

The War of Women

By

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***Free*editorial** 

NANON DE LARTIGUES

I.

At a short distance from Libourne, the bright and bustling city mirrored in the swift waters of the Dordogne, between Fronsac and Saint-Michel-la-Rivière, once stood a pretty little white-walled, red-roofed village, half-hidden by sycamores, lindens, and beeches. The high-road from Libourne to Saint-André-de-Cubzac passed through the midst of its symmetrically arranged houses, and formed the only landscape that they possessed. Behind one of the rows of houses, distant about a hundred yards, wound the river, its width and swiftness at this point indicating the proximity of the sea.

But the civil war passed that way; first of all it up-rooted the trees, then depopulated the houses, which, being exposed to all its capricious fury, and being unable to fly like their occupants, simply crumbled and fell to pieces by the roadside, protesting in their way against the savagery of intestine warfare. But little by little the earth, which seems to have been created for the express purpose of serving as the grave of everything upon it, covered the dead bodies of these houses, which were once filled with joyous life; lastly, the grass sprang up in this artificial soil, and the traveller who to-day wends his way along the solitary road is far from suspecting, as he sees one of the vast flocks which one encounters at every turn in the South cropping the grass upon the uneven surface, that sheep and shepherd are walking over the burial-place of a whole village. But, at the time of which we are speaking, that is to say about the month of May, 1650, the village in question lay along both sides of the road, which, like a mammoth artery, nourished it with luxuriant vegetation and overflowing life. The stranger who happened to pass along the road at that epoch would have taken pleasure in watching the peasants harness and unharness the horses from their carts, the fishermen along the bank pulling in their nets wherein the white and red fish of the Dordogne were dancing about, and the smiths striking sturdy blows upon the anvil, and sending forth at every stroke of the hammer a shower of sparks which lighted up the forge. However, the thing which would most have delighted his soul, especially if his journeying had given him that appetite which has become a proverbial attribute of travellers, would have been a long, low building, about five hundred yards outside the village, a building consisting of a ground-floor and first floor only, exhaling a certain vapor through its chimney, and through its windows certain odors which indicated, even more surely than the figure of a golden calf painted upon a piece of red iron, which creaked upon an iron rod set at the level of the first floor, that he had finally reached one of those hospitable establishments whose proprietors, in consideration of a certain

modest recompense, undertake to restore the vigor of the tired wayfarer.

Will some one tell me why this hostelry of the Golden Calf was located five hundred yards from the village, instead of taking up its natural position amid the smiling houses grouped on either side of the road?

In the first place, because the landlord, notwithstanding the fact that his talents were hidden in this out-of-the-way corner of the world, was in culinary matters an artist of the first rank. Now, if he displayed his sign at any point between the beginning and the end of the two long lines of houses which formed the village, he ran the risk of being confounded with one of the wretched pot-house keepers whom he was forced to acknowledge as his confrères, but whom he could not bring himself to regard as his equals; while, on the contrary, by isolating himself he more easily attracted the notice of connoisseurs, who, having once tasted the delicacies that came from his kitchen, would say to others:—

"When you are going from Libourne to Saint-André-de-Cubzac, or from Saint-André-de-Cubzac to Libourne, do not fail to stop, for breakfast, dinner, or supper, at the Golden Calf, just outside the little village of Matifou."

And the connoisseurs would follow this counsel, would leave the inn well-content, and send other connoisseurs thither; so that the knowing Boniface gradually made his fortune, nor did that prevent him, strange to say, from continuing to maintain the high gastronomic reputation of his establishment; all of which goes to prove, as we have already said, that Master Biscarros was a true artist.

On one of those lovely evenings in the month of May, when Nature, already awakened from her winter's sleep in the South, is beginning to awake in the North, a denser vapor and more savory odor than usual was escaping from the chimneys and windows of the Golden Calf, while Master Biscarros in person, dressed in white, according to the immemorial custom of sacrificers of all times and of all countries, was standing in the doorway, plucking with his august hands partridges and quail, destined to grace the festive hoard at one of those dainty repasts which he was so skilful in preparing, and which he was accustomed, as a result of his love for his art, to superintend personally to the smallest detail.

The day was drawing to a close; the waters of the Dordogne, which, in one of the tortuous windings wherein its course abounds, turned aside from the road at this point, and washed the base of the little fort of Vayres, a fourth of a league away, were beginning to turn white beneath the dark foliage. A sense of tranquil melancholy overspread the landscape with the upspringing of the evening breeze; the laborers were toiling to their homes beside their horses, and the fishers with their dripping nets; the noises in the village died away; the

hammer having struck its final stroke upon the anvil, bringing to its close another day, the nightingale began to raise his voice among the trees hard by.

At the first notes which escaped from the throat of the feathered warbler, Master Biscarros too began to sing,—to accompany him no doubt; the result of this rivalry and of the interest of Master Biscarros in the work he had in hand was that he did not perceive a small party of six horsemen, who appeared upon the outskirts of the village of Matifou, and rode toward his inn.

But an exclamation at one of the windows of the first floor, and the sudden noisy closing of that window caused the worthy inn-keeper to raise his head; thereupon he saw that the horseman at the head of the party was riding directly toward him.

"Directly" is not altogether the appropriate word, and we hasten to correct ourselves; for the man halted every few steps, darting keen glances to right and left, scrutinizing by-paths, trees, and bushes, holding a carbine upon his knee with one hand, to be ready for attack or defence, and from time to time motioning to his companions, who followed his movements in every point, to come on. Then he would venture forward a few steps, and the same manœuvres would be repeated.

Biscarros followed the horseman with his eyes, so deeply engrossed in his extraordinary mode of progression that he entirely forgot to detach from the fowl's body the bunch of feathers which he held between his thumb and forefinger.

"That gentleman is looking for my house," said Biscarros to himself. "He is short-sighted doubtless, for my golden calf is freshly painted, and the sign projects a good way. However, I'll place myself where he'll see me."

And Master Biscarros planted himself in the middle of the road, where he continued to pluck his partridge with much freedom and majesty of gesture.

This step produced the anticipated result; the cavalier no sooner spied the worthy inn-keeper than he rode up to him, and said, with a courteous salutation:—

"Your pardon, Master Biscarros, but have you not seen hereabout a party of soldiers, who are friends of mine, and should be looking for me? 'Soldiers' is perhaps too strong a word; 'gentlemen of the sword' is better, or best of all, 'armed men,'—yes, armed men, that expresses my meaning. Have you seen a small party of armed men?"

Biscarros, flattered beyond measure to be called by his name, affably returned the salutation; he had not noticed that the stranger, with a single glance at the inn, had read the name and profession of the proprietor upon the

sign, as he now read his identity upon his features.

"As to armed men," he replied, after a moment's reflection, "I have seen only one gentleman and his squire, who stopped at my house about an hour ago."

"Oho!" exclaimed the stranger, caressing his chin, which was almost beardless, although his face was already instinct with virility; "oho! there is a gentleman and his squire here in your inn, and both armed, you say?"

"Mon Dieu! yes, monsieur; shall I send word to him that you wish to speak to him?"

"Would it be altogether becoming?" rejoined the stranger. "To disturb a person whom one doesn't know is somewhat too familiar usage, perhaps, especially if the unknown is a person of rank. No, no, Master Biscarros, be good enough to describe him to me, and let it go at that; or, better still, show him to me without letting him see me."

"It would be difficult to show him to you, monsieur, for he seems anxious to keep out of sight; he closed his window the moment you and your companions appeared upon the road. To describe him to you is a simpler matter: he is a slender youth, fair-haired and delicate, hardly more than sixteen; he seems to have just about enough strength to carry the little parlor sword which hangs at his baldric."

The stranger knit his brow as if searching his memory.

"Ah, yes!" said he, "I know whom you mean,—a light-haired, effeminate young dandy, riding a Barbary horse, and followed by an old squire, stiff as the knave of spades: he's not the man I seek."

"Ah! he's not the man monsieur seeks?" Biscarros repeated.

"No."

"Very good: pending his arrival whom monsieur seeks, as he cannot fail to pass this way, there being no other road, I trust that monsieur and his friends will enter my humble inn, and take some refreshment."

"No. I have simply to thank you, and to ask what time it might be."

"Six o'clock is just striking on the village clock, monsieur; don't you hear the loud tones of the bell?"

"Tis well. Now, Monsieur Biscarros, one last service."

"With pleasure."

"Tell me, please, how I can procure a boat and boatman."

"To cross the river?"

"No, to take a sail upon the river."

"Nothing easier: the fisherman who supplies me with fish—Are you fond of fish, monsieur?" queried Biscarros, parenthetically, returning to his first idea of persuading the stranger to sup beneath his roof.

"It's not the most toothsome of delicacies, monsieur; however, when properly seasoned it's not to be despised."

"I always have excellent fish, monsieur."

"I congratulate you, Master Biscarros; but let us return to the man who supplies you."

"To be sure; at this hour his day's work is at an end, and he is probably dining. You can see his boat from here, moored to the willows yonder just below the large elm. His house is hidden in the osier-bed. You will surely find him at table.

"Thanks, Master Biscarros, thanks," said the stranger.

Motioning to his companions to follow him, he rode rapidly away toward the clump of trees and knocked at the door of the little cabin. The door was opened by the fisherman's wife.

As Master Biscarros had said, the fisherman was at table.

"Take your oars," said the horseman, "and follow me; there's a crown to be earned."

The fisherman rose with a degree of precipitation that was most eloquent of the hard bargains mine host of the Golden Calf was wont to drive.

"Do you wish to go down the river to Vayres?" he asked.

"No; simply to go out into midstream, and remain there a few moments."

The fisherman stared at his customer's exposition of this strange whim; but, as there was a crown at the end of it, and as he could see, some twenty yards away, the dark forms of the other horsemen, he made no objection, thinking that any indication of unwillingness on his part might lead to the use of force, and that, in the struggle, he would lose the proffered recompense.

He therefore made haste to say to the stranger that he was at his service, with his boat and his oars.

The little troop thereupon at once guided their horses toward the river, and, while their leader kept on to the water's edge, halted at the top of the bank, in such a position, as if they feared to be taken by surprise, that they could see in

all directions. They had an uninterrupted view of the plain behind them, and could also cover the embarkation about to take place at their feet.

Thereupon the stranger, who was a tall, light-haired young man, pale and rather thin, nervous in his movements, and with a bright, intelligent face, although there were dark rings around his blue eyes, and a cynical expression played about his lips,—the stranger, we say, examined his pistols with particular attention, slung his carbine over his shoulder, made sure that his long rapier moved easily in its sheath, and then gazed attentively at the opposite shore,—a broad expanse of plain, intersected by a path which ran in a straight line from the bank to the hamlet of Isson; the dark church-spire and the smoke from the houses could be distinguished through the golden evening haze.

Also on the other bank, scarcely an eighth of a league distant, stood the little fort of Vayres.

"Well," said the stranger, beginning to lose patience, and addressing his companions on the bank, "is he coming; can you see him anywhere, to right or left, before or behind?"

"I think," said one of the men, "that I can make out a dark group on the Isson road; but I am not quite sure, for the sun's in my eyes. Wait! Yes, yes, there are one, two, three, four, five men, led by a laced hat and blue cloak. It must be the man we expect, attended by an escort for greater safety."

"He has the right to bring an escort," rejoined the stranger, phlegmatically. "Come and take my horse, Ferguzon."

The man to whom this command was addressed, in a half-familiar, half-imperative tone, obeyed at once, and rode down the bank. Meanwhile the stranger alighted, and when the other joined him, threw his bridle over his arm, and prepared to go aboard the boat.

