yet dazzling not
The eye like what it circled; the thin robes
Fluencing like light clouds 'twixt our gaze and heaven;
The many-twinkling feet, so small and sylph like,
Suggesting the more secret symmetry
Of the fair forms which terminate so well.

MARINO FALIERO, ACT. IV.

A FETE at the Louvre, in the early half of the sixteenth century! That old regal edifice—so old, indeed, that the era of its origin and the derivation of its name have not come down to us—half prison, half palace—enlarged by Philip Augustus, and left incomplete by Napoleon, after exhausting the taste and the treasure of six centuries of monarchs—this ancient edifice, one summer night, more than three hundred years ago, was blazing with flambeaux, and resounding with merriment. Along its lengthened galleries, and through its magnificent halls, moved throngs of the brave and the beautiful—the titled and the distinguished.

There was Claude, eldest daughter of the deceased Louis, amiable Queen of France; and by her side, in maiden beauty, like a star on the verge of the horizon, sat Anne, the fair daughter of Thomas Boleyn, destined victim, alas! to the lawless love of Henry of England. There was the high and haughty Duchess of Angouleme, relict of Charles of Orleans, and indulgent mother of Francis—the

unprincipled, the imperious, the passionate Louise of Savoy; and her daughter, the widowed Duchess of Alencon—the accomplished Margaret of Valois, affianced to the young soldier at her side, Henry D'Albret, the monarch of Navarre. There, too, the star of the night, was the fair descendant of the ancient house of Poitiers—Diana, Duchess of Valentinois,* favorite of the king. And there was the ambitious Charles, Duke of Bourbon, Lord High Constable of the realm, the illustrious victim of the amorous and vindictive Louise of Savoy; and Bayard, "the most accomplished gentleman at the French court;" and La Tremouille, the conqueror of Suffolk and the English; and Odet of Foix, and his gallant brother, the champion of Navarre; and many, many another, whose name is memorable in the chronicles of that memorable era, but whom, as we shall have occasion to introduce them, as our story advances, we now omit to mention.

For the first time was that magnificent range of apartments, now designated as the "*Old Louvre*," added to that ancient pile by Francis the First, thrown open to the admiration of the most refined and polished court in Europe. In the elegant severity of the architecture—in the style of the furniture, of the hangings, of the decorations, of the vestments of the guests—even in the form and fashion of the richly-embossed and enameled plate which flashed in the lamp-light, as, sparkling with costly wines and laden with rare viands, they were borne along by liveried menials—in almost everything, indeed, might be observed the influence of that revival of correct taste in the arts, at that epoch remarkable in France.

Hour chased hour lightly away, and midnight had passed. There was music and dancing; and peals of merry laughter, and shouts of rout and revel rang along the splendid saloons. There was the rustle of silken vestments, and the waving of tresses yet more silken; the flash of bright jewels, and the sparkle of eyes yet brighter; the nodding of plumes, and the glitter and jingle of armor. The brave and the lovely whirled by in the voluptuous waltz; and there was the murmuring of soft lips and of deep tones in the secluded promenade.

Among those who had retired from the close atmosphere of the thronged saloons, and were pacing the grand colonnaded gallery, in order to inhale the perfumed breath of those elegant grounds, since so celebrated in history as the "*Gardens of the Tuileries*," were two cavaliers, who were distinguished, as much by the nobility of their bearing as by the richness of their dress, from the general throng. One of these was a young man of apparently some five-and-twenty years. His stature was not remarkable for height; but his shoulders were broad, and his breast was brawny, and his whole form, though strongly developed, was symmetrical in its proportions, and gave evidence both of activity and power. The style of the face was aquiline. The brow was full and broad, yet not lofty. The eye was large and laughing, and an expression peculiarly winning rested in its dark blue depths. The hair was chestnut, and gathered in close dense masses around the head; while the beard, according to the fashion of the times, extended in thick curls beneath and around the chin. The complexion was sunburnt, except where the helmet had protected the forehead from exposure in the field; the cheek-bones were high, the cheeks thin, the neck broad and muscular.

But the most striking—indeed, the characteristic features of this remarkable face were the mouth and the nose. The latter was a singular union of the Grecian form with the Roman, for it was very straight, very prominent, and very angular. Upon the thin and expressive lips seemed lingering a perpetual smile—a smile of mingled humor and sentiment, though the former predominated. Gayety, indeed, seemed the ruling expression of the countenance, though, at times, subdued by a shade of thought; and in the graceful and elegant, though rapid movements, and the soft and clear-toned voice, were manifested the accomplished and fascinating courtesy of the knight and the troubadour of the age of romance. Every attitude was graceful, yet unstudied; every gesture was easy, yet dignified; every glance mild, yet commanding; every tone courteous, yet noble. Individually, there was scarce a feature of that face or figure, however striking it might seem, which could be termed handsome, if, perhaps, we except the mouth; yet altogether, they made up the person of the most fascinating, as well as the most amiable and accomplished gentleman in Europe. No one could have looked upon that young cavalier in any garb—in any station—and turned away his eyes with indifference; nor can we even now, after the lapse of more than three centuries, gaze upon that remarkable countenance, as handed down to us by the pencil of Titian, and doubt that these were the features of a remarkable man.

The dress of this young cavalier was in strict accordance with his person and his manners. It was rich and imposing, though it seemed to owe those attributes rather to the taste with which it was adapted to the figure and was worn, than to the splendor or costliness of the material of which it was composed. A low vest of white satin, exposing the throat, and partially open upon the breast, served well to exhibit their fine muscular developments; while the velvet pourpoint of deep purple, falling in heavy folds upon the shoulders around the figure, gave to it an air at once dignified and graceful.

The companion upon whose arm this young man leaned, as, in earnest conversation, the pair paced the illuminated gallery, was, as his garb betokened, an officer of high military station. He was, apparently, the elder of the two by some years. His figure was large and commanding. On his lofty brow and noble yet care-worn

* The student of History will not look for strict accuracy in Fiction.

features, were enstamped pride and power, in lineaments too legible to be misinterpreted; and yet, upon his lip rested the same engaging smile, and in his voice and bearing were to be remarked the same high-bred courtesy, that distinguished his companion.

And whom think you, reader, *were* these two personages we have described at such expenditure of good writing-paper, not to mention our own trouble and time? The first was none other than Francis of Orleans, Count of Angouleme—"the merry monarch" of France, as was Charles Stuart, a hundred years after, the "merry monarch" of England, and the first of his name on his ancestral throne. The other was Bonnivet, admiral of the kingdom; brave, chivalric, noble, endued with all knightly courtesies and accomplishments, and the beloved and bosom confidant of his royal lord. Like most of the eminent men of that era—like Francis himself—Bonnivet's mind was strongly tinctured with a spirit of romance; and he was as ambitious of the reputation of an accomplished and courteous gentleman in time of peace, as of that of a brave and gallant knight in time of war. This will seem the less remarkable when we consider that this was the era of Bayard, the knight without fear and without reproach—*sans peur et sans reproche*, in the language of Brantome—and whose prowess in combat, whose punctilious honor and formal gallantry, according to an elegant historian, bear a nearer resemblance than anything recorded, to the character ascribed to the heroes of chivalry.

But return we to the Louvre.

"I tell thee," was the earnest exclamation of Francis—"I tell thee, Bonnivet, I hate this cold constable, Charles of Bourbon. You hate him, too. Greatly do I misdoubt, also, notwithstanding his protestations, that his purpose is to place himself at the head of my foes in Italy, so soon as he can do it without the immediate cost of his head. For me to leave the kingdom at present, is impossible. To thee, then, my faithful Bonnivet, shall I commit my interests in the Milanese."*

The features of the admiral lighted up with gratitude and joy. "Sire!" he exclaimed—

"Nay—nay, no thanks. I am but serving myself through the prowess of the first gentleman, as one of the bravest soldiers in my realm. Besides, admiral, no other of my generals has such powerful inducements to succeed as you have. No one but Bonnivet has won the love of fair Agnes of Milan, though many gentlemen of France have been equally fascinated—Francis among the rest. But no jealousy! My heart is in Paris, just at present. And this reminds me of the amour of which I spoke to you some days ago."

"Ah, yes! And how progress you, sire?"

"Progress?" Not at all. Never, in the whole course of my life, have I been more deeply interested, and never less successful. In faith I am losing all patience. The girl is a *soubrette* of about eighteen—of humble origin, no doubt, but as bewitchingly beautiful as—as your Agnes of Milan, Bonnivet."

"And you meet her but once a week, I think you told me?" said the admiral.

"Yes, every Sabbath, at the church of Saint Germain. She'll make a perfect Waldense of me, if this goes on much longer. I'm more than half priest for her sake now. I have sought her thus for two months."

"And the fair one lives—"

"In a secluded house near the Hotel Vendome, in the midst of a small park."

"Ah, yes! surrounded by a high wall of brick. I remember the spot well, and have thought it a grand place for an intrigue. And you have pursued her home to this seclusion, sire?"

"To be sure I have," replied the king, somewhat hastily. "But an old hag of a woman has always pursued her steps, also, like a special providence, to guard her from harm; and such strict watch and ward does this old crow keep over the eyes, ears, mouth, if not every other sense of my pretty dove, that of precious little benefit to myself or to any one else, is my pertinacity. Another thing more strange and quite as annoying is the circumstance, that often of a dark night, a man, closely enveloped in a mantle, will glide stealthily along beneath the wall, and, at length, all at once, most mysteriously, by some secret entrance, disappear into the house."

"Do the same, sire!" said Bonnivet, with a smile.

"Oh, the devil! The walls are tall as a donjon-keep, and the doors would stand a fortnight's battering with a ram!"

"And has the girl ever given any sign of having observed you, or that she is at all aware who her lover is, sire?" asked Bonnivet.

"As to that," replied Francis, "I think, if I know anything of the language of a woman's eye, that I may interpret sundry glances which the fair creature has thought fit to bestow upon me, to intimate no insurmountable repugnance to my person. She knows, of course, nothing of my station, as I am always disguised in the costume of a scholar."

"Ah, I perceive," said the admiral, laughing. "Your majesty is in a fair way to carry on a very platonic amour with the wife or lady-love of some *curé*, for a twelvemonth, mayhap. But here comes Triboulet. He, I suppose, knows all about the affair, and is certainly the most accomplished *intrigant* at court. If he fails, none of us can hope to assist you, sire."

"Triboulet knows nothing of *this* affair," replied the king. "How it has happened that I have not yet thought proper to avail myself

of his remarkable genius in such matters, I hardly know. On the whole, however, I am inclined to believe, that keeping the amour concealed, even from Triboulet, is good policy at present. What say you, Triboulet?" continued the king, in a louder tone, "is not silence indispensable to success in love?"

"Question a fool according to his folly," replied the individual who now joined the pair. "Francis is a very wise young king, no doubt. Let it not be said that his wisdom is the wisdom of a fool."

The person from whom came this bold reply, was one of those unfortunate beings called dwarfs, who, at that era, in the absence of more rational taste or means of amusement, were selected for their hideousness of form and feature, as well as for the brilliancy of wit often concealed under such an uncouth exterior, like a gem in an earthen casket, to afford amusement in hours of relaxation to even the proudest dignitaries of the most polished courts.

The miserable being who now joined the group, could lay claim to even more than an ordinary degree of the hideousness of his hideous class; and, in the same ratio, he exhibited more brilliancy of wit and more pungency of sarcasm. His deep, dark, bead-like eye seemed the very concentration of malice and venom, as it darted its keen flashes through the tangled eyebrows. The figure was short and squat. One would suppose that it had been crushed lengthwise at some time by some enormous mass upon the head. His shoulders were broad, muscular and powerful. From his breast protruded a huge bump, and from his back a larger one. His feet were prodigious, and his hands were, if possible, more prodigious than his feet. His legs each formed a parabola from the thigh to the heel; and, united, constituted a fair representation of an ellipse. The head and the face of this unfortunate being presented a strange contrast to the rest of his person. Although, as has been said, his eye was small and sunken, it evinced an unusual degree of intelligence; and it flickered and flashed beneath the broad and massive brow, like a human lamp. The prevailing expression upon his features was gloom, lighted up, from time to time, by lurid gleams which shot across it, even as the electric glare shoots athwart the deep darkness of a threatening cloud. His costume was that of court jesters at the time. Its hue was blue, slashed with crimson. It was profusely sprinkled with small silver bells, which tinkled not unpleasantly as he moved along. The fool's cap on his head, and the bauble—a mock sceptre—in his hand, completes the description.

"And what think you of the fête, Triboulet?" asked the king; "and who, according to your most exquisite taste, is the star of the night?"

"The fête is certainly worthy of your new palace, cousin Francis, and the palace is certainly worthy the extravagance of the hair-brained young man who reared it. As for the star of the night, I think it can be none other than the royal consort, Claude of France—yonder. She shines at a distance, and is the only lady who seems fixed. All the rest are planets."

The king colored slightly at this allusion to one more worthy of admiration, on some accounts, than any other in those lighted saloons; who, yet in all her loveliness and splendor, sat most neglected, because, forsooth, upon her rested the dignity of the Queen of France.

"Ha! my beautiful friend, the Countess de Vendome!" exclaimed the king, as he surveyed a group of ladies who were passing. Among them was one superb creature, whose voluptuous person and seducing manners were worthy the sultana of a harem.

"Her husband, sire!" said Bonnivet, in a low tone. "A little lower, or the count will hear you. He is just at your side."

The count was short, fat, and awkward—according to Brantome, one of the four *greatest* gentlemen in France.

"And, if he *does* hear, what matters it?" replied the king, laughing. "He will get the worst of it."

"Yes, but it will come to the ears of Diana," said the admiral.

"And again, what matters *that*?" said the king, with a slight frown, turning abruptly away to address the new object of his fickle fancy.

"What does it all mean?" said Bonnivet to the jester. "He has not spoken with the fair Diana of Poitiers in public this seven-night. He can hardly meditate yielding her up to her husband again? What think *you*, Triboulet, my prince of *intriguants*?"

"Think? why, that the king is just beginning to *love* his victim. When a man and a woman take especial pains to avoid each other, on a night like this, be sure, there is more of love than of hate in it all."

"She has recompensed her father's pardon, so they can part fair quits, if they choose," said the admiral. "But, *apropos* of this lord of Saint Valliar, it was a strange idea of that strange old man to commit this daughter of his, so exquisite in her beauty, and his only child, to the nuptial couch of a hunchback seneschal, though he were grand-seneschal of Normandy. A blind man might have foreseen what has resulted."

"Louis de Brezè is not a very elegant cavalier," returned the jester, "any more than some other very passable people," surveying his own person as he spoke. "As for Saint Valliar, he is, *en vérité*, an old fool. I was beside him on the scaffold when his pardon came, nearer than I am now to you, admiral, at this moment. He was grave and pale, but not in the least agitated. When the pardon was placed in his hand, just as he was about bowing his head to the executioner, all he was heard to say was—"God keep the king!" They say he is now a mere imbecile, a perfect wreck."

CHAPTER II....THE COURTIER.

"Ye have angels' faces, but Heaven knows your hearts."

You know their private virtues
Far better than we can, to whom alone
Their public vices, and most foul oppression,
Have made them deadly.

BYRON.

"Alas! Dame Margaret Douglas would rather hear a Huguenot psalm of Clement Marot sung to the tune of "*Rexillez vous, belle endormie!*"—

THE ABBOT. VOL II. C. XV.

"Ah, cruel! And will you, indeed, forsake Paris?"

Such was the earnest inquiry of Francis, in a low tone, addressed to the beautiful Countess of Vendome, as the pair walked slowly past the spot on which stood the admiral and the jester; their arms closely locked and her hand clasped in his.

"Must you, indeed, go?" repeated the king.

"I have no choice, sire," was the reply, in a soft and trembling voice. "My husband goes to Soissons, and his wife must, of course accompany him, if he wishes it."

"And is it not intolerable," exclaimed the young king, with the high-flown, complimentary gallantry of the age and nation; "is it not intolerable, at a moment when all Paris, the proudest nobles and brightest wits, fix upon you eyes filled with admiration; at the most envied point of your envied career; when all the perpetrators of duets and of sonnets reserve for your charms their most polished verses, and their most skilful blows; when those beautiful eyes, scattering everywhere their soft flames, eclipse the brilliancy of those of all other ladies of my court, and steal away their lovers: is it not, indeed, too hard, that you, who shed upon our capital such splendor, that when this sun has departed, we shall doubt if it is yet day—that you should go, despite of king and noble, to beam an imperial star in a provincial firmament!"

"Ah, you mock me! Pray be silent, sire!" murmured the gratified woman, as she bowed her blushing face, and fixed her dark sparkling eyes upon the ground.

"No, Florence, no: I must not be silent. This sudden resolution is all your own caprice; and it quenches the most brilliant lustre in the height of the fête. If it be possible, I must—"

At that moment the lady raised her eyes, and then hurriedly disengaged herself from the king. Surprised, Francis also glanced around, and perceived the cause of the lady's fright in her husband, who was entering the gallery.

"My jealous husband!" she exclaimed, and with a smile and a nod she was lost among the throng.

"The devil take the man!" said the king, turning to the jester, after gazing a moment after the beautiful countess. "I have addressed not less than a quatrain of poetry to his wife. Did Clement show you those last verses of mine, Triboulet?"

"Oh, to be sure," said the jester: "he was very anxious to inflict them on me. He did not succeed, however. The fact is, cousin Francis, I make it a point never to mind your verses. A king's poetry is invariably intolerable. Let the *canaille* make rhymes, good or bad. People should stick to their callings: your's is to make love, sire, Marot's to make verses. It is low business for a monarch, this rhyme-writing."

"You're a fool, Triboulet," rejoined the king, laughing. "To rhyme to the beautiful, honors the lover as well as the beloved. Is it not so, my fair queen of hearts?" said the king to a young maid of honor of dazzling charms, who now drew nigh.

She was no other than the unfortunate Anne Boleyn, who then, in her first loveliness, was receiving the accomplishments of education at the most elegant court in Europe.

As the gallant monarch joined the fair English girl, and addressed to her some of those ready compliments ever upon his lips, the Countess de Vendome again appeared, and her quick eye at once caught the situation of her royal lover.

"Now my head on it," said Triboulet, who had observed the glance of the countess—"My head on it, a glove or a flower will be dropped by yonder fair lady, before the night is three minutes older."

The jester was right. While the words were yet on his lips, the countess swept slowly by the spot on which the king was standing eagerly conversing with his companion, and carelessly dropped her bouquet at his feet.

In an instant the courteous monarch was on his knee. The flowers were restored to their owner, and her arm and hand were again in the possession of one, from whom the lady seemed to have no inclination ever to withdraw them.

"I'm a prophet as well as a fool, it would seem," again murmured the jester with a smile of malicious satisfaction, as he witnessed the scene which was passing before his watchful eye. "Oh, woman, if thou art an angel, then angels are very artful beings, as well as very beautiful—that's all. Ha!" continued the buffoon, as he still gazed. "What now? Yes, I see that troublesome husband again! He was certainly regaled with a pleasant sight then—his wife more than half way in a monarch's arms!"

"Ah, my Triboulet, am I not a happy fellow?" cried the young king, again joining the jester! "Jupiter! what a woman! What eyes—lips—bosom! Oh, I am happy! And you, old fellow—how are you, to-night? Are you happy?"

"Considerably," was the slow and quiet answer. "I laugh a good deal at all I see—the coquetry—the envy—the vanity—the jealousy—oh, it is rare sport to stand aside unobserved and watch all this! I philosophise, and you act. You are happy as a king, I as an old

hunchback jester. Oh, we are two fine fellows, to be sure, each in his own way, and enjoy ourselves at a fête largely!"

"All goes gayly with me," replied the king, "except the jealousy of this fat fool, Vendome. *N'importe*, we'll find a way yet. Jove was a joke to Francis the First; and his Olympus a mole-hill to my Louvre!"

"It is my respectful belief, sire, that you are drunk," said the jester, with an air of imperturbable gravity, reprovingly shaking his head.

"Ah, very like—very like!" replied the monarch. "But stay—those eyes again! by Venus, those matchless eyes! there they go! Now for a curtain lecture. But, come, Triboulet—some wine—this love-making is thirsty business. Come, you shall be our bodyguard to the shrine of Bacchus—"

*Vivent les gais dimanches
Du peuples de Paris!
Quand les femmes sont blanches!*—

sang the merry prince, as he left the apartment—

"Quand les hommes sont agis!"

chimed in his hunchback comrade, completing a verse of a popular drinking-song of the time, from the popular pen of Clement Marot.

As the pair disappeared, the poet himself entered the saloon, and, approaching a group of the courtiers, was cordially saluted as a favorite by all.

He was a young man of about twenty. His figure was slight and elegant, and his manners were urbane. His eyes and his complexion were dark, and his night-black hair, parted upon his broad, fine brow, fell in masses upon his shoulders. He had come to the French court as a page to Margaret, sister of Francis, whose court he subsequently joined when she was Queen of Navarre; and he soon became the favorite of the merry monarch, whose disposition was so much like his own—as well as of the whole court.

Marot seems to have been addicted to some of the license of the troubadour, as well as to have possessed his genius. His amour with the beautiful Diana of Poitiers is mentioned by French chronicles as well known; and a warmer attachment than that of mere friendship is more than suspected to have existed between the poet and the young Queen of Navarre. Marot was as gallant on the field, as even in the bower of his lady's love. He accompanied Francis over the Alps, and was wounded and made captive at the unfortunate battle of Pavia. The romantic monarch had vowed to capture that city or perish; and it was not until his favorite Bonnavet, with 10,000 of the flower of his army were slain beneath its walls, that he deemed himself released from the sanction he had assumed! On Marot's return to Paris, he was imprisoned on suspicion of calvinism; and during his confinement, issued an edition of the celebrated "*Romance of the Rose*." Twenty years afterward, John Calvin made the poet a member of the church of Geneva; and, in conjunction with Beza, he completed a translation of the Psalms in his own epigrammatic style—the *style Marotique*—which were long used by the Huguenots of France in their sabbath worship. These Geneva Psalms of Marot's were much noted. But the gay-hearted troubadour soon recanted the doctrines of a faith so little congenial to his natural taste; and at length, twenty years after the date of our story, an exile and a catholic, he died at Turin.

Such was the eventful career of the young and brilliant poet, who was now a star of no ordinary magnitude at the court of Francis the First.

"Ah, Clement! you poets are sad fellows!" exclaimed a tall, soldierly-looking young man, in the splendid uniform of field marshal, as he cordially saluted the poet. "This is your first *entrée* at the fête to-night; an amour of no ordinary interest could have caused your absence. Ah, you are a true troubadour," continued the young officer, reprovingly shaking his head. "We must have you sent to a monastery, or married—which shall it be?"

The gay poet very earnestly deprecated either fate, evidently considering one as little to be desired as the other—in fact, regarding them equally to be dreaded. He was evidently by no means anxious to be questioned upon his whereabouts for the night; and, to direct attention into another channel, inquired with much seeming interest the incidents of the fête.

"Oh, the fête has gone off grandly," was the reply. "A perfect *orgie*, in fact! Never was it surpassed, to the best of the remembrance of us all. Ah, Clement, you have lost so much! Splendid entertainment—lovely women—enchanting music! Our merry monarch has been perfectly in his element—up to his eyes in love and beauty; we have never known him more amused."

"Not very pleasant news that, to all, I fancy," replied Marot with a significant smile. "We all know how Francis of Valois is best amused; and we know, too, his irresistible powers of amusing. Thank heaven, I am not a husband, unless my better moiety could possess the years and attractions of the Witch of Endor! But here comes the good admiral! Now for some news! He never wears so much mystery on his face for nothing."

"Yes, yes, now for some news; Clement is right!" cried the courtiers, gathering eagerly around the favorite Bonnavet as soon as he came up.

"Clement is right!" repeated the admiral. "My friends, something has happened—something new—something to puzzle the wittiest and the wisest! An admirable thing—a laughable thing—a wonderful thing—a beautiful thing—a delicate thing—*en verite*, a thing clearly incredible, inevitable, and impossible!"

"What! what! what?" was the eager exclamation of all, as they gathered yet more closely around the speaker. "Quick, good Bonnavet—out with it—we give it up!"

"Hush!" said the admiral, with a mysterious air of mock solemnity, placing his finger on his lip. "Come hither, Master Clement Marot—poet, page, priest, and so forth."

"And what would my lord admiral with me?" modestly asked the poet, making his way through the throng to the spot where stood his good-humored summoner.

"Clement, my dear fellow, you are a great blockhead!" was the sober rejoinder.

"Indeed, my lord admiral, you flatter my poor pretensions," quietly replied Marot with a smile. "I had never been able to persuade myself that I was a *great* anything."

"In that poem of yours about the siege of Peshiere—a poor affair, you know—occur these lines about our excellent Triboulet:

As wise at sixty, the wonderful fool,
As at his natal hour.

You are a great blockhead, Clement."

"May Cupid disown me if I take!" exclaimed the puzzled poet.

"Very like, very like," replied Bonnavet. "Come hither, L'Esparre, Tremouille, Lautree—all; I have something to tell."

The courtiers formed a close circle around the admiral, and listened with eager curiosity, their eyes glancing alternately from him to the poet.

"Now, my friends, pluck up your wits and guess," continued the admiral. "A wonderful thing has happened to Triboulet. What?"

"Has he got back his brains?" asked L'Esparre.

"Has he been beheaded for hideousness?" asked La Tremouille.

"Has he been knighted for gallantry?" asked Latree.

"Has he been butchered by mistake for a hog, and served up baked for dinner?" asked Marot.

"Neither, my friends, neither," rejoined Bonnavet. "Something more entertaining. He has—guess what he *has*?"

"An ape more hideous than himself?"

"No!"

"His pockets full of cash?"

"No!"

"Bourbon's office—high constable?"

"King's turnspit? the dog!"

"A soul, perhaps?"

"An assignation with the Virgin, no doubt?"

"No, no, no! Ten to one on my riddle!" exclaimed the admiral. "You are all wrong. Triboulet, the good, the amiable, the beautiful—he *has*—try again—something marvellous!"

"His hunchback?"

"His hunchbreast?"

"Eyes?"

"Nose?"

"Mouth?"

"Hands or feet?"

"A hundred to one, none of you can guess," rejoined the admiral. "Give it up. He has a—*mistress*!"

The shout of laughter which burst from the lips of all present at this strange avowal was loud and hearty, and seemingly inextinguishable. Peal succeeded peal. The laughter ceased and was renewed—it died away, and again broke forth more violently than before.

"Ah, capital!" cried Marot, struggling with his convulsions.

"Excellent!" exclaimed L'Esparre.

"On my word, gentlemen," said the admiral gravely—"I am serious." Triboulet, the jester, has a mistress. Moreover, she is young and lovely, and I can point you out the house in which he keeps her. Every dark night, at a late hour, he steals through the retired and deserted streets to the place, enveloped in a huge old gray mantle—creeping along as sombre, and soft, and savage, as one of your troubadours, Clement, or yourself, to a lady-love. I have long kept an eye on Triboulet's movements, and, roving about one dark night near the hotel Vendome, I got the first clew to the thing. It is a profound secret—remember!

"What a theme for a *rondeau*?" said Marot laughing. "Night metamorphoses the hunchback into a cupid. The fair would make a capital mermaid: *mulier formosa superne, sed infra*—Triboulet! If English Suffolk should again march his Flemings into Picardy, there would be no chance for your gallantry a second time, Tremouille: * Triboulet and his mistress would alone be sufficient to scare the scoundrel over the seas again."

"What say you, gentlemen, to a pleasant adventure on the strength of my discovery?" asked the admiral. "Every one of us, you know, has some grudge against this hunchback buffoon. Hitherto he has been safe in his folly and hideousness—covered all over with them, indeed, as with armor, he has been penetrable at no one-joint by any weapon in our possession. This discovery of mine renders the malicious dog invulnerable no longer. The countless insults of each of us can now be avenged. At midnight, let us all meet at the head of the *Cul de-sac*, near the hotel Vendome. Until then not a syllable."

"Good!" cried Marot. "I comprehend."

"Is it agreed?" asked the admiral.

"Agreed!" exclaimed all.

"Hush!" said Bonnavet. "There comes the king with Triboulet—Cupid—drunk as Bacchus both!"

CHAPTER III...THE FATHER OF LETTERS.