"Look you," said Ferguzon, laying his hand upon his arm, "no useless foolhardiness, Cauvignac; if you see the slightest suspicious movement on your man's part, begin by putting a bullet through his brain; you see that the crafty villain has brought a whole squadron with him."

"True, but not so strong as ours. So we have the advantage in numbers as well as in courage, and need fear nothing. Ah! their heads are beginning to show."

"Gad! what are they going to do?" said Ferguzon. "They can't procure a boat. Ah! faith, there is one there as by magic."

"It's my cousin, the Isson ferry-man," said the fisherman, who evinced a keen interest in these preliminaries, and was in terror lest a naval battle was

about to take place between his own craft and his cousin's.

"Good! there the blue-coat steps aboard," said Ferguzon; "and alone, by my soul!—strictly according to the terms of the treaty."

"Let us not keep him waiting," said the stranger; and leaping into the skiff he motioned to the fisherman to take his station.

"Be careful, Roland," said Ferguzon, recurring to his prudent counsel. "The river is broad; don't go too near the other shore, to be greeted with a volley of musket-balls that we can't return; keep on this side of the centre if possible."

He whom Ferguzon called now Roland, and again Cauvignac, and who answered to both names, doubtless because one was the name by which he was baptized, and the other his family name, or his nom de guerre, nodded assentingly.

"Never fear," he said, "I was just thinking of that; it's all very well for them who have nothing to take rash chances, but this business promises too well for me foolishly to run the risk of losing all the fruit of it; so if there is any imprudence committed on this occasion, it won't be by me. Off we go, boatman!"

The fisherman cast off his moorings, thrust his long pole into the watergrass, and the boat began to move away from the bank, at the same time that the Isson ferry-man's skiff put off from the opposite shore.

There was, near the centre of the stream, a little stockade, consisting of three stakes surmounted by a white flag, which served to point out to the long lighters going down the Dordogne the location of a dangerous cluster of rocks. When the water was running low, the black, slippery crest of the reef could be seen above the surface; but at this moment, when the Dordogne was full, the little flag, and a slight ripple in the water alone indicated its presence.

The two boatmen seemed by a common impulse to have fixed upon that spot as a convenient one for the interview between the two flags of truce, and both pulled in that direction; the ferry-man reached the flag first, and in accordance with his passenger's orders made his skiff fast to one of the rings in the stockade.

At that moment the fisherman turned to his passenger to take his orders, and was not a little surprised to find a masked man, closely wrapped in his cloak. Upon that discovery his feeling of dread, which had never left him, redoubled, and his voice trembled as he asked this strange personage what course he wished him to take.

"Make your boat fast to yonder piece of wood," said Cauvignac, pointing to one of the stakes, "and as near monsieur's boat as possible."

The boatman obeyed, and the two craft, brought close together by the current, permitted the plenipotentiaries to hold the following conference.

II.

"What! you wear a mask, monsieur?" exclaimed the new-comer in a tone of surprise not unmixed with vexation. He was a stout man of some fifty-five to fifty-eight years, with the stern, glaring eye of a bird of prey, and a grizzly moustache and royale; although he wore no mask, he concealed his hair and his features as much as possible beneath a huge laced hat, and his figure and his clothes beneath a blue cloak of ample proportions.

Cauvignac, upon obtaining a view at close quarters of the individual who addressed him, could not restrain an involuntary movement of surprise.

"Well, well, monsieur, what's the matter?" demanded he of the blue cloak.

"Nothing, monsieur; I nearly lost my balance. I believe that you did me the honor of addressing me. What were you saying, pray?"

"I asked you why you are masked."

"That is a plain question," said the young man, "and I will reply with equal frankness; I am masked in order to conceal my face."

"Then it is a face that I know?"

"I think not; but having seen it once you might know it again later; and that, in my opinion, would be utterly useless."

"I should say that you were quite as outspoken as myself."

"Yes, when outspokenness can do me no harm."

"Does your frankness go so far as to lead you to disclose the secrets of others?"

"Why not, if such disclosure can be of advantage to me?"

"It's a singular profession that you practise."

"Dame! one does what one can do, monsieur; I have been, in succession, lawyer, doctor, soldier, and partisan; you see that I am not likely to go begging for a trade."

"What are you now?"

"Your humble servant," said the young man, bowing respectfully.

"Have you the letter in question?"

"Have you the blank signature?"

"Here it is."

"Shall we make the exchange?"

"One moment, monsieur," said the stranger in the blue cloak; "your conversation is delightful to me, and I should be sorry to lose my enjoyment of it so soon."

"Good lack! monsieur, it is quite at your service, as I myself am," rejoined Cauvignac. "Let us talk, by all means, if it is agreeable to you."

"Shall I step into your boat, or do you prefer to come aboard mine, so that our boatmen may be out of ear-shot in the other boat?"

"Useless, monsieur; you speak some foreign tongue, no doubt?"

"I can speak Spanish."

"And I; let us talk in Spanish, then, if you please."

"By all means! What motive," continued the gentleman, adopting from that moment the idiom agreed upon, "led you to inform the Duc d'Épernon of the infidelity of the lady in question?"

"I was desirous to be of service to that eminent nobleman, and to get into his good graces."

"Have you any ill-will to Mademoiselle de Lartigues?"

"Ill-will? By no manner of means! On the contrary, I must admit that I am under some obligation to her, and I should be extremely sorry were any mishap to befall her."

"Then Monsieur le Baron de Canolles is your enemy?"

"I never saw him; I know him only by reputation, and I must say that he is said to be a gallant knight and worthy gentleman."

"I am to understand that your action is not induced by hatred of any person?"

"Go to! if I had a grievance against Baron de Canolles I should challenge him to exchange shots or sword-thrusts with me, and he is too much of a man ever to decline an invitation of that kind."

"In that case I must recur to the reason you have given me."

"I think you can do no better."

"Very good! I understand that you have the letter which proves Mademoiselle de Lartigues to be unfaithful."

"Here it is. No offence, but this is the second time I have shown it to you."

The older gentleman glanced sadly from afar at the dainty paper, through

which he could see the written characters.

The young man slowly unfolded the letter.

"You recognize the writing, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Then give me the blank signature, and you shall have the letter."

"In a moment. Will you allow me to ask you a question?"

"Ask it, monsieur."

The young man tranquilly folded the paper again, and replaced it in his pocket.

"How did you procure the letter?"

"I am quite willing to tell you."

"I am listening."

"You know that the somewhat extravagant government of the Duc d'Épernon has aroused a strong feeling against him in Guyenne?"

"Very well; go on."

"You know that the frightfully stingy government of Monsieur de Mazarin has aroused a tremendously strong feeling against him in the capital?"

"What have Monsieur de Mazarin and Monsieur d'Épernon to do with the matter?"

"One moment; these two strongly contrasted governments have produced a state of things much resembling a general war, in which every one has a share. At this moment Monsieur de Mazarin is fighting for the queen; you are fighting for the king; the coadjutor is fighting for Monsieur de Beaufort; Monsieur de Beaufort is fighting for Madame de Montbazon; Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld is fighting for Madame de Longueville; Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans is fighting for Mademoiselle Soyon; the Parliament is fighting for the people; lastly, Monsieur de Condé, who was fighting for France, has been imprisoned. Now I, who have no great stake to gain by fighting for the queen, for the king, for the coadjutor, for Monsieur de Beaufort, for Madame de Montbazon, for Madame de Longueville, for Mademoiselle Soyon, for the people, or for France, conceived the scheme of espousing no party whatever, but of following the one which I feel inclined to follow at the moment. Thus with me it is a question of expediency pure and simple. What say you to the idea?"

"It is ingenious, certainly."

"Consequently I have levied an army. You can see it drawn up yonder on the bank of the Dordogne."

"Five men? Nonsense!"

"That's one more than you have yourself; it doesn't look well, therefore, for you to treat it with contempt."

"Very ill clad," continued the older man, who was in ill-humor, and for that reason inclined to be censorious.

"True," rejoined his interlocutor, "they somewhat resemble the companions of Falstaff. Falstaff, by the way, is an English gentleman of my acquaintance. But to-night they will be newly equipped, and if you fall in with them to-morrow, you will admit that they are pretty fellows."

"Let us return to yourself. I am not concerned with your men."

"Very well; as I was saying, in the course of my warfare on my own account, we fell in with the tax-collector of this district, who was going from village to village, rounding out his Majesty's purse. So long as there was a single stiver uncollected we did escort duty for him faithfully, and I confess that, as I watched his money-bags filling, I was strongly tempted to join the king's faction. But the infernal confusion that reigned everywhere, together with a fit of spleen against Monsieur de Mazarin, and the complaints that we heard on all sides against Monsieur d'Épernon, brought us to our senses. We concluded that there was much to be said in favor of the justice of the princes' cause, and we embraced it with ardor; the collector completed his round of visits at the little house which stands by itself yonder among the poplars and sycamores."

"Nanon's house!" muttered the other; "yes, I see it."

"We watched until he came out, we followed him as we had been doing for five days, we crossed the Dordogne with him just below Saint-Michel, and when we were in midstream I told him of our conversion politically, and requested him, with all the courtesy of which I am capable, to turn over to us the cash in his possession. Would you believe, monsieur, that he refused? Thereupon, my comrades searched him, and as he was shrieking in a way to cause scandal, my lieutenant, a resourceful rascal,—you see him yonder, in a red cloak, holding my horse,—reflected that the water, by intercepting the air-currents, interfered with the continuity of sound; that is an axiom in physics which I, as a physician, understood and applauded. The author of the suggestion thereupon bent the recalcitrant tax-collector's head over toward the river, and held it a foot—no more—under water. As a matter of fact he ceased to shout, or, to put it more accurately, we ceased to hear him. We were able, therefore, to seize in the name of the princes all the money in his possession,

and the correspondence which had been intrusted to him. I gave the money to my soldiers, who, as you justly observed, need to be newly equipped, and I kept the papers, this one among others: it seems that the worthy collector acted as Mercury for Mademoiselle de Lartigues."

"Indeed," muttered the old gentleman, "he was a creature of Nanon's if I mistake not. What became of the wretch?"

"Ah! you will see whether we did well to dip the wretch, as you call him, in the river. Why, except for that precaution he would have aroused the whole country. Fancy, when we took him out of the water, although he had been there hardly quarter of an hour, he was dead with rage!"

"You plunged him in again, no doubt?"

"As you say."

"But if the messenger was drowned—"

"I didn't say that he was drowned."

"Let us not haggle over words; if the messenger is dead—"

"Oh! as to that, he's dead enough."

"Monsieur de Canolles will not have received the letter, of course, and consequently will not keep the appointment."

"Oh! one moment; I make war on powers, not on private individuals. Monsieur de Canolles received a duplicate of the letter making the appointment; but as I considered that the autograph manuscript was of some value, I retained it."

"What will he think when he fails to recognize the writing?"

"That the person who hungers for a sight of him has employed another hand, as a measure of precaution."

The stranger eyed Cauvignac in evident admiration of such unbounded impudence combined with such perfect self-possession. He was determined, if possible, to find some means of frightening the reckless swashbuckler.

"What about the government," he said, "and the investigations that may be set on foot? Do you never think of that?"

"Investigations?" rejoined the younger man, with a laugh. "Oh! Monsieur d'Épernon has many other things to do besides investigate; and then, did I not tell you that I did what I did for the purpose of obtaining his favor? He would be ungrateful indeed if he didn't bestow it on me."

"I don't altogether understand," said the other, satirically, "how it ever

occurred to you, who have, by your own admission, taken up the cause of the princes, to do Monsieur d'Épernon a service."