'Tis true I am a king;
Honor and glory, too, have been my aim;
But, though I dare face death and all the dangers
Which furious war weaves in its bloody front,
Yet could I choose to fix my name by peace,
By justice, and by mercy; and to raise
My trophies on the blessings of mankind.

Rowe.

"SAVANS at court!" exclaimed Triboulet, upon whose arm was leaning his royal master, more than half intoxicated, as the admiral had said, as they entered the saloon. "What a monstrous notion is that, cousin Francis!"

"I wish to heaven you could make my fair sister Margaret think so!" replied the king. "She plagues my life out of me with her entreaties that I should patronize learned men, and make myself, as she calls it, 'The Father of Letters!' A nice father of letters I'd make! Yes, in sooth, she is more than half in earnest in her solicitations, I do believe, absurd as you think them; and I am more than half persuaded to yield, that I may be rid of them, if nothing else."

"Be that as it may, cousin Francis," returned the jester, "there is one thing, which, between ourselves, just at this present, you will admit; it is, that I am less drunk to-night than you are. Well, sire, that granted, it follows that I possess one great advantage in judging of these matters which you do not—nay, now I think of it, I believe I may claim *two* advantages—I am not so typsy as you, and I am not a king. Well, with these capacities for a notable judgment, my decision is, that, sooner than these *savans* of your sister Margaret's, your court had better receive a visitation from war, pestilence and famine!"

"Methinks your advice is a trifle bold, Triboulet. Besides, as I said, Margaret is evidently serious in her wish. 'Francis,' said she to me this very night, in a low tone in the midst of the festivities, 'Francis, fair women will not always suffice you for happiness, when the flush of youth has passed away and you are wearied.'"

"Unheard of antidote!" interrupted the jester. "Savans a remedy for ennui! But Margaret of Angouleme has such a sweet, amiable disposition, that it is her very nature to uphold those who are too feeble to uphold themselves. Besides, the beautiful duchess evidently has a taste and genius for these things to which you, cousin Francis, can lay no pretension—'Father of letters' though you are to be! Witness her brilliant poems '*Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses*,' her '*Mirror of a Sinning Soul*,' the pious Huguenot, not to mention her '*Heptameron*, or *Seven days' Tales*,' not quite so pious, unless we concede the same quality to those of your favorite Italian, Boccaccio, which those do much resemble."

"Well, well," impatiently answered the young monarch; "I know all this. Margaret of Valois is brilliant as she is beautiful; and so unlike her unworthy brother, that he has given her up as an enigma long ago, much as he loves and values her. How the same Huguenot pen could have indicted the Bible mysteries and that gay thing, the '*Heptameron*,' is beyond my comprehension; and how to get out of her this fancy about divines, *savans*, and the like, is equally so."

"Better send Clement to her," suggested the buffoon, with a smile of peculiar meaning. "The handsome troubadour is said to possess no ordinary influence over the beautiful widow, notwithstanding the presence of the young monarch of Navarre."

Francis slightly colored, and bit his lip. He knew that the hot blood of Valois rolled in his sister's veins as well as in his own, and that there had been indications in her behavior, notwithstanding her character for piety, and her betrothal to the gallant Henry d'Albert, that she was not insensible to the fascinations of her young and admired page.

"Well, Triboulet, well," rejoined the king, after a slight pause, "if we are to have no men of learning, let us, at least, have half-a-dozen poets, since they seem in such fair acceptance. I confess, my own taste leans rather to them, of the two."

"Sire—sire—in mercy! indeed, my good cousin," exclaimed the jester, in a ludicrous affectation of alarm, "inflict not this fearful shower upon us of rhyme-writers, everlastingly pouring forth their licensed nonsense! Beelzebub dreads not holy-water as I should dread them!"

"But, five or six, Triboulet, *only* five or six"—

"An army—a mob—a menagerie! Have we not enough of element there," continued the jester, elevating his voice so as to be heard by Marot, "have we not enough of his trash, in all conscience, without poisoning ourselves with more of these locusts, ycleped poets?"

As the group of courtiers, as well as the poet, heard this sally of the jester's; there was a smile on their lips, and Marot slightly colored.

"No, no," continued the buffoon. "The women, sire, the women—ah, there is the only heaven on earth for one of your temperament; and what need you more? I prythee, cousin Francis, trouble us no more with your typsy visions of *savans*, much less a mob of poets to craze us all with their romantic rhyming nonsense."

"Peace, fool!" exclaimed the king, petulantly. "I tell you on the word of a gentleman of France, that I care more for one soft glance of a certain dark eye, than for all the doctors there are in Germany, or all the troubadours there are in Provence. But, I say,

Triboulet, that crowd of coxcombs, yonder, is abusing you. See them glance at you and laugh; they look rather savage, too."

The jester listened quietly and attentively for a moment, and then turned back to the king.

"Was I not correct, old fellow?"

"No, sire," calmly replied the buffoon; "they are abusing another fool—a greater one."

"Impossible! Whom, pray?"

"The king!"

"Ha! What say they?"

"They say that you are partial, and bestow all your favors on Navarre and not on France."

"Excellent!" exclaimed the king, laughing. "Let me see: Montchenu, Bourbon, Latree; one I have made marshal, the second high constable, and the other, Montchenu, master of my hotel. In the name of reason, what would they have more?"

"Justice, sire, justice!" replied the jester, loud enough to be heard by all of whom he was speaking. "There is one other service which you can do for them which they each and all abundantly merit."

"Ha! what is that?"

"Hang them, sire, hang them!"

The king burst into a loud laugh, and the courtiers exchanged glances of rage and mortification.

"But not to waste more words on these trivial matters," continued the jester, "let us return to love and woman. You should at times, sire, for the sake of novelty, put to the test your fascinations with woman, as a *man*. Oh! it must be delightful to hear the lip murmur 'No,' while the eye far more eloquently says 'Yes!' To be loved by a heart that is dazzled, is not to be loved at all—it is the admiration of an eye that is blindfold."

"Ha! think *you* thus, Triboulet?" was the quick reply. "Do you know, then, that there is one woman in the world whom I truly hope, and verily believe loves me for myself—loves *Francis*, not the king?"

"A *bourgeoise*, of course?" remarked the jester.

"Why not?"

"Beware, cousin Francis, beware!" said the jester gravely. "A *bourgeoise*! Perilous business this! The *bourgeoises* are perfect Romans in these matters. If one touches their chattels, the mark sticks to their hands ineffaceably. No—no, Francis, let us be content, fools and kings that we are, with the wives, sisters, and daughters of our right honorable gentlemen of France."

At this moment a tumult was heard at one of the entrances, and a voice was heard above the confusion, exclaiming.

"I must see the king! I must speak with the king!"

"Ah, this will be pleasant!" cried the jester, as the crowd separated, and a woman in deep mourning came forward. "Now for a scene! It is Saint Valliar!"

CHAPTER IV.—THE CURSE.

Ruin seize thee, ruthless king!
Confusion on thy banners wait,
Though fann'd by conquest's crimson wing,
They mock the air with idle state.

THE BARD.

"Awake! awake!"

Great though thou art, awake thee from the dream
That earth was made for kings—mankind for slaughter—
Women for lust—the people for the palace!
Dark warnings have gone forth."

"FRANCIS OF VALOIS, hear me!" said the old man in a deep voice, as he stood before the monarch, and fixed on his countenance a stern and steady eye.

The courtiers receded in astonishment, and the pair stood alone face to face, confronting each other in the midst.

As the first tones of Saint Valliar's voice had fallen on the ear of Francis, he started and changed color, and was about refusing an audience. He seemed, however, as rapidly to have altered his determination as it was formed. Folding his arms firmly upon his breast, he stood in the attitude of one who yields a respectful hearing to an unpleasant truth, which it is impossible for him to avoid. His cheek and brow were deadly pale, though his dark eye was bright and his lip was firm.

"Francis of Valois, hear me! It is now nearly three months since, by your sentence, I stood upon the scaffold. At a moment when I was awaiting only the stroke of the headsman, was your royal pardon placed in my hands. I was as one called back from another world, I stood as in a dream, and I bade God bless you! But ah, I knew not—I knew not what I said! I knew not, then, the deep, the damning dishonor which to me that royal parchment conveyed! I knew not, alas! that, instead of a blessing, that clemency called only for the deepest curse! Yes, sire, at the very moment when I, a gray-haired man was retracing my way with feeble steps from the scaffold, and in my soul was imploring the God of Victory that all the remaining days of your career might be days only of glory, you, Francis of Valois, regardless of the pure blood of Poitiers, noble for centuries, regardless of every tie of duty, virtue, justice, honor; without fear, without compassion, without shame, ay, without even that long-restrained but irrepressible passion, which may sometimes almost palliate crime; you, sire, in this your magnificent Louvre, the splendid sepulchre of woman's purity, were triumphing over the honor of my innocent daughter—the chaste as lovely Diana of Poitiers, the Countess of Brezé! To me, her aged father, by her so dearly loved, was conveyed the sentence to a violent death; and, at that same hour, was the daughter borne by the power of

ravishers to this infamous pile; and then, did he, the violator—this Francis of Valois—this Duke of Milan and Lord of Genoa—this monarch of France—this flower of chivalry, a knight of the *Accolade* of Bayard; then, did this man, with the axe suspended, day after day—for I know not how long—over his victim's head, descend so low as to barter for a daughter's honor with a father's life! One morning at sunrise there stood in the *grève* a scaffold, which, ere that sun had set was to be the destined bed of dishonor to the daughter, or the block of execution to the father! Just God! where then slept thy bolts of retribution, when that same scaffold presented to thine all-seeing eye the impious mockery of a royal form, robed in the hallowed garb of clemency, dripping with the pollution of licentious violence!

"Son of Orleans, in doing this thing, you have not done well! Had the blood of an aged soldier crimsoned the scaffold, the deed might have seemed just. The old man, perchance, had merited his fate—loyal though he might be, and noble, though for centuries had been his ancestry. But, when, instead of this old man, you seized his only child, and, in violation of every principle of royalty and honor, trampled the chastity of a weeping and terrified girl in triumph under your feet—sire, you did then an impious, infamous thing, for which, if there be not here, there must be strict account hereafter.

"By this deed, you have transcended even the broad prerogative of a monarch of France. The father was yours—the daughter was not. To the father you have given a *pardon* for an imputed crime—the thing is called a *pardon*! a blessing; and he is an ungrateful man, I suppose, because he can only deem it the darkest of curses: and, from the daughter you ravished, as the price, that, which to father and to daughter, was infinitely beyond *all* price! Oh, sire, why came you not—why came you not then to my dungeon, and, extending my daughter's honor in one hand, proffered me my life with the other? That, though despotic, would have borne some faint resemblance to justice. And then would I have implored you—'give to me the mercy of death! Mercy for my spotless child! Mercy for my ancient and unstained name! Death for me! The scaffold, not the disgrace! Take the life, but, oh stamp not infamy on the brow—misery on the heart!' I would have said that, sire; and, on the night of that day, my pure Diana would have bowed her sweet face above my mutilated form, and, in peace and in honor, would have offered up her supplications for the soul of her sacrificed father.

"Son of Orleans, I come not here to demand back my unhappy child, she is nothing now to me. Never more can she be daughter of mine. She is lost! She is as dead to me as if the marble of her ancestral tomb had closed over her. When once honor is gone, nothing worthy of estimate remains. She may love—she may hate you—she may be indifferent to you. It matters not. When courage in man, or chastity in woman, is gone, what else can there be in either which we may deem vile enough for denunciation? Every subsequent crime seems, in the comparison, only a virtue, and is lost in the deep darkness of the primal dereliction. Keep her, then, or discard her—it is all one to me.

"For myself, I have thought proper to come hither to recall to you the memory of my wrongs, in this hour of your revel and festivity. It is my first coming—it is not my last. No, Francis of Valois! until that final hour when some father, brother, husband—ah, it will be so! shall have avenged, with one blow, the wrongs, the insults, the agonies of hundreds—until the red bolt of Heaven's retribution shall have been sped—pale and tottering shall I bring these grizzled hairs to your festive board, and shall say to you: 'Son of Orleans, you have done ill! you have done ill!' Ay, and you will give ear to me, even as you now do; and you will have no power to turn away your pallid front until my mission shall have been accomplished. Nay, sire, move not! Would you silence my vengeance by violence? Would you again yield me to the headsman? Would you smother these accursing lips in the midnight of your dungeons? Francis of Valois, you *dare* not! you dare not disembody this agonized spirit! you would dread, that, in the still night-watches, my gory spectre should stand beside your couch and shriek into your tortured ear those maledictions which fall now so terribly from living lips! Francis of Valois, I am done. Upon you rests an old man's curse!"

On this scene gazed the assembled courtiers in terror and dismay. They seemed stricken speechless and motionless at the audacity of the injured old man. The observations, "He is mad!" "Why is he not seized?" ran, indeed, in hurried and stifled whispers around the circle when he had concluded; but no hand was extended to arrest him. His grief and his wrongs seemed to consecrate him. The king stood silent and still—motionless, almost breathless, and pallid as marble, until the last syllable of the old noble's malediction had fallen from his lips. He then raised his head and advancing a step with his eye upon his accuser, seemed about to rejoin.

"Nay, cousin Francis, stay!" exclaimed the Buffoon Triboulet, waving his sceptre of wood, "it is *my* prerogative to rule in matters like this. Do you not perceive that this good old fellow is a fool, like myself? You cannot think of joining issue with a fool! Let a fool prate to a fool? Permit me—even Triboulet, the court jester, to harrangue, in reply to this everlasting speech which has been forced on us—a most lugubrious as well as a most ludicrous affair, all will admit."

Then advancing with an air of mock solemnity to Saint Valliar, he continued:

"My lord, we must be somewhat brief with you. It was deemed

proper by you to enter into a conspiracy against our crown. You were detected, convicted, and sentenced to die. We, in our royal clemency, thought fit to pardon this crime; whereupon your fair daughter, the most adorable Diana of Poitiers, thought proper to feel grateful to us, and to prefer the love of our unworthy self to that of her legitimate lord, the right honorable and most valiant Count of Breze, who chances to be gifted with a hump before, like our illustrious self. For all which pardons from us to you and yours, it becometh you, as a leal subject, to do us your most humble devoir, instead of inflicting your late wrathful tirade!"

Saint Valliar looked at the king during this unworthy assault, as if claiming, as a right, his interference. None, however, was offered.

"One insult more!" exclaimed the old noble, when the jester ceased his taunts. "Ah, Francis, is *this* well done? you have listened to me in silence, as you ought; you, with all your vices, you are yet a king; but is it well upon an expiring lion to let loose a yelping hound? Have not I the right to be treated by you as majesty by majesty? You are a monarch—I am an aged man, and *was* a father. We have each that crown upon the brow to which none should raise an insolent glance: you the regalia of France—I these withered hairs. King! when treason dares insult your crown, it is royalty that avenges! It is God who will avenge the sacrilege of this night to mine!"

Then turning to the jester, who quailed beneath his stern, cold glance, he continued:

"And you, who with venomous tongue have this night mocked the wretchedness of a miserable old man—that old man's curse be on you!"

CHAPTER V.....THE BOHEMIAN.

What a pestilent knave is this same?—SHAKESPEARE.

Then have at you with my wit; I will dry-beat you with an iron wit, and put up my iron dagger.—IB.

Has this fellow no feeling of his business?—HAMLET, Act V.

This fellow, methinks, hath no drowning mark upon him: his complexion is perfect gallows.—TEMPEST.

In a secluded corner of the *Cul-de-Sac*, or Place Vendome, stood a low dwelling of humble aspect. It was surrounded by a high wall of brick, above which could be seen the tops of numerous trees, by which it was environed. So tall, indeed, was the wall, and so dense was the foliage of the trees, that the mansion itself would hardly have been observed by the passenger below, had it not been for a broad gallery, or terrace, which ran along the entire length of the edifice, spreading out from the windows of the second story to the summit of the wall. Upon this rested the external edge of the terrace, protected by a low and heavy ballustrade of stone-work; and over the whole was suspended the ponderous branches of the ancient trees. With this gallery communicated the second floor of the dwelling, by means of a door, as well as the garden below, by means of a broad flight of stairs, although this latter was, of course, to be viewed only from within. A person inside the wall would also have observed numerous seats of turf and of stone beneath the large trees, as well as secluded alcoves, and beds of rare flowers, and trellises buried in vines.

On the opposite side of the place, or lane, ran a high wall, similar to that described, above which rose the stately roofs of the Hotel Vendome embowered in trees. Beyond could be caught, against the western sky, the sharp profile of roofs innumerable: and, conspicuous among the confused mass stood out the ponderous towers of St. Severin, whose heavy bell was even then pealing forth the curfew hour.

The shadows of night were gathering rapidly over the city of Paris; but enough of departing daylight yet remained, to enable a close observer to perceive the figure of a man cautiously stealing up the lane beneath the wall, closely enveloped in a mantle. From time to time, as he glided lightly but rapidly along, he paused to look back, and to listen if he were pursued. At length he reached a low door in the wall; and, withdrawing a key from his bosom, he was about applying it to the lock, when a step arrested his movements. He turned; the tall and muscular figure of a man, covered with an immense gray cape, or cloak, who had stood concealed, as if in waiting, beneath the shadow of the opposite wall, strode directly across the passage.

"Good even to ye, sir!" was his salutation, in a deep and sonorous tone.

The first comer turned, and seemed busily examining the state of his pockets.

"I have nothing for you," he said, after a moment's investigation.

"I ask nothing, sir," was the quick reply. "Pshaw! sir, did you mistake me for a mendicant?"

"Well—had I no cause? Leave me!" rejoined the first.

"You judge me ill, sir. I am no beggar. I am a man of the sword," said he of the cape, somewhat haughtily. "But, to business," continued he, approaching his companion, and lowering his tone. "For some months past, sir, I have observed you wandering, nearly every dark night, up this lane, with the stealthy air of a man engaged in an intrigue of love, or of hatred. Am I right? Am I wrong?"

The man in the mantle started at these abrupt interrogatories, so unceremoniously administered. But, resuming his self-possession at once, he answered, "Well, suppose you are *right*, what is it to you?"

"It is more to yourself than to me," was the reply. "I meddle with your affairs more for your advantage than for my own. If you knew me better, sir, you would treat me more civilly. Is it impossible that your lady-love has a lover? Are you never jealous?"

"Well, well," interrupted the first, impatiently, "what does all this mean? What would you propose? Be brief!"

"Simply this," was the reply, in a low, soft tone: "For a consideration, this rival shall cross your path no more."

"Ah, I understand!"

"You perceive, sir, that I am an honest fellow, after all?"

"Very!"

"And, that if I dog your steps, it is for the best of purposes?"

"A valuable man, certainly!"

"The guardian of the honor of all the ladies of Paris—nothing more," was the modest rejoinder.

"And what is your mode of operation—how do you dispatch a ruffling gallant?" asked the first.

"Oh, that depends more on the gallant himself than on me, and the skill with which he wields his weapon."

"Well, to dispatch a great Lord?"

"Ah, the deuce!" said the man; "one runs the risk of finding a sword through his own lungs, before he knows it, in attacking such gentry! They are always armed. Oae perils his life. A great Lord is expensive."

"A great Lord is expensive! Is it possible that the *Bourgeois* ever engage your services?"

"Not often," replied the man, smiling. "They do these little matters for themselves—they can't afford to hire. But, among people well-born, there is generally a certain pride in such affairs—very foolish, too, it seems to me. To be sure, some low fellows, who give themselves the airs of gentlemen, come to me, at times, for service; but, be sure of it, sir, I make them pay well—half in advance, and half when the deed is done."

"But, are you not aware—of course you must be—that you risk the gibbet—the penalty for—"

"Oh, no!" interrupted the man smiling—"not quite so bad! Our profession pays heavy tribute to the Police of Paris—so many crowns a head."

"An excellent arrangement, truly, and well worthy of your honorable craft. But how get you your prey into your clutches?"

"Why, very easily; thus: I dispatch him at his own house in the city, or across the Seine at *mine*, as my patron may desire. Again, the business is sometimes accomplished in the streets of Paris. For this kind of work, I wear a keen cut-and-thrust-sword, and I dodge the man about until—"

"Well, at your own house, how?" interrupted the man in the mantle.

"I have a sister, sir—a beautiful girl—her name is Madeleine. She dances like a sylph and talks like a poet, and, *in*, is so bewitching, that it is no difficult matter for her to *seduce* a man who has seen her once desire to see her again; and then *she* *seduces* the man about the Seine—"

"Ah, I comprehend—a perfect Calypso, no doubt."

"All this is accomplished, you see, without tumult or disturbance, in the most discreet and decent manner possible. Give me your custom, my good sir—give me your custom—and be sure of it, you shall not be dissatisfied. I am a gentleman, sir—I keep no Bagnio—I never break the king's peace: above all, I am not one of your dagger-gentry—bandits, bravoos, and brawlers—who charge ten crowns for a life, and whose skill is as slight, and their courage as short, as the weapon they wear. There's *my* instrument, sir," continued the man, raising his cloak and very complacently displaying the full length of a most formidable rapier. "It is at your service, sir!"

"Thank you!" replied his companion, recoiling from the tremendous weapon. "I have no necessity for such service at present."

"So much the worse for me," said the man, coolly thrusting back the rapier into its sheath: "And, so much the better for your purse, and your particular friends, whoever they may chance to be. When you *do* wish for my services, however, I may be found any day, at noon, promenading before the Hotel du Maine. My name is Saltabadil."

"A Bohemian?"

"Yes, and a Burgundian," said the man. "I pray you, think as well of me as you can."

"Oh certainly," rejoined the other. "Every man must have some means of support, I suppose; and, on the whole, I am not sure that yours is much worse than that of some others."

"The meanest of all callings, in *my* opinion," said the man, "is to beg—to be a mendicant, a rogue! I have four daughters at home and a wife, their mother. They, of course, know nothing of my deeds—they know not whence comes the bread they eat, or how it is earned. My wife and eldest daughter are noted for their piety. I am determined my children shall be reared well."

"Oh, no doubt!" was the significant response. "Good night, Saltabadil!"

"Adieu, I am your servitor for life!" said the Bohemian, departing.

"My servitor for life?" said he—"oh, yes, until some one is fool enough to hire him to shorten it! And yet, strange enough, I *like* that man!" soliloquized the individual who was left. "I like him because he is like me. He has my sympathy. Yes, we have both of us the hatred of our kind, and both of us the self-same pride of soul, under the self-same base exterior. A sharp tongue—a sharp rapier! I am the wit—he the assassin. I the man who laughs—he the man who murders. Our weapons are marvellously different, yet marvellously alike. The wounds they inflict are equally painful, if not equally fatal. Strange!"

CHAPTER VI.—THE BUFFOON.

REMORSE—she ne'er forsakes us;
A bloodhound stanch, she tracks our weary step.—COLERIDGE.

I, that am curfall'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionably,
That dogs bark at me, as I halt by them.—RICHARD III, ACT I.

For a few moments, he mused and smiled; then looking cautiously around him, he advanced toward the door in the wall. After again looking carefully on every side, he produced a key and placed it in the lock. The door opened inwardly, without noise. The man entered the garden, closed the door and bolted it, and walked slowly and thoughtfully on.

"That old man cursed me!" he murmured. "Yes, he raised his palsied hand, and said, 'An old man's curse be on you!' And I derided his wretchedness! Oh, infamous! I ridiculed the misery of a poor old man, bereaved so cruelly of his own child! And yet, how strangely, all the while, trembled my heart within me! Was it presentiment?"

The court-jester, for it was no other, seated himself on a bench of stone beneath the deep shadow of a tree, and bowed his head upon his knees.

"Yes! that old man cursed me! What a corrupt, cruel, cowardly creature have mankind and destiny made me! I am a bad man; but have I made myself all that I am? Oh, misery! to be a buffoon—to be a humpback cripple! Even this withering thought, whether I sleep or wake, or when, in day-dreams, I have glided in spirit over the earth—falls back upon my soul—"You are a deformed jester for the court! You can have no will, no power, no right, but to laugh when you are bid, and to cause others to do the same!" What a depth of wretchedness and degradation! What! that which the common soldiery, ruled by a rag which they call a standard, and which, for their lives, they dare not for one hour desert, possess—that which remains, even after all else is gone, to the Spanish mendicant, to the slave of Tunis, to the victim of the galleys, to the condemned in his dungeon, to every man here below who still breathes and eats—the right to weep and the right to be silent—these rights—these alas! I have not!

"Sad and moody of disposition—with a body diseased and deformed—filled with disgust at my own destiny—tortured with envy and jealousy of power or of beauty, in man or in animal—surrounded by magnificence which only contrasts my own misery—at times, savage, sorrowful, and desolate, I seek a retired corner where I may be alone. In the midst of this loneliness and misery, comes my master to seek me out—my light-headed, joyous master—beloved of women, respected of men—contented with existence—lovely, handsome, brilliant—the monarch of France! Touching me with his foot, as I sit sad and disconsolate in my seclusion, he exclaims with a yawn—"Come, Triboulet, come—make some sport for us! Why, the poor fool is as melancholy as a cat in love, to be sure! He is then a man, after all!"

"And, then, the hell of conflicting passions which rage in my soul! the rancor, the scorn, the disdain, the wrath, the envy, the fury of which my breast is full—the everlasting meditation of some hideous design, all the legion of midnight thoughts that gnaw my vitals—upon a single nod from my royal master they must at once be smothered; and, for whatsoever coxcomb may wish it, I am forced to make instant merriment! Oh, wretch—abject—degraded! Let him walk, stand, sit, rise, evermore does the corroding chain cling to him and waste away his energies! Despised, hated of man; disregarded, humiliated of woman!

"The queen, beautiful creature—the young, and lovely Claude, on whose charms not even a brute could look with coldness, permits this wretch to lie about in her very bed-chamber, even as a dog; and, with her voluptuous person half unrobed, she starts, all at once, gives a single glance, then says: 'N'importe, it is only Triboulet! He is harmless!'

"Ah, harmless! think you thus, my fine cavaliers? my right noble railers? Does not the fool full often recompense all your derision? If he is a reptile, do you never feel his sting? Does he never fling back on you scorn so cutting, that you writhe with rage, and shame, and wrath? Is he not an evil genius, ever at the ear of his master and your's? Oh, it is a merry, merry thing to scatter to the winds their cunningly-devised schemes—their well-plotted purposes! They have made me mad, and is it more than meet that I should make them miserable?

"And, yet, what agony is there in all this! The wretchedness I create, I feel myself more keenly than can my victim. To dash with wormwood the wine which makes men glad—to crush every good instinct—to stifle every kindly feeling—to dissipate every worthy purpose—to distract with my bauble and bells the brain that would meditate—to lure on the youthful to ruin—to deceive the unthinking—to rove about, day after day, night after night, through these glittering festivities, which, to me, are but a magnificent mockery—to demolish the happiness of the happy—to have no aim, no hope, no desire, no ambition in life, but to create mischief and misery—to make others as miserable as myself—and more than all, ever to bear about with me, like a livid corpse, in my bosom everywhere, associated with everything—yet guarded, concealed, buried beneath a mocking laugh, an old native ineradicable and bitter hatred of all—*all my race!*

"But here—what matters all this here? Once through that gate and I am another being. Let me forget, though but for an hour, the dark and the wicked world I have left behind. Here I should bring nothing of all the miseries without.

"That old man cursed me!" continued the jester, after a moment of abstracted musing. "Yes, he cursed me! Why—why comes ever thus that remembrance back upon me, even like a ghastly spectre, chase it from me us often as I may? What malediction can curse me? Am I not a fool? Away! I will think of it no more! No earthly curse can make me more cursed than I already am. I am too truly and utterly a wretch, to be affected by the malison, or the benison of man—I had almost said of God himself! From my birth have I been plunged into the dark waters of wretchedness, until I am now invulnerable to every arrow sped by a human hand. My only tie to existence is here."

He advances to the house—he knocks—the door opens—and a young and beautiful girl in a loose white robe leaps joyously into his extended arms!

CHAPTER VII.... BLANCHE.

Thou hast the sweetest face I ever look'd on.—KING HENRY VIII.

Oh, she is fair!
As fair as Heaven to look upon! As fair
As ever vision of the Virgin blest
That weary pilgrim, resting by the fount,
Beneath the palm, and dreaming to the tune
Of flowing waters, duped his soul withal.

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

The chariest maid is prodigal enough,
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.—HAMLET.

THE young girl by whom the jester was so affectionately received, seemed not to have exceeded her eighteenth year. She was not tall, but her figure was exquisitely moulded, and, young as she was, its rich and rounded *tournure*—its graceful curves—its perfect developments, displayed all the seductive proportions of woman in the maturity of her charms. The dreamy languor which floated in her light hazel eye well corresponded with such a form, and with the full and impassioned lip. Her forehead was clear and open—the bright brown hair, simply parted in the middle, was carried down each temple over the delicate ear, and gathered in a graceful mass low behind. The complexion was fair—perhaps *too* fair—but the cheek and chin were rounded, and the throat and bust were perfect. The erect carriage of the figure and the graceful bearing of the head, were as striking for the air of quiet dignity with which they invested one so young, as was the serious and thoughtful expression of the features—that expression which unerringly indicates an impassioned nature; for, deep feeling is always sad—never joyous; often seemingly *cold* in its demonstrations. Yet, at times, when a smile would curl that full soft lip, and light up the depths of that calm melancholy eye, how pure was that illuming which chased away all coldness and sadness, though but for an instant, from that pale face—even as the vase of alabaster is illumed by the sudden light of a lamp within!

It will not be understood, that all these peculiarities of form and of feature were observable during the moment that the fair girl stood in the lamp-light at the door, ere she was clasped in the arms of the old man. No, there was hardly time for that!

"My daughter! my beautiful daughter!" exclaimed the jester, clasping her with transport to his bosom. "Oh, place those white arms around my neck—around my heart! Near thee, again life smiles on me, and is precious: nothing pains me longer. Oh, my child, I am happy—once more the mountain is raised from my breast—once more I breathe free!"

The old man released his child a moment from his arms, and, retreating a step, ran his eye eagerly over her charms.

"More beautiful every day!" he murmured. "And you are happy, Blanche? you want for nothing? you wish for nothing? Embrace me, dear! Now tell me you are happy."

"How good you always are, my father," replied the soft silvery accents of Blanche. "No one else is so kind to me as you are."

"I only love thee, that is all, my innocent child," said the father, seating her beside him on one of the benches of the garden. "No one loves thee as I do. Are you not my life? my very blood and being? If I had not thee—oh, my God! if I had not thee, how could I continue to exist?"

"You sigh, my father: you are agitated," said Blanche, laying her little white hand upon the rough forehead of the buffoon, and gazing upon his disturbed features with innocent surprise. "Some secret trouble, is it not? Tell your poor simple daughter, that she may share your griefs. Alas! I know not even whom to call you—I know not your name!"

"And what matters that, my Blanche? Love you me not as dearly as if you did know my name?"

"Yes, my father, oh yes! But, excepting Blanche, I know not my own name. Our neighbors in the little hamlet of Chinon, where I was reared, believed me an orphan, until you came for me."

"Ah, I should have left you there!" said the jester, quickly. "It would have been more prudent. But how could I live without thee, my daughter? Oh, I had need of thee—need of one heart in the wide, cold world to love me?"

"If you wish me not to ask your name my father—"

"Blanche—Blanche!" interrupted the old man, "never go out into the streets of this city, except to church."

"I have now been in Paris three months, and I have been but eight

times to Notre Dame," was the meek response. "But, my father, if you wish not to tell me of yourself, tell me something at least of my mother."

"Thy mother, child—ah, thy mother! you little know the feelings which that question awakens. You recall that, which often seems to me, and which were you not before my eyes, would now seem to me, only the memory of a heavenly vision! Thy mother, Blanche, was a woman far different from most of her sex. She had a soul! She saw me, lonely, infirm, poor, unhappy, diseased, despised: and, wonderful to tell! she loved me for my very wretchedness! She could have loved and pitied me for nothing else. She is dead now—she has gone to the tomb, bearing in her bosom the sacred secret of her youthful love—a love which poured over my spirit a flood of heaven's brightness, lighting up its midnight of despair. Light be the earth on that gentle bosom which so long pillowed a weary head! And now, my Blanche, you are my all in the world."

There was a pause of some moments, and the jester covered his face with his hands and wept.

"My father—my father, you are very unhappy," said Blanche, throwing her arms around his neck; "you seem *always* unhappy—why is this? Oh, you should have no concealments from your daughter! *Why* do you weep?"

"And what, Blanche, would you say, were you to see me always laughing?"

"I could form no idea of that. But something does trouble you, my father. Tell me your name—confide your sorrows to me—pour all your griefs into my bosom!"

"No, my daughter, no," rejoined the old man with some energy of manner, after a pause, "you must not now know my name—perhaps never. In this great world, of Paris, of which you can comprehend so little, one person fears me, another despises me; one ridicules, another hates. Did you know my name, you might sometimes hear it lightly spoken. That I could not bear. I could not endure to have the ears of my daughter wounded thus by contempt for the author of her existence. Here, at least, in thy presence, in this little solitary seclusion, where all is innocence, I wish to be viewed only as thy father—esteemed, respected, loved."

"And are you not ever thus to me and more than this, my father?" said the fair girl.

The old man embraced her to his bosom, and pressed his shrivelled lips to her pale, clear forehead.

"Yes, my daughter, yes! And thine is the only heart in all this great Paris—in all France—in all the world, that answers back to mine. Oh, my beautiful Blanche, I love thee; and I love thee even for all those causes—youth, beauty, goodness—for which I hate all others. This is strange, yet it is even so. Sit then beside me, Blanche, and tell your father how much you love him. Why, when I am with thee, do I permit thee to speak of anything else? My child—the sole, solitary blessing that God hath vouchsafed me! Others, even the loveliest, have parents, brothers, sisters, friends, wives, children—they may have houses, lands, wealth, but I, an infirm old man—I have but thee, my Blanche—thee alone! To thee my heart yearns with a warmth and tenderness unutterable: on the other side, and to all others, it is ice—as cold and as hard. Should I loose thee! But no, that is impossible. It is a thought, which, for an instant, I cannot endure. Smile on me, my daughter, smile away my apprehensions—ah, that smile! It was thy mother's, Blanche. She, too, was beautiful. You have many of her manners. Often when you pass your little hand across your forehead, as if to sweep away all clouds, as she was used to do, I almost think it must be herself. A pure heart will ever have an innocent brow—a heaven, all sunshine. To my vision, around thee rays the halo of an angel—through thy clear eyes, my soul looks down into thine, and then all is pure, and serene, and beautiful, as the bosom of a saint."

"My father," said the young girl, after gazing earnestly and mournfully for some moments upon his face—"My father, I wish I could make thee happy! Is that impossible?"

"Happy? Me? Why, my child, am I not always happy with thee? I have only to look upon thee, Blanche, and my heart at once overflows with happiness."

"My father, I have a request to make—no not a request, only, I think I should be pleased if I could go out some evening, just after the sun sets, and walk around and see Paris a little."

The old man turned suddenly very pale, and, bending a penetrating glance of his keen gray eye upon his daughter, in hurried tones replied—

"Never, Blanche, never! Tell me, my daughter, you have never gone out thus with Dame Marion?"

"No, my father—oh no!" quickly rejoined the trembling Blanche. "I have gone nowhere with Dame Marion, except to church. You know you have so desired me often."

An expression of alarm passed over the countenance of the jester. "Oh, heaven," thought he, "some one will see her, some one will be inflamed by her loveliness, some one may pursue her steps and seek out her retirement: Oh, my God, some villain of the court or the city may seduce and ruin her! The daughter of a jester dishonored would cause only a laugh!"

"My daughter! my daughter!" exclaimed the old man, eagerly; "in time to come, go not out at all into the city! you know not how fatal to women is the atmosphere of Paris—how license and debauchery pervade every street and lane. Oh, my God!" he continued,

raising his eyes and hands to Heaven, "preserve, I implore thee, this fair flower, reared up so tenderly beneath thine eye in this retired asylum—oh, preserve her from all those terrible storms which have so often laid low other flowers, as fair as she is, and as pure! Protect her from every unhallowed touch! Preserve her in safety and in peace, that her unhappy father, in his hour of retirement from the miseries of the world, may be refreshed by the perfume of this virgin rose, untouched and untainted by all that is impure!"

Concealing his face in his hands, the old man bowed, and sobbed and wept in uncontrollable agitation. His mis-shapen form seemed convulsed with agony. His breast heaved—his head rocked from side to side—his knees quivered. Indeed, were he lamenting the fulfilment of his worst apprehensions, it would seem that he could hardly have exhibited more of wretchedness.

Upon this scene the simple-hearted Blanche looked with astonishment and grief. At length she succeeded in withdrawing her father's hands from his face, and his agitation became less violent.

"Oh, my father!" exclaimed the young girl, "why—why do you weep? If you wish me to go out no more into the city, it shall be so, although I can comprehend nothing of the dangers to which you allude. I will never go again—I will never speak or think of going: only do not—do not weep! I will obey you in anything—but do not weep!"

"Blessings on thee, my child! God will surely bless thee for thy obedience to thy poor old parent. But let me weep—tears often relieve a drowning heart. Besides, Blanche, I must laugh and jest during all the remainder of the night. Even now they miss me. I must leave thee, Blanche. I must again resume the hateful yoke!"

"But you will soon come again? Say that you will come to see your daughter again?"

"Perhaps, my child—if possible. But I am not my own master—I am the slave of another's will. But where is Dame Marion?"

The jester called aloud the name of the housekeeper, and presently an old woman appeared at the door.

"Think you, Dame Marion, that any one observed me when I came in?" asked the old man. "Were you on the watch?"

"No one can have seen you, sir, I think," was the reply. "The lane was so dark that I could scarcely see you myself from the terrace, although I was expecting you and was diligently watching."

"Well, I must go, dame. Be sure that you keep my precious bird safe for me. Remember that she is my life—and thine, too! This house it seems to me is too public. I know one more retired, in the rear of St. Germain. I must visit it to-morrow."

"This house pleases me well, my father," said Blanche; "the terrace on the garden wall is so delightful. I can look down into the street and all the neighboring gardens, in the evening when I walk."

"Be careful, my daughter—very careful. You will be seen from below. Go not often on the terrace. Hark! heard you not a step without the wall?"

The old man stole to the door, and cautiously unlocking and opening it without noise, peered out into the lane. Several times he looked keenly up and down the deserted alley, but all was dark and still. At length, as if satisfied with his investigation, he turned hastily back into the garden, leaving the door half open. As he did this, a figure of a man enveloped in a dark mantle stepped from behind a buttress near the door, and glided lightly, unobserved, into the shrubbery of the garden beneath the wall.

"You will always be cautious, dame," said the jester to the old woman; "you will always be cautious to keep that door closed and bolted, and never at night place a lamp near the windows looking out upon the terrace."

"And how think you it possible, sir, that any one should penetrate into this garden or the house, even if he took the trouble, of which there is not the slightest probability?"

At that instant a stir in the shrubbery caused her to look around, and close beside her in the shadow stood the figure of a man. A scream was on her lips, when an arm was extended, and a heavy purse of gold was pressed into her hand unperceived. Meanwhile, Triboulet was looking carefully to the door of the house and up at the terrace.

"Why all these precautions, my father?" innocently inquired Blanche; "tell me—what fear you?"

"Nothing for myself—everything for thee. Danger is all around thee. Adieu, my Blanche, adieu!" continued the father, folding his child to his breast, and then retreating to the door. He went but a few steps and hastily returned.

"A thought strikes me, dame. When you have gone to the Cathedral on the Sabbath, have you ever remarked whether any one particularly observed you—whether any one watched your movements, or seemed to follow your steps?"

"Never!" sturdily replied old Marion.

Blanche turned suddenly pale, then red, but spoke not a word.

"If any one ever annoys you or pursues you, dame, you must be sure to cry out for protection," enjoined the old man earnestly.

"Ah, never fear me: I shall shout loud enough to scare off the most impudent cavalier in Christendom."

"And then you will be sure never, on any account, by day or night, to open the garden door, let who will knock as long as he may."

"Suppose the king knocks?" asked the old woman, as if irritated at the punctiliousness of the jester.

"Above all other men in Paris—in France—in Europe, admit not Francis of Valois!" was the solemn and energetic reply. "Be vigilant, Dame Marion—be true, and your reward is sure! But, as you value life and peace, beware that I am not deceived!"

With these words the old man again folded his daughter affectionately to his breast, and hurrying through the door, carefully secured it behind him, and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.....THE LOVERS.

It is my lady; O, it is my love
O, that she knew he were!

ROMEO & JULIET, ACT II SC. 2.

Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face;
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night.—Is.

I do not know, nor have I seen
More that I may call men, than you, good friend,
And my dear father: how features are abroad,
I am skillless of; but, by my modesty—
The jewel in my dower—I would not wish
Any companion in the world but you;
Nor can imagination form a shape,
Besides yourself, to like of.

TEMPEST, ACT III.

"My poor father! Oh, I fear I have done very wrong! I have much to regret!" said the young Blanche, as she pensively listened with downcast eyes and folded hands, to the retreating footsteps of her father, as they became less and less audible in the distance.

"Yes, I have deceived my poor old father! And how fondly he loves me! How fearful for my safety—how the slightest thing alarms him! I should have been true to him, Dame Marion—I should have told him all—I should have told him of that young cavalier whom every Sunday we meet at Notre Dame, who watches us so narrowly, and looks at me so tenderly, and always follows after us so closely. I should have mentioned him, dame—should I not? that handsome young man—you remember him?"

"Ah, yes, Miss Blanche, I know well whom you mean;" replied the old woman. "But why tell your father, child? you *dislike* this young man, I suppose, and wish your father to free you from his attentions?"

"Dislike him, dame! Oh, no, I do not dislike him!" sighed the simple-hearted Blanche. "On the contrary, ever since the sabbath that I first saw him, I have thought and dreamt of no one else. Ever since that hour, when his heart spoke to mine so warmly through his bright eyes, his image has lived constantly in my bosom, by night and by day. I have felt restless and uneasy when away from him, and, oh, Dame Marion, if it has been wrong for him to follow us so closely, I am as bad as he; for I have followed him in my imagination far more closely than he has ever followed us. How noble he always looks! so proud, and yet so mild! And then he has such a grand, smooth forehead, and such large speaking eyes, and a grand, noble bearing, Dame Marion! Oh, he is such a very handsome young man!"

While the fair young Blanche was thus expressing her innocent admiration for the strange cavalier, whose personal attractions, whatever they might be, it is not wonderful should seem transcendent, as compared with the deformity of her decrepit old parent—almost the only other man she had ever particularly noticed—the individual who has been mentioned as having by stealth entered unseen the garden-door, softly drew nigh to the group; and as he listened with eager attention to every syllable uttered by Blanche, pressed a broad piece of gold into the ready palm of her companion, as a seeming earnest of future reward, if she proved faithful to his purpose.

"Yes, Blanche," replied the old woman; "the young man is indeed handsome—very handsome!"

A second piece of gold found its way into the old dame's hand.

"In his eyes, it seems as if one could read his whole heart," said Blanche. "A great heart, dame?"

"An immense heart!" (A piece of gold was the prompt reward.)

"And beautiful eyes, dame?"

"Divine eyes!" (A piece of gold.)

"And his form is so elegant?"

"Splendid!" (A piece of gold.)

"So graceful?"

"Magnificent!" (The gold.)

"So noble?"

"Grand!" (The gold.)

"So brave?"

"Formidable!" (The gold.)

"Good—perhaps?"

"Oh, without doubt good!" (The gold.)

"Generous?"

"Munificent!" (The gold.)

"Accomplished?"

"Oh, very accomplished!"

Here the mysterious cavalier signified to the rapacious old flatterer, that his store of gold was exhausted.

"Ah!" sighed the unsuspecting Blanche, "how I do love to hear you praise him!"

"He is no doubt a very great lord," said Dame Marion, "as may be seen from his proud air, and especially by the gold embroidery on the sleeve of his gauntlet."

"Oh, but I do not wish him a great lord, dame;" quickly rejoined the simple-hearted girl. "I much prefer he should be a poor scholar—some poor student at the university, from some one of the provinces. He would love me so much better than a great lord."

"Well—well, it is quite probable, that he is only a poor scholar,

after all, since you wish him so," replied the accommodating old lady, "you young girls have such singular tastes! You will be rid of all that before you reach my years. But, be the young man what or whom he may, he certainly loves *you*—loves you to desperation!"

"Oh, do you think so, dame! do you, indeed, think so? Well, I love him—I *believe* I love him, too: Sunday never comes round quick enough now; and when I do not see him as soon as I reach the church, I feel so sad and dissatisfied. Oh, dame, I thought last Sunday as we were leaving Notre Dame, that he was coming up to speak to me, his eyes looked so eloquent; and how I did tremble! how my heart did beat! Dame, I think of him both day and night: do you suppose he thinks so of me? Oh, I am sure he does! He has my face before him all the time. And he cares for no other girl but me. And he never goes to great fêtes, where there is dancing, and laughing, and singing, as you have told me. No, he is always sad, and solitary, and lonely, and thoughtful, when he is away from me. Is he not so, Dame Marion?"

"No doubt he *should* be so," was the evasive reply.

"No doubt he *is* so, dame?"

"Yes—yes, no doubt he *is* so—or *will* be so."

"Ah, how often, when I am dreaming of him by night or by day, do I wish he were with me—at my side—before my eyes."

As she thus earnestly expressed the promptings of her heart, the cavalier glided from his concealment among the shrubbery, and letting fall his mantle from his face, dropped unobserved upon one knee beside her and extended his arms.

"That I might see him," she continued—"that I might hear his voice—that I might speak to him—that I might feel the pressure of his hand—be satisfied—contented—happy! Oh, yes, I love—I am sure I love—"

At that instant turning her eyes, what was her amazement to see at her feet, by the clear light of the stars, the form and the features of which she had so long and so tenderly dreamed, and of which she was even then so wildly speaking!

"Say on—say on!" said the young man. "I love thee! Say—I love thee! Oh, say it! Fear nothing. On lips like thine that soft word *love* is so sweet—so precious! Oh, say that you love me!"

Astonished—bewildered—alarmed—the timid girl looked fearfully around for the protecting presence of her aged companion.

She had disappeared.

"Marion! Dame Marion!" she faltered in tremulous accents.

No one replied.

"Marion! Marion!" again she cried, now thoroughly terrified. "Oh, God, is there no one to protect me! Does no one answer me! Will no one come to me? No one! Then I am lost!" she exclaimed, extending her clasped hands to heaven.

"And whom would you have to protect you, my beautiful Blanche, and against whom?" mildly asked the cavalier, still bending upon his knee at her feet, with his arms extended, as if to fold her to his breast. "Is it me that you fear? Blanche, I am thy lover. I would give my life to guard thee from a moment's pain, sweet lady; and is it kind for thee to *fear* me?"

Trembling and irresolute stood the fair girl, while the fascinating stranger spoke. His tones were soft and musical, and so mild—so subdued—so imploring, that, strange indeed would it have been, could the poor girl have resisted their eloquence from the lips of one, who, for months, had been the idol of her maiden visions. With one foot advanced in an attitude for flight, she listened with clasped hands; and, involuntarily—unconsciously, as the pleading appeal from the lips of the graceful figure at her feet fell like music upon her ear, was she arrested in her purpose. Her head turned and her eyes rested timidly on her lover.

"Oh, how came you here, sir?" she asked in tremulous tones.

"Whence came you? Why have you come?"

"What matters all that, my sweet Blanche? What matters it how I am here, or whence I came—whether from heaven, or from earth—whether I am a man, or a spirit? *Why* I am here, my beautiful, is because I love thee—because I would risk my life for that love."

"Oh, spare me, sir—have pity on me—if you love me, leave me!" exclaimed Blanche rapidly, in a feeble and agitated voice.

"Oh, go—go at once! If any one saw you enter—if my father—"

"Go, my Blanche!" sadly replied the cavalier, rising from his knee and gently grasping her hand. "Yes, I will go, if you would, indeed, have it thus. I will obey you, whatever pangs it may cost me. But *will* you—*can* you force me thus from your presence, at the moment when we first have met—when, at the hazard of my life, after months of anticipation, I am at your side; and when months may elapse before we can meet again, if we ever do—when I have declared myself all your own, and have for the first discovered that you are all mine—at such a moment must I leave you? Yes, Blanche, you *are* mine, as truly as I am yours. You love me, fairest—I heard it all, but now from your own lips. Yes—yes, you *love* me!"

Overwhelmed with shame and confusion, poor Blanche covered her blushing face with her hands. "Oh, he has heard all!" she timidly murmured.

"Yes, dearest—all," replied the young stranger, stealing his arm around her waist and heaving bosom. "Nay, Blanche—nay, fear me not. Why should not thy lover hear all, and be to thee all that man may be to woman? Doubt not that he loves as dearly as thou

lovest, and that thy words were the sweetest syllables that ever fell upon his ear!"

"And now, sir, will you leave me?" faltered the trembling Blanche, in tones low and tremulous. "Now that you have seen me, and spoken to me, and told me you love me, and have heard—have heard me say, what—a maiden should not say, perhaps—now will you not leave me—in pity, leave?"

"And do you bid me leave you, Blanche," sadly replied the lover, "at a moment, when our fates are blending into one? at a moment, when our double star is just beaming above the horizon? at a moment, when for the first time are unveiled the priceless treasures of thy pure heart? when a paradise of rapture is dawning upon thy soul and mine? Love—oh, it is the sun of the spirit! Feel you not its mild flame kindling even now, Blanche, in your gentle bosom? Oh, love—love! The sceptre which death extends and which ambition grasps—that glory gathered on the field of battle—the winning of an illustrious name—the possessing of boundless domains—the wielding of imperial power—to be a prince—a monarch—all these things are but transient—evanescent—earthly. In this world of shades and vision, there is but one thing divine—it is Love! Blanche! Blanche, it is happiness thy lover brings thee! Rapture is knocking timidly at thy young heart. Life is a flower—a fragile flower, and its only sweet is love. It is the dove, borne on the eagle's pinion to the highest heaven—it is grace and loveliness, quivering beneath the resistless might of power—it is thy soft little hand in mine, Blanche, tenderly oblivious of everything else. Oh, let us love! let us love!"

And the encircling arm of the excited young man grew closer around the form of his trembling mistress, and sought to clasp her bosom to his.

"No—no—no!" murmured the agitated girl, struggling feebly in the embrace of her lover. "Leave me, sir—oh, release me and leave me!"

But it was too late!

The palpitating form of poor Blanche was in the eager arms of the ardent young man, and his burning lips were pressed again and again to hers. Overcome by the excitement of her feelings and the earnestness of her lover, her head sank back upon his shoulder—her eyes closed—their long, dark lashes reposed upon her cheek—her lips were slightly parted—a delicate flush, like a rosy cloud, hung upon her forehead, and her white bosom rose and fell irregularly, like tumultuous waves.

"Tell me that you love me, Blanche! Tell me once more that you love me!" murmured the impassioned cavalier, clasping the powerless form of his mistress to his breast, and pressing his lips to hers.

A deeper flush overspread the countenance of Blanche.

"You know it, sir, already," she said in a low and timid tone.

"You heard me before. You know that I love you."

"Oh, I am happy!" exclaimed the lover, again pressing the fair girl with transport to his heart.

"And I—I am lost!" cried Blanche, and with sudden energy she released herself from her lover's embrace. "Oh, sir, who are you? who are you? I do not know you. Pray, tell me your name, sir. Tell me you are not a great lord of the court, or a gentleman? Oh, I am sure you are not a gentleman. My father fears all the gentlemen of the court so much! Will you tell me who you are? Will you tell me your name, sir? Will you tell me that you are not a gentleman?"

"Oh, no, my sweet Blanche, I am not a gentleman," was the laughing rejoinder. "And my name—my name is Norman—Norman Mervil. I am from the province of Anjou. I am a scholar—I am of humble parentage—I am very poor and I love!"

The cavalier was interrupted in the enumeration of his qualifications to be the lover of the simple Blanche, by the hasty entrance of old Dame Marion, who had been on the terrace during the interview, anxiously watching the street below against surprise.

"Some one comes, sir, some one comes," earnestly exclaimed the old woman, in a low and hurried tone. "I hear voices in the street and the approach of footsteps. You must fly, sir, instantly. There is a private door, at the lower extremity of the garden, leading out on the quay, by which you can escape. Here is the key," placing it in his hand."

"Oh, my father—it is he!" cried Blanche, "you must leave me, sir—you must go at once—indeed you must go!"

"Blanche, Blanche, will you love me always as you do now?"

"Ah, sir, will you always love me thus?"

"My whole life is yours!"

"No, no, you will deceive! I have deceived my father!" mournfully replied the conscience-stricken girl.

"Never, Blanche, never! We shall meet again—we shall meet soon—to-morrow night? say, shall it be to-morrow night?"

"If you wish it, sir," was the reply, in a tone low and sad, after a slight pause. "You can come now when you choose. I have no power to refuse you anything."

The young man clasped her for a moment eagerly in his arms.

"Kiss me, Blanche, kiss me!" he whispered.

With trembling hands she parted the dark masses of hair from his forehead, as he bent before her, and pressed to it a lip which was now chill and pallid.

The kiss was warmly returned with a hurried embrace, and the young man disappeared among the trees.

For some moments Blanche gazed sadly on the spot where her lover had vanished, then slowly and thoughtfully entered the house.

CHAPTER IX.....THE PUNISHMENT.

What is thy enterprise—thy aim—thy object?—WALLENSTEIN.

You knew, none so well, none so well as you, of my daughter's flight.
MERCHANT OF VENICE.

ROD. What ho! Brabantio! Signior Brabantio, ho!
IAGO. Awake! what ho! Brabantio! thieves! thieves! thieves!
Lock to your house, your daughter, and your bags!
Thieves! thieves!

OTHELLO, Act I.

WHILE the scene described in the last chapter was drawing to its close in the garden, a very different scene was about commencing in the *cul-de-sac* without. Old Dame Marion was correct when she gave warning to the lovers, that the noise of voices and of footsteps was approaching the house.

It was now near midnight; and, amid the gloom which rested upon the city, might be distinguished a group of some half a dozen men disguised by masks and mantles, advancing stealthily down the lane, followed by a valet bearing on his shoulder a light scaling ladder, and in his hand a dark lantern. There was much conversation, carried on in whispers; and, now and then, might be heard a short and smothered laugh.

"Come, gentlemen, come," said one of the group, in a low tone; "let us be in haste. We have no time to lose. We have determined to take vengeance on the hunchback jester, and here we are, at the appointed hour, on the appointed spot, with a warm resentment, and a righteous purpose, and what is quite as much to our advantage, a good strong scaling-ladder. We have now arrived at the house, and have only to mount the terrace, bear off the girl, and, to-morrow morning, let our merry monarch find this young peri at his levee at the Louvre."

"And there, good admiral, I suppose our duties end," said another voice. "Since the jester's mistress is so very beautiful, our noble Francis as a man of taste, will relieve us of all further service, no doubt."

"That's no concern of your's, Vendome," was the reply. "Let the devil unravel the snarl as he may, you get your share of the matter: you get your revenge on the jester."

"Well said, admiral," replied a third voice. "And if everything is ready, let us to the work. I am all enthusiasm to look upon this marvellous and mysterious beauty."

"No doubt of that, Clement. You have a marvellous fancy for beauties of all kinds—mysterious or just the reverse," said another of the group. "It will be only ordinary gallantry, however, for you to inscribe one of your sentimental psalms to the poor girl."

"Hush! hark!" interrupted Marot, suddenly turning in the attitude of listening. "Did none of you hear a footstep, gentlemen?"

The attention of the whole group, arrested by this observation of the poet, was at once turned in the direction from which the sound of footsteps seemed to proceed.

A man now appeared coming down the lane. His step was slow and irregular, and he appeared to be soliloquizing.

"Why am I here again? Why do I return? Why this indistinguishable apprehension—this presentiment of impending evil? Why do I thus hover round the hiding-place of my earthly treasure? Why quake at every breath that falls on my ear? Ah, that old man cursed me! that old man cursed me! That malediction weighs upon my soul. Some evil thing hangs over me. My daughter—my Blanche! Oh, art thou in safety, my precious one?"

The old man stood in the shade, beneath the terrace, and leaned, with folded arms, against the wall. His head rested heavily on his breast, and, from time to time, a deep groan betrayed the agony of his feelings.

"Who is he?" whispered one of the group to the admiral.