"And yet it's the simplest thing in the world: an inspection of the papers found upon the collector convinced me of the purity of the king's intentions; his Majesty is entirely justified in my eyes, and Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon is in the right a thousand times over as against his subordinates. That, therefore, is the just cause, and thereupon I embraced the just cause."

"Here's a scoundrel whom I will have hanged if he ever falls into my hands!" growled the old gentleman, pulling savagely at the ends of his bristly moustache.

"I beg your pardon?" said Cauvignac, winking under his mask.

"I said nothing. Let me ask you a question; what do you propose to do with the signature in blank which you demand?"

"Deuce take me if I've made up my mind! I asked for a signature in blank, because it is the most convenient thing, the easiest to carry, and the most elastic. It is probable that I shall keep it for some great emergency; but it is possible that I may throw it away on the first whim that comes to my mind; perhaps I may present it to you in person before the end of the week, perhaps it will not come back to you for three or four months, and then with a dozen or more endorsers, like a piece of commercial paper; but never fear, I shall not use it for any purpose for which you and I need blush. Noble blood counts for something, after all."

"You are of noble blood?"

"Yes, monsieur, the very noblest."

"In that case I will have him broken on the wheel," muttered the unknown; "that's the service his blank signature will do him!"

"Have you decided to give me the signature in blank?" asked Cauvignac.

"I must," was the reply.

"I don't force you to do it; let us understand each other. What I propose is an exchange; keep your paper if you choose, and I will keep mine."

"The letter?"

"The signature?"

And he held out the letter with one hand, while he cocked a pistol with the other.

"Don't disturb the repose of your pistol," said the stranger, throwing open his cloak; "for I have pistols, too, and they are all loaded. Fair play on both

sides; here's your signature."

The exchange of documents was effected without further parley, and each of the parties examined that which was handed to him, carefully and in silence.

"Now, monsieur," said Cauvignac, "in which direction do you go?"

"I must cross to the right bank."

"And I to the left."

"How shall we arrange it? My men are where you propose to go, and yours where I propose to go."

"Why, nothing could be simpler; send my men over to me in your boat, and I will send yours over in mine."

"You have an inventive mind, and one that works very quickly."

"I was born to command an army."

"And so you do."

"Ah! true, I had forgotten," said the young man.

The stranger motioned to the ferry-man to cast off his boat, and pull to the opposite shore in the direction of the clump of woods which reached to the road.

The young man, who was perhaps expecting some treachery, stood half erect to look after him, with his hand still resting on the butt of his pistol, ready to fire at the least suspicious movement on the stranger's part. But the latter did not even deign to notice the distrust of which he was the object, and, turning his back on the young man with real or affected indifference, began to read the letter, and was soon entirely engrossed in its contents.

"Remember the hour," Cauvignac called after him; "eight o'clock this evening."

The stranger made no reply, and did not seem to have heard.

"Ah!" said Cauvignac to himself, caressing the butt of his pistol: "to think that, if I chose, I might throw open the succession to the government of Guyenne, and stop the civil war! But, with the Duc d'Épernon dead, what good would his signature in blank do me? and with the civil war at an end, what should I live on? Upon my word, there are times when I believe I am going mad. Vive le Duc d'Épernon and the civil war!—Come, boatman, to your oars, and pull to the other shore; we must not keep the worthy man waiting for his escort."

In a few moments Cauvignac approached the left bank of the Dordogne, just as the old gentleman was sending Ferguzon and his five bandits over to him in the ferry-man's boat. As he did not choose to be less prompt than he, he ordered his boatman to take the stranger's four men in his boat, and put them ashore on the other bank. In midstream the two boats met, and the occupants saluted one another courteously, as they passed on toward the point where their respective leaders were awaiting them. The old gentleman thereupon, with his escort, disappeared among the trees which stretched from the river-bank to the high-road; and Cauvignac, at the head of his army, took the path leading to Isson.

III.

Half an hour after the scene we have described, the same window in Master Biscarros' hostelry which had been closed so suddenly was cautiously re-opened, and a young man of some sixteen or eighteen years, dressed in black, with sleeves puffed at the wrists, in the fashion of that day, rested his elbows on the window-sill, after carefully scrutinizing the road to right and left. A shirt of the finest linen protruded proudly from his doublet, and fell in wavy folds over his beribboned small-clothes. His small, slender hand, a true thoroughbred hand, toyed impatiently with his buckskin gloves, embroidered along the seams; a pearl-gray felt hat, surmounted by a magnificent blue feather, shaded his long, golden-chestnut locks, which formed a marvellously fitting frame for an oval face, with fair complexion, rosy lips, and black eyebrows. But truth compels us to state that this attractive ensemble, which was well adapted to make the youth one of the most charming of cavaliers, was for the moment ever so little clouded by an expression of ill-humor, caused no doubt by a season of profitless waiting; for he gazed with dilated eye along the road, which was already swimming in the evening mist.

In his impatience he struck his left hand with his gloves. At the sound, the landlord, who was plucking his last partridge, raised his head, and said, removing his cap,—

"At what hour will you sup, my young sir? We are only awaiting your orders to serve you."

"You know that I do not sup alone, but am awaiting a friend; when you see him coming, you may serve the supper."

"Ah, monsieur," rejoined Master Biscarros, "I wouldn't presume to censure your friend, for he is certainly free to come or not; but it's a very bad habit to keep people waiting."

"He has no such habit, and I am much surprised at his tardiness."

"I am something more than surprised, monsieur; I am deeply grieved, for

the joint will be burned."

"Take it off the spit."

"Then it will be cold."

"Put another to the fire."

"It won't be cooked."

"In that case, my friend, do as you please," said the youth, unable, notwithstanding his ill-humor, to refrain from smiling at the inn-keeper's despair: "I intrust the matter to your supreme wisdom."

"There is no wisdom, not even King Solomon's own, that would make a warmed-over dinner eatable."

Having propounded that axiom, which Boileau was to express in verse twenty years later, Master Biscarros, shaking his head sadly, entered the inn.

Thereupon the youth, as if to cheat his impatience, drew back into the chamber, and was heard for a moment or two stamping noisily back and forth across the floor; but almost immediately, thinking that he heard horses' footsteps in the distance, he rushed to the window again.

"At last!" he cried; "there he is! God be praised!"

As he spoke, the head of a mounted man appeared beyond the thicket where the nightingale was singing, to whose melodious notes the young man seemed to pay no attention, doubtless because of his intense preoccupation. To his great astonishment, he waited in vain for the horseman to come out upon the road, for he turned to the right and rode in among the bushes, where his hat soon disappeared,—an unmistakable indication that he had alighted. A moment later the watcher saw through the branches, as they were cautiously put aside, a gray helmet, and the last rays of the setting sun were reflected on a musket-barrel.

The young man remained at his window lost in thought; evidently the man hiding in the thicket was not the friend he expected, and the impatient expression which darkened his mobile features gave place to an expression of curiosity.

Soon a second hat appeared beside the first, and the young man drew back out of sight.

The same gray helmet, the same glistening musket-barrel, the same manœuvring in the thicket. The new arrival addressed some words to the other, which the watcher could not hear because of the distance; and, in consequence doubtless of the information he received, he plunged into the hedge which ran parallel to the thicket, crouched behind a rock, and waited.

From his elevated position the young man could see his hat above the rock. Beside the hat gleamed a luminous point,—it was the end of the musket-barrel.

A feeling of terror took possession of the young gentleman's mind, and he drew back farther and farther as he watched.

"Oho!" he thought, "I wonder if they have designs on me and the thousand louis I have with me. But no; for, even if Richon comes, so that I can go on this evening, I am going to Libourne, and not to Saint-André-de-Cubzac, and so shall not pass the spot where those villains are in ambush. If my old Pompée were here, I would consult him. But what's this? If I'm not mistaken—yes, on my word, there are two more men! Gad! this has every appearance of an ambuscade in form."

He stepped still farther back, for it was true that at that moment two other horsemen appeared at the same point; but only one of these two wore the gray helmet. The other, astride a powerful black horse, and wrapped in the folds of an ample cloak, wore a hat trimmed with gold lace and adorned with a white feather; and beneath the cloak, as the evening breeze blew it aside, could be seen an abundance of rich embroidery upon a reddish doublet.

One would have said that the day was prolonging itself in order to light this scene, for the sun's last rays, as the luminary came forth from behind a bank of those dark clouds which sometimes stretch so picturesquely along the horizon at sundown, suddenly set ablaze a thousand rubies in the windows of a pretty little house, situated a hundred yards or less from the river, and which the young man would not otherwise have noticed, as it was in a great measure concealed by trees. This additional supply of light enabled him to see in the first place that the spies were watching the end of the village street and the little house with the shining windows, looking from one to the other; secondly, that the gray helmets seemed to have the greatest respect for the white feather; and lastly, that one of the windows in question was thrown open, and a woman appeared upon the balcony, looked about for a moment, as if she too were expecting some one, then re-entered the house as if she wished to avoid being seen.

As she disappeared, the sun sank behind the hill, and as it sank, the ground-floor of the house was immersed in darkness, and the light, gradually abandoning the windows, ascended to the slate roof, to disappear at last, after playing for a moment with a weather-vane consisting of a sheaf of golden arrows.

In the facts we have detailed there was ample material for any intelligent mind to build up a structure of probabilities, if not of certainties.

It was probable that the men were watching the isolated house, upon the balcony of which a woman had shown herself for an instant; it was probable that the woman and the men were expecting the arrival of one and the same person, but with very different intentions; it was probable that this person was to come from the village, and consequently to pass the inn, which was about half-way between the village and the thicket, as the thicket was about half-way between the inn and the house; it was probable that the horseman with the white feather was the leader of the horsemen with gray helmets, and, from the eagerness with which he stood up in his stirrups, in order to see farther, it was probable that he was jealous, and was watching in his own interest.

Just as the young man was concluding this chain of reasoning, the links of which fell naturally together in his mind, the door of his apartment opened and Master Biscarros appeared.

"My dear host," said the young man, without giving him time to explain the purpose of his visit,—a purpose which he guessed, however, "come hither, and tell me, if my question is not impertinent, whose is the small house which I see yonder,—a white speck among the poplars and sycamores."

The landlord followed with his eyes the direction in which the speaker's index finger pointed, and scratched his head.

"Faith!" he replied, with a smile which he tried to render cunning, "sometimes it belongs to one person, sometimes to another; it's yours, if you have any reason for seeking solitude, whether you wish to conceal yourself, or simply to conceal some one else."

The young man blushed.

"But who lives there to-day?" he asked.

"A young lady who passes herself off for a widow, and whom the ghost of her first, and sometimes of her second husband, comes to visit from time to time. But there's one remarkable thing about it, and that is that the two ghosts seem to have an understanding with each other, and never return at the same time."

"Since when," asked the young man, with a smile, "has the fair widow occupied this house, which is so convenient for ghosts?"

"About two months. She keeps very much to herself, and no one, I think, can boast of having seen her during that time, for she goes out very rarely, and always heavily veiled. A little maid—a fascinating creature, on my word!—comes here every morning to order the meals for the day, and I send them to the house; she receives the dishes in the vestibule, pays handsomely for them, and shuts the door in the waiter's face. This evening, for example, there is a

banquet on hand, and the partridge and quail you saw me plucking are for her."

"Whom does she entertain to-night?"

"One of the two ghosts I told you of, no doubt."

"Have you ever seen these ghosts?"

"Yes; but only passing along the road, after sunset, or before daylight."

"Nevertheless, I am sure that you have noticed them, dear Monsieur Biscarros; for, from the first word you spoke, I could see that you are a close observer. Come, what have you noticed in their appearance?"

"One is the ghost of a man of some sixty to sixty-five years; and that one I take to be the first husband, for it goes and comes like a ghost sure of the priority of its rights. The other is the ghost of a young man of twenty-six or twenty-eight, and this one is more timid, and has the appearance of a soul in torment; so I would swear that it's the ghost of the second husband."

"At what hour is the supper to be served to-night?"

"Eight o'clock."

"It is half after seven," said the young man, drawing from his fob a dainty little watch which he had already consulted several times; "you have no time to lose."

"Oh! it will be ready, never fear; but I came up to speak about your own, and to tell you that I have begun it all anew. So try, now, as your friend has delayed so long, to keep him away for another hour."

"Look you, my dear host," said the young gentleman, with the air of a man to whom the important question of a meal served at the proper moment was a secondary matter, "don't be disturbed about our supper, whenever the person whom I expect arrives, for we have much to talk about. If the supper isn't ready we will talk first; if it is ready, we will talk afterward."

"In good sooth, monsieur, you are a very accommodating gentleman, and since you are content to leave the matter in my hands, you shall not be disappointed; make your mind easy on that score."

Whereupon Master Biscarros made a low bow, to which the young man replied with a nod, and left the room.

"Now," said the young man to himself, resuming his station at the window with renewed interest, "I understand the whole affair. The lady is expecting somebody who is to come from Libourne, and the men in the bushes propose to accost him before he has time to knock at her door."

At that instant, as if to confirm the supposition of our sagacious observer, he heard the hoof-beats of a horse at his left. His eye instantly sought the thicket to observe the attitude of the men in ambush there. Although the darkness was beginning to obscure the different objects, it seemed to him that some of the men put aside the branches, while the others stood up to look over the rock, all alike preparing for a movement, which had every appearance of being an aggressive one. At the same time a sharp click, like the cocking of a musket, reached his ear thrice, and made him shudder. He at once turned in the opposite direction, to try and discern the person whose safety was menaced by that murderous sound, and spied a young man trotting briskly along upon a graceful, well-shaped horse. A handsome fellow he was, head erect, nose in air, and hand on hip, wearing a short cloak, lined with white satin, thrown gracefully over his right shoulder. Seen from a distance, he seemed to have a refined, poetic, joyous face. At closer quarters, it was seen to be a face with pure outlines, bright, clear complexion, keen eyes, lips slightly parted by the habit of smiling, a soft, black moustache, and fine, white teeth. A lordly way of twirling his switch, accompanied by a soft whistle, like that affected by the dandies of the epoch, following the fashion set by Monsieur Gaston d'Orléans, was not lacking, to make of the new-comer a perfect cavalier, according to the laws of good form then in vogue at the court of France, which was beginning to set the fashion for all the courts of Europe.

Fifty paces behind him, mounted upon a horse whose gait he regulated by that of his master's, rode an extremely consequential, high and mighty valet, who seemed to occupy a no less distinguished station among servants than his master among gentlemen.

The comely youth watching from the window of the inn, too young, doubtless, to look on in cold blood at such a scene as seemed imminent, could not restrain a shudder as he reflected that the two paragons who were approaching, with such absolute indifference and sense of security, would, in all probability, be shot down when they reached the spot where their foes were lying in ambush. A decisive conflict seemed to take place between the timidity natural at his age and his love for his neighbor. At last the generous sentiment carried the day, and as the gallant cavalier was riding by in front of the inn, without even looking toward it, the young man obeyed a sudden, irresistible impulse, leaned from the window, and cried,—

"Holé! monsieur, stop a moment, please, for I have something of importance to say to you."

At the sound of the voice, and the words which it uttered, the horseman raised his head, and seeing the young man at the window, stopped his horse with a movement of his hand which would have done honor to the best of squires.

"Don't stop your horse, monsieur, but ride toward me unconcernedly, as if you knew me."

The traveller hesitated a second; but realizing that he had to do with a gentleman of engaging countenance and pleasant manners, he removed his hat, and rode forward, smiling.

"Here I am, at your service, monsieur," he said; "what can I do for you?"

"Come still nearer, monsieur," continued he at the window; "or what I have to tell you cannot be told aloud. Put on your hat, for we must make them think that we are old acquaintances, and that you were coming to this inn to see me."

"But I don't understand, monsieur," said the traveller.

"You will understand directly; meanwhile put on your hat—good! Now come near, nearer! Give me your hand! That's it! Delighted to see you! Now listen; do not ride on beyond this inn, or you are lost!"

"What's the matter? Really, you terrify me," said the traveller, with a smile.

"The matter is that you are on your way to yonder little house where we see the light, are you not?"

The horseman started.

"Well, on the road to that house, at the bend in the road, in yonder dark thicket, four men are lying in wait for you."

"Oho!" exclaimed the traveller, gazing with all his eyes at the young man, who was quite pale. "Indeed! you are sure?"

"I saw them ride up, one after another, get down from their horses, and hide,—some behind the trees, others behind rocks. Lastly, when you rode out of the village just now, I heard them cock their muskets."

"The devil!" exclaimed the traveller, beginning to take alarm.

"Yes, monsieur, it's just as I tell you," continued the young man at the window; "if it were only not quite so dark you could see them, and perhaps recognize them."

"Oh! I have no need to see them; I know perfectly well who they are. But who told you that I was going to that house, monsieur, and that it is I they are watching for?"

"I guessed it."

"You are a very charming Œdipus; thanks! Ah! they propose to shoot me; how many of them are assembled for that praiseworthy purpose?"

"Four; one of whom seemed the leader."

"He is older than the others, is n't he?"

"Yes, as well as I could judge from here."

"Does he stoop?"

"He is round-shouldered, wears an embroidered doublet, white plume, brown cloak; his gestures are infrequent but imperative."

"As I thought; it's the Duc d'Épernon."

"The Duc d'Épernon!"

"Well, well, here I am telling you my business," said the traveller with a laugh. "I never do so with others; but no matter, you have done me so great a service that I don't care so much what I say to you. How are the men dressed who are with him?"

"Gray helmets."

"Just so; they are his staff-bearers."

"Become musket-bearers for to-day."

"In my honor; thanks! Now, do you know what you ought to do, my young gentleman?"

"No; but tell me your opinion, and if what I ought to do can be of any service to you, I am ready in advance to undertake it."

"You have weapons?"

"Why—yes; I have a sword."

"You have your servant?"

"Of course; but he is not here; I sent him to meet some one whom I expect."

"Very well; you ought to lend me a hand."

"To do what?"

"To charge the villains, and make them and their leader beg for mercy."

"Are you mad, monsieur?" cried the young man, in a tone which showed that he was not in the least inclined for such an expedition.

"Indeed, I ask your pardon," said the traveller; "I forgot that the affair had no interest for you."

Turning to his servant, who had halted when his master halted, he said,—

"Come here, Castorin!"

At the same time he put his hand to his holsters, as if to make sure that his pistols were in good condition.

"Ah, monsieur!" cried the young man at the window, putting out his arms as if to stop him, "monsieur, in Heaven's name do not risk your life in such an adventure! Rather come into the inn, and thereby avoid arousing the suspicion of the men who are waiting for you; consider that the honor of a woman is at stake."

"You are right," rejoined the horseman; "although, in this case, it's not her honor, precisely, but her material welfare. Castorin, my good fellow," he added, addressing his servant, who had joined him; "we will go no farther just now."

"What!" cried Castorin, almost as disappointed as his master, "what does monsieur say?"

"I say that Mademoiselle Francinette will have to do without the pleasure of seeing you this evening, as we shall pass the night at the Golden Calf; go in, therefore, order supper for me, and a bed to be got ready."

As he doubtless saw that Monsieur Castorin proposed to make some rejoinder, he accompanied his last words with a movement of the head which effectually precluded any more extended discussion. Castorin at once passed through the gate, crestfallen, and without venturing to say another word.

The traveller looked after him for an instant; then, after reflecting for another instant, seemed to have made up his mind what course to adopt. He alighted from his horse, passed through the gate on the heels of his lackey, over whose arm he threw his rein, entered the inn, and in two bounds was at the door of the room occupied by the young gentleman, who, when his door was suddenly thrown open, made an involuntary movement of surprise mingled with alarm, which the new-comer could not detect because of the darkness.

"And so," said the latter, approaching the young man with a jovial air, and cordially pressing a hand which was not offered him, "it's a settled fact that I owe you my life."

"Oh, monsieur, you exaggerate the service I have done you," said the young man, stepping back.

"No, no! no modesty; it's as I say. I know the duke, and he's an infernally brutal fellow. As for you, you are a model of perspicacity, a perfect phoenix of Christian charity. But tell me, my obliging and sympathetic friend, if you carried your thoughtfulness so far as to send word to the house."

"To what house?"

"Pardieu! to the house where I was going,—the house where I am expected."

"No," said the young man, "I did not think of it, I confess; and had I thought of it I had no way to do it. I have been here barely two hours myself, and I know no one in the house."

"The devil!" exclaimed the traveller with an anxious expression. "Poor Nanon! if only nothing happens to her."

"Nanon! Nanon de Lartigues!" exclaimed the young man in amazement.

"Upon my word! are you a sorcerer?" said the traveller. "You see men lying in wait by the roadside, and you divine whom they are waiting for; I mention a Christian name, and you divine the family name. Explain yourself at once, or I denounce you, and have you condemned to death at the stake by the parliament of Bordeaux!"

"Ah! but you surely will agree that one need not be very cunning to have solved that problem; once you had named the Duc d'Épernon as your rival, it was plain enough that if you named any Nanon whatsoever, it must be the beautiful, wealthy, and clever Nanon de Lartigues, by whom the duke is bewitched, so they say, and who really governs in his province; the result being that throughout Guyenne she is almost as bitterly detested as he is himself. And you were on your way to visit that woman?" the young man added, reproachfully.

"Faith, yes, I confess it; and as I have called her name, I won't deny her. Besides, Nanon is misunderstood and slandered. She is a charming girl, faithful to her promises so long as she finds it agreeable to keep them, and devoted to the man she loves, so long as she loves him. I was to sup with her this evening, but the duke has upset the saucepan. Would you like me to present you to her to-morrow? Deuce take it! the duke must return to Agen sooner or later."

"Thanks," returned the young gentleman, dryly. "I know Mademoiselle de Lartigues by name only, and I have no desire for any further acquaintance with her."

"Well, you are wrong, morbleu! Nanon is a good person to know in every way."

The young man's brows contracted.

"Oho! I beg your pardon," said the astonished traveller; "but I thought that at your age—"

"I know that I am of an age at which such suggestions are ordinarily accepted," replied the other, noticing the bad effect his prudery seemed to have

produced, "and I would gladly accept, were it not that I am simply a bird of passage here, and am compelled to continue my journey to-night."

"Pardieu! surely you will not go until I know the name of the gentle knight who so courteously saved my life?"

The young man hesitated for a moment before he replied,—

"I am the Vicomte de Cambes."

"Aha!" said his companion; "I have heard of a lovely Vicomtesse de Cambes, who has large estates near Bordeaux, and is a close friend of Madame la Princesse."

"She is a kinswoman of mine," said the young man, hastily.

"Faith, viscount, I congratulate you, for they say that she is charming beyond compare. I hope you will present me to her, if the opportunity ever occurs. I am Baron de Canolles, captain in the Navailles regiment, and at present enjoying a leave of absence which Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon was pleased to grant me, at the recommendation of Mademoiselle de Lartigues."

"Baron de Canolles!" cried the viscount, gazing at his companion with the curiosity naturally aroused by that name, renowned in the love intrigues of the time.

"You know me?" said Canolles.