"It is our man himself—it is Triboulet!"

"Ha! good! A double victory!" was the eager answer. "Let us spit the old hedgehog on our rapiers at once!"

"No, no! Not so rash, L'Esparre. Would you slay the hen that lays the golden eggs?" rejoined the admiral. "Would you spoil all our sport of to-morrow by one mad act of to-night?"

"But the old one will spoil all our sport of to-night and to-morrow also," rejoined L'Esparre with a laugh.

"Leave that to me, gentlemen," said Marot. "I have it—I will arrange all;" and, walking boldly up to the jester, he pronounced his name. "Ha, Triboulet, is it you?"

The old man started hurriedly to his feet, and demanded,

"Who is that?"

"There—there, old mastiff, don't bite," replied the merry poet.

"It is I."

"And who may I be?" returned the jester, in a surly tone.

"I may be Beelzebub, old fellow, for aught you know. I don't think I am, however, or you would dispute my title. Do you know me now?"

"Surely I ought to know the voice of the most impudent jackanapes in all Christendom—the psalm-singer of Cahors. But what iniquity are you upon at midnight, in such a dark lane as this, Master Clement? I'll report you to your master, boy, and have you whipped for keeping unseasonable hours in the morning!"

"Nay, good hunchbelly, you'll do no such thing, and I'll not tell of you. It is plain, old sinner, you are in this dark hole for nothing laudable. You have suffered your soft and simple heart to be seduced by the blandishments of some practiced syren; and you now await

her hour of assignation at the rendezvous. It is shameful that she forces a lover so young and so fascinating to tarry thus for her embraces! Your old master, the devil, delights to aid his neophytes in all their laudable endeavors, and so he has been smoking his pipe to afford you a dark night. I am glad your adventures and mine happen to be attempted on the same night. What think you is my adventure, old Triboulet?"

"Nothing less than ravishment, no doubt."

"Right, old man! you're a prophet."

Could the poet have witnessed the effect of these few simple syllables on the jester, he would have been astonished. His flesh became livid, and cold drops hung upon his face. His knees knocked together, and he was forced to lean against the wall to avoid sinking upon the ground.

"And what think you is the game at which we strike? No less than Madame of Vendome! We carry her off more with her own consent than without it, in order to save appearances. She meets her royal lover at the Louvre before the sun is up!"

"Capital!" ejaculated the jester with a deep respiration.

A world of lead seemed lifted from his heart. Then, after a pause,

"What is the scheme? How do you reach her chamber?"

"All arranged, old fellow; I have the key to it."

"Ah, Clement, you poets are awfully given to lying—it is one of your prerogatives. How came the king's valet with the key to the Countess of Vendome's bed-chamber? tell me that!"

Perhaps the valet's master obtained the key from the fair hands of the beautiful countess herself. Royal lovers are rarely refused anything, and Vendome scorns her hump-bellied, lawful lord, every one knows. But stay—let me search my pockets and you shall consult your own senses, my innocent and most unbelieving Triboulet."

The night, as has been remarked, was excessively dark, and a dense mist, which now was coming up from the Seine, rendered it yet darker. The poet, therefore, while he pretended to be searching his pockets for the key, stepped lightly and rapidly back to the group of his friends, unobserved by the jester. The courtiers had distinguished nothing of the previous conversation.

"Quick—quick, Vendome!" whispered the poet. "Your key one moment."

The key was handed him.

"Ah, here it is, at last," continued Marot, who was again with the jester. "Here is the key, you can feel the blazon of Vendome on the middle of the shank."

The old man took the key in his hands, and scrutinized it for several minutes with care.

"Believe you don't lie, Master Clement. Here are the three vine-leaves. The key is plainly Vendome's, however you may have come by it. Well, the plot is excellent—I must have a part in it. How the fat Vendome will rave to find in the morning his beautiful wife stolen! But where is your party, Master Marot?"

"They are just at hand," was the reply. "We are all masked, for fear of accidents."

"Have you no mask for me?"

"I have an old mask in my pocket, but it will never suit your huge face. Besides the strings are gone. But stay, I will do my best for you, by way of paying up old scores; and your broad back will come in use and be of service to us, without doubt."

The poet then proceeded to place a mask on the face of the Buffoon, and bound on a large handkerchief around his eyes and ears, under pretence of retaining it in its place.

"Are there many of you?" inquired the old man. "I neither hear or see anything with this bandage around my head."

"There are half-a-dozen of us, perhaps," was the reply.

"The scaling-ladder was now planted firmly against the wall surmounted by the terrace of Triboulet's house, and the party prepared to proceed with their adventure.

"We need have no great fear of being heard, let us make what noise we may," said the poet to his comrades, with a laugh. "That bandage makes the old fellow both blind and deaf. Now, Triboulet," he continued, leading the old man to the base of the ladder; "your sole office is to stand on the inner side of this ladder, and hold it firmly against the wall. We shall then enter Vendome's Hotel in a body, and the adventure will soon have been accomplished. Happen what may, you will remember that this is your post, and you will not move from it until all is over. Stand firm. Everything depends on this."

The dark lantern was now opened, and, by its light, several of the party mounted the ladder to the terrace, and disappeared into the house.

In a few moments the door in the wall seemed forcibly flung wide, and a man appeared, bearing in his arms the form of the struggling Blanche, with a large bandage bound over her mouth. In an instant, the whole party gathered around them, and the group rapidly disappeared up the lane.

"They are somewhat silent as well as slow in their movements," at length muttered the old man, still continuing faithfully at his post. He waited a few moments longer, and, hearing nothing, ventured to remove the bandage and the mask from his face.

He looked around him. All was still and deserted. On the ground at his feet stood a dark lantern, and, beside it, by the light, he perceived something white. He stooped and examined it. It was his daughter's veil! He looked up—the ladder was planted against the terrace of his own house: around—the door in the wall was spread

wide: he listened—on the night-wind mournfully came the faint cry—"My father! Oh, my father!" followed by the distant shout—"Victory!"

Instantly the dreadful truth rushed upon his conviction!

He sprang furiously into the house. The next moment he appeared, dragging along the half-undressed and shrieking Marion. He gazed on her in a stupor of horror and rage, while she implored his mercy. At length, raising his eyes and clasped hands to heaven, he feebly ejaculated—

"Ah, that old man's curse!" and dropped, like a lifeless log, upon the ground.

CHAPTER X.—THE TEMPTATION.

Let others
Deem that the splendor consecrates the sin!
I'd loved thee with as pure and proud a love,
If thou hadst been the poorest cavalier
That ever served a king—thou know'st it, Louis.

HULWELL.

"In spite of all the virtue we can boast,
The woman that deliberates is lost."

He loves me, then! He loves me! Love! wild word!
Did I say love? Dishonor, shame, and crime
Dwell on the thought! And yet—and yet—he loves me!

THE DUCHESS DE LA VALLIERE.

It was morning. The scene of our story shifts to the royal ante-chamber in the palace of the Louvre. The apartment was of small dimensions, but elegantly decorated and furnished. The hangings, the gildings, the paintings, the sculpture, all the articles of furniture, bore witness to that refinement of taste, for which the age was distinguished. A sideboard, at one extremity of the room, was garnished with a rich array of gold and silver plate, splendidly embossed, and numerous vessels filled with choicest wines. At the other extremity of the apartment, folding doors seemed to conduct into a larger and more public one beyond, while, on the right, was a door leading into the bed-chamber of the king, over which hung the heavy folds of a curtain of gorgeous tapestry.

The sun had been above the horizon for several hours, and was now streaming cheerfully through the broad casements. At length, the folding doors opened, and a group of courtiers, gayly laughing and talking, entered the room. They were evidently the daring adventurers of the preceding night.

"Well, gentlemen, we are all here, as agreed," said L'Esparre. "Now for the catastrophe of this adventure."

"It will be rare sport to witness the hunchback's rage at the loss of his ladye-love!" cried Vendome. "He will never discover the place of her concealment. Did any of the palace porters see her last night, when she was brought here?"

"It was impossible to prevent it," was the reply; "but they have all been strictly enjoined to declare that no female passed the threshold during the night. Moreover, the valet who accompanied us on the expedition—a rogue who seems quite *au fait* at such matters—has taken upon himself to noise about among the *erotics* of Triboulet, that he saw a young woman borne by men, after midnight, into the Hotel D'Hautefort, and that she struggled violently, and had a bandage around her mouth."

"Capital!" cried Vendome. "The Hotel D'Hautefort, just in the opposite direction from the Louvre?"

"Excellent!" chimed in Marot. "And, in order to fasten the blinder yet more bewilderingly over his eyes, I too have been at work."

"Well done, Clement!" cried they all, gathering around the poet; "and what is it?"

"I had this note placed in his hands this morning, when he just made his appearance—

Your ladye-love fair is now mine, Triboulet!
Farewell! we leave France to go over the sea!"

Can you perpetrate a keener joke than that, comrades?"

The whole group laughed immoderately.

"Signed *Jean de Nivelles*," added the poet. And the laughter was renewed louder than before.

"Ye gods! how the old murrain will burst and rage!" cried L'Esparre.

"Oh, a capital joke!" added Vendome. "The old cripple will be like a baited bull; he will not know on which side to leap to find his tormentors."

"Ah, when we see the malicious wretch tottering about, with his hands clenched and his teeth grating with despair and rage, the sport of all he meets, methinks we shall pay him up, in a few hours, the arrears of months," said Marot. "The old inquisitor will now experience"—

The irritated and resentful poet was interrupted in the expression of his bitter feelings by the entrance, through the side-door of which mention has been made, of the king in a morning dress, leaning upon the arm of Bonnavet. The admiral seemed reciting to Francis something which interested him, and with which he was highly entertained. The courtiers ranged themselves on either side of the apartment, as the pair approached; and, to his condescending salutations, returned their most reverential *devoirs*.

"And she is at this moment in the Louvre, did I understand you, Bonnavet?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire, and she has received the most respectful attention in private apartments, ever since she reached the palace."

"Are you sure she is my Triboulet's mistress?" asked the king; "Triboulet's mistress! that's *too good*!"

"She is his mistress, or his wife, sire—possibly his daughter. But she is too lovely for a thing like Triboulet to be her father. Will your majesty receive her now?"

"Yes, yes, immediately! I long to see her. It will be capital sport, this making Triboulet jealous. But I never had any suspicion of his being a husband, father, or lover before; had you, Bonnavet? How funny! Triboulet's mistress! Triboulet's wife! Triboulet's daughter! But that is too absurd! And you say she is beautiful? Well, well, let me see the lady-bird."

The admiral left the room at once, and Francis, turning to L'Esparre, exchanged with him a few sentences of a light and jovial character, and concluded by draining a morning-draught of the spicy Burgundy which stood upon the sideboard. From time to time, however, his eye rested with ill-repressed curiosity upon the folding-doors, in anticipation of the spectacle about to be exhibited.

Nor was it long delayed. The door opened, and Blanche, agitated and trembling—her delicate form shrouded in the voluminous folds of a large veil, and leaning for support and protection on the stately admiral, appeared on the threshold.

The king gazed with a look of surprise on the young girl as she entered, and then sank carelessly into a chair.

"Come, my fair girl," said the admiral soothingly, "do not be terrified. You have no cause to tremble. Take courage. You are near the king, who will protect you, and be very kind to you."

"Is that young man the king?" she faltered, when she ventured to raise her eyes, as the pair drew nigh to the chair on which his majesty was sitting.

"It is the king," was the brief reply.

Forsaking the arm of Bonnavet, poor Blanche crept forward and sank at the royal feet.

"Oh, sire, have mercy on me!" she cried, in tones of the most touching distress.

At the sound of that voice, Francis started to his feet, and made a rapid gesture that every individual but Blanche should retire from the apartment.

The instant they were alone, the king raised her from the floor, and placing her in the chair he had just occupied, dropped upon his knee at her feet. Respectfully and tenderly, he then laid away the veil from that pallid but beautiful face:

"Blanche!" he exclaimed.

"Norman!" was the reply of the innocent and simple-hearted girl; "my Norman!"

"My Blanche! my Blanche! my angel! my love! beautiful as ever! come to my arms!" exclaimed the lover.

"No—oh, no!" was the timid reply of the shrinking girl. "The king—the king! Leave me, sire! Oh, I do not know what to think, or to say. Norman—no, you are not my Norman—you are the King of France. Oh, whoever you are," she continued, "have pity and send me home!"

"Have pity on thee, Blanche!" cried the king, raising her from his feet; "what a petition to one who adores thee! Whatever Norman Mervil, the poor scholar, said to thee last night, Francis of Valois, the king of France, repeats to thee this morning. I have told thee I love thee—you have told me the same; why may we not still be happy? A man is none the worse lover, Blanche, for being a monarch. You thought me a poor country scholar, fairest—perhaps something even meaner, yet you loved me. And now that you have chanced to learn that my birth is somewhat higher, and that I am the king of France, will you hate me? I have not the happiness to be a clown, my pretty Blanche, though as you seem so strangely to desire it, I would, for your sake, I were one. You will not cease to love me, Blanche, because I happen to be a king? Say you will not?"

"Oh, sire, I have no power not to love you, whatever you may be; and yet—and yet—oh, my God, I wish I were in my grave!"

And the unhappy girl burst into an uncontrollable paroxysm of tears.

"Blanche! Blanche!" cried the king, distressed at her anguish and striving in vain to allay it. "Do—do not, I pray you, distress me thus! Do not think, for an instant, that I would willingly cause pain. Blanche, if a king can make you happy, you shall be so. The fete, the game, the tourney, the dance, the song of the troubadour, the praise of the poet, the undivided admiration of the most splendid court in Europe and the undivided heart of its monarch, shall all be yours. And then, love, think! you will always be with your Norman—our future fates will be one. Oh, think of this, Blanche, and of all our undisturbed communion of soul—the rapturous intercourse of love—the quiet ramble alone in the park, at sunset—the morning jaunt—the hunt—the drive—the thousand delights of the sunny summer day—the ten thousand joys which night with its dusky wing overshadows! Oh, my beautiful Blanche, let us be lovers—let us be happy! Life is but short, my sweet one—life is at best but short; and age, and infirmity, and sickness soon enough come over us; and existence, bereft of those joyous moments which love alone can sprinkle along the pathway of its votaries, is but a weary burden—nay, it is a sad-haed tissue, without a solitary spangle to light it up—like the sky without a star—like the earth without a flower. Blanche, I have thought long and earnestly of all this—much of human happiness and its pursuit—much of human life, its end and its aim; and this is my fixed conviction—my maxim of conduct: God made man to be happy, and we honor Him when we make ourselves so, and all who are around us. Blanche, I am young, but you are

younger; it is but meet, then, that I should counsel. Oh, let us love! let us love!"

To this eager rhapsody, poor Blanche eagerly listened—her pale face covered with her hands—and her heart sank within her. She quietly retained her position, without attempting the slightest reply; but when the king, at its conclusion, mistaking her silence for assent to his wishes, extended his arms to fold her to his bosom, she shrank, trembling, almost with fear, from his proffered embrace.

"Oh, my dreams—my illusions—how they have fled!" she sadly murmured. "How little—oh, how little now seems that idol of my bosom like the pure, bright being that I fancied him!"

"My Blanche! what means this?" said Francis, in a subdued tone, after a pause of surprise. "Why do you reject me thus? And so you fancied me one of those timid, trembling, blushing, bashful lovers—one of those luke-warm, weeping sentimental simpletons, who would be satisfied with a sigh, and a smile, and a glance of the eye from the woman whom he worships! My Blanche! my pretty, simple little Blanche—was it not so? Am I not right? But you will soon get over that."

And again the king attempted to clasp her to his bosom. But this time he was repulsed with not a little of anger and disgust. The clear hazel eye sparkled and the bright red lip quivered.

"Leave me, sir! Leave me! Go!" she cried, as sternly as her soft voice would permit.

"Blanche—Blanche!" said the king with seriousness; "do you consider whom you have at your feet? France—her whole territory; her wealth; her splendor; her fifteen millions of men; power, rank, honor—all are mine. I am Francis of Orleans, the king! And Blanche, Francis is *thine*! the king is *thine*! Thou art sovereign of the sovereign. I am the king; and now wilt thou be my queen?"

"Your wife, sir?" was the simple question of Blanche, looking inquiringly into his eyes.

"What innocence! What simplicity! What virtue!" exclaimed the king with a smile. "Ah, Blanche, the wife of a king is not always the mistress of his heart; and the mistress of his heart is seldom his wife."

"The mistress of the king!" ejaculated the poor girl, with a glance of horror at her royal lover, at the same time rising to her feet, as if to find safety in flight. "Never, sir—never! What vile disgrace! Sir, release me! Let me go to my home. I am not yours; I never can be yours. I am my father's; my poor, deserted father's, who, when he finds I am stolen from him, will surely die!"

As she alluded to her father, she burst into a flood of tears, and wept and sobbed, as if her heart would break.

The feelings of Francis, which, had they been untainted by the license of the times and his station, would have been considerably remarkably amiable, were now thoroughly touched.

He placed the distressed girl upon a chair, and knelt at her feet.

"Nay, Blanche; nay, do not weep. You are dear, very dear to me. I knew not until this moment that you were so dear. It pains me to see you weep; and to know that I am the cause of such tears is worst of all. Oh, do not weep! Come to my heart!"

"Never, sir; never!"

"My Blanche, have you not said you loved me? You have not forgotten that! You have not retracted that?"

"But I knew not then you were the king. That is all over now. I cannot be your wife. You are a king."

"Then I have been blessed by you against your will, my sweet Blanche? But do not weep; do not sob so like a forsaken one. Oh, I am a wretch for having caused tears to those beautiful eyes. What! Francis of Valois make a woman weep? Why, I shall be despised throughout all Christendom! Weep no more. You shall not be harmed. Everything you wish shall be granted."

"Oh, are you, indeed, serious in what you say, sir?" cried Blanche, brushing away her tears, while a gleam of joy passed over her pale countenance. "All this, then, is only a jest? I was sure it could not be reality. And you will send me back again to my home and my poor father. You are the king; you can do anything. I live in a retired lane near the Hotel Vendome. But you know all this, I suppose. And yet—oh, I can comprehend nothing! They seized me last night just as I was going to rest—not long after you—after my Norman left me; and they carried me off in the dark, I know not where; and they did not treat me kindly, sir: they were very rough and cruel, and they pained my limbs. But, why do I tell all this to you? It must be that you know it all! Everything seems confused to me like a vision. And you—you whom I thought so mild and gentle—you to treat me so unkindly! Oh, I do not think I love you now, sir. You are a king; I fear you."

"Ah cruel one!" replied Francis, with a smile; "I shall make you fear me."

"Leave me, sir!" cried Blanche, as the king again attempted to embrace her; and, springing from her seat, she retreated to the farther extremity of the apartment.

The king followed, and the poor victim continued to retreat. In course of her flight, the small side-door, leading into the inner chamber caught her eye, and, without an instant's reflection, she darted through the half-opened entrance, securing the door behind her.

Francis paused an instant; then, taking a small key from his girdle, he quietly locked the door.

"A strange refuge, pretty one! thy lover's bed-chamber, of all other places! And, now, what's to be done?" he continued, pacing the apartment with folded arms. "I love her; she loves me. She

must be mine. But, no violence! She must not be harmed. I love her too well for that. I must be kind and affectionate to her. I must win her by gentleness. Mine she *must* be; mine in heart she already *is*, notwithstanding her resistance. No woman, young or old, ever said to Francis of Valois the three syllables, *"I love thee,"* who, soon or late, became not, soul and body, his own!"

CHAPTER XI....THE AUBERGE.

"Trust not a man! They are by nature cruel,
False, deceitful, treacherous, and inconstant.
When a man *talks* of love, with caution hear him!
—But if he *swears*, he'll certainly deceive you!"

O, to what a reed
We bind our destinies, when man we love!
Peace, honor, conscience lost—if I lose *him*,
What have I left? THE DUCHESS OF LA VALLIERE.—ACT III.

The angel hath not left her! if the plumes
Have lost the whiteness of their younger glory,
The wings have still the instinct of the skies,
And yet shall bear her up!

IS.

On the banks of the Seine, near to that ancient fortress so celebrated in the licentious and bloody biography of Margaret of Burgundy, *La Tour de Nesle*, stood an old and ruined mansion. It was two stories in height, although its dimensions were limited. The principal entrance, which looked out upon the river, was protected by a heavy portico with a slanting roof, on which stood a faded sign of the *Auberge* of "*La Comme du Cin*." Another and smaller entrance to the hotel could be seen in the rear, to the left, near to which was a low casement partially obstructed, but easily permitting any person standing without, to observe all transpiring in the chief apartment on the ground-floor, within.

At the distance of some rods from the *Auberge*, at the foot of the quay, stood the ruins of a parapet of stone, into which, as a basement, was secured the iron frame-work supporting a large bell, which had once been in use for a Ferry. For years, indeed, had the old *cabaret* been famed as the "*Inn of the Ferry*." At the foot of the parapet rippled on the dark waters of the Seine, and, beyond the stream, rose the multitudinous spires and roofs of ancient Paris: prominent among which, beetled up the heavy twin towers of Notre Dame.

The sun had been below the horizon for some hours, and over the old city, in the dusk of the evening, gloomed the gathering clouds of an impending storm.

Within the ancient tavern, on the hearth, gleamed the flickering flame of a fire, as could be seen through the half opened door; while the apartment was thus lighted up sufficiently to exhibit to the satisfaction of the beholder its furniture and its inhabitants. Of the latter there were but two, a man and a woman. The man was sitting on a low form before the blaze, busily engaged in furbishing a huge sword; and the woman, young and beautiful, seemed equally engaged with her household avocations, in the furtherance of which she shortly withdrew into a less public apartment.

The furniture of the room seemed of the most primitive description. In the centre, stood a large and massive table, and, in various positions, might be seen oaken stools, equally massive, and almost as large. Upon an open *dressoir* against the wall, on one side was arranged a variety of utensils of earthenware of convenience in household economy, but of the coarsest description; and against the opposite wall was planted a ponderous structure, designed apparently by its inventor as a pantry, but which, in course of its prolonged existence, had been forced by the necessities of its possessor to subservise every other accommodation, as well as that for which it was originally designed. This old *Ark*, for it contained a little of *everything*, was in fact the prominent feature of the apartment; and, a more venerable representative, as well as relique, of time departed—what with its age-stains, and its damp-mould, and its festoons of flaunting spiders' webs—could scarcely have been hunted up.

The two floors of the old mansion communicated with each other by means of a ricketty flight of stairs, or rather a ladder, most perilous to mount; running up at one extremity of the lower apartment. It was blast with not even an apology for a balustrade; about every other step was in some degree fractured, and it shook and creaked beneath the step of an intruder, like—like to an old gibbet in a gale of wind!

To the apartment above was a single window opening on the roof of the portico. And thus the whole interior of this most democratic of mansions was laid open, by means of its wide-spread doors and windows, and the interior illumination of its flickering fire upon the hearth, to the inspection of any passer-by, possessed of curiosity enough to honor it with a look.

Through the increasing gloom of the night, two figures might be descried slowly approaching the *Auberge*, along the by-road which conducted from the city. One of these individuals was, seemingly, an old man: the other a young girl, who was led by the hand; and they were engaged in earnest conversation.

"And you love him still, Blanche?" asked the old man.

"Yes, my father, I love him still," was the soft and timid reply.

"And you have striven constantly, during the last six or seven months, to crush this passion?"

"I have tried to obey you, my father; yet—I love him only the more."

"Oh, frail heart of woman!" ejaculated the old man. "And, yet, with all thy frailty, how firm—how constant—how changeless, where once thy affection is fixed! It matters not the character of the *magnet*, vicious or virtuous: its power, by the magnetized, is ever

acknowledged, and is ever equally strong! But my daughter, why, why do you love this man? Explain to me the reasons for your love."

"I do not *know* why;" was the simple answer.

"Strange!" said the old man, musing.

"Oh, it seems not so to me, my father. Men love those who do them favors; who give them things of value; who make them happy; who are kind to them—do they not?"

"They do, my daughter."

"Well, Francis has brought nothing but ill to me; he has deprived me of my only treasure; he has caused me much pain: and yet I know not why—I *love him*! So wild, indeed, is my folly, my dear father, that were it necessary, I feel that I could die for him who has been so fatal to me, as willingly as for you, who have ever been so kind."

"My child, I pardon thee," replied the old man, tremulously—almost reproachfully, so tender were his tones.

"But hear me! hear me, my father," quickly rejoined the young girl: "*he loves me thus!*"

"No, my child—no;" replied the father, with a melancholy smile, as if pitying the simplicity of his inexperienced daughter. "*That is, indeed, a folly, the wildest folly of all.*"

"Oh, yes—yes, he *does* love me!" was the eager answer. "He has told me so often! He has sworn it, father, he has sworn it by God in Heaven! And, then, he has always spoken so softly to me, and has treated me so kindly and so tenderly, and he has been so respectful to me, and he has besought me so often and so humbly to forgive him the harm he has done me, that I sometimes almost fear that I *have* forgiven him, though I suppose I ought not. And, when he tells me he loves me, and looks so tenderly down into my very soul with his large bright eyes—oh, my father, it is not in the heart of your poor Blanche—it is not in the heart of man to disbelieve all. Her heart loves too deeply itself even to believe that such love is not returned."

The pair walked slowly on for some steps in silence. The young girl, from time to time, gazed earnestly into her father's face, as if striving to interpret the dark shadows which were lowering portentously there.

"Infamous ravisher!" at length he muttered, as if to himself, in the vehemence of his feelings. "His hand has laid my earthly happiness in ruins: let him beware—let him beware!"

And the old man quivered like a seared leaf with suppressed excitement.

"My father! my father!" exclaimed the terrified Blanche—"Oh, what do you mean! you will not harm him? you have forgiven—"

"Never! never!" interrupted the jester, with terrible emphasis. "*Forgive!* For seven interminable months have I striven to *forget*; but it has been only that my vengeance might, at last, prove the more severe, and the more deadly!"

For some moments Blanche clung in speechless terror to her father's arm for support.

"My father," she at length faltered: "will you, also, take vengeance on me?"

"On you, my poor ruined child—on you! Why, Blanche, have I ever blamed you for one instant? Have I ever even looked a reproach at you? Has one syllable of murmur at you left my lip? Have I not been as kind and as tender toward you, my daughter—oh, more so, since that dreadful night, as before? *Thou art innocent—thou art innocent!* This is my last, lone, consoling thought. And, oh, were it possible for such a pure, beautiful being as thou art, to be *guilty*, the guilt of thy mistaken love has brought its own punishment. I can have no vengeance for thee. Vengeance on thee from me! A wild thought, my Blanche."

"Then, then, my father, spare him! If you love me, if you would not destroy me, spare him—forgive him! During the past few months I have often, you know, ventured to speak of him to you; I have even been encouraged by you so to do, and you have seemed to have forgiven him; you have seemed to love him even as you ever did before."

"Seemed!" was the bitter reply. "You are right, my child. I *have* seemed! Blanche—Blanche, listen to me: This man has ruined you! He has deliberately, calmly, with full purpose of mind, bereft you of that, which all heaven, earth, and hell cannot restore! He has made you a thing to be despised, scorned, loathed by the whole world—by every living being, except your poor old father! And he effected this by taking a most base and villainous advantage of the pure and innocent attachment of a young, ardent and inexperienced child! Now, my daughter, tell me—I know you will tell me *truly*, when you think upon all this dreadful wrong which this man has done you, the ruin, complete and irreparable, which your deceiver has brought upon you—tell me, does your heart feel no *anger* against him?"

"*Anger against him!* my father! Oh, no—never! Indeed, I do not *think* now of all that of which you speak. Perhaps it is strange that I do not. I did at first. But now I only think of him; how noble, and illustrious and handsome he is; and how kindly and tenderly he always treats me; and how dearly he loves me—loves me alone. And I think, my father—I think—that—I shall soon be a mother. This is all my world now. I do not care for any other world, what it thinks of me—what it says of me. I have done very wrong, I know. But I have done so for the happiness of one dearer far to me than reputation or life: and, so long as Francis loves me,

and you forgive me, I shall be happy. When that ceases, then I will die. If I have broken God's law in one respect, oh, He knows, that I have striven with prayer and agony to observe that law in every other!"