"By reputation only," the viscount replied.

"And by bad reputation, eh? What would you have? Every one follows his natural inclinations, and I love a life of excitement."

"You are perfectly free, monsieur, to live as you choose," rejoined the viscount. "Permit me, however, to express one thought that comes to my mind."

"What is it?"

"That there is a woman yonder, deeply compromised for your sake, upon whom the duke will wreak vengeance for his disappointment in your regard."

"The devil! do you think it?"

"Of course; although she is a somewhat frail person, Mademoiselle de Lartigues is a woman none the less, and compromised by you; it is for you to look to her safety."

"Gad! you are right, my young Nestor; and in the pleasure of conversing with you, I was near forgetting my obligations as a gentleman. We have been betrayed, and in all probability the duke knows all. It is very, true that Nanon

is so clever that if she were warned in time, I would wager my life that she would make the duke apologize. Now let us see; are you acquainted with the art of war, young man?"

"Not yet," replied the viscount, with a laugh; "but I fancy I am likely to learn it where I am going."

"Well, here's your first lesson. In war, you know, when force is out of the question, we must resort to stratagem. Help me to carry out a stratagem."

"I ask nothing better. But in what way? Tell me."

"The inn has two doors."

"I know nothing about that."

"I know it; one that opens on the high-road, and another that opens into the fields. I propose to go out by the one that leads into the fields, describe a semi-circle, and knock at the back door of Nanon's house."

"Yes, so that you may be caught in the house!" cried the viscount. "You would make a fine tactician, upon my word!"

"Caught in the house?" repeated Canolles.

"Why, to be sure. The duke, tired of waiting, and failing to see you leave the inn, will go to the house himself."

"Yes; but I will simply go in and out again."

"Once inside, you won't come out."

"There's no doubt about it, young man," said Canolles, "you are a magician."

"You will be surprised, perhaps killed before her eyes; that's all there is about it."

"Pshaw!" said Canolles, "there are closets there."

"Oh!" exclaimed the viscount.

This oh! was uttered with such an eloquent intonation, it contained such a world of veiled reproach, of offended modesty, of charming delicacy, that Canolles stopped short, and darted a piercing glance at the young man, who was leaning on the window-sill.

Despite the darkness, he felt the full force of the glance, and continued in a playful tone,—

"Of course, you're quite right, baron; go by all means, but conceal yourself carefully, so that you may not be surprised."

"No, I was wrong," said Canolles, "and you are right. But how can I warn her?"

"It seems to me that a letter——"

"Who will carry it?"

"I thought that I saw a servant following you. A servant, under such circumstances, runs the risk of nothing worse than a few blows, while a gentleman risks his life."

"Verily I am losing my wits," said Canolles; "Castorin will do the errand to perfection, especially as I suspect that the rascal has allies in the house."

"You see that the matter can all be arranged here," said the viscount.

"Yes. Have you writing materials?"

"No; but they have them downstairs."

"Pardon me, I beg you," said Canolles; "upon my word, I can't imagine what has happened to me this evening, for I say one idiotic thing after another. No matter. Thanks for your good advice, viscount, and I shall act upon it immediately."

Without taking his eyes from the young man, whom he had been examining for some moments with strange persistency, Canolles backed to the door and descended the stairs, while the viscount muttered anxiously,—

"How he stares at me! can he have recognized me?"

Canolles meanwhile had gone down to the ground-floor, and having gazed for a moment with profound sorrow at the quail, partridge, and sweetmeats, which Master Biscarros was himself packing in the hamper upon the head of his assistant cook, and which another than he was to eat perhaps, although they were certainly intended for him, he asked to be shown to his room, called for writing materials, and wrote to Nanon the following letter:—

Dear Madame—About a hundred yards from your door, if nature had endowed your lovely eyes with the power to see in the dark, you could descry in a clump of trees Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, who is awaiting my coming to have me shot, and compromise you wofully as a consequence. But I am by no means anxious to lose my life or to cause you to lose your peace of mind. Have no fear, therefore, in that direction. For my own part I propose to make use of the leave of absence which you procured for me the other day that I might take advantage of my freedom to come and see you. Where I am going, I have no idea; indeed, I am not sure that I shall go anywhere. However that may be, recall your fugitive adorer when the storm has passed. They will tell you at the Golden Calf in which direction I have gone. You will give me due

credit, I trust, for my self-sacrifice. But your interests are dearer to me than my own enjoyment. I say my own enjoyment because I should have enjoyed pommelling Monsieur d'Épernon and his minions under their disguise. Believe me, dear lady, your most devoted and most faithful servant.

Canolles signed this effusion, overflowing with Gascon magniloquence, knowing the effect it would have upon the Gascon Nanon. Then he summoned his servant.

"Come hither, Master Castorin," said he, "and tell me frankly on what terms you are with Mademoiselle Francinette."

"But, monsieur," replied Castorin, wondering much at the question, "I don't know if I ought—"

"Have no fear, master idiot; I have no designs upon her, and you haven't the honor of being my rival. I ask the question simply for information."

"Ah! that's a different matter, monsieur, and I may say that Mademoiselle Francinette has deigned to appreciate my good qualities."

"Then you are on the best of terms with her, aren't you, monsieur puppy? Very good. Take this letter and go around by the fields."

"I know the road, monsieur," said Castorin, with a self-satisfied expression.

"T is well. Knock at the back door. No doubt you know that door, too?"

"Perfectly well."

"Better and better. Take that road, knock at that door, and hand this letter to Mademoiselle Francinette."

"Then, monsieur," said Castorin, joyfully, "I may—"

"You may start instantly; you have ten minutes to go and come. This letter must be delivered to Mademoiselle Nanon de Lartigues at the earliest possible moment."

"But suppose they don't open the door, monsieur?" queried Castorin, suspecting that something had gone wrong.

"Why, you must be a fool in that case, for you should have some particular way of knocking, which makes it certain that a brave fellow like you won't be left outside; if that's not the case, I am much to be pitied for having such a dolt in my service."

"I have a private knock, monsieur," said Castorin, with his most conquering air; "first I knock twice softly, then a third—"

"I don't ask you how you knock, nor do I care, if the door is opened."

Begone! and if you are taken by surprise, eat the paper, or I'll cut off your ears when you return, if it's not already done."

Castorin was off like a flash. But when he reached the foot of the staircase he stopped, and, in defiance of all rules, thrust the letter into the top of his boot; then he left the inn by the barn-yard door, and made a long circuit, sneaking through the bushes like a fox, jumping ditches like a greyhound, until at last he reached the rear door of the little house, and knocked in the peculiar fashion he had tried to explain to his master.

It proved to be so effective that the door opened instantly.

Ten minutes later, Castorin returned to the inn without accident, and informed his master that the letter was in the fair hands of Mademoiselle Nanon.

Canolles had employed these ten minutes in opening his portmanteau, laying out his robe de chambre, and ordering his supper to be served. He listened with visible satisfaction to Monsieur Castorin's report, and made a trip to the kitchen, giving his orders for the night in a loud tone, and yawning immoderately, like a man who is impatient for bed-time to arrive. These manœuvres were intended to convince the Duc d'Épernon, if he had put spies upon him, that the baron had never intended to go farther than the inn, where he had stopped for supper and lodging, like the unpretentious, inoffensive traveller he was. And the scheme really produced the result that the baron hoped. A man in the guise of a peasant, who was drinking in the darkest corner of the public room, called the waiter, paid his reckoning, rose, and went out unconcernedly, humming a tune. Canolles followed him to the door, and saw that he went toward the clump of trees; in a few moments he heard the receding steps of several horses,—the ambuscade was raised.

Thereupon the baron, with his mind at rest concerning Nanon, thought only of passing the evening as agreeably as possible; he therefore bade Castorin bring cards and dice, and, having done so, to go and ask the Vicomte de Cambes if he would do him the honor to receive him.

Castorin obeyed, and found at the vicomte's door an old, white-haired squire, who held the door half open, and replied surlily to his complimentary message,—

"Impossible at present; Monsieur le Vicomte is very much engaged."

"Very well," said Canolles, when the answer was reported to him, "I will wait."

As he heard considerable noise in the direction of the kitchen, to pass the time away he went to see what was going on in that important part of the

establishment.

The uproar was caused by the return of the poor scullion, more dead than alive. At the bend in the road he was stopped by four men, who questioned him as to the objective point of his nocturnal expedition; and upon learning that he was carrying supper to the lady at the little house among the trees, stripped him of his cap, his white waistcoat and his apron. The youngest of the four then donned the distinctive garb of the victim's profession, balanced the hamper on his head, and kept on toward the little house in the place and stead of the scullion. Not long after, he returned, and talked in a low tone with the man who seemed the leader of the party. Then they restored his vest and cap and apron, replaced the hamper on his head, and gave him a kick in the stern to start him in the direction he was to follow. The poor devil asked for no more definite instructions; he started off at full speed, and fell half-dead with terror at the door of the inn, where he had just been picked up.

This episode was quite unintelligible to everybody except Canolles; and as he had no motive for explaining it, he left host, waiters, chambermaids, cook, and scullion to cudgel their brains over it; while they were outdoing one another in wild conjectures, he went up to the vicomte's door, and, assuming that the first message he had sent him by the mouth of Monsieur Castorin permitted him to dispense with a second formality of the same nature, he opened the door unceremoniously and went in.

A table, lighted and set with two covers, stood in the middle of the room, awaiting, to be complete, only the dishes with which it was to be embellished.

Canolles noticed the two covers, and drew a joyful inference therefrom.

However, the viscount when he saw him standing in the doorway, jumped to his feet so suddenly that it was easy to see that he was greatly surprised by the visit, and that the second cover was not intended for the baron, as he flattered himself for an instant that it was. His doubts were set at rest by the first words the viscount uttered.

"May I be permitted to know, Monsieur le Baron," he asked, walking to meet him ceremoniously, "to what new circumstance I am indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"Why," rejoined Canolles, somewhat taken aback by this ungracious reception, "to a very natural circumstance. I am hungry. I thought that you must be in the same plight. You are alone, I am alone; and I wished to have the honor of suggesting to you that we sup together."

The viscount looked at Canolles with evident distrust, and seemed to feel some embarrassment in answering him.

"Upon my honor!" said Canolles, laughing, "one would say that I frighten you; are you a knight of Malta, pray? Are you destined for the Church, or has your respectable family brought you up in holy horror of the Canolles? Pardieu! I shall not ruin you if we pass an hour together on opposite sides of a table."

"Impossible for me to go to your room, baron."

"Very well, don't do it. But as I am already here—"

"Even more impossible, monsieur; I am expecting some one."

This time Canolles was disarmed.

"You are expecting some one?" he said.

"Yes."

"Faith," said Canolles, after a moment of silence, "I should almost prefer that you had let me go on at any risk, rather than spoil, by your manifest repugnance for my society, the service you rendered me, for which I fear that I have not as yet thanked you sufficiently."

The young man blushed and walked to Canolles' side.

"Forgive me, monsieur," he said in a trembling voice; "I realize how rude I am; and if it were not serious business, family matters, which I have to discuss with the person I expect, it would be both an honor and a pleasure to admit you as a third, although—"

"Oh, finish!" said Canolles; "whatever you say, I am determined not to be angry with you."

"Although," continued the viscount, "our acquaintance is one of the unforeseen results of mere chance, one of those fortuitous meetings, one of those momentary relations—"

"Why so?" queried Canolles. "On the contrary, the most sincere and enduring friendships are formed in this way: we simply have to give credit to Providence for what you attribute to chance."

"Providence, monsieur," the viscount rejoined with a laugh, "decrees that I depart two hours hence, and that, in all probability, I take the opposite direction to that you will take; receive, therefore, my sincere regrets at my inability to accept, gladly as I would do so if I could, the friendship you offer me so cordially, and of which I fully appreciate the worth."

"You are a strange fellow, upon my word," said Canolles, "and the generous impulse upon which you acted in the first place gave me quite a different idea of your character. But of course it shall be as you desire; I

certainly have no right to persist, for I am your debtor, and you have done much more for me than I had any right to expect from a stranger. I will return, therefore, to my own room, and sup alone; but I assure you, viscount, it goes against my grain. I am not addicted to monologue."

Indeed, notwithstanding what he said, and his declared purpose to withdraw, Canolles did not withdraw; some power that he could not understand seemed to nail him to his place; he felt irresistibly drawn to the viscount, who, however, took up a candle and approached him with a charming smile.

"Monsieur," said he, extending his hand, "however that may be, and short as our acquaintance has been, I beg you to believe that I am overjoyed to have been of service to you."

Canolles heard nothing but the compliment; he seized the hand the viscount offered him, which was warm and soft, and, instead of answering his friendly, masculine pressure, was withdrawn at once. Realizing that his dismissal was none the less a dismissal, although couched in courteous phrase, he left the room, disappointed and thoughtful.

At the door he encountered the toothless smile of the old valet, who took the candle from the viscount's hands, ceremoniously escorted Canolles to his door, and hastened back to his master, who was waiting at the top of the stairs.

"What is he doing?" the viscount asked in an undertone.

"I think he has made up his mind to take supper alone," replied Pompée.

"Then he won't come up again?"

"I hope not, at least."

"Order the horses, Pompée; it will be so much time gained. But what is that noise?"

"I should say it was Monsieur Richon's voice."

"And Monsieur de Canolles?"

"They seem to be quarrelling."

"On the contrary, they are greeting each other. Listen!"

"If only Richon does n't say anything."

"Oh! there's no fear of that; he's very circumspect."

"Hush!"

As they ceased to speak, they heard Canolles' voice.

"Two covers, Master Biscarros," he cried. "Two covers! Monsieur Richon sups with me."

"By your leave, no," replied Richon; "it's impossible."

"The deuce! so you too propose to sup alone, like the young gentleman upstairs?"

"What gentleman?"

"The one upstairs, I say."

"What's his name?"

"Vicomte de Cambes."

"Oho! you know the viscount, do you?"

"Pardieu! he saved my life."

"He?"

"Yes, he."

"How was that?"

"Sup with me, and I'll tell you the whole story during supper."

"I cannot; I am to sup with him."

"Ah! yes; he is awaiting some one."

"Myself; and as I am late, you will allow me to leave you, will you not, baron?"

"Sacrebleu! no, I will not allow it!" cried Canolles. "I have taken it into my head that I will sup in company, and you will sup with me or I with you. Master Biscarros, two covers!"

But while Canolles turned his back to see if the order was executed, Richon darted rapidly up the staircase. When he reached the top stair a little hand met his and drew him into the viscount's room, the door of which immediately closed behind him, and was locked and bolted for greater security.

"In very truth," muttered Canolles, looking about in vain for Richon, and seating himself at his solitary table, "in very truth, I don't know what the people of this cursed country have against me; some of them run after me to kill me, and others avoid me as if I had the plague. Corbleu! my appetite is vanishing; I feel that I am growing melancholy, and I am capable of getting as drunk as a lansquenet to-night. Holé! Castorin, come here and be thrashed. Why, they are locking themselves in up there as if they were conspiring.

Double calf that I am! of course they are conspiring; that's just it, and it explains everything. The next question is, in whose interest are they conspiring?—the coadjutor's? the princes'? the parliament's? the king's? the queen's? Monsieur de Mazarin's? 'Faith, they may conspire against any one they choose, it's all the same to me; and my appetite has returned. Castorin, order up my supper, and give me some wine; I forgive you."

Thereupon Canolles philosophically attacked the first supper that was prepared for the Vicomte de Cambes, which Master Biscarros was compelled to serve up to him, warmed over, for lack of supplies.

IV.

Let us now see what was taking place under Nanon's roof while Baron de Canolles was vainly seeking some one to sup with him, until, growing weary of the profitless quest, he decided at last to sup by himself.

Nanon, whatever her enemies may have said or written—and among her enemies must be accounted the great majority of the historians who have devoted any space to her—was, at this period, a charming creature of some twenty-five or twenty-six years; small of stature, dark-skinned, but with a supple, graceful figure, bright, fresh coloring, eyes of deepest black, in whose limpid depths all the passions and emotions found expression: gay on the surface, in appearance a laughing siren. But Nanon was very far from giving her mind to the whims and follies which embroider with fantastic designs the silky and golden woof of which the life of a *petite-maitresse* ordinarily consists. On the contrary, the most weighty conclusions, long and laboriously reasoned out in her shapely head, assumed an aspect no less seductive than clear when enounced by her vibrating voice, in which the Gascon accent was very marked. No one would have divined the untiring perseverance, the invincible tenacity, and the statesmanlike depth of insight which lay beneath that rosy, smiling mask, behind that look overflowing with voluptuous promise, and glowing with passion. And yet such were Nanon's qualities, good or bad according as we look at the face or the reverse of the medal. Such was the scheming mind, such the ambitious heart, to which her seductive body served as envelope.

Nanon was of Agen. Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, son of that inseparable friend of Henri IV. who was in his carriage when Ravaillac's knife struck him, and was the object of suspicions which did not stop short of Marie de Médicis—Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, appointed governor of Guyenne, where his arrogance, his insolence, and his exactions caused him to be generally execrated, was captivated by the little creature, who was the daughter of a simple attorney. He paid court to her, and conquered her scruples with great difficulty, and after a long defence maintained with the skill of a consummate

tactician determined that the victor shall pay the full price of his victory.

But, as the ransom of her thenceforth ruined reputation, Nanon had despoiled the duke of his power and his freedom. At the end of the first six months of her liaison with the governor of Guyenne, she was the *de facto* ruler of that fair province, returning with interest the injuries and insults she had received from all those who had slighted or humiliated her. A queen by chance, she became a tyrant by design, shrewdly realizing the advisability of supplementing the probable brevity of her reign by abusing her power.

As a consequence, she seized upon everything she could reach,—treasure, influence, honors. She was enormously wealthy, distributed appointments, received visits from Mazarin and the leading noblemen at court. With admirable skill she made of the various elements that she had at her disposal a combination useful to her credit, and profitable to her fortune. Every service that Nanon rendered had its stated price. There was a regularly established tariff for appointments in the army and in the magistracy: Nanon would procure this position or that for some fortunate individual, but it must be paid for in hard cash or by a royal gift; so that when she relaxed her hold upon a fragment of power for the benefit of one person or another, she recouped the fragment in another form, giving up the authority, but retaining the money, which is its active principle.

This explains the duration of her reign; for men, in their hatred, hesitate to overthrow an enemy who will have any consolation remaining in his downfall. Vengeance thirsts for total ruin, for complete prostration. Nations are reluctant to expel a tyrant who would carry away their money, and depart with smiling face. Nanon de Lartigues had two millions.

And so she lived in a species of security over the volcano which was unceasingly shaking everything about her to its foundations. She had felt the popular hatred rise like the tide, increase in force, and assail with its waves the power of Monsieur d'Épernon, who, when hunted from Bordeaux in a day of wrath, had carried Nanon in his wake, as the ship carries the skiff. Nanon bent before the storm, ready to stand erect again when it should have passed; she had taken Monsieur de Mazarin for her model, and, an humble pupil, she practised at a distance the political tactics of the clever and pliable Italian. The cardinal's notice was attracted by this woman, who waxed great and wealthy by the same method which had made him a prime minister, possessed of fifty millions. He admired the little Gasconne; he did more than that,—he let her do as she chose. Perhaps we shall eventually know why.

Notwithstanding all this, and although some who claimed to be better informed averred that she corresponded directly with Monsieur de Mazarin, but little was said of the fair Nanon's political intrigues. Canolles himself,

who, however, being young and rich and handsome, could not understand the need of intriguing, did not know what to think upon that point. As to love-affairs, whether it was that Nanon, in her preoccupation by more serious matters, had postponed them to a more convenient season, or that the gossip caused by Monsieur d'Épernon's passion drowned whatever noise any secondary amours might have made, even her enemies were not lavish of scandalous reports in her regard, and Canolles was justified in believing, as a matter of personal and national self-esteem, that Nanon was invincible before his appearance upon the scene. It may be that Canolles was, in truth, the beneficiary of the first real passion of that heart, hitherto accessible to ambition only; it may be that prudence had enjoined upon his predecessors absolute silence. At all events, Nanon, as mistress, was a fascinating woman; Nanon, insulted, was like to be a redoubtable foe.

The acquaintance between Nanon and Canolles had come about in the most natural way. Canolles, a lieutenant in the Navailles regiment, aspired to the rank of captain; in order to obtain the promotion, he was obliged to write to Monsieur d'Épernon, colonel-general of infantry. Nanon read the letter, and replied in the ordinary way, making a business appointment with Canolles. He selected from among his family jewels a magnificent ring, worth some five hundred pistoles (it was less expensive than to purchase a company), and betook himself to the place appointed for the meeting. But on this occasion Canolles, preceded by the renown of his previous triumphs, upset all Mademoiselle de Lartigues' calculations. It was the first time that he had seen Nanon; it was the first time that Nanon had seen him; they were both young, handsome, and clever. Their conversation consisted chiefly of reciprocal compliments; not a word was said concerning the business which brought them together, and yet the business was done. The next day Canolles received his captain's commission, and when the ring passed from his finger to Nanon's it was not as the price of gratified ambition, but as a pledge of mutual love.

V.

A few words will suffice to explain Nanon's residence near the village of Matifou. As we have said, the Duc d'Épernon was intensely hated in Guyenne. Nanon, who had been honored by being transformed into his evil genius, was execrated. The popular outcry drove them from Bordeaux to Agen. But at Agen it began anew. One day the gilded carriage in which Nanon was driving to join the duke was overturned upon a bridge. By some unexplained means, Nanon found herself in the river, and Canolles pulled her out. One night Nanon's residence in the city took fire, and Canolles it was who made his way to her bedroom and saved her from the flames. Nanon concluded that the Agenois might probably succeed at the third trial. Although Canolles left her side as little as possible, it would be a miracle if he should always happen to

be on hand at a given point to rescue her. She availed herself of the duke's absence on a tour through the province, and of an escort of twelve hundred men, of whom the Navailles regiment furnished its quota, to leave the city at the same time with Canolles, hurling defiance from her carriage windows at the populace, who would have liked nothing so much as to wreck the carriage, but dared not.

Thereafter the duke and Nanon selected, or rather Canolles had secretly selected for them, the little country-house where it was decided that Nanon should remain while an establishment was being prepared for her at Libourne. Canolles procured a leave of absence, ostensibly in order to attend to some private business at his home, really so that he might be at liberty to leave his regiment, which had returned to Agen, and to remain within a reasonable distance of Matifou, where his protecting presence was more necessary than ever.

In fact, events were becoming alarmingly serious. The princes of Condé, Conti, and Longueville, who had been arrested and imprisoned at Vincennes on the 17th January preceding, afforded an excellent pretext for civil war to the four or five factions which divided France at that epoch. The unpopularity of the Duc d'Épernon, who was known to be entirely devoted to the court, continued to increase, although it was reasonable to hope that it had reached its limit. A catastrophe, earnestly desired by all the factions, who, under the extraordinary conditions prevailing in France at the time, did not themselves know where they stood, was imminent. Nanon, like the birds which see the storm approaching, disappeared from the sky and betook herself to her leafy nest, there to await the result unknown and in obscurity.