The old man listened thoughtfully, in silence, with mingled and varying feelings of indignation and tenderness. At length he replied:

"You say, Blanche, that so long as your betrayer loves you, and treats you kindly, you shall be happy—you shall love him. Suppose you were assured, beyond a doubt—a hope—that he loved you no longer—that he never had loved you: suppose you were to hear him declare this, with your own ears, and were to see him, with your own eyes, confirm his protestations by caressing another, would you still love him?"

The poor girl stopped and turned very pale.

"Oh, I do not know, my father," she replied, after a pause: and, then quickly and eagerly—"But that is not possible! He loves me—only me: he loves me more than all the world beside—better than his own life—he told me so yesterday."

"At what hour?" asked the old man, bitterly.

"At about this hour, yesterday evening."

"Well, Blanche, we will stop at this old cabaret. You have thought it singular that I have desired you to walk with me to this lonely spot; you will now discover my purpose."

The old man advanced cautiously to the low window in the *Auberge*, of which mention has been made, and, having glanced hastily into the apartment described, stepped back again to his daughter.

"Stand at this window," he continued, leading her up to the casement, after having gazed carefully around him on every side, to be sure that they were unobserved; "look into that room and notice all that is said and done. Last evening, your deceiver assured you that he loved you: mark what he assures another this evening."

Obedient to her father's request, Blanche looked into the cabaret, and, for a short time, both were silent.

"What see you, my daughter?" asked the old man, at length.

"I see only a large, dark-looking man, seated before the fire, polishing a monstrous sword," was the reply. "He is very busy; he does not raise his head."

"Be patient," said the old man, "you will see more anon. Nay, do not tremble, my child; your father is with you."

And the jester placed himself at her side, and putting his stalwart arm around the waist of the trembling girl, he looked with her into the apartment.

For some time, everything remained as before. At length, hasty footsteps were heard approaching; the small door beside them was thrown open, and the king, in the uniform of an officer of his guard, entered the room.

There could be no disguise, no mistaking. There was the bold and handsome face; there the elegant figure and graceful movements of Francis of Valois.

Blanche now trembled violently, and a murmured ejaculation of astonishment died between her lips. Regardless of everything else, she now pressed her forehead against the casement, and, with a listening ear, gazed intently on all that transpired.

The king walked briskly across the apartment, and, advancing to the man at the fire, gave him a tap on the shoulder.

The man looked up from his employment. It was Saltabadil, the Burgundian.

"Bon soir! my good fellow!" cried the king, "There are two things I desire to see *instantanément*?"

"What are they, sir?"

"One is your fair sister, Madeline, the other a cup of wine."

"It is the constant custom of this king, 'by the grace of God,'" whispered the old man into his daughter's ears, "thus to expose his life in the most degraded cabarets in his capital, where he soon gets drunk and becomes the gyramede of a tavern."

Blanche made no reply.

Meanwhile, Saltabadil had gone to the pantry, which has been described, and, producing thence an earthen jug and a cup of pewter, silently placed them on the table in the centre of the room. Then striking two blows with the hilt of his sword on the floor, the woman, "young and beautiful," to whom reference has been had in the opening of this chapter, in a few minutes entered the apartment.

She was apparently two or three-and-twenty years of age, though her air and bearing bespoke the maturity of one much more advanced. Her stature rather excelled that of her sex generally. Her form was full and round, and her limbs seemed almost muscular in their development. Her hair was rather coarse in fibre, but black and glossy; and tastefully, though carelessly arranged. Her complexion was a clear olive; lips too full for beauty, but well shaped, red and flexible; brow clear and open; eye large, dark, lustrous—all passion; teeth small, uniform, brilliant. Add to this description a seductive smile and a charming *naïveté* and frankness of manner, and the Bohemian girl may, methinks, be imagined by our reader, as, even in imagination, she stands before us now.

We will say nothing of her dress, for we know nothing of the costume of the Bohemian damsels of 1517; but we have no doubt that it was becoming in cut and color, though coarse in texture: nor will we allude to the softness of her tones, or the richness of her idiom, for she has not yet permitted us to judge of either.

As the Bohemian girl sprang lightly into the room, with a good-humored smile on her open features, the king placed himself in her

path, and sought to clasp her in his arms. She eluded his grasp, and, passing to the other side of the large table, seated herself carelessly upon one corner, and laughed merrily at his diacomfiture.

As for Saltabadil, he very gravely resumed the furbishing of his sword, as if the brightness of his earthly hopes depended on the lustre of its blade.

"I say, my good fellow," cried the king, "that hideous bar of iron that you are scouring so unmercifully there, will be all the brighter if you scour it with a little dew."

"I comprehend," was the laconic answer.

Rising with great gravity, Saltabadil shouldered his rapier, and, saluting the king, as he would any gentleman of the army, he left the apartment by the private door, taking care securely to close it behind him.

On reaching the open air, he looked around into the darkness with a scrutinizing glance, as if expecting to be accosted by some one who awaited him.

The jester perceived him, and, leaving Blanche still at the casement, approached the spot where he stood.

"Your man is in my hands, sir," said the Burgundian; "shall he live or die?"

"Come to me again soon," was the answer; "I will then have determined."

The Bohemian slowly disappeared in the darkness, and the old man resumed his place beside his daughter.

CHAPTER XII.....THE BETRAYAL.

He loves me, then, no longer! All the words
Earth knows shape but one thought—"He loves no longer!"—BULWER.

Ay!

Thou hast learned, betimes, the truth, that man's wild passion
Makes but its sport of virtue, peace, affection;
And breaks the plaything when the game is done!—IB.

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.—JULIUS CÆSAR,

Farewell—we meet no more in life!—Farewell!—BYRON.

THE KING and the Bohemian girl were now alone. The latter still sat quietly upon the table, gazing at her companion, whom she evidently supposed the officer of high rank he represented. But, when he approached her with open arms and a smiling countenance, she slipped from her seat, and laughingly eluded his embrace. In this manner continued the chase around the table, until the king, seemingly discouraged by her coyness, himself assumed the seat at the table she had forsaken, and, folding his arms, gazed at her, and reprovingly shook his head.

"No—no—no," do you say?" exclaimed the king. "Well, this is remarkable progress I am making in your affections, most assuredly. The instant I come within grasping and clasping distance, away are you, with your 'No—no—no!' Come, Madeline, do be a reasonable woman! Sit down a moment, and let me talk to you."

"There, thank you," continued Francis, as the Bohemian walked quietly up to the table and seated herself at a short distance from him, with a listening air, her great black eyes fixed earnestly, if not ardently, upon his face.

"Let me see, Madeline, how long is it since we first met? It must be nearly a week, since I first saw these wonderful eyes of yours. And who brought us together? My Triboulet, I suppose. He is always leading me into some mischief; and, during the six months past, it does seem as if the very devil was in the old hunchback. He has kept me in a constant routine of hazardous intrigues, from some of which, nothing but a ready sword and a ready tongue could have saved me. But, as I was saying, it is a whole week since I first saw your black, beautiful eyes; and, on the word of a gentleman, I have thought of nothing else by day, and dreamed of nothing else at night. Triboulet would not let me see you before, and I am here now, only at my most earnest intercession. I love you, Madeline; I love you alone!"

[Poor Blanche!]

"Ha—ha—ha!" rang the silvery laugh of the Bohemian. "Love me alone! And how many scores do you except by mental reservation? Why, you have the air of a perfect libertine, young man!"

"Well, Madeline!" replied the king, joining in her laugh; "that remark does some credit to your penetration, though not so much to your manners. You are right. I am a perfect libertine. I am perfectly irresistible! So you may as well yield at discretion, first as last!"

"Oh, the coxcomb!" cried the Bohemian.

"True, on my word," replied Francis. "But what a wretched old hovel you live in," he continued: "and your wine," drinking a cup which he had filled from the earthen jug; "is worse than your house, if anything; and that brother of yours—is he your brother, Madeline?—is worse than both the others put together. Why! his face looks like the muzzle of a bull-dog beside your delicate lips and cheeks! I don't believe he is your brother. Why do you live with him, and in such a place? *N'importe*. I shall stay here myself to-night, I think."

And the king looked up at the ceiling and around the apartment, as if to examine the character of his anticipated lodgings.

"Stay here, indeed!" resumed the girl; "you will do no such thing, I fancy. You must go home and take care of your wife and children. Besides, we have no room for you here."

"My wife and children!" replied Francis, with a smile. "Good advice, no doubt; but my Claude herself could hardly help being amused at such advice to her recreant lord, in such a place, and from such a source. Poor Claude!"

[Poor Blanche!]

The king seemed lost for some moments in thought, and the Bohemian narrowly watched the changes of his countenance.

From this reverie, which seemed to be neither painful nor pleasant—or, rather, which seemed to partake of both feelings—he freed himself by a sudden effort, and, gliding rapidly to the side of his fair companion, passed his arm around her waist before she appeared aware of his design.

"No—no—no!" she exclaimed, struggling to release herself from the eager embrace of her temporary lover, though she had plainly but little heart for the effort. "Be quiet, sir, or you must leave me."

"Why, you pretty gipsy, what a noise you make!" replied the king, with a laugh. "It is *you* who must be quiet. I am sober enough."

"Oh, an extraordinary young man for sobriety *you* are, no doubt!" said the girl, gliding from his grasp and resuming her seat, at about the same distance as before.

Francis did not this time pursue her: indeed, he suffered her to slip easily from his arms, when he perceived that such was her purpose; nor did he reply. Turning himself, however, he fixed his large, full, brilliant eye steadily upon hers.

The effect of this seemed almost magical. In a few minutes, a change came over the countenance of the Bohemian. The smile forsook her lip: the flush fled from her cheek. Her dark eye dilated, and seemed fastened as if by fascination upon the burning orbs of her companion; and a shade almost of sadness fell upon her speaking features.

"To-morrow," she murmured; "to-morrow," as if in reply to a fancied request of the king.

"To-morrow, Madleine!" was the reply, in a low tone of voice; "to-morrow may never come to us! Now, now: *oh, let us love! let us love!*"

[Poor Blanche!]

Without a word of reply, the Bohemian arose from her seat, and gliding softly to the side of the king, placed her hand quietly in his.

"Ah, what a soft hand!" said Francis; "how peacefully it sleeps in mine! They seem almost to stifle each other with caresses."

"You are jesting with me, sir," replied the Bohemian; and her voice trembled with emotion.

"Madelaine! my beautiful!"

"No, sir, no: I am not beautiful."

"Be it so. Yet, I love thee: I love thee! Know you not the rapture of love? Know you not of the mystic flame that glides kindling along the veins, and plays like a halo around the soul? Know you not of that electric flash, that nerves the heart and fires the brain?"

The Bohemian gazed at the king during this rhapsody, as if doubting how it was meant, and how it should be received. Her keen sense of the ridiculous prevailed, however: her risibles were not proof against the preposterous rhodomontade of the court, and she burst into a hearty laugh.

"On my word, sir, that is very fine! *too* fine entirely to be wasted on a poor, ignorant girl like me. But tell me, from what book did it come?"

"Oh, I forget," replied Francis, not in the least disconcerted, but joining in the laugh of his companion. "One kiss, Madleine! I must have a kiss!"

"No, no! Why, sir, you have been drinking, I fancy! You are intoxicated!"

"Yes, with love from your melting eyes, Madleine."

"No, you do not love me. You are but jesting, with that half-tender, half-sad, half-smiling, jovial air of yours. No, you do *not* love me."

"Yes—yes; thee—only thee!" exclaimed the king, passionately clasping her to his breast.

"There, that will do!" said the Bohemian, striving feebly to free herself.

"Madelaine—Madelaine! be mine—my love—my wife!"

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the Bohemian. "And pray, sir, how large is your seraglio now? Your *wife*, indeed! And, yet, I doubt not I love you quite well enough to be your wife—quite as well as most wives love their lords, and better than many do."

"Madelaine—dear Madleine!" said the king, clasping her hand in his, and again folding her to his bosom. "What a dear, warm-hearted, good-humored, seducing girl, you are! I would defy St. Anthony to withstand your fascinations. I, alas! never was a saint!"

The conversation now sank into a whisper. The Bohemian no longer resisted the caresses of her royal lover. Sitting upon his knee, with her hand upon his shoulder, she listened eagerly to his endearments, and with smiles and blushes gazed ardently into his eyes. Poor Blanche!

Poor Blanche, indeed! She had seen all! she had heard all! The whispered words of endearment—the warm caresses—the passionate gaze—the low murmur of tenderness—all, all those demonstrations of love, which had been to her so precious, she had beheld lavished on another—lavished by one for whom she would willingly have yielded up her life-blood, drop by drop, had he asked it!

Her brain reeled—a mist came over her sight—her heart sank within her—the blood became chill in her veins—her very soul sickened—she could endure the terrible scene no longer—and, pale and tottering, she turned away.

"Well, my daughter," said the old man, after gazing on his child with a look of inexpressible tenderness for some moments, in silence, as she leaned on his breast, "What think you now? tell me, what shall I do?"

"Oh, treachery! ingratitude!" murmured the wretched Blanche, bursting into tears. "Oh, my heart! I believe it is broken! This man has terribly deceived me! He has no soul—he is false-hearted—he is perfidious! My father, he has spoken those very things to this shameless woman that he once spoke to me! Oh, how well do I remember all of them—all of his caresses! Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, raising her clasped hands to heaven, "how could he have the heart to make a poor girl like me, who loved him so dearly, and who would have given up her life, as she has what was dearer than life, so truly wretched as I am now! Francis! Francis! God will surely judge thee for this! May he forgive thee, for I fear that I never can!"

"Be calm, my poor child, be calm," said the old man, pressing her tenderly to his bosom. "Weep no more; leave all to me; you shall be avenged."

"My father!" said Blanche, looking up inquiringly into his face.

"Yes, my child, you shall be avenged; all is ready."

"My father, what mean you? Why do you look so terribly? What is your purpose?"

"Blanche! listen to me," said the old man in a low and hurried tone. "Go home—to our old home—as fast as you can; the distance is not far; you know the way; when there, you will find in a small closet of the front chamber, the dress of a page, which you will at once put on, together with the sword. In the same closet you will see a small chest, of which this is the key. Open it; supply yourself liberally with gold for a journey. You will find there also a picture of your mother; place it next your heart. In the stable you will find saddled a strong horse; mount, and start off at once on the route to Evreux. To-morrow I will join you at that place. God bless you, my child! God bless you, love!" said the old man, in stifled tones, pressing his daughter to his breast. "Now go; do all as I have bade you; and, above all, return not *here* again; a terrible thing is soon to happen; go, dear, go!"

"My father! my father!" said Blanche, hanging upon his shoulders, and gazing with earnest entreaty into his face, "Oh, will you not go with me? I fear!"

"Impossible, Blanche!" firmly replied the old man. "You know, my child, that your father would go with you through the world—to suffering—to death. You know he never bade you make a sacrifice but for your own good. Oh, you know he would cause you no pain willingly. But you *must* go, Blanche! you must go *alone*, as I have said to you. God will be your guard, dear; fear nothing."

"I tremble!" said the poor girl, glancing timidly into the surrounding gloom.

"Be calm, my child; this is inevitable; you must obey me."

"My father—oh, you will not harm *him*?"

"Blanche!"

The poor girl, at this exclamation of mingled reproof and expostulation, burst into a flood of tears, and for some time wept and sobbed convulsively on her father's breast. The old man poured out his tears with her's.

At length, again embracing her, he kissed her cheek and disengaged her from his arms.

"Now, dear, now, you will go?" he whispered in tones of tenderness, which, perhaps only a parent can realize—a parent, that most tender of all earthly relationships! "You will obey me now, Blanche? We shall soon meet again. There, there—do all as I have told you—good night!"

"Good night, my father!" sobbed poor Blanche, striving to suppress her tears; and, returning her father's kiss upon his wrinkled and rugged front with lips as soft as rose-leaf, she retired from his arms, and slowly disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIII....THE NIGHT STORM.

Let never man be bold enough to say,
Thus, and no farther, shall my passion stray;
The first fault past compels us into more,
And guilt grows *fate*, that was but *choice* before.—AARON HILL.

Lose I not

With him what fortune could in life allot?

Lose I not hope—life's cordial?

CRAEEL.

The old man continued gazing in the direction in which his daughter had disappeared, long after she had ceased to be visible.

"Oh, my God!" he ejaculated, with hands convulsively clasped to his bosom: "keep, guard, preserve her! *She* is pure and guiltless, though I, alas! am not so. Visit not on her innocent head the sins of her father. And, if we have parted for the last time, if we are never again to meet upon the earth: then thy will be done; be thou with her, in her loveliness and purity: in life, or in death!"

The old man's lips were yet writhing in an agony of supplication, which words feebly essayed to express, when a step was heard approaching from the river, and, in a few minutes, Saltabadil, the Burgundian, was at his side.

The expression of suffering passed instantly from the face of the jester; and stern, proud, cold, collected, he gazed on the man of blood.

Without deigning to exchange with him a word of courtesy, the old man withdrew a purse from his bosom, and placed it in the assassin's hand.

"In that purse are twenty crowns: you demand forty. You will receive twenty more when the deed is done. He will pass the night here without fail?"

Saltabadil examined the heavens in silence.

"It will rain in an hour. The tempest and my sister will detain him."

"At midnight I return."

"That is madness. I can cast the body into the Seine."

"I will do that myself," was the quick response.

"As you choose, sir. Men differ in tastes; you will receive the corpse sewn up in a sack."

"At midnight?"

"At midnight."

"It is well," replied the jester, after a thoughtful pause.

"Whom call you this young man?" asked the Burgundian abruptly.

"His name?"

"His name."

"Perhaps you would like mine, too?"

"I should," was the sturdy reply.

"Well: his name is *Crime*; my name is *Punishment*. Good night!"

The jester turned and walked off.

"Cool enough!" muttered the Burgundian. "He should be a bravo himself. Never mind. His gold is good, I suppose."

Meanwhile, the sky had become overcast and black, and angry clouds were rolling up rapidly from the horizon over the firmament. A vivid flash of lightning succeeded by a rumble of distant thunder, broke in on the bravo's meditations.

"Ha! The storm comes grandly on! It is nearly over the city already. So much the better. The quay will be the more deserted. How strangely things look to-night! And the people whom I chanced to meet: how they stared at me! Why was it so? Could it be fancy merely? No matter!"

Again the bravo studied the face of the sky with a keen and prolonged gaze. Then, turning, he entered the house.

The occupants of the apartment still retained the relative positions in which we left them; the Bohemian half-reclining in the arms of the king. At the step of her brother on the threshold, she sprang to her feet and released herself from his embrace.

A peal of thunder was heard in the distance.

"It will rain to-night: observed the bravo.

"Good! Let it rain!" cried Francis. "It pleases me, sir host, to occupy your chamber!"

"It pleases him!" rejoined the Bohemian playfully. "Why, he takes on himself the airs of a king!"

"Will not your family be alarmed at your absence, sir?" asked Saltabadil.

"I have none, thank Providence!" was the laughing response.

"I must have your bed, my good fellow: "you sir," continued the king, as the rain now began rattling in large drops upon the roof: "you can go sleep with your horses, if you have any, or with the devil, if he will let you."

"Indeed!" replied the assassin, with a significant smile.

This meaning smile did not escape the penetrating glance of the Bohemian girl. She became very pale, and, approaching the king, she pronounced in a low and emphatic tone, while pretending to be engaged in lighting a lamp, the single monosyllable,

"Go!"

"Why! it rains!" cried Francis. "We shall have a perfect tempest! You would not have me go out on a night when you would not turn a decent poet from your door—would you, Madleine? How dreadfully black the sky is!" he continued, looking out at the window; "and how vividly it lightens!"

"Let him stay!" whispered the bravo to his sister, unobserved by the king. "Twenty crowns of gold I have already received for him: I shall receive twenty more at midnight." Then turning graciously to the king, "If I may offer my poor chamber to my lord, I shall be most happy if he will accept it."

"Oh, don't disturb yourself about accommodations, my fine fellow," replied Francis, laughing, "I have no doubt you fry in that same chamber of yours in July, and, by way of variety, freeze in December. Am I not right?"

"Quite right, sir. Will you please to try it?"

"Oh, by all means. Let us see."

Saltabadil took the lamp from the table and began ascending the rickety stairs. The king tarried for an instant to embrace Madleine and whisper a few syllables in her ear, and then ascended to the upper apartment.

"There is your bed, sir, and a chair, and table;" said the bravo, pointing to the three articles of household furniture, as the king entered the chamber.

"And how many legs have they all?" asked Francis, with a merry laugh, after gazing alternately at the wretched articles before him. "Three—six—nine and a half—three-quarters, perhaps—admirable! I say, my honest fellow, was this furniture of yours at the battle of Marignano, that it is so pitifully crippled?"

Then approaching the window, through which the lightning was flashing with fearful brilliancy—

"What a night! heavens! how black it is, and how it lightens! No casement—no shutter—no curtains! Why, one might as well sleep in the open air! It would be impossible to treat the elements in more hospitable fashion than you do, my fine fellow;" he continued, addressing his companion, who had remained standing upon a single spot, gravely listening to the comments of the king without reply. "Well, well, this is better than going home, I suppose; so, good night!"

"Good night, sir," replied Saltabadil, placing his lamp upon the table, "May God keep you!"

And the bravo went out, closed the door carefully behind him, and his steps were heard descending the creaking stairs.

"Ah, how tired I am;" yawned the king when alone, unbuckling his sword-belt and preparing to throw off his doublet. "And how singularly sleepy I feel. I should think the wine I have drunk to-night drugged, were not the idea so ridiculous. Why drug wine in a hovel like this! a good knife would serve the same purpose. No, it can hardly be the wine; and yet I am desperately sleepy;" he continued, drawing off his boots and extending himself upon the bed. "It must be the scenes of the evening. This love is wonderfully exhausting. What a superb creature is that Madleine! she almost makes me forget my poor little Blanche. And, yet, she resembles Blanche—resembles her in many respects, although their style of beauty is so utterly dissimilar. There is the same passionate eye; the rounded form; the same full lip: but there is not—oh, no, there is not the same sweet, innocent, trusting smile on the lip of the Bohemian girl as on that of my dear, darling, beautiful Blanche! Ah! I am a sad, sad rover! I do pray that Blanche may never discover what an unfaithful lover she has, for her sake; for, verily, I believe it would kill her."

The king lay for some time as if absorbed in thought. At length he roused himself with a deep sigh.

"No more of this—no more of this! I will think only of Madleine to-night. She is a queen of a woman; I hope that brother of her's did not fasten the door," he continued, raising himself and looking closely at the latch. "No; all right;" he added, as if satisfied with the result of his investigation; and, again lying down, his deep and regular breathing, after a few yawns and sighs, very shortly indicated that he slept.

Meanwhile the storm burst upon the city with all the fury of an autumnal tempest. The rain came down in floods; the lightning glared; the thunder rolled incessantly.

In the chief apartment of the *cabaret* below, sat the Bohemian girl at the table, her head leaning upon her hand, as she gazed upon the expiring embers on the hearth, as if in deep and melancholy reflection.

Opposite at the table, sat Saltabadil, his eyes fixed stupidly upon the cup and jug left by the king, and of which he seemed to have been making a liberal use: the cup was the same, but the wine-vessel was evidently not.

Minute, after minute—a whole hour passed away, and the silent pair still maintained their relative positions.

The girl at length broke silence.

"What a noble young man!"

"Very!" was the brief reply.

"Must he die, brother?"

"He must!"

"Why?"

"I receive forty crowns for his corpse."

"Oh, he is worth twice forty crowns."

"Perhaps he is. Go up and see if he sleeps. He had a sword—bring it down."

Madleine obeyed. Taking the lamp, she ascended to the chamber, and, shading the light with her hand, gazed long and mournfully on the quiet countenance of the slumbering monarch.

"Poor fellow, how soundly he sleeps! But he will sleep sounder soon!"

Her eyes suffused with tears, she took up the sword of the king, which lay upon the chair, and descended the stairs.

Meanwhile, through the rage and fury of the tempest, a figure closely enveloped in a cloak, and in the garb of a traveller, was slowly approaching the old mansion, guided by the incessant glare of the electric flame. The stature and proportions of this individual seemed too slight for those of a man, though such was the garb; and, though accoutred as for a journey, he plodded blindly on, as if without any definite aim, regardless of the inequalities of the route, and seemingly buried in thought.

"A terrible thing is to happen here to-night!" said my father!—thus soliloquized the wayfarer—"What meant he? What terrible thing? To whom did he allude as the victim? Alas! I know not; but I do know that Francis—my own Francis, cruel though he has been to me—will pass here the night. And did not my father speak of him? Oh, my father, pardon thy unhappy child! Thou art no longer here, and I disobey thee in thus returning! But this was inevitable. There is a wilder, more resistless love than even that of a child to its parent, fond though that love may be, and self-sacrificing though it often is. And yet—and yet, I have begun to know, young as I am, that a parent's love for a child is tenderer than all else. I would give my life to secure happiness to my poor old father! I have given, alas! more than my life to secure that of my lover. How strange it seems, that one born and reared as I have been, in the most secluded retirement—leading a life as quiet and as solitary

as that of my birds and my flowers—ignorant of the great world—its cares, its pleasures, its vices—should thus, within the space of one year, have been plunged headlong into that dark and troubled sea, and have been brought to experience sensations of rapture and of agony, of which my heart had never dreamed of before! My innocence—my virtue—my earthly happiness—alas! I have been bereft of them all! Within me all is tempest, even as all is tempest without. And does love always leave the heart in which his flames have been kindled thus in ruins behind him, as he has mine? Of all this wild conflagration of feeling, nothing now but a few smouldering ashes remains. Francis loves me no longer! What agony there is in that thought! Through all the sufferings and shame of the last half-year—and, God knows, they have been fully proportioned to my grief—the certainty that Francis loved me has been a comfort and consolation in my darkest hours. But now—oh, but for his unborn infant, how willingly would I die and never see him more! What a frightful night!" she continued, gazing timidly around. "What dreadful thunder! Well, it is meet it *should* be so. I am glad it is so. A sweet, quiet night, like some I have known, would only mock my miserable heart. How it lightens! Ah, there is the house. Let me press on. There are few things that a despairing, loving woman will not attempt. And I who trembled like a leaf, even at my own shadow—but no more—let me hasten—oh, while I have been delaying, death may have been busy!"

Guided by the light of the lamp which gleamed out from the window, Blanche drew nigh to the old mansion with trembling steps, and resumed her location to view all that transpired within.

CHAPTER XIV.....THE SACRIFICE.

Ere the bat bath flown
His cloister'd flight; ere, to black Hecate's summons,
The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.—MACBETH, Act III, Scene II.
Murder most foul, as in the best it is;
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.—HAMLET, Act I, Sec. IV.
Is there no way to save thee? Minutes fly,
And thou art lost!—thou!—MARINO FALIERO.
—Thou hast killed the sweetest innocent
That ere did lift up eye.—OTHELLO, Act V.

THE BOHEMIAN and her bandit brother retained their positions, as before described, beside the hearth.

"My brother," at length said the girl, looking up from her reverie, and breaking the silence.

"Well, Madleine."

"Know you of what I have been thinking?"

"How the devil should I?"

"Guess."

"Nonsense!"

"That young man"——

"I'll warrant it. You are too old for such folly, Madleine."

"What a noble fellow he is; and how handsome and gallant. I do believe he loves me—I am sure I love him. He is sleeping as unsuspectingly up stairs as a tired child. Let us not kill him, my brother!"

"My God!" ejaculated Blanche.

The bravo said nothing, but rising from his seat, he went to the old press and drew forth what appeared to be a large sack of coarse cloth, somewhat torn.

"Sew up for me the rents in this sack," was his cool request, presenting the cloth to the girl.

"For what purpose, my brother?" she asked, with pallid lips.

"In order that it may be ready to receive the corpse of your Apollo, when I shall have got him ready for it. A heavy stone at the bottom of the bag will then soon carry him to the bottom of the Seine."

"But, my brother"——

"You must not meddle in this affair, I tell you, Madleine. It is no concern of yours."

"But, if"——

"I will not hear a syllable. Were one to listen to you, he would never do his duty. Sew up the sack, as I bade you!"

"My God!" again ejaculated Blanche, who, at the casement, heard and saw all that transpired. "Is this a pair of humanized beings on the face of the earth? or, am I listening to the damned in hell?"

"I obey you, my brother," said Madleine, quietly sitting down and taking the sack to repair it. "But, let us talk a little on the matter."