She gave herself out as a widow, desirous of living in seclusion. So Master Biscarros described her, the reader will remember.

Monsieur d'Épernon paid her a visit, and announced his intention of being absent for a week. As soon as he took his leave of her, Nanon sent by the tax-collector, her protégé, a little note to Canolles, who was making use of his leave of absence to remain in the neighborhood. But, as we have seen, the original note had disappeared in the messenger's hands, and had become a copy under Cauvignac's pen. The reckless young nobleman was making all haste to obey the summons contained therein, when the Vicomte de Cambes stopped him four hundred yards from his destination. We know the rest.

Nanon therefore was awaiting Canolles, as a woman who loves is wont to await the loved one, consulting her watch ten times a minute, walking to the window again and again, listening to every sound, gazing questioningly at the sun as it sank in ruddy splendor behind the mountain, to give place to the first shades of night. The first knocking was at the front door, and she despatched

Francinette thither; but it was only the pseudo-waiter from the inn, bringing the supper for which the guest was lacking. Nanon looked out into the hall and saw Master Biscarros' false servant, who, for his part, stole a glance into the bedroom, where a tiny table was set with two covers. Nanon bade Francinette keep the dishes hot, then sadly closed the door and returned to the window, which showed her the road still deserted as far as she could see it in the gathering darkness.

A second knock, a peculiar knock, was heard, this time at the back door, and Nanon cried,—

"Here he is!"

But still she feared that it was not he, and stopped in the middle of the room. The next moment the door opened, and Mademoiselle Francinette appeared on the threshold in evident consternation, holding the letter in her hand. Nanon spied the paper, rushed up to her, tore it from her hand, hastily opened it, and read it in an agony of fear.

The perusal of the letter was like a thunder-clap to Nanon. She dearly loved Canolles, but with her, ambition was almost equal to love, and in losing the Duc d'Épernon she would lose not only all her hopes of fortune to come, but perhaps her accumulated wealth as well. However, as she was a quick-witted siren, she began by putting out the candle, which would have caused her shadow to betray her movements, and ran to the window. It was time; four men were approaching the house, and were not more than fifty feet away. The man in the cloak walked first, and in the man in the cloak Nanon recognized the duke beyond a peradventure. At that moment Mademoiselle Francinette entered, candle in hand. Nanon glanced despairingly at the table and the two covers, at the two arm-chairs, at the two embroidered pillows, which displayed their insolent whiteness against the background of crimson damask bed-curtains, and at her fascinating *négligé*, which harmonized so well with all the rest.

"I am lost!" she thought.

But almost immediately her wits returned to her, and a smile stole over her face; like a flash she seized the plain glass tumbler intended for Canolles, and threw it out into the garden, took from its box a golden goblet adorned with the duke's arms, and placed beside his plate his silver cover; then, shivering with fear, but with a forced smile upon her face, she rushed down the stairs, and reached the door just as a grave, solemn blow was struck upon it.

Francinette was about to open the door, but Nanon caught her by the arm, thrust her aside, and said, with that swift glance which, with women taken by surprise, serves so well to complete their thought,—

"I am waiting for Monsieur le Duc, not for Monsieur de Canolles. Serve the supper!"

With that she drew the bolts herself, and threw herself upon the neck of the man with the white plume, who was preparing to greet her with a most savage expression.

"Ah!" she cried, "my dream did not play me false! Come, my dear duke, everything is ready, and we will go to supper at once."

D'Épernon was dumfounded; however, as a caress from a pretty woman is always acceptable, he allowed himself to be kissed.

But the next moment he remembered what overwhelming proof he possessed.

"One moment, mademoiselle," he said; "let us have an understanding, if you please."

With a wave of his hand to his followers, who drew back respectfully but did not go away altogether, the duke entered the house alone, with slow and measured step.

"Pray, what's the matter, my dear duke?" said Nanon, with such well-feigned gayety that any one might have thought it natural; "did you forget something the last time you were here, that you look around so carefully on all sides?"

"Yes," said the duke; "I forgot to tell you that I am not a consummate ass, a G ronte, such as Monsieur Cyrano de Bergerac introduces in his comedies, and having forgotten to tell it you, I have returned in person to prove it to you."

"I do not understand you, monseigneur," said Nanon, with the most tranquil and sincere expression imaginable. "Explain yourself, I beg."

The duke's eyes rested on the two arm-chairs, and passed thence to the two covers and the two pillows. There they paused for a longer time, while an angry flush overspread his face.

Nanon had foreseen all this, and she awaited the result of his scrutiny with a smile which disclosed her pearly teeth. But the smile strongly resembled a contraction of the nerves, and her teeth would have chattered if anguish had not kept them pressed tightly together.

The duke at last fixed his wrathful gaze upon her.

"I am still awaiting your Lordship's pleasure," said Nanon, with a graceful courtesy.

"My Lordship's pleasure is that you explain this supper."

"I have already told you that I dreamed that you would return to-day although you left me only yesterday. My dreams never fail to come true, so I ordered this supper purposely for you."

The duke made a grimace which he intended to pass off for an ironical smile.

"And the two pillows?" he said.

"Pray, is it monseigneur's intention to return to Libourne? In that case, my dream lied to me, for it told me that monseigneur would remain."

The duke made a second grimace even more significant than the first.

"And this charming *négligé*, madame? And these exquisite perfumes?"

"It is one of those I am accustomed to wear when I expect monseigneur. The perfume comes from sachets of *peau d'Espagne*, which I put in my wardrobes, and which monseigneur has often told me he preferred to all others, because it is the queen's favorite perfume."

"And so you were expecting me?" rejoined the duke, with a sneering laugh.

"Good lack, monseigneur," said Nanon, frowning; "I believe, God forgive me, that you would like to look in the closets. Are you jealous by any chance?"

Nanon laughed aloud, whereat the duke assumed his most majestic air.

"I, jealous? No, no! Thank God, I'm no such idiot as that. Being old and rich, I know naturally that I was made to be deceived, but I propose to prove to those who deceive me that I am not their dupe."

"How will you prove it, pray? I am curious to know."

"Oh! it will be an easy matter. I shall simply have to show them this paper."

He took a letter from his pocket.

"I don't dream, myself," he said; "at my age one doesn't dream, even when awake; but I receive letters. Read this one; it's very interesting."

Nanon shuddered as she took the letter the duke handed her, and started when she saw the writing; but the movement was imperceptible, and she read,

—

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Épernon is informed that a man who, for six months past, has been on familiar terms with Mademoiselle Nanon de

Lartigues, will visit her this evening, and will remain to supper and to sleep.

"As I do not desire to leave Monseigneur le Duc d'Épernon in uncertainty, he is informed that his fortunate rival is Monsieur le Baron de Canolles."

Nanon turned pale; the blow struck home.

"Ah! Roland! Roland!" she murmured, "I believed myself to be well rid of you."

"Am I well informed?" queried the duke, triumphantly.

"Not by any means," retorted Nanon; "and if your political police is no better organized than your amorous police, I pity you."

"You pity me?"

"Yes; for this Monsieur de Canolles, whom you gratuitously honor by believing him to be your rival, is not here, and you are at liberty to wait and see if he comes."

"He has come."

"He?" cried Nanon. "That is not true!"

There was an unmistakable accent of truth in this exclamation of the accused.

"I mean that he came within four hundred yards, and stopped at the Golden Calf, luckily for him."

Nanon saw that the duke was not nearly so well informed as she had supposed at first; she shrugged her shoulders as another idea, prompted doubtless by the letter, which she was folding and unfolding in her hands, began to take root in her mind.

"Is it possible," said she, "that a man of intellect, one of the cleverest politicians in the kingdom, allows himself to be gulled by anonymous letters?"

"That's all very well; but how do you explain this letter, anonymous or not?"

"Why, the explanation's very simple; it's simply a continuation of the generous proceedings of our friends at Agen. Monsieur de Canolles applied to you for leave of absence on account of urgent private business, and you granted it; they found out that he had come in this direction, and this absurd accusation has no other foundation than his journey."

Nanon noticed that the duke's features did not relax, but that his scowl became more pronounced.

"The explanation would answer, if the letter you attribute to your friends

had not a certain postscript, which, in your confusion, you omitted to read."

The young woman shivered with terror; she realized that, if chance did not come to her assistance, she could not long continue the struggle.

"A postscript?" she repeated.

"Yes; read it," said the duke; "you have the letter in your hands."

Nanon tried to smile; but she felt that her distorted features would not lend their aid to any such demonstration; she contented herself, therefore, with reading aloud, in the firmest tones she could command,—

"I have in my possession Mademoiselle de Lartigues' letter to Monsieur de Canolles, making the appointment I mention for this evening. I will give up the letter in exchange for a paper signed in blank by Monsieur d'Épernon, to be handed to me by a man, alone in a boat on the Dordogne, opposite the village of Saint-Michel-la-Rivière, at six o'clock in the evening."

"And you were so imprudent—" continued Nanon.

"Your handwriting is so precious to me, dear lady, that I thought I could not pay too high a price for a letter of yours."

"And you revealed such a secret to the possible indiscretion of one of your servants! Oh! Monsieur le Duc!"

"Such confidences, madame, a man should receive in person, and I so received this one. I, myself, was waiting in the boat on the Dordogne."

"Then you have my letter?"

"Here it is."

Nanon made a superhuman effort to remember the exact contents of the letter, but it was impossible; her brain was beginning to be confused. She had no alternative, therefore, but to take her own letter and read it. It contained barely three lines; Nanon ran her eye over them in eager haste, and saw, with unspeakable delight, that the letter did not compromise her beyond all hope.

"Read it aloud," said the duke; "like you, I have forgotten what the letter contains."

Nanon found the smile she had sought in vain a few seconds before, and complied with the duke's suggestion.

"I shall take supper at eight o'clock. Are you free? I am. If so, be punctual, my dear Canolles, and have no fear for our secret."

"I should say that that is explicit enough," cried the duke, pale with rage.

"That is my salvation," thought Nanon.

"So you have a secret with Monsieur de Canolles, have you?" continued the duke.

VI.

Nanon realized that to hesitate for a second would be her destruction. Moreover, she had had time enough to develop in her brain the scheme suggested by the anonymous letter.

"Yes," said she, gazing fixedly at the duke, "I have a secret with that gentleman."

"You confess it?" cried Monsieur d'Épernon.

"I must; for one can conceal nothing from you."

"Oh!" shouted the duke.

"Yes, I was expecting Monsieur de Canolles," continued Nanon, calmly.

"You were expecting him?"

"I was expecting him."

"You dare admit it?"

"Freely. Tell me, now, do you know who Monsieur de Canolles is?"

"He is a jackanapes, whom I will punish cruelly for his impudence."

"He is a noble and gallant gentleman, to whom you will continue your benefactions."

"Oh! I swear by the Almighty that I will not!"

"No oaths, Monsieur le Duc; at all events, not until I have said what I have to say," rejoined Nanon, smiling sweetly.

"Say on, then, but waste no time."

"Haven't you, who are so skilful in probing the human heart to its lowest depths," said Nanon, "haven't you remarked my partiality for Monsieur de Canolles, my repeated solicitations in his interest?—the captain's commission I procured for him, the grant of money for a trip to Bretagne with Monsieur de Meilleraie, his recent leave of absence,—in a word, my constant efforts to gratify him?"

"Madame, madame!" said the duke, "you exceed all bounds!"

"For God's sake, Monsieur le Duc, wait until you hear the end!"

"Why should I wait any longer? What more is there for you to tell me?"