"Very well."

"Have you any spite—any grudge—any ill feeling toward this cavalier?"

"Who? me? Oh, no! On the contrary, his frank and noble bearing, which seems to have fascinated you so much, has quite prepossessed me in his favor. It was my own profession once, until I descended from a wholesale commission business into a snug retail trade on my own account."

"You have no desire, then, to kill him?"

"I have no desire either way. It is a mere matter of business, I tell you."

"You kill him because you are paid for it, do you not?"

"To be sure. How simple you are become."

"And your employer"——

"Is about as hideous an old hunchback, Madleine, as you ever

looked at," said the bravo, laughing. "I wish you could only see him; he does look so comical, the little fellow, with his hump before, and his hump behind, and his bandy legs, and his squinting eyes."

"My brother, it is a shame to kill such a handsome fellow as our guest up stairs, for such an old Beelzebub as you describe!"

"I agree with you, Madleine; but I have promised this same old Beelzebub to deliver up to him this same handsome fellow, in a sack, at midnight. I have received for the service twenty crowns already, and am to receive twenty crowns more on the delivery. I must deliver him dead, at midnight, therefore, in a sack, you see; that's as clear as sunshine."

"Why not kill Beelzebub himself, when he comes back at midnight, with his twenty crowns?"

"Oh, my poor father!" sighed Blanche.

"What say you?" continued the girl. "Would not your object be attained in one way as well as in the other?"

Saltabadil turned around, and, for a moment, gazed gravely into the girl's face, as if astonished and offended, to satisfy himself that she was serious in her request.

"For whom do you take me, my sister? This from you! Am I a bandit—a liar—a thief? to kill a customer who pays me, and is like to employ me again? Did I not say that I had promised? My promise is as inviolable to me as the king's is to him—far more, perhaps. I may be an assassin, but I am no traitor. I abhor treachery!"

"Well, since you are so conscientious in your scruples, and deem it duty to do murder, or anything else, to satisfy an employer, suppose we sew up that faggot in the sack? In the storm and darkness, Beelzebub will mistake it for his dead man, and will be satisfied with you."

"An excellent device, truly! What fool is there fool enough to mistake a faggot for a corpse, though the darkness were like to that of hell itself? Why, a fagot is hard—dry—stiff—unyielding—rough—ragged, and has no appearance of ever having had life in it. A corpse, on the contrary, is heavy—unwieldy—chilly—irregular; and such a corpse as I ought to deliver, would be damp with blood, too."

"How cold it is," murmured Blanche.

"My brother!" exclaimed the Bohemian, throwing down the sack from her hands, and clasping them in the attitude of entreaty, "Spare this young man—for my sake, spare him!"

"Impossible!"

"Do you suppose there is any being on this earth who loves you as I do? Is there any one on this earth whom you love as you do me? Our past life has been a strange—a dreadful one; and it has linked us very closely; yes, crime has its fetters as well as affection. This, this is almost the only petition I ever made to you. Do not refuse it. In mercy to your miserable sister, spare the life of this young man!"

"It cannot be!" was the cold and resolute reply.

"My brother, it *must* be!" responded the girl, in tones low and hurried, but resolute as his own.

"Come, come, Madleine; he must die, and you must be quiet; obey me!"

"I will not obey you! This young man shall not be murdered, unless I share his fate! I tell you I love him; and, it seems, you have yet to learn what a woman will encounter for a man she loves. He shall be aroused! he shall escape!"

"Madleine, listen to me—listen to reason!" said the bravo, astonished at a spirit in his sister, the existence of which he had never suspected before.

"No, no, no! I will listen to no one, until this poor young man is safe!"

And, seizing the sword of Francis, which lay beside her on the table, she placed herself, with a determined air, at the foot of the staircase. Her face was pale, but her lip was firm, and her large eyes were dazzling in their dark brilliancy.

Checked in his purpose by this unlooked for obstacle, Saltabadil gazed in astonishment for a moment on the excited woman, and then, as if satisfied that resistance to her determination would be vain, he returned quietly to his seat, to devise some method by which circumstances so conflicting might be reconciled.

"Let us see," he began; "the state of the case is this: the hunchback has engaged me to kill this man, and has partly paid me for it; at midnight he comes to pay me in full, and to receive his corpse; it is clear, then, that somebody must be killed; Madleine will not permit that *somebody* to be her handsome lover. Well, who then shall it be? that's the question. There is no one here but ourselves; it is not probable that any one will come here between now and midnight; it is, nevertheless, possible; suppose some one should come—a traveller—a beggar—a robber—a reveller—no matter whom, and demand lodgings of us, him might I kill and sew up in the sack instead of the handsome lover. Beelzebub, as you call him—the name is a capital one—would, of course, find out nothing of all this; he is not so familiar with the features of his foe, I fancy, as to be able to distinguish them by the sense of touch, through the coarse sackcloth, in a night like this, or any other, as to that. The old rascal would rejoice just the same, therefore, provided he cast a corpse into the Seine, whether it was in reality that of his dearest friend or his bitterest foe. There, my sister, that's the best scheme I can devise; indeed, it is *all* I can do for you."

"And whom, in mercy's name, suppose you, will pass such a lonely place as this is, on such a fearful night, at so late an hour—much more, who will stop?"

"It is the sole chance for your lover."

"Why am I thus permitted to be tempted?" ejaculated the unhappy Blanche, who listened to every word. "Is it the will of God that I should die, that He subjects me to all this? Must I take this terrible step for one so ungrateful? Oh, I am too young to die!"

"It is a wild thought, my brother. No one will come to-night."

"Then, the young man dies!"

"Oh, horror!" ejaculated Blanche, with quivering tones; "what, what am I to do? Shall I call the watch? None would hear me on a night like this: even the guardians of Paris sleep. Besides, this dreadful man would denounce my father as a murderer; that thought again comes up; but, oh, I cannot die—I am not prepared to die—I am not willing! There are many reasons, and one reason that makes the idea of death overwhelm me with horror! I have much yet to do in life. My poor old father, if I am taken away, who will console and comfort him? And, then, to die; thus to die, so young; while I am yet but sixteen years of age! It is frightful! No, no; I cannot die! Oh, God, now the iron enters my soul!"

At that moment, a blow of the clock sounded from the old tower of Notre Dame, immediately succeeded by two others.

"The hour sounds from Notre Dame," said Saltabadil; "it is three-quarters after eleven. No one will come after midnight. Do you hear any noise without?"

"Hark! I thought I heard a groan," replied the Bohemian girl.

Both listened attentively for some minutes.

"You mistook, my sister. It was only the mutterings of the thunder at a distance. This business must be finished. I have now less than one-fourth of an hour for work."

During the conversation which has been detailed, Madleine had left her station at the foot of the staircase, and had laid down the weapon of the king. This the bravo had secured; and, in anticipation of such a result, no doubt, had he suggested the improbable scheme of saving his victim's life. Regardless of the entreaties and threats of his sister, he now placed his foot upon the ground step of the staircase, prepared to ascend.

"A little while—only a little while, my brother; wait, and I am sure some one will come!" entreated Madleine, clinging to the garments of the assassin.

"What!" murmured Blanche; "this woman weeps, and entreats for a life, which to her is as nothing, and which it is impossible for her to save; and I—I who have slumbered on his bosom—I to whom he is dearer than life—I who can save him, hesitate! And why should I live? What charm hath this miserable life for me? Francis loves me no longer! Yes, I will die: I will die! And if he is ever told who saved him, he will surely remember his poor Blanche when she is gone."

"I can delay no longer," said the bravo; "it is impossible."

"If I only knew how they would kill me," continued Blanche. "Does one suffer long? What is the sensation? Do they stab in the breast? Oh, God! Yet, be it so. This wretched heart of mine cannot be more agonized than it now is, though cleft in twain."

"My sister," again exclaimed Saltabadil, striving to disengage himself from the grasp of the girl; "this is madness—folly! What would you I should do? Think you Providence would send any human being on a night like this, at this hour, to such a place, simply to be sacrificed for this young man?"

"How cold the rain is!" said Blanche, as she crept along to the door. "How dreadful to die when one is so cold! My blood is freezing! But it must be done!"

And Blanche struck a feeble blow upon the door.

"Hark!" said Madleine; "some one surely knocked."

"Nonsense! It was only the wind moaning, or the river rushing, or the thunder muttering. Let me go."

Again Blanche struck upon the door, louder than before.

"Some one did knock!" joyfully cried the Bohemian, springing to the casement, which she at once threw open.

"This is wonderful!" muttered the bravo.

"Who is there?" cried the girl.

"Lodging for the night!" feebly rejoined Blanche.

"He will sleep a long slumber," said the bravo.

"Yes, his 'lodging' will, indeed, be a long one," said the Bohemian. "It is a young man, I think, by his voice. Shall I open the door? Poor fellow; he knocks at his tomb."

"Nay, stay an instant. My knife: where is it?"

Going to the press, so often alluded to, he soon produced a large knife, the edge of which he began sharpening upon a broken piece of a scythe in the stead of the usual utensil for such a purpose. This conflict of steel upon steel rang keenly on the ear, notwithstanding all efforts to deaden it.

"Oh, God! oh, God! they are sharpening the knife to stab me!" murmured Blanche. "What! can it be that I am about to die? or, is this only a horrible dream? No—no—it is no dream! It is a dreadful reality! I am on the very threshold of another world. Oh, God!" she ejaculated, dropping upon her knees; "pardon thou me my many offences, even as now I give pardon unto all those, who have, in any manner, done evil to me. And wilt thou forgive them—even those who are about to deprive me of life. And he whom I have so dearly loved—forgive and bless him; and, if it will

render him happier, oh, let him forget me: let him forget that we ever loved; may he never know my fate. Make him a good man; may his power never depart from him; may he live long in prosperity; may he never know the misery he has caused to me, and may he die a more peaceful death, than she who is about to die for him. And my poor old father: he will be lonely when I am gone; oh, God, keep—console—bless him!"

A noise of footsteps was heard within the house, and Blanche rose to her feet, and again knocked at the door.

"Quick! He will leave!" hurriedly whispered the Bohemian girl.

"That will do, I think," said Saltabadil, trying the edge of the blade he had been sharpening upon the table. I will conceal myself behind the door, and await his entrance."

The assassin did as he proposed; and, with uplifted knife, stood ready to plunge it from behind into the breast of the person entering.

"I wait the signal," said the girl, her hand upon the bolt of the door.

"All ready! open!" was the reply.

"Enter!" said the Bohemian, unfastening the door.

"Oh, God! pardon them—pardon me—my father, pardon me!" ejaculated Blanche, as her foot was on the threshold.

The arm of Saltabadil descended—there was a heavy blow—a groan—a deluge of blood—and all was over!

CHAPTER XV....THE AVENGER.

One sole desire, one passion now remains,
To keep life's fever still within his veins;
Vengeance!—dire vengeance, for the act which cast
O'er him and all he hoped that ruinous blast. MOORE,

"Darkly the night sweeps on. No thought of sleep,
Steals to my heart."

"Hark to the midnight's funeral knell! How, through the roar
Of winds and thunder, thrills that single sound,
Solemnly audible!"

"Then Heaven have mercy on thy soul—Farewell!"

THE storm was over. The rain had ceased. The thunder muttered feebly in the distance. At long intervals, the lightning glared through the gloom, mantling the scene with lurid and leaden, though momentary, illumination. The heavy clouds were trooping off to the north in broken masses, like the shattered squadrons of a deserted army; and, here and there, for an instant, through the divided ranks—as they drifted on, gleamed out a single star. Through the darkness came the hurried rush of the Seine swollen by the recent tempest, as it rolled heavily on; and a dense mist was rising from its waters.

All was still around the old *cabaret*. Not a sound broke the silence, save the regular dripping of water from its eaves, the sullen splash of the swollen river, and the low rumble of the distant thunder. All was dark and deserted. The house was closed, and not a solitary lamp gleamed from the casement. Around that old and gloomy structure rested the silence and the solitude of death.

Along the road, leading to the *Auberge*, were heard approaching footsteps; and soon a single traveller appeared through the mist.

"The deed is done!" he muttered: "At length, then, am I avenged! For full seven months have I watched and waited. I have," continued the jester of the court, "shrouded the misery of the damned beneath the jokes, and jibes, and jeers of an idiot: weeping tears of blood beneath a laughing mask. But now—now—" continued the jester, drawing nigh to the door of the *Auberge*, "what a thin partition separates me from the full fruition of my long-nourished and dearly cherished revenge! Through that door will the pledge of gratified vengeance be placed in my hands. It is the hour. I am on the spot. The deed is done. As I drew nigh, the struggle of death fell on my ear. Then all was still—dark and still."

"Why do I now delay to claim my prize? Is it that I may feast in imagination on the banquet of revenge that is served up to me? If the anticipation is so rapturous, how overwhelming will be the reality! Ah, Love and Hate! the sweet draughts which the cup of Life proffers to the lip are mingled by ye! But the rapture of love is less lasting than that of revenge."

"What a night it has been! A night of tumult, and mystery, and blood! A tempest in heaven—a murder upon the earth! And such a murder! Well might the flames of this revenge blaze up with those of the frenzied elements! What a monarch has ceased to exist! A sovereign on whom has hung the destinies of twenty others, and on whose will has depended the peace or strife of half the world! Now, that he is no more; now that the great centripetal power which has held kingdoms in their orbits hath ceased to exist—how will all things rush into their primal chaos! The first has been withdrawn—the crash will be awful! And mine is the deed! It is this hand of mine which has plunged all Europe in blood, and tears, and wretchedness for long years to come, striving with convulsed and impotent struggles to regain her equilibrium. It has been at the touch of my finger that this volcano has thrown open its devastating crater. Superior intelligence—beings of the air will look down on this tempest from their viewless homes, and, in amazement will ask, "Who has thus terrified Charles and Henry, and Leo and Doria, and Solyman the Magnificent, the Lord of Asia? What Caesar, what Alaric, what Saint or Saracen, has tumbled thus these kingdoms the one upon the other? What army of Titans again piles up the wooded Pelion upon Ossa? What terrible will thus shakes the world at its

pleasure? Ah, rejoice, vile jester, in thy fathomless hate! The vengeance of a fool convulses the world!"

At this moment the clock in the tower of Notre Dame pealed heavily out over the Seine, through the last mutterings of the storm.

"Midnight! the half hour after midnight," said the old man, as he counted the strokes of the bell.

Stepping briskly up to the door of the tavern, he gave a quick rap "Who comes here?" asked a voice within, after a considerable pause.

"It is your man," was the brief answer.

The lower half of the door slowly opened, and the head of a man appeared.

"You must not enter. I will be with you in a moment."

The head vanished, and, almost immediately, the form of Saltabadil upon his knees, dragging a heavy object, could be dimly distinguished through the narrow aperture.

"Heavy enough!" he muttered. "Help me to bear it a few steps."

With eager aid the old man assisted to carry the oblong and unwieldy mass, shrouded in a sack, to the bank of the river.

"Your man is in this sack," said the bravo, as the burden was laid upon the quay.

"Joy! Let me see him! A light!—quick!"

"By no means!" replied the assassin.

"Whom fear you?"

"The night-watch. Devil! no light, if you please. It would cause plague enough. Now the money, sir."

The old man handed the Bohemian a purse, and, while he was counting the contents, bent earnestly down to examine the sack.

"Shall I assist to cast the body into the Seine?" asked the bravo, after satisfying himself that he was not cheated, and putting up the purse.

"I can do it alone," was the abrupt reply.

"But two can do it easier than one," said Saltabadil.

"A foe whom one bears to his grave, is not a heavy burthen."

"Well, sir: well," replied the Bohemian slowly. "Your's is a strange taste; but you can indulge it. Do not cast the sack in *there* however," he added, pointing to the parapet: "the water is shallow: besides, there is a back current, which will throw up the body on the shore. But there, just above, in that corner, the water is deep and sure enough. Be quick! good night!"

The Bohemian walked slowly into his house and shut the door.

The old man was alone with the corpse.

When all was still, he gazed anxiously into the gloom around, and then fixed his eyes on the motionless mass at his feet.

"Dead! he is dead! Shall I examine his face by the flashes of lightning? It might be well. But no," he continued, bending down and passing his hand along the sack: it were useless; I feel assured it is he: my heart tells me it is my foe. *Is my foe. I am wrong: was my foe. He is crushed, he is my foe no longer.*"

Then drawing up his form to its full stature, the old man planted his foot firmly upon the corpse, and exclaimed—

"Behold! Paris, France, Christendom: behold this scene! A jester and a king! And *such* a king: the first of all kings! the ruler of monarchs! There, under my heel do I hold him, and the Seine will be his sepulchre, and a tattered sack his sarcophagus. What long and lingering astonishment to all Europe will the events of this night occasion! Henceforth let none think to read futurity. Despot or slave, monarch or fool; creatures of destiny all; by chance are we placed here, by chance taken hence. One of the proudest of earth's majesties, the prince with the heart of flame; the lord of the battle-field; beneath whose tread the walls of cities have crumbled; in an obscure and deserted corner of his dominions, in the silence and darkness of the night, hath passed ingloriously away The hero of Marignano; the young conqueror, who, when but twenty years of age, led the black bands of Suabia over the Alps to claim his heritage; who, during two whole nights and one whole day, led on his fiery squadrons against the serried Swiss; and when the morning dawned, wounded and weary—with the stump of the last of three Spanish blades—stood a victor on the battle-plain, amid the bodies of ten thousand of his slaughtered foes; the hero of Marignano; of that *combat de giants*, which the veteran of twenty conflicts pronounced so terrible, that all the others were only the quarrels of boys; the hero of Marignano, whose renown was the star of chivalry. God, how strangely does it seem that his proud spirit should thus have departed from the earth! Borne hence by a single blow, he who had laughed to scorn the assaults of hundreds—borne hence in the flower of his years, and in the prime of his power, lord of the bravest nation, and idol of the most brilliant court in Europe—borne hence, like an unfortunate infant, strangled at its birth by the knotted tresses of its unnatural mother: in silence, in secrecy, in mystery, in a midnight of tempest, by a hand unknown, unsuspected, never to be laid bare!"

"And is this era—this dynasty thus to melt away like a cloud of summer? Is this king, who rose like Lucifer, son of the morning, upon the world, to glide away like the meteor of a stagnant marsh? Is such a being thus to appear, and thus to disappear—even as the electric flash of yonder cloud—as bright, as brief? Can all this be so?"

"And yet, on the morrow morn, in a few short hours, the screaming heralds may traverse every street, and laue, and court of Paris, shouting to the dismayed and astonished passengers, while they proffer sons of useless gold as a reward—

'Francis of Orleans! Francis of Valois! Francis the First, of France! He is lost! He is lost!'

"Wonderful!—Wonderful! He died of a humpback fool!"

The old man clasped his hands, and, for some moments, stood gazing on the shrouded corse at his feet, as if buried in reflection.

A flash of lightning, succeeded by the low muttering of distant thunder, seemed to recall his thoughts, and to send them off in a different channel.

"My daughter!" he murmured in tones of heart-broken pathos; "my poor, lost daughter! But you are fearfully avenged! They never dreamed of this. Blood! what need had the foolish old man of blood? A handful of gold—a few mocking words of sympathy—a laugh and a jest, and the worth of his ruined child would be paid, and the old father would be satisfied. Ah! fools—fools! The virtue of that child to me, Francis of Valois, was of more value than was the diadem of France and Navarre to you. My Blanche—my beautiful child! the spoiler came to thee, in thy loveliness and trustfulness, and wound himself, like a serpent, around thee. He took thee in thine honor and happiness. He has returned thee bereft of one; and, alas! despoiled for ever of the other. But he will never harm thee more. Thou art avenged, my daughter; nor thou alone. Ah! that old man's curse! Terribly hath that malison descended on me, and on thee, Francis! terribly hath that old man's prophecy been fulfilled on thee! He is avenged on thee as on me; ay, we are *all* avenged on the infamous violator—fathers and children—the gray-haired jester, and the gray-haired noble—the extinguished star of a brilliant court, and the crushed flower of a lowly cottage. *All* are avenged, and the old jester hath done it all, and he now plants his misshapen foot on the neck of her polished and princely ravisher!

"Because the fool feigned to have forgotten all, did the nobler fool delude himself that all was forgiven? He fancied, forsooth, that the wrath of a feeble old man would soon be exhausted—that his memory of wrong was weak, and his power to avenge that wrong was weaker; and, in dreamless security, he slumbered on. But the hour of retribution came at last. It was a long struggle—a struggle of the feeble with the powerful, and the feeble hath prevailed: of the crafty with the mighty, and the crafty is conqueror: of the serpent with the eagle, and the rapacious bird is dragged from his eyrie in the clouds to the den of the rocks. The deformed monster, that pressed his lips to the soles of the monarch's feet, hath plunged his fang of poison into the monarch's heart. *He* has triumphed—the misshapen buffoon—the hideous hunchback—the miserable moiety of a half human form—that revolting lump of disproportionate flesh that startles men by its resemblance to a lower order of creation—that doubtful animal to whom is said—'Dog!' Ha! ha! ha! it is even *such* a thing that hath triumphed, and is, at this moment, victor over the most exalted sovereign of Europe!

"When once vengeance, like a minister from hell, hath possessed the breast, the heart most lifeless becomes *all* life; the form most hideous is transformed; the being most degraded is exalted; the naked fool becomes clothed in garments of terror; the most debased is the most desperate; the most cowardly the most deadly; the timid slave draws forth his gleaming hate as from a scabbard; the cat becomes the tiger; the contemptible buffoon becomes the avenger of wrong! Ah! that all this could be heard and felt by the lifeless lump at my feet, and yet continue on the lifeless lump that it is!

"And now to the river abhorred mass of sin and corruption, and see if you can discover in its depths some current that remounts to St. Denis! To the Seine, Francis of France!"

And the old man seized the body and dragged it to the water's edge.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE DISCOVERY.

They meet—upon her brow—unknown—forgot—

Her hurrying hand had left—'t was but a spot—

Its hue was all he saw, and scarce withstood—

Oh! slight but certain pledge of crime—'t is blood!

THE CORSAIR.]

Oh! 't was a sight, that would have bleached

Joy's rosy cheek forever!

M. G. LEWIS.

Oh me, Oh me!—my child, my only life,

Revive, look up, or I will die with thee!

Help, help! call help.

ROMEO AND JULIET, ACT IV.

At the moment when the sack, containing the corpse, was balanced upon the edge of the old parapet of disjointed stones, skirting the water, preparatory to its final plunge into the deep and turbid stream, the attention of the jester was arrested by a noise behind him, and he turned his eyes in the direction whence it came. The sound proceeded from the old *auberge*, the principal door of which slowly opened, and on its threshold appeared Madleine, the Bohemian girl, bearing a light which she shaded with her hand, in a manner to throw the illumination upon her features.

For some moments she gazed with an air of solicitude carefully around: then, as if satisfied with the investigation, she again entered the dwelling, and almost immediately reappeared at the entrance: with her was the king, his arm closely enclasping her waist.

Her dress was deranged, her long black hair was disheveled and hung loosely down her form—her face was colorless, and an expression of horror sat upon her features and glared from her large flashing eyes. Shudderingly, as she peered out into the gloom, she clung to the king, as if for protection; and by hurried gestures indicated the path which, if pursued, would lead him to the city.

As the king turned to give her a farewell embrace, the shifting flame of the lamp, held in the hand of his companion, was turned

toward her by a sudden gush, and threw a strong illumination on her face and form. Shocked by the expression thus revealed, the king started back, and, removing his hand from her bosom, it was damp—with blood! He then perceived that the thin drapery upon her breast was torn and darkly discolored with crimson stains. Here and there, too, upon her forehead and face, and throat, might be seen a spot of the same ominous hue, and her hands seemed steeped in gore.

"Madleine! Madleine!" exclaimed the king. "How is this? Are you hurt? Is this blood?"

Startled by this exclamation, the girl strove to conceal the spectacle presented, by gathering over her breast the fragments of her garment. At the same time she laughed—it was a convulsed and ghastly laugh.

"Oh, you see blood, do you?" she faltered. "It is nothing—nothing—a mere accident, a scratch—a little water will remove all. Good night—go—go!"

The king seemed but half satisfied with this subterfuge; but clasping her damp bosom to his own, and imprinting a kiss on an icy lip, he hurried away.

The Bohemian girl gazed after him an instant, then with a shudder disappeared. The door closed, the light was extinguished, and all was once more dark, and still, and desolate.

As the king walked briskly up the quay, his voice could be heard singing—

*"Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol est qui s'y fie."*

On all this scene had gazed the old jester, as he stood by the ruined parapet, grasping the shrouded corpse to plunge it into that sepulchre, which gives not up its dead, until the dawn of the resurrection morning. Almost petrified with amazement, he had remained rooted to the spot on which he stood, incapable of motion or of speech.

"What!" he exclaimed at length, as the singing of the king died away in the distance. "What voice! visions of the night! do ye mock me? Dwellers in eternity! do ye return?"

He pauses—he gazes—he listens intently.

The king had disappeared in the darkness; but the sound of his retreating footsteps on the stony quay could be faintly caught, and once more his voice was heard, diminishing in loudness, as he walked rapidly away, singing the concluding couplet of his song—

*"Une femme souvent,
N'est qu'une plume au vent."*

"Ten thousand curses!" vociferated the enraged old man, now clearly comprehending that he had been deceived. "Oh, misery! After all, it is not he! The villain yet lives and triumphs in his guilt! I am mocked! I am deceived!"

Leaving the corpse upon the parapet, he rushed furiously up to the tavern, and in the tones of a maniac screamed forth a mingled vociferation of entreaties and maledictions.

But all was dark and silent, and deserted.

With his whole force he threw his body against the door. But the tough oak, though old and decayed, baffled his frantic violence. Like a wild beast seeking some escape from its cage, the infuriated old man prowled around that ruined structure, seeking an entrance.

But, in vain. Every door—every window—every aperture, was effectually secured and mocked his impotent efforts to effect his purpose. The casement over the porch alone was open. Before this the jester repeatedly stopped and wistfully gazed up, as if measuring the altitude with his eye. But at length he seemed satisfied that it was impossible for him to succeed in his attempt; and, leaving the old *auberge* as still, and as dark, and deserted as he found it, he hurried back to the parapet.

"I can, at least, discover what is contained in the sack," he muttered, as he dragged it with fury up the quay.

Kneeling down beside the motionless mass, he now passed his hands carefully over the surface.

"Yes; it is certainly a human body. Some innocent man has been murdered, and the guilty one has escaped. Ah, traitor! traitor!"

Producing a dagger from his girdle, the jester hastily ran the keen blade through the sack, from one extremity to the other, and its contents were laid bare. It was too dark, however, for the countenance of the victim to be distinguished. Bending on one knee and raising and resting the head of the corpse on the other, the old man gazed intently on the upturned face with fixed and earnest eye.

For some time all remained dark and indistinguishable. Still he gazed down on that livid countenance. A flash of lightning, at length, flickered faintly for an instant, with blue and lurid glare, along the horizon; and, in the sullen muttering of the distant peal which succeeded, was mingled a groan as deep and awful—a groan such as may be heaved from the bosoms of the damned in another world, but seldom from the breast of man in this—a groan of more than human anguish.

Another flash, and a shriek so shrill and frantic rose on the heavy atmosphere, and echoed along that deserted quay, that one would have thought it the wail of a lost spirit.

"My daughter! merciful God! My daughter!" exclaimed the wretched old man, clasping the cold form of his child in his arms, as if bereft of reason. "My Blanche! earth and heaven! it is—it is my own, only child!"

And again the pale lightning played over that beautiful face, and the thunder sullenly muttered.

"Blood! is it blood?" murmured the jester, placing his drenched hand to his lips. "Yes, it is blood!" he continued, as the peculiar taste of the vital fluid struck his sense. "Oh, God! and whose blood? I faint—I sicken—I reel—I sink—I am lost! horrible vision! But no—no—no—this cannot be! it is impossible! It is too dreadful to be true! it is all a horrid dream! My pretty little innocent Blanche. I told her to go—she never disobeys her old father—I told her to go to Evreux, and she is now, no doubt, in safety on her route. God keep her!" ejaculated he, dropping on his knees beside the body, and raising his clasped hands and his eyes to heaven. "God keep and bless my child! Protect her beneath thy wing! May no harm come nigh to her! And, oh, may this horrible vision pass away—may this be only a hideous illusion!"

Again, and more vividly than before, the lightning illuminated the countenance of the corpse. No—there could be no mistaking that pale, but still lovely face, for another's.

The eyes were closed; the long silky lash rested on the marble cheek; the lips were yet red, and, slightly parting, disclosed the pure and pearly teeth between. In the fair round shoulder, descending to the left breast, was a deep gash, from which the crimson current yet welled with every movement of the body; and the garments and the sack were dripping with gore.

From the position and the shape of the wound, the instrument by which it had been inflicted seemed to have been turned aside from its aim, at the instant of its descent, by the intervention of some hard substance upon the breast, which had thus protected the poor girl from instantaneous death, as was designed by the practiced arm that dealt the stab.

It had been even thus. As the hand of the miserable old father passed over the bosom of his child to determine the extent and character of her wound, it encountered the obstacle buried in the garments where it had been concealed. Withdrawing it from its bloody resting-place, he held it up before his eyes and gazed intently.

The lurid lightning for an instant played over it. And, then, a calm, sweet, beautiful face smiled out through the gore by which it was disfigured; and as quiet and peaceful was that angelic smile, as if those bright lips had never known sorrow—as if the soft features of the long-buried mother were not drenched in the life-blood of her innocent child!

It was but a single glimpse of this ghastly spectacle that passed before the old man's vision; but it was enough.

"Horror! horror! My child—it is my child! The daughter and the mother!" groaned the wretched man, as the terrible certainty at last came home to him. And clasping her bleeding form to his bosom, he tottered up to the door of the old mansion.

Laying his precious burthen gently upon the ground, he knelt beside it, and shouted and shrieked to the guilty inmates of the house for help. But no help came to him.

"Help! help! help!" was the maniac scream that awoke the echoes.

And then he strove to stanch the gaping gash, and again shrieked for light and aid. "My daughter, my child, my Blanche—answer me! Oh! heaven, answer me!"

It was strange! Those cold lips moved! Those closed eyes slowly opened! As if in reply to the earnest and agonized prayer of that wretched father, his apparently lifeless child *did* answer him!

"Who calls? Who calls Blanche?" she murmured in faint and smothered accents.

"She speaks—she revives—she awakes—her heart beats—her pulse moves—she breathes—her eyes open—her lips move—she lives—she lives! No, no, no, I knew she could not be dead! That would have been too awful for earth!"

The old man now applied himself earnestly to resuscitate his reviving child. He tore the linen from his breast to stanch her hideous wound; but, in spite of all his efforts, the blood still gushed forth at every motion of the body. He chafed her languid pulses; he strove to excite by friction the natural warmth in her limbs, he smoothed back the long locks of her brown hair, now stiff with gore, from her forehead. He stripped off the damp and bloody garments from her breast, and laid his hand and his ear to her heart to be sure it was not yet stilled; he even placed his lips to the chill lips of his child, as if to breathe into her exhausted frame a portion of his own vitality.

It was a fearful sight, that old man thus striving, in all the agony of his soul, to call back to existence his only child! And ever and anon he sent forth the hoarse shout—

"Help!—help!—help!"

Again the lips of the poor girl moved.

"Where am I?" she faintly asked. "Who is with me? Francis! Oh, I suffer!"

"My child—my Blanche!" cried the jester, clasping the gory form to his bosom. "Know you not my voice? Can you not comprehend? Speak, love!"

"My father—"

"Blanche—what has been done to thee? Who has done this? What terrible mystery is here? Why are you not far hence? Oh, I fear to touch thee, to move thee, lest I should cause thee pain. It is all dark and desolate, and my shouts bring no aid. I can see nothing. I can only feel a gash and the wet blood. You are wounded,

my child; where are you wounded? Direct my hand to the spot, Blanche!"

The fainting girl took the hand of her father and pressed it to her breast, but not upon the wound.

"My heart—I am sure—the iron touched—I felt—"

"Who struck this blow, my Blanche?" cried the jester. "He shall perish!"

"No—no—it is all my own fault!" murmured the suffering girl. "I deceived you; I disobeyed you, my father; I loved him too much; I came back to save him; he is saved; I suffer in the place of him!"

"Oh, Fate! inexplicable! inexorable! inscrutable! Sared in the net of my own weaving! Foiled by the scheme of my own contriving! It is the hand of God that crushes me! Short-sighted and miserably man that I was, to think that vengeance belonged to myself! Dreadfully has this blow recoiled on mine own head! Tell me, my child, how came all this about? I cannot yet comprehend. All is mystery. What was done to thee, Blanche? and how? and why? and by whom? Explain to me all, my child. Speak!"

"Do not ask me to speak, my father!" replied the poor victim, faintly.

"My precious one, forgive me!" exclaimed the old man, covering her face with kisses. "But to see thee thus—to see thee suffer, and know not why—to lose thee, and know not how! Thy lips are cold, my love; thy forehead is damp!"

"Oh, the other side!" faltered the sufferer, striving to turn herself.

"Quick, my father—I stifle! I—"

"Blanche—Blanche! Say—do not die! There—there!" cried the old father, in an agony of apprehension, seating himself on the damp stones of the quay, and clasping his girl, as if she were an infant, to his breast. "Help—help!" he shouted. "Help! Watch! Murder! Help! In the name of God, will you leave an old man's only child to die in this way, in the dark, at night, assassinated, on the banks of the Seine! Help! watch! help! this way—this way! Ah! I remember now—the old Ferry bell stands there—just there. Blanche—my child—shall I not leave you one instant, to ring the bell for help? a single instant?"

"Do not leave me, my father! do not leave me alone!" faltered Blanche.

"No—no, my blessed child, your father will never leave you; and yet, it must be so a single instant. Help! holloa! watch! help! This way!"

But it was a lonely spot. All was still and desolate. The old house gave no sign of life in the darkness; but there it stood—silent—deserted—shadowy, like a sepulchre.

"The other side, my father—my father!" groaned poor Blanche, writhing with pain. "Oh, I suffer!"

"My child, do not die; do not forsake your old father!" exclaimed the jester, all the parent's agony of apprehension again bursting forth. "Stay with me, Blanche, I will not stir, in mercy do not die! You are in pain, my daughter, my arm is not well placed, it hurts your wound—you do not lie well. I will change it all. There—there, is it better now, dear? Oh, in pity, try and breathe until some one comes to us! It will be soon—it must be soon!"

And again he shouted in despair and anguish for assistance.

"Forgive him, my father!" whispered Blanche. "Forgive me. God bless you! God bless—"

She had fainted with the loss of blood. Her head fell back on the old man's shoulder, and the idea that she was dead arose on his mind.

Leaning the lifeless form tenderly on the ground, he rushed to the bell, and, for an instant, rang it with such furious violence that every echo along the river bank was awakened far and near.

CHAPTER XVII.

Alack the day! she's dead, she's dead, she's dead.—SHAKSPERE.

Oh! she is gone for ever!

I know when one is dead, and when one lives;

She's dead as earth.—KING LEAR. ACT V.

Search, seek and know how this foul murder comes.—SHAKSPERE.

What should it be that they so shriek abroad?—IB.

So may she rest, her faults lie gently on her.—IB.

HASTENING back to his wounded child, the old man seated himself on the pavement, and embraced her cold form to his misshapen but stalwart breast, as if its weight had been that of an infant. Taking off a portion of his own garments, he wound them around her naked shoulders and breast, to protect her from the damp atmosphere of the dawn, which was sweeping up chill and misty from the surface of the Seine. Now, he would smooth back from her fair forehead the stiff masses of auburn hair, once so bright and soft; then he would press his lips to her's and strive in vain to distinguish whether the breath of life yet lingered there; and again he would clasp her bleeding form to his bosom, and pour out the passionate ejaculations of lament, and love, and supplication.

"Speak to me, my daughter—one word—one little word—tell me you yet live! in pity speak to your old father once more! This matchless form, why is it now so cold and stiffened! But she is not dead! Sixteen years! that is too young to die. You cannot be dead, my Blanche! You would never have forsaken your old father thus! She does not answer me—she does not hear me! why? oh! why?"

The last desperate efforts of the jester to procure assistance for

his child seemed to have been successful. Lights were seen approaching on the land, and from the city, across the Seine. The confused murmur of voices mingled with shouts, and, now and then the rattling of wheels along the quay, could be heard in the distance gradually drawing nigh.

The dawn of day was beginning grayly to break along the eastern horizon, and a chill breeze came over the Seine.

The tempest of the night had long since passed away; the thunder had died in the distance, and the rain had ceased to fall. And there, in the mists of the morning, the old *Auberge* stood as lone, and as silent, and as desolate, amid the approaching tumult, as during the darkness, and stillness, and horrible scenes of the night. There it stood—not a light could be seen—not a sound could be heard—not a voice spake—not a window or a door moved—not a living thing could be distinguished. There it stood, in the gray light of the dawn, like a terrible embodiment of mystery and crime; like a frightful phantom of assassination and blood!"

"Which way?"

"Where is it?"

"What's the matter?"

"Who rang the bell?"

"How dark it is!"

"What a dreadful night!"

"Somebody murdered?"

"How cold!"

Such were the confused exclamations of the crowd, which now drew nigh, and gathered around that bloody spectacle of the old jester and his senseless child.

At first, the old man seemed hardly aware of their presence, but continued to pour out his passionate exclamations to the cold burthen on his bosom, and to cover it with his caresses.

"Why did Heaven give me a creature so matchless? Why was she not taken away from me before she had become a portion of my very soul? Why was she spared to me to be at last the cause of such awful wretchedness? Why was she so beautiful and so good? Why was I suffered so wildly to love her, only the more terribly to mourn her loss? But, oh, thou canst not be dead! thou art a child, my Blanche—thou art a little innocent girl, that plays almost with the other children! It cannot be that thou art dead—and by such a cause! Who would harm a little child? Why stab to death an innocent girl? Impossible!"

"His words cut me to the very heart!" said a woman in the crowd to another woman, wiping her eyes.

"The old man's child has been murdered," was the reply.

"Something must be done!" cried a third person in the crowd. "Why do we stand here? Why are we idle? Have we no hearts?"

But no one moved. The throng seemed too much petrified with horror and amazement to take the necessary steps for the relief of the wretchedness before them.

A man from the multitude, at length, stepped forward and laid his hand on the jester's shoulder.

The bereaved raised his glazed eyes from the still features of his child, and looked around, with an air of surprise, on the assembled throng.

"Ah, you are here!" he said, after a pause, as if to recover his consciousness. "You have come at last! Well—it is high time you had come! It is a grand spectacle you have gathered to witness—an infirm old man and his murdered child. Through all the darkness and the tempest of this dreadful night has he shrieked to you for help, when that help would have been to him more than life, and no one came! But you are here now—you are here at last, to behold a scene. Well, feast your hearts on an old man's misery! Oh, you are too late—too late!"

Then, after a pause, perceiving a carriage-driver near him with a whip in his hand, he exclaimed,

"Are your horses here, man? your carriage? Speak! Are you deaf? Your carriage—your horses—are they here?"

"Yes!" replied the man. "How wild his eyes are!" added the man in a lower tone, retreating a step or two into the crowd.

"Yes?" rejoined the jester. "Well, take my head and crush it beneath your horse's hoofs!"

And again he clasped his chill burthen in his arms, and relapsed into his former insensibility.

Several of the more intelligent citizens were, by this time, in the assembling throng, and, among them, a surgeon.

An attempt was immediately made to separate the father and his child, in order, if life was not yet utterly extinct in the poor girl, measures might be taken for her restoration.

But all such benevolent attempts were met by the old man with unyielding resistance.

"I will not—I say I will not!" he cried, grasping his child convulsively to his bosom. "You cannot have my daughter! she is my all on earth—I have nothing else. What! take from an old man his only child? Are ye men to do this thing? Nay—nay, my friends, why do you grasp me so roughly? I have done you no harm—I pray you, do not injure me. I am a very feeble and infirm old man, who has nothing to love, or to love him, but his daughter; and sure, you cannot have hearts to take her from me! I do not know any of your faces—you all look very strange to me; and I suppose I look very strange to you, sitting here all alone in the dark, on the cold stones of the quay, with my daughter in my arms. But

I was doing no harm—no harm to any one I assure you. I am only a poor old man who has lost his daughter. Do you comprehend me now? Why do you come to me, so many of you? What do wish with me? Ah, that woman weeps! she knows what it is to be a parent. Bless her—how kind she is! She will not permit them to carry away my child. Oh, tell them, good woman, to let me stay here, and let my daughter stay with me; and God will be good to you and yours forever!”

“Nay, sir!” replied the woman; “pray be calm—compose yourself. They mean no harm. They only wish to be of service to you. Let them take your child from your arms. You can do her no good. We fear she is dead: she—”

“No—no—no!” eagerly interrupted the jester. “Leave me! go away, all of you. She is not dead—she is not dead I tell you! Do I not feel her heart throb a little? And she breathes a little—yes, a little. She needs me near her, she loves me more than all of you. She was always an affectionate, dutiful girl. Dead, did you say, my good woman? Why, look at this face: did you ever see a dead face so beautiful? And her lips—how red they are! and her eyes—and her forehead and bosom—how fair they are! give me your apron, my good woman, to cover her shoulders, and then go tell a surgeon to come to me from the city, and tell him to come quickly, and that I have plenty of gold for him.”

“A surgeon is here,” replied one of the crowd.

Another attempt as unsuccessful as the former, was made to release the wounded girl from her father's arms.

“What means this violence?” cried the jester, sternly knitting his shaggy brows, “will you tear a dying daughter from the arms of her parent? Monsters, begone! But no—no—I will not be angry. You do not mean to harm me, good people, or my child. You are only a little mistaken, that's all. You do only think that a father's arms is no place for a suffering daughter. You only think she loves you more than she loves him. Ha! ha! That is a mistake, indeed; and you think, too, I suppose, that you love her more than her old father does! Well, one mistake is about as near the truth as the other is; and that idea of yours that she is dead, is the wildest mistake of all! Why! such a thing, I tell you, is not only improbable, but it is impossible! Such events are not permitted on the earth. God Almighty could not be so cruel to a poor old wretch, like me, as to tear away his only child in this manner! He knows, what none of the rest of you know, that this little girl in my arms is the only thing dear to me in the whole world; and are you so wicked as to suppose he would suffer such an innocent creature to be stabbed to death, at midnight, in the midst of a thunder storm, in such a desolate spot as this is? Besides, she loves me, as much as I love her. Look at me good people. Bring nearer your flambeaux, and hold them up to my face. Did you ever see anything half so hideous? Examine my form; did you ever dream that the human figure could be so monstrously fashioned! See! what a prodigious hump before, and another behind worse than that in front! And all the world scorns and hates the hideous and deformed; every one flies from him—no one cares for him. Yet she loves me—she, so pure and peerless; she, a creature so much more lovely than all others, as I am more hideous; she, my joy, my treasure, my sole consolation upon the earth, loves me! When others have mocked and derided her poor, deformed old father, she has wept with and comforted him; when all the world was arrayed against and hated him, her heart has yearned to him and blest him. So good—and dead! So young, and bright, and beautiful, and dead! No—no! Is she not fair, good woman? is she not very fair? Her cheek is pale now, poor innocent, from faintness and loss of blood. But she will soon revive. Her forehead is damp. A kerchief, pray, to wipe away the cold dew.”

The woman complied with his request, and, having wiped the damp from the pale brow of his child, he again clasped her to his breast.

“Was it not strange,” he continued, after a brief pause, “was not it very singular, that the mother's picture should thus have protected the life of the child? It was my request, that she should place that picture next her heart. Why was it so? Was it presentiment of coming evil? She obeyed my bidding; and lo! that sweet semblance from her angel mother, like a guardian spirit, turned aside the keen blade of the assassin from the heart of the child!”

The old man withdrew the portrait from his bosom, and, wiping away the dark stains of blood from its surface, he gazed attentively on that beautiful face, and on the still, quiet features that reposed on his breast.

The crowd around looked on the scene with wonder, and offered no interference.

“No—I never knew until now,” continued the old man, “the wonderful similarity of these two faces! The same open forehead, the same clear eyebrow, the same curving lip is here as there; and the same gentle smile sleeps on the features of the mother and the child. Do you see how the red yet lingers on her lip? Oh, I remember—could you only have seen her! I see her now as she looked when a little girl of four years, with her soft hair, and her large bright eyes, and her calm, intelligent gaze; she was always a quiet child, strolling about on the flowery banks of the Vienne, in the little village of Chinon. Oh, she was such a beautiful child! People came all the way from Sanmur, a dozen miles, only to see her. No one ever dreamed that the old hunchback, who took such pride and delight in the admiration bestowed on this lovely girl, was her father. She never dreamed it herself, innocent thing, though strangely

enough! she loved me all the same. No one knew it but the old spae-wife, who closed her sweet mother's eyes when Blanche was born.

The old man paused for a moment and wept.

“Oh, it was a strange contrast, no doubt,” he continued; “that old deformed man playing about in the fields with that little girl among the flowers—herself the sweetest flower of all the treasures of summer. And now—now,” he slowly added, “my Blanche, my poor ruined child, my innocent sufferer, lost though thou art; yet, thou art beautiful still! The cold world may scorn thee and cast thee out, but thy old father will never forsake—will never cease to love thee and protect thee. When she was an infant I held her thus. She slumbered in my arms then as gently as she is slumbering now. And when she awoke, the sweet cherub, she would open her bright, large eyes and gaze up in my face so knowingly, and smile with her soft lips so sweetly; and then I would kiss her little delicate feet and rosy fingers, and hug her to my heart. Ah, poor innocent lamb, how little did I then think it was possible she should ever suffer as she now does!”

To convey an idea of the manner in which all this was said—and in that manner was nearly all its force—would be impossible. The sighs, the sobs, the moans, the piteous and cutting smiles, as the poor old sufferer, from time to time, looked up in the face of those around him; his beseeching gaze, the indescribable pathos of his tones, the tears which gushed in torrents along the channels grooved in his rugged and grief-worn face, the touching tenderness with which he fixed his eyes on the dear burthen clasped so fondly to his breast, the keen and jealous glance of watchfulness which he cast around him every moment, as if he feared his child would be stolen from his embrace—all of these circumstances accompanying his wild and rambling ejaculations, lent to them an eloquence which no mere words in any tongue could possibly convey.

“You see, good people,” continued he, after a pause of longer duration than usual, “you see I am very quiet and very reasonable. I am tranquil and peaceable, and have no wish to offend any one. You see I am an infirm and feeble old man, who could do no harm if he tried. Once, I believe, I was spiteful and malicious, and revengeful. But, oh, I feel not so now. Indeed, good people, I am not sure that my mind is exactly what it used to be, I have become so gentle. People used to be afraid of me—great people, too, while I feared no one: it seems as if I feared all of you, and none of you feared me. But, no matter, no matter. I am sure you will let me hold my poor girl in my arms, and that is all I ask. She will wake soon: you will see her large eyes open like bright stars when a cloud has passed over them. Not one furrow on this pale forehead, not a single wrinkle, no graves of old griefs here! No, she is too young for that. How smooth and marble-like! How still and cold also! But not dead! oh, no! Dead, and so beautiful! See, I have already revived one of her little hands in mine. Look! see! touch them, sir! How soft and white; nay, sir, stoop down, I will permit you to take hold of her hand,” he continued, to one of the crowd who stood nearest, and who was a surgeon. “You look too kind and sorrowful, I am sure, to harm either my child or me.”

The man of science seized this opportunity not only to feel the pulse of the poor sufferer, but to examine her wound. Meanwhile the old father continued his incoherent and rambling ejaculations.

“She revives, sir! she certainly revives! Can you not feel her pulse throb? And yet,” he added, in a whisper, with a piteous smile, “and yet they thought her dead! But she is not dead, sir? She is not dead?” he anxiously repeated, gazing up keenly into the surgeon's eyes.

The man slowly arose to his feet; and, then, in a calm, distinct voice, he replied—

“Old man, I fear your child is dead.”

There was a sigh, a groan; and the jester's misshapen head sank heavily back on the stones of the quay.

CHAPTER XVII....THE RETRIBUTION.

High minds, of native pride and force,
Most deeply feel thy pangs, REMORSE!
Fear, for their scourge, mean villains have—
Thou art the torturer of the brave!
Yet, fatal strength they boast, to steel
Their minds to bear the wounds they feel,
Even while they writhe beneath the smart
Of civil conflict in the heart.—MARMION, CANT. III.

Two months and part of a third had passed away, since the melancholy events of our last few chapters.

The surprise occasioned by the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the jester and his daughter had almost ceased at the French court; and a circumstance which at first had monopolized the thoughts and engrossed the conversation of all, was now but rarely alluded to by any.

It would be injustice to Francis to say that he, too, as soon forgot one who for him had sacrificed her all on earth, and for whose life she had willingly offered her own. No—selfish as the vices of Francis of Valois had rendered him, there yet flowed in the depth of his bosom, beneath all superincumbent impurities, a current of warm and generous emotion: and, if no angel had ever before come down to move those waters, to make them pure and impart to them a health-giving efficacy—their surface, at least, had been agitated, by the gentle virtues and innocent simplicity of the character of the unfortunate Blanche.

It was, therefore, with deep and sincere solicitude, that he first

learned the mysterious disappearance of the jester and his daughter from the court; although he then supposed that absence could be caused only by the peculiar situation of the unfortunate girl, and that, in a few weeks, or, at the longest, a few months, she would return from her seclusion, bearing in her arms a pledge of their love.

But, when, week after week, and month after month had passed away—when every means which the anxiety of affection could devise to find out the retreat of the unhappy Blanche had utterly failed of success,—when not a syllable of her fate or her situation could, by the most incessant and searching scrutiny, be gained—the king yielded to his darkest apprehensions, and, in bitterness of soul, bewailed the loss of one whom alone he had ever truly loved, and whose place now vacated in his heart, he felt could never be filled by another.

He retired from the gayeties of the court—he shut himself up in the most retired apartments of the Louvre; and, for months, resolutely refused all counsel or consolation.

What would have been the ultimate effect of this bereavement, if left to work out its own legitimate results on a nature so susceptible as was that of Francis, is not easy to determine. Whether some new attachment would shortly have effaced all memory of the old, as is often witnessed under similar circumstances; or, whether an affliction so sudden and so severe would have had the effect, as in the instance of the celebrated Armand Rancè, restorer of the Order of La Trappe—to metamorphose the libertine into a recluse—is impossible to decide.

It was at this crisis, however, that another, and, perhaps, the ruling passion in the breast of the young monarch of France, was, by an unexpected event, for the first time in his life thoroughly roused. That passion was Ambition; and it never slumbered again, until its victim slept the last sleep in the sepulchre of St. Denis.

It has been well said, that man often flies from love to ambition—seldom from ambition to love: and it cannot be doubted, that emotions in many respects so similar in feature and effect—equally wild and intoxicating—equally exciting and absorbing—though not equally transient and evanescent—should be better adapted to neutralize each other, or—experienced in succession—to extinguish one the other, than any of the sister passions which make up the nature of man. No, it is not strange that the heart of man when seathed by bereavement, or disappointed, or unrequited love, so often yields up all its energies to the delirious excitements of ambition; though happier far were he, if, as is often witnessed in the gentler nature of woman, the blight of an earthly affection should lead him to give his affections to his God.

It would not, therefore, have been a circumstance singular or unprecedented, had Francis sought relief from the pangs of a wound which he felt could never be healed, by plunging voluntarily and eagerly, as a last and a sole resort, into the fiery waves of ambition. Yet, were this thus, sad, indeed, was a resolution, with which commenced the reverses and afflictions of all his future reign, and of all his future life. And truly may it be said, that if the wild love of Francis of Valois blighted wherever it fell, amply was that love avenged by the wilder ambition of the destroyer. If the love of Francis caused ruin and wretchedness to others, the ambition of Francis, to which that love gave birth, caused more than equal ruin and wretchedness to himself. Indeed, from the day, or rather the night, of the mysterious disappearance of the last victim of his unbridled and unprincipled lust, may we date not only the commencement of his reverses, but the rise of that wild and ruinous ambition, which, for twenty years, plunged all Europe in blood, and stripped the diadem of France of some of its richest gems.

It was in the early part of 1519, that an event took place, which, though in itself too inconsiderable to attract much attention—by reason of its consequences has been pronounced more memorable, than any occurrence for several ages—an event, which, by rousing a spirit of rivalry between the two most powerful princes of Europe, broke the profound peace then prevailing throughout Christendom, kindling a conflict more general and more lasting, than any which those nations had hitherto experienced.

This event was the death of Maximilian, the Emperor of Germany—a prince, whose fame may be deemed to owe more to his death than his life, since to the former alone and its results is his name at all noticeable in the chronicles of the age.

To the imperial dignity thus vacated aspired Charles of Spain and Francis of France—each sanguine in his anticipations of success, and each as resolute, and as unscrupulous as the other, in the instruments employed for its attainment. Promises, bribes, entreaties, threats, everything which could induce or dissuade was eagerly put in requisition by the rival candidates to carry the desired end; and all Europe gazed with breathless interest on a contest, illustrious as much by reason of the competitors as for the prize. The princes themselves professed, each for the other, the most exalted sentiments of respect and admiration, and declared that personal animosity should have no place in their competition. "We court the same mistress," exclaimed the gallant and warm-hearted Francis. "Let each urge his suit with all the address of which he is master. The most fortunate will prevail. Let the other rest content."*

But this was far easier for the young monarch to say, when his own hopes of success were high and his expectations sanguine, than it was for him to feel, when, in the eyes of all Christendom, his

rival, by the unanimous vote of the electoral college, was elevated to the imperial chair.

The disappointment of Francis at this event was terrible—almost overwhelming. Never did ambitious aspiration receive a check so severe—never was mortification at failure so keen and so cutting. His whole soul had been thrown into this competition—his hopes and his happiness had seemed to depend on its successful issue; and now that all was lost, he felt that nothing but the most signal and brilliant exploit could wipe off the remembrance of a failure, which to his high-wrought and sensitive honor, was little less than the stain of disgrace. Ardently did he long again to be on the distant battlefield where the yet green laurels of his youth had been won; and it is not surprising that a desire so much in his own power to gratify, should soon have attained its object.

To gain to his favor Henry of England, who, at that era, by the force of various circumstances, was the acknowledged "Arbiter of Europe," Francis procured that interview between the French and the English courts with their respective monarchs, on the Plain of Guisnes, so celebrated by the appellation of "The Field of the Cloth of Gold," where, for eighteen days, with a magnificence and profusion unequalled in history, all the knightly feats of tilt and tournament—all the exercises and pastimes—all the grace and the gallantry of a chivalric age, were beheld. Even the monarchs themselves united in the pastimes of the festival; and, in a wrestling match, the majesty of England was twice thrown to the earth by the superior dexterity in that exercise of the majesty of France!

But, if this success can be deemed a triumph, small as it was, it was the only advantage gained by Francis through this gorgeous pageant; and he had the mortification to perceive, that more was gained from the selfish and vacillating Henry by his more astute and politic rival, in a private interview shortly subsequent at Gravelines, than by all the pomp and profusion of Guisnes; and that the imperial chair had cost less to Charles in bribery, than had been vainly lavished by himself in an idle show. Indeed, his splendid display of magnificent gallantry seems not only to have failed to attain the end for which it was designed, but almost to have conducted to a result precisely the reverse—a result most fatal to the aspirations of its projector: for, from the date of that interview, the crafty prelate Wolsey, and, through his influence, the King of England, seem to have been unalterably attached to the interests of Charles.

Perceiving, at length, that he could hope to gain no advantage over his rival by the arts of peace, Francis resolved at once to have recourse to those of war; and, having concluded an alliance with the Pope, he proceeded at once to invade Navarre, in the name of Henry d'Albret, son of the former sovereign. The French troops under the gallant but rash L'Esparre were victorious. Navarre was speedily reduced, and then as speedily was it lost by the imprudence of the young victor, who was himself captured by the enemy, and his forces expelled the kingdom.

At the head of a large army, Francis in person next invaded the Netherlands; and here—singular enough—not by rashness, but by excess of caution, he failed of success!

Peace was now proffered Francis by the emperor, but, being indignantly rejected, a league between Charles and Henry of England was at once concluded against the imprudent monarch. With equal imprudence Odet de Foix, a young and impetuous cavalier, was appointed to the government of Milan, the insolence and rapacity of whose rule soon caused a rupture with Leo; and the Milanese was invaded by the Papal troops. Marechal de Lautrec, the gallant brother of Odet, was instantly dispatched to the theatre of war. Arrived on the spot, the money provided for the payment of his troops was seized and detained by Louise of Savoy, the mother of Francis, to gratify a hatred of Lautrec, who had failed to return her love for him, and to prevent his success. The final result was the defeat of Lautrec, and the expulsion of the French from the Milanese. A body of Swiss were then levied by the intrepid Lautrec. These mercenaries insisted on immediate engagement with the imperial army, and the result was a bloody defeat. At the same time, almost without resistance, Genoa fell into the hands of the Emperor, and Francis no longer retained in Italy an inch of his late extensive possessions. In the very midst of all these terrible reverses, an English herald appeared at Paris, and, in the name of his sovereign, declared war against France.

But the spirit of Francis succumbed not. Never does he appear invested with so much true dignity and ability as now. His armies were defeated, and his coffers were exhausted: but calmly, yet vigorously, did he, at once, proceed to recruit the one and to supply the other. The result was favorable; and once more did fortune smile on the banners of Francis. Surrey, who, with his troops had ravaged the coasts of Normandy and invaded Picardy, was driven out of France by Vendome with defeat and disgrace.

Thus closed the second campaign of Francis.

The third campaign opened with the defection of Venice, which had ever remained firm in her attachment to France, and her alliance with the Emperor. To this acceded Pope Adrian; and "Francis," in the words of Guicciardini, "was left without a single ally to resist the assaults of so many foes, whose armies threatened, and whose territories encompassed his dominions on every side."

But the intrepid spirit of Francis, ever most dauntless when danger was most imminent, quailed not before this threatened League. Long before an army had been marshalled to assault him, he was

* Guicciardini I. XIII, 159,

ready for the field, and his troops were on their march for the scene of their former triumphs—the sunny plains of the Milanese.

The van of his forces was already at Lyons on its route, and Francis was about assuming the command, when an extensive conspiracy, involving the very existence of his kingdom, was discovered, at whose head was Charles, Duke of Bourbon, Lord High Constable of the realm.

This treason of Bourbon was, no doubt, to a great extent, superinduced by the amorous and revengeful passions of Louise of Savoy. Slighted, disappointed, insulted, the ardent love of this vindictive and powerful woman was turned into the most implacable hate; and, for years, she had exerted all her vast abilities to ruin in fame and in fortune the accomplished prince, who either could not or would not return her passionate regard. It was this persecution, and a neglect of his claims to distinction by Francis, which first served to alienate his feelings from the crown of France.

Abandoning the design of invading the Milanese in person, Francis remained at home to guard against the consequences of Bourbon's treason, the constable having fled across the Rhine to join the emperor. In his stead, he appointed Admiral Bonnivet, "the most accomplished gentleman in the French court," to the supreme control.

The chief qualification of Bonnivet to this responsible station, seems to have been his deadly hate to the traitor Bourbon; for, on his arrival in Italy, when a series of fortunate circumstances had placed Milan in his power, he utterly failed, from a negligence which has been attributed to infatuation, to improve them; and was compelled to retire from the siege.

It was at this time that the English under Suffolk, together with a body of Flemings, again invaded France, and advanced to within thirty miles of Paris. On the banks of the Oyse, this powerful force was met by La Tremouille with a few thousand men, and driven like frightened sheep out of the kingdom.

In a similar manner were the imperial troops defeated in their invasion of the provinces of Burgundy and Vienna.

These, however, were but single gleams of sunshine lighting up the gathering clouds which lowered darkly around the fortunes of Francis. The events which succeeded these were the loss of Fontarabia by treachery, and the defeat of Bonnivet by the allied army in the Milanese under the traitor Bourbon and—the ablest of the imperial generals—the Marquis of Pescara. In this battle Bonnivet was dangerously wounded, and the celebrated Chevalier Bayard was slain. When no longer able to keep his saddle because of his wounds, this intrepid man was seated on the earth with his back supported by the bole of a tree, and his face turned to the approaching foe. With his eyes then fastened on the cross-guard of his sword, he composed his mind for death. In this position he was found by Bourbon, who led the van of the pursuit, and by Pescara who soon came up, both of whom expressed deep sympathy for his fate, and the latter of whom ordered a tent to be pitched and surgical aid to be furnished him. "He died," however, says the elegant historian of that era, "as his ancestors for several generations had done, on the field of battle. Pescara ordered his body embalmed and sent to his relations; and such was the respect paid to military merit in that age, that the Duke of Savoy commanded it to be received with royal honors in the cities of his dominions: in Dauphine, Bayard's native country, the people of all ranks came out in solemn procession to meet it."

Thus ended the third campaign of Francis of Valois beyond the Alps; and it left him not an ally in Italy, nor a foot of ground.

The fourth campaign opened with an attempt of the emperor to invade Provence. The scheme was a magnificent one, though too chimerical for success. The victorious army of Italy, under Bourbon and Pescara, carried the Alps, and, entering Provence, laid siege to Marseilles. For full forty days was every machine with which the military engineers of that era were familiar, put in action for the reduction of this important position. But all proved unsuccessful, and, on the approach of Francis with a powerful army from Avignon, the besieged force retraced their steps over the Alps into Italy, as hastily as they had descended into the plains of Provence.

To pursue this shattered and retreating army—to lead the most brilliant body of troops he had ever commanded into the Milanese, and recover his ancient and hereditary possessions—was a vision too fascinating to a spirit like that which animated the impetuous French monarch, to be resisted. Regardless of the remonstrances of his subjects, the dissuasions of his wisest counsellors, and the entreaties of his sagacious mother, he committed to the latter the regency of his kingdom, and commenced his rapid march for the theatre of action.

Milan was taken by surprise; the imperial troops were driven from its walls, and the city was captured almost without a blow.

The reduction of the city of Pavia was next resolved on; and, for a period of three months, all the arts of the French engineers were employed against its defences in vain. To capture Pavia, or to perish beneath its walls, had been the frequent and chivalric vow of Francis during this protracted siege; and, although the imperial army in great power was now advancing to give him battle, he was resolute in his determination not to leave his intrenchments for a mere favorable position. He was even so imprudent as to weaken his force by detaching a body of troops six thousand strong, under the command of John Stuart, Duke of Albany, for the invasion of Naples. In this condition he rashly led on his army against the

imperial troops, and the result, as might have been apprehended, was a defeat more disastrous than France had ever before experienced. Ten thousand of her bravest subjects, and the flower of her nobility, were left dead on the bloody field. Bonnivet, whose counsels more than those of any one else had conducted to this terrible calamity, would not survive the defeat; and, rushing into the thickest of the fight, fell, covered with wounds, the last being received in protecting the life of his beloved sovereign. Francis had two horses killed under him, and, although severely wounded, long continued to perform prodigies of valor on foot. His life at length became in imminent danger, from the fury of a body of Spanish soldiers ignorant of his person and rank. But, though exposed to almost certain destruction by his obstinacy, he refused to yield his sword to the traitor Bourbon, though entreated so to do. De Lannoy, the Viceroy of Naples, was accordingly called up, to whom Francis surrendered his sword. The Viceroy instantly unloosed his own weapon from his side, and placed it in the hands of the king.

Another illustrious prisoner by this defeat was Henry D'Albret, the young monarch of Navarre.

The first intelligence of this disastrous battle was conveyed by a letter from the king himself to his mother, in which he made the memorable exclamation, "All is lost except our honor!" Consternation immediately filled all France; but the measures adopted by Louise of Savoy for the safety of the realm, were as honorable to her abilities as regent as had been her former exhibitions of passion disgraceful to her character as a woman.

The royal captive, with every courtesy due to his rank, though with every precaution to prevent his escape, was committed to the custody of Don Ferdinand Alarcon, a general of Spanish infantry, and conducted for safe keeping to the castle of Pizzichitona. Dispatches announcing the event were instantly sent off to the emperor, and the courier received a passport from the hand of Francis himself, in order to enable him to expedite his journey by a shorter route through France, so sanguine was the French monarch of instant liberation by Charles.

But greatly did Francis err in thus judging of the nature of his rival by the generous impulses of his own. The warm sensibilities—the high and chivalric sentiments of the French monarch found no responding chords in the cold heart of the Castilian. So vigorous, therefore, were the conditions imposed upon the liberation of the royal captive, and so unexpected were they to himself, that, when first proposed, he instantly grasped his dagger and exclaimed, in a paroxysm of despair and indignation, "Better that a king should die thus!" Alarcon, in great alarm, grasped his arm; but the king solemnly declared, that, sooner than strip himself of his possessions by conceding to such infamous propositions, he would die by his own hand in a Spanish prison.

So eager was Francis for an immediate and personal interview with Charles, that he even furnished the galleys for his voyage to Spain, the emperor being too poor at that time to fit out a convoy; and, in a few weeks, he found himself in the Alcazar at Madrid, still under the jealous guardianship of the ever-vigilant Alarcon.

The unfortunate monarch of France soon became convinced that he had little to hope from the generosity of his rival. Weeks passed away, and his incessant and importunate solicitations for an interview were received with silent disregard. It was now plain, that Charles designed availing himself of the good fortune which the victory of Pavia had thrown into his hands, to the utmost extent, and, by all the rigor of the most severe captivity, to exact from his prisoner the last farthing of the largest ransom he could obtain.

The scene of the imprisonment of Francis was a dreary old castle, and his jailer an austere old Don of Castile; while the only exercise permitted, to one whose life had been action, was an occasional ride upon a lazy mule, surrounded by a guard of heavy-armed cavalry.

It is, perhaps, impossible for any one fully to appreciate the feelings of the unhappy monarch during his captivity. The mortification; the anguish; the suspense; the disappointment; the despair of a nature like that of Francis, under a reverse of fortune so severe, must have been indescribably tormenting. And, if we may be permitted to regard any amount of mere temporal suffering as adequate retribution for temporal crimes; even those of Francis the First, dark as had been their dye, may, perhaps, be viewed as amply recompensed by the wretchedness endured during that dreary imprisonment in the old castle of Madrid.

Now is it wonderful, that mental misery so intense should have soon begun its ravages on the bodily health of its victim! The condition of the unhappy young man is described as most pitiful. His gay spirits forsook him: he became moody and silent, though never sullen: his love of books and amusements ceased; and, at length, he was thrown upon his couch by a fever so violent, that his life was despaired of. In the delirium attendant on his disease, he moaned his captivity in the most piteous terms; and expressed his longings for freedom and a return to his own beautiful France, with a pathos and an anguish of feeling which cut even his rough jailers to the heart. It soon became evident to his medical attendants, that the poor captive would certainly die, unless he were visited by the emperor, and some hope of liberation held out to him. Charles, therefore, fearful of an event which would deprive him of vast advantages, and a magnificent ransom, hastened to the prison of the unhappy monarch, and, in an interview, brief, because of the feebleness of Francis, assured him of "speedy deliverance and princely treatment."

From that moment, the poor captive began to mend, and was soon in the enjoyment of his wonted health.

But his hopes were vain. Charles was by nature perfidious; and, while the captivity of Francis continued as rigorous and as hopeless as ever, the distinguished reception by the emperor of the traitor Bourbon at Madrid, placed another rankling thorn beneath his pillow.

All confidence between the two monarchs seemed now at an end, and the prospect of the liberation of the royal captive, every day more distant. In vain did Margaret, the Duchess of Alençon, who was permitted to visit her brother, intercede in his behalf. In vain did Henry the Eighth insist on his immediate release. In despair, Francis resolved to abdicate his throne in favor of his son; and the deed to that end was signed, and sealed, and delivered by him to his sister, to be taken to France, and there registered; while to Charles he declared his fixed determination to remain a captive for life, and desired that his prison should be named, and suitable arrangements for his comfort for the remainder of his days be made.

Startled by this resolution, and apprehensive, from the recent escape from his prison of the king of Navarre, that Francis might, by possibility, be assisted to accomplish the same, Charles became more reasonable in his demands; and the French king learning that a powerful confederacy was forming against his rival in Italy, became more compliant, in hope of soon regaining, at the head of an army, all that he was now compelled to relinquish.

A treaty was accordingly signed, by which he yielded the duchy of Burgundy, the sovereignty of Flanders and Artois, all claims to Milan, Naples, Genoa, and Asti; promising never again to interfere with Navarre in behalf of Henry d'Albret, and to pay a ransom of 2,000,000 crowns.

He also promised to restore the traitor Bourbon all his goods confiscated, with damages for their detention; to maintain a league offensive and defensive with Charles; to marry his sister Eleonora, the queen-dowager of Portugal—Claude some years before having died—and, for the fulfillment of these conditions, to deliver as hostages his two youngest sons.

A few hours before signing these several articles, Francis called together all those on whom he could depend in Madrid; and having exacted an oath of secrecy, disclosed to them the contents of the treaty, the arts and violence used to obtain his signature; and, in a solemn protest, he declared it void and of no effect!

The bridal ceremony between Francis and Eleonora of Portugal, was immediately solemnized; but its consummation was not suffered by Charles until the arrival of the regent's ratification from Paris. Francis was then permitted to set out for the frontier of his dominions, escorted by a troop of cavalry under Alarcon, who became more fastidious than ever in his vigilance, as the hour for his captive's emancipation drew nigh. The description of the scene which ensued, is so beautifully given by the historian to whom we are chiefly indebted for the events in the career of Francis which we have condensed, that we shall be pardoned for its quotation here:

"When they arrived at the river Andaye, which separates the two kingdoms, Lautrec appeared on the opposite bank with a guard of horse equal in number to Alarcon's. An empty bark was moored in the middle of the stream; the attendants drew up in order on the opposite banks; at the same instant, Lannoy with eight gentlemen put off from the Spanish, and Lautrec with the same number from the French, side of the river; the former had the king in his boat; the latter the dauphin and duke of Orleans; they met in the empty vessel; the exchange was made in a moment: Francis, after a short embrace of his children, leaped into Lautrec's boat, and reached the French shore. He mounted at that instant a Turkish horse, waved his hand over his head, and with a joyful voice crying aloud several times, 'I am yet a king!' galloped full speed to St. John de Luz, and from thence to Bayonne. This event, no less impatiently desired by the French nation than by their monarch, happened on the eighteenth of March, a year and twenty-two days after the fatal battle of Pavia."

The first act of Francis on reaching Bayonne, was to write Henry of England a warm acknowledgment for the zeal manifested in his behalf, to which he attributed the regaining of his freedom. He then set out on his journey for the capital. His route conducted him through the centre of his dominions, from one extremity to the other, and was little less than an uninterrupted triumphal procession. At every city, and town, and village, and hamlet, the entire population poured out to welcome his return, with all those enthusiastic demonstrations of feeling for which that excited people are distinguished. The incidents of that journey would fully substantiate, were all other proof wanting, that, whatever the misery brought upon his subjects by his unbridled lust and his unprincipled ambition, never was there a prince upon the throne of France more ardently loved and universally admired, than was Francis of Valois.

CHAPTER XVIII.....THE APPARITION.

"Oh Heaven, receive her back!
Through the wide earth the sorrowing dove hath flown,
And found no haven; weary though her wing,
And sullied with the dust of lengthened travel,
Now let her flee away and be at rest!
The peace that man has broken—Thou restore
Whose holiest name is Father!"
In a low voice—but never tone
So thrilled through vein, and nerve, and bone.—SCOTT,

"It was on the fourth day of the journey from Bayonne, that the royal cavalcade, as the sun was going down, drew nigh to the little

village of Chinon. This place, so celebrated as the scene of some of the most melancholy events in the romance of history, is situated on the right bank of the Vienne, not far from the confluence of that stream with the Loire. Its site is a beautiful vale, sheltered by a range of precipitous crags in the rear and on the flank, while in front sweep on the sparkling waters of the Vienne.

On the summit of the loftiest of these crags, we learn from an interesting writer, are still to be witnessed the ruins of that once formidable fortress, which, for one thousand years, held all the surrounding country in awe.

The castle of Chinon is regarded as one of the strongest and most perfect of all the remains of Feudal Architecture. It is still remarkable for its solid masonry; and, like other structures of the age, is furnished with numberless secret passages and subterranean galleries, one of which is said to have extended from the royal chamber, down through the deep walls and through the crag on which the castle stands to the Vienne: thence, beneath the bed of the river, to the opposite bank, emerging in a tower of a convent of Carmelites within sight of Chinon; thence, again, descending into the earth, it continued its midnight course to the Chateau of Sanmur, twelve miles distant.

History speaks, too, of the terrible "Oubliettes" of this fearful pile, which are yet to be traced out immediately behind the fireplace of the principal sitting room; "so that the haughty prince might be stretching his legs over the fire, with the utmost nonchalance, at the moment the wretch who had offended him, might be precipitated, at his very side, into this horrid grave! Alas!" continued the writer from whom we quote; "Alas! that history should have recorded this to have been actually the case with that mirror of chivalrous honor, Francis the First, in company with one of his mistresses!"

Fain are we to hope, that this terrible charge partakes more of the romance than the reality of history; yet, as Chinon was a favorite spot with Francis, its truth is by no means impossible.

It was entering this beautiful village, at the quiet hour of sunset, that we left our hero some pages back—defiling through the narrow and lane-like streets of the hamlet, the cortège swept off from the river to the left, and winding up the rugged ascent to the castle, disappeared within its walls. At that moment, the white standard of France rolled out its heavy folds from the summit of the loftiest tower, silvered by the last rays of the sinking sun, and the note of the melancholy bugle from the battlements, as it rose and fell on the evening breeze, told to all the surrounding county for many miles, that Francis of Valois was once more at Chinon.

As the darkness closed in, lights flashed from every loop-hole of that stern old fortalice, perched up on its lonely height among the clouds—strains of wild music and bursts of merriment could be heard mingling in the distance; and the mid-hour of the night had long passed, when the last shout of the reveller fell on the ear, and the last lamp ceased to glimmer from the casement.

Wearied by the fatigues of a long and rapid day's ride, and the revels of the night, in which he had mingled with something of that light-hearted joviality, which had characterized him, when first presented to the reader—Francis threw himself upon his couch so soon as he reached his turret-chamber, and in a few minutes was buried in a slumber deep and profound.

But this slumber was not to continue. His breathing shortly became less free and regular, and at length with a sudden start, as of alarm, he awoke. His heart was throbbing rapidly and with a sensation of suffocation. A chilling pang shot through his brain, as if an icy hand had been resting upon his forehead. The castle-clock tolled sullenly forth the third hour of the morning, and chateau and convent, for miles around, gave forth, mellowed by distance, on the stillness, their iron response. With a slight shudder he opened his eyes. The moon, which had just risen, cast that pale and spectral light into the apartment peculiar to her rays, when she is waning from her full. Turning his head upon his pillow, he glanced toward the deep oriel window on his right projecting boldly from the turret, and a vision met his eye, at which his cheek paled and his frame quivered. There—in the blue and ghastly moonlight, tranquil and unmoving, stood the figure of a female! Her garb was that of a sister of the order of Carmelite nuns, but her head was uncovered, and her dark and luxuriant hair was thrown back in heavy tresses on her shoulders. The features of the countenance were thus fully revealed.

The apparition moved. The rays of the moon for an instant streamed brightly upon the face; and—oh, God! who shall describe the sensations of the monarch, when there—turned full upon him, he recognized the pale, yet beautiful countenance of one, whom for long years he had mourned as dead! The eyes of this apparition were fastened steadfastly on his own, the features were calm and unmoving, the lips were slightly parted, and the hands were meekly folded on the breast.

With emotions of amazement, bordering on terror, Francis raised his head from his pillow and earnestly leaned forward. The figure remained motionless, as at first; but while he gazed, its outlines became more and more clearly defined, and its proportions grew more and more familiar to his remembrance. No—no—there could be no mistaking! That form, though robed in the full and flowing costume of a recluse, and though now, as contrasted with its once rounded and voluptuous proportions, attenuated almost to translucency—was still that graceful and elegant form so often folded with rapture to his own—that face, pallid as alabaster and traced with

many a line of suffering and of thought, was yet the same beautiful face which had once seemed fairer to him than all the world of faces beside—that pale brow bore the same open and innocent expression as ever before; but time's dusky wing in its onward sweeping, had for an instant lingered there as it passed, and had left a seal of meditation which in girlhood-days it had never known—the eye, ah! *that* was indeed the same—that was indeed unchanged! There was the same deep, fond, melancholy gaze, the same look of melting and unutterable tenderness, as were before to him! The lips—they smiled—yes, there was the same bland, yet radiant smile, which to him had been the sunlight of a brief, bright vision of his earlier years—those soft lips moved—

“Francis!”

The tones were faint, like the far-off moan of half-remembered music; but they were her's; and, oh! how ravishingly sweet did they fall upon his ear!

Powerless to move or to speak, the monarch gazed on with dilating eye and quivering pulse, uncertain whether he looked upon a spirit from another world, or a reality of the present. And yet the superstition of the age, from which he was far from free, caused the former impression to predominate.

Again those pale lips moved, and again the name of “Francis” floated faintly to his ear.

“Blanche! my own Blanche!” he cried.

An expression of more than human happiness passed over that pure and spirit-like face.

“Answer me, beloved!” again he exclaimed. “If it be thou, oh, speak to me! Do not leave me! This world without thee has been but a lonely dwelling-place. Come to me, Blanche—to my heart—once more to thine home!”

With these words, Francis earnestly extended his arms.

A smile of rapture played over the soft lips and the pale cheek of the apparition, like a gleam of sunlight on a quiet lake; and those large and luminous eyes for an instant beamed with supernatural brightness. It passed away—a shade of mingled solemnity and sorrow gathered upon the countenance—the arm was slowly raised from the bosom, and the finger directed to heaven.

“Hereafter! hereafter! We meet no more on earth!”

As these syllables fell on the listener's ear, a cloud passed over the moon—the apartment for a moment was darkened—again the wan moonbeams poured in floods through the oriel—the apparition was gone! and on the air floated faintly away, as if dying in distance, mournfully and melodiously as the strain of an Æolian harp—

“Farewell! farewell! farewell!”

The king spoke not—moved not! His eyes closed—breathlessly he listened; and when the last, soft accent died sadly away, a sense of utter and unutterable loneliness came over him—his head sank back on the pillow, and tears—tears the first which for seven weary years had fallen from his eyelids, gushed forth like a flood!

At length the paroxysm ceased—his grief became less passionate—quietly he arose, and, walking to the oriel, looked forth on the tranquil scene without.

The night was calm—the sky was serene and clear, save a few fleecy clouds which floated near the zenith—the hosts of heaven were all out in their magnificence, and old Orion was riding up the firmament with wintry brilliancy. The waning moon was nearly half way to its meridian, and poured forth its beams purely and palely upon the earth. Beneath, all was quiet; the river—the forests—the little peaceful hamlet—all seemed so still as if slumbering in the cold moonlight; and, as the king looked down on them from the high turret-window of that stern old tower, he alone, of all the world, inanimate or animate, appeared to wake and to watch.

He was turning away from this quiet scene, when his glance fell for an instant on the old Carmelite convent on the opposite bank of the Vienne. A single light, like a star, beamed steadily out from its loftiest tower.

The king threw himself once more on his couch; and, exhausted by the scenes of the night, was soon buried in slumber.

The merry sunshine of a spring morning was streaming richly into his apartment when he awoke. The birds were at their matins—the bleating of flocks, the lowing of kine, the fitful song of the shepherd-boy going forth to his daily task, rose in a full chorus of pastoral sounds from the little village; and the neighing of steeds, the rattling armor and caparisons, and the confused and heterogenous sounds in the courts of the castle itself, betokened that the revellers of the preceding night were thoroughly roused from their slumbers, and were making preparations to resume their route.

Francis opened his eyes, and, with a mingled feeling of anticipation and apprehension, carefully surveyed his apartment. Everything continued as he remembered to have observed it on his retiring to rest. His garments lay as he had thrown them on; his sword and belt remained near the couch where they had been placed, and beside them the massive goblet of silver, from which, agreeably to the custom of the age and nation, he had drained his posset before lay-

ing his head on his pillow. In fine, not a trace was to be seen indicative of the exciting events, or of his unlooked-for visitant, of the preceding night.

Mounting to the battlements of the turret by a winding stair in the massive masonry—a turret distinguished as the *Tour d'Argenton*, and devoted to the king himself—Francis looked forth on the magnificent landscape spread out like a panoramic picture before his eye. All was beautiful and calm. Far away to the right, winding among the tremendous crags which butted over its glassy surface, swept up in redundant tide the gentle Vienne, eddying along at the base of the steep on which the castle was founded. Far away in blue distance on the left might be caught the green banks of the Loire—the proud promontory of Landes reflected in its waters, and the stern old citadel of Sanmur frowning darkly down on the bright little hamlet at its base. An immense extent of hill and vale, of plain and meadow, of field and forest, was unfolded to the eye on every side. In front, beyond the rippling river, rose peacefully among the hills the pale turrets of the Carmelite convent—half castle, half monastery, as was the custom of the feudal time—partially shrouded in the mist-wreaths of night, which yet floated around their summits.

On all this tranquil and beautiful scene, lighted up by the glad sunshine of morning, Francis gazed long and earnestly, and with a thoughtful eye: then turning silently and abstractedly away, he descended into the castle to issue orders for the journey.

It was late on the morning of that day, that the cavalcade of the previous night was seen defiling from the dusky portals of Chinon, winding down the stony and precipitous descent to resume its route to the capital.

To all the inquiries set on foot by Francis—and they had been numerous and scrutinizing—nothing more satisfactory could be gained in reply from the simple villagers than this—that, some six or seven years before, an old man and a girl, answering in description to the jester and his daughter, had suddenly appeared in the hamlet—with some of the peasantry of which, and the neighboring localities on either bank of the Vienne, the old man had seemed familiar—and then, after a secluded residence of several months, they had as suddenly and mysteriously disappeared as they came. Whether the old man had, at length, sunk under his many infirmities; and whether the neighboring convent had sheltered within its protecting walls the orphan girl, under the assumed name of some one of the legion of the sisterhood of the Catholic saints, no one was able, or was willing, to tell; and so, despairing of a happy issue to further investigations, even should a faint hope which had risen in his mind prove not wild and chimerical, Francis at length, after several hours of delay, issued the necessary order for the cortège to advance.

Abstracted and thoughtful, the monarch rode silently and sadly on all that day, and all the next day, and the next, at the head of his troop. And, as he pondered, he felt that, whether his mysterious visitant of the previous night were an apparition from the living or from the departed—whether she were one dead to the world by seclusion from its scenes, or by a final departure from the earth—he had looked for the last time, with human eyes, on the sweet face of his long-lamented and much-loved Blanche. Had she yielded up the remnant of her days to the service of her God, then he shuddered at the thought of the sacrilege of that impure passion, which would tear her from His altar; had she become a habitant of the blest spirit-land, as he seemed most inclined to believe, then she would never indeed come back to him, though, by a life of penitence, he might hope to go to her. And, as he rode thus thoughtfully and silently on—not a little to the wonder of his attendants—and pondered again and again on all the scenes of the preceding night, and called up the deathless affection of that last fond gaze, and thought of those last parting syllables which floated to his ear, a calm serenity stole over his agitated spirit; and it was with humble resignation and penitent joy he at length exclaimed—

“Hereafter! hereafter! We meet no more on the earth! But, oh, we shall meet again, my Blanche! we shall meet again in a world where nought of earth's evil can trouble—where sin, and sorrow, and suffering are known no more forever—where the wronged and the weary ones do rest!”

And Francis of Valois went on his way with a humbled, yet confident heart. And, in after years, when cloud after cloud had gathered over his pathway, and tempest on tempest had burst on his devoted head, until he seemed the doomed victim of misfortune, he thought upon Blanche; and, though he knew not *all* the suffering which his wild love had caused that fair and innocent girl, he felt that Heaven's retribution was just, and he was silent, and murmured not at his fate.*

* On one occasion, when Charles, with a victorious army, was within two days' march of Paris, we are told by Brantome, that Francis, in a moment of anguish, exclaimed, “Oh, my God, how dear do I pay for this crown, which I thought thou hadst granted me freely!” The next moment, recovering from this emotion, he added—“Yet, Thy will be done!”—and at once proceeded, with all that coolness and presence of mind for which he was so distinguished, to issue the necessary orders for the defence of his capital.

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