"That I have a most affectionate interest in Monsieur de Canolles."

"Pardieu! I know it well."

"That I am devoted to him, body and soul."

"Madame, you abuse—"

"That I will do my utmost to oblige him while I live, and all because—"

"Because he's your lover; that's not difficult to guess."

"Because," continued Nanon, seizing the wrathful duke's arm with a dramatic gesture, "because he is my brother!"

Monsieur d'Épernon's arm fell to his side.

"Your brother?" he said.

Nanon nodded affirmatively with a triumphant smile.

"This calls for an explanation," the duke cried, after a moment's reflection.

"Which I will give you," said Nanon. "When did my father die?"

"Why, about eight months since," replied the duke, after a short mental calculation.

"When did you sign the captain's commission for Canolles?"

"Eh? at about the same time."

"A fortnight later," said Nanon.

"A fortnight later; it's very possible."

"It is a sad thing for me to disclose another woman's shame, to divulge a secret which belongs to us alone, you understand. But your extraordinary jealousy drives me to it, your cruelty leaves me no alternative. I am like you, Monsieur le Duc, I lack generosity."

"Go on, go on!" cried the duke, beginning to yield to the fair Gasconne's imaginative flights.

"Very good; my father was an attorney of some note. Twenty-eight years ago he was still young, and he was always fine-looking. Before his marriage he was in love with Monsieur de Canolles' mother, whose hand was denied him because she was of noble blood, and he a plebeian. Love undertook the task of remedying the mistakes of nature, as it often does; and during Monsieur de Canolles, the elder's, absence from home—Now do you understand?"

"Yes; but how does it happen that this affection for Monsieur de Canolles took possession of you so recently?"

"Because I never knew of the bond between us until my father's death;

because the secret was made known to me in a letter handed me by the baron himself, who then addressed me as his sister."

"Where is that letter?" queried the duke.

"Have you forgotten the fire which consumed everything I owned,—all my most valuable jewels and papers?"

"True," said the duke.

"Twenty times I have been on the point of telling you the story, feeling sure that you would do everything for him whom I call my brother under my breath; but he has always prevented me, always begged me to spare his mother's reputation, for she is still living. I have respected his scruples because I appreciated them."

"Ah! indeed!" said the duke, almost melted; "poor Canolles!"

"And yet," continued Nanon, "when he refused to let me speak, he threw away his own fortune."

"He's a high-minded youth," said the duke, "and his scruples do him honor."

"I did more than respect his scruples,—I swore that the mystery should never be revealed to any one on earth; but your suspicions caused the cup to overflow. Woe is me! I have forgotten my oath! Woe is me! I have betrayed my brother's secret!"

And Nanon burst into tears.

The duke fell upon his knees and kissed her pretty hands, which hung dejectedly at her side, while her eyes were raised toward heaven, as if imploring God's forgiveness for her perjury.

"You say, 'Woe is me!'" cried the duke; "say rather, 'Good luck for all!' I propose that poor Canolles shall make up for lost time. I don't know him, but I desire to know him. You shall present him to me, and I will love him like a son!"

"Say like a brother," rejoined Nanon, with a smile.

"Villanous informers!" she suddenly cried, passing to another train of thought, and crumpling the letter in her hand as if she proposed to throw it in the fire, but carefully placing it in her pocket, with a view of confronting its author with it later.

"Now that I think of it," said the duke, "why shouldn't the rascal come here? Why should I wait any longer before seeing him? I'll send at once to the Golden Calf to bid him come."

"Oh, of course," said Nanon, "so that he may know that I can conceal nothing from you, and that I have told you everything in utter disregard of my oath."

"I will be careful."

"Ah! Monsieur le Duc, do you wish me to quarrel with you?" retorted Nanon, with one of those smiles which demons borrow from angels.

"How so, my dear love?"

"Because you used to be more anxious for a tête-à-tête than now. Let us sup together, and to-morrow it will be time enough to send for Canolles. Between now and to-morrow," said Nanon to herself, "I shall have time to warn him."

"So be it," said the duke; "let us sup."

Haunted by a vestige of suspicion, he added, under his breath,—

"Between now and to-morrow I will not leave her side, and if she succeeds in inventing any method of warning him, she's a sorceress."

"And so," said Nanon, laying her hand upon the duke's shoulder, "I may venture to solicit my friend in my brother's interest?"

"Most assuredly!" rejoined d'Épernon; "as much as you choose. Is it money?"

"Money, indeed!" said Nanon. "He's in no need of money; indeed it was he who gave me the magnificent ring you have noticed, which was his mother's."

"Promotion, then?" said the duke.

"Ah! yes, promotion. We'll make him a colonel, won't we?"

"Peste! how fast you go, my love! Colonel! To obtain that rank, he must have rendered his Majesty's cause some service."

"He is ready to render that cause whatever service may be pointed out to him."

"Indeed!" said the duke, looking at Nanon out of the corner of his eye, "I shall have occasion to send some one on a confidential mission to the court."

"To the court!" exclaimed Nanon.

"Yes," replied the old courtier; "but that would separate you."

Nanon saw that she must take some means to destroy this remnant of suspicion.

"Oh! don't be alarmed about that, my dear duke. What matters the

separation, so long as there is profit in it? If he's near at hand, I can be of but little use to him—you are jealous; but, at a distance, you will extend your powerful patronage to him. Exile him, ex-patriate him if it's for his good, and don't be concerned about me. So long as I retain my dear duke's affection, have I not more than enough to make me happy?"

"Very well, it's agreed," said the duke; "to-morrow morning I will send for him, and give him his instructions. And now, as you suggest," he continued, casting a much more amiable glance upon the two chairs, the two covers, and the two pillows; "and now, my love, let us sup."

They took their places at the table, smiling amicably at each other; so that Francinette herself, although, in her capacity of confidential maid, she was well used to the duke's peculiarities and her mistress's character, believed that her mistress was perfectly tranquil in her mind, and the duke completely reassured.

VII.

The gentleman whom Canolles greeted by the name of Richon, went up to the first floor of the Golden Calf, and was taking supper there with the viscount.

He was the person whose coming the viscount was impatiently awaiting when chance made him a witness of Monsieur d'Épernon's hostile preparations, and made it possible for him to render Baron de Canolles the important service we have described.

He had left Paris a week before, and Bordeaux the same day, and was therefore the bearer of recent news concerning the somewhat disturbed state of affairs, and the disquieting plots which were brewing all the way from Paris to Bordeaux. As he spoke, now of the imprisonment of the princes, which was the sensation of the day, again of the Parliament of Bordeaux, which was the ruling power of the neighborhood, and still again of Monsieur de Mazarin, who was the king of the moment, the young man silently watched his strong, bronzed face, his piercing, confident eye, his sharp, white teeth, which showed beneath his long, black moustache,—details which made Richon the perfect type of the true soldier of fortune.

"And so," said the viscount, after his companion had told what he had to tell, "Madame la Princesse is now at Chantilly?"

As is well known, both Duchesses de Condé were so called, but the additional title of Dowager was bestowed upon the elder of the two.

"Yes, and they look for you there at the earliest possible moment," said Richon.

"What is her situation?"

"She is practically in exile; her movements as well as her mother-in-law's are watched with the utmost care, for there is a shrewd suspicion at court that they do not mean to confine themselves to petitions to parliament, and that they are concocting something for the benefit of the princes more likely to prove efficacious. Unfortunately, as always, money—Speaking of money, have you received what was due you? That is a question I was strongly urged to ask you."

"I have succeeded with great difficulty in collecting about twenty thousand livres, and I have it with me in gold; that's all."

"All! Peste! viscount, it's easy to see that you are a millionaire. To talk so contemptuously of such a sum at such a time! Twenty thousand francs! We shall be poorer than Monsieur de Mazarin, but richer than the king."

"Then you think that Madame la Princesse will accept my humble offering, Richon?"

"Most gratefully; it is enough to pay an army."

"Do you think that we shall need it?"

"Need what? an army? Most assuredly; and we are busily at work levying one. Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld has enlisted four hundred gentlemen on the pretext that he wishes them to be present at the obsequies of his father. Monsieur le Duc de Bouillon is about starting for Guyenne with an equal number. Monsieur de Turenne promises to make a descent upon Paris in the hope of surprising Vincennes, and carrying off the princes by a coup de main; he will have thirty thousand men,—his whole army of the North, whom he has seduced from the king's service. Oh! everything is going along well," Richon continued, "never fear; I don't know if we shall perform any great deeds, but at all events we shall make a great noise."

"Did you not fall in with the Duc d'Épernon?" interposed the young man, whose eyes sparkled with joy at this enumeration of forces, which augured well for the triumph of the party to which he was attached.

"The Duc d'Épernon?" repeated Richon, opening his eyes; "where do you suppose I fell in with him, I pray to know? I come from Agen, not from Bordeaux."

"You might have fallen in with him within a few steps of this place," replied the viscount, smiling.

"Ah! yes, of course, the lovely Nanon de Lartigues lives in the neighborhood, does she not?"

"Within two musket-shots of the inn."

"The deuce! that explains the Baron de Canolles' presence at the Golden Calf."

"Do you know him?"

"Whom? the baron? Yes. I might almost say that I am his friend, if Monsieur de Canolles were not of the oldest nobility, while I am only a poor roturier."

"Roturiers like yourself, Richon, are quite as valuable as princes in our present plight. Do you know, by the way, that I saved your friend, Baron de Canolles, from a thrashing, if not from something much worse."

"Yes; he said something of that to me, but I hardly listened to him, I was in such haste to join you. Are you sure that he didn't recognize you?"

"He could hardly recognize a person he had never seen."

"I should have asked if he did not guess who you are."

"Indeed," replied the viscount, "he looked at me very hard."

Richon smiled.

"I can well believe it," he said; "one doesn't meet young gentlemen of your type every day."

"He seemed to me a jovial sort of fellow," said the viscount, after a brief pause.

"A jovial fellow and a good fellow, too; he has a charming wit and a great heart. The Gascon, you know, is never mediocre in anything; he is in the front rank or is good for nothing. This one is made of good stuff. In love, as in war, he is at once a dandy and a gallant officer; I am sorry that he is against us. Indeed, as chance brought you in contact with him, you should have seized the opportunity to win him over to our side."

A fugitive blush passed like a flash over the viscount's pale cheeks.

"Mon Dieu!" continued Richon, with that melancholy philosophy which is sometimes found in men of the most vigorous temper, "are we so sober-minded and reasonable, pray, that we manage the torch of civil war in our adventurous hands as if it were an altar light? Is Monsieur le Coadjuteur, who, with a word, tranquillizes or arouses Paris, a very serious-minded man? Is Monsieur de Beaufort, whose influence in the capital is so great that he is called 'le roi des halles' (King of the Markets), a very serious-minded man? Is Madame de Chevreuse, who makes and unmakes ministers at pleasure, a very serious-minded woman? or Madame de Longueville, who nevertheless sat on

the throne at the Hôtel de Ville for three months? or Madame la Princesse de Condé, who, no longer ago than yesterday, was engrossed with dresses and jewels and diamonds? Lastly, is Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, who is still playing with his jumping-jacks, in charge of women, and who will don his first breeches, perhaps, to turn all France topsy-turvy—is he a very serious-minded leader of a party? And myself, if you will allow me to mention my own name after so many illustrious ones, am I a very serious personage,—I, the son of a miller of Angoulême, and once a retainer of Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld,—I, to whom my master one day, instead of a cloak to brush, gave a sword, which I gallantly buckled on at my side, an embryo warrior? And yet the son of the miller of Angoulême, Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's former valet-de-chambre, has risen to be a captain; he is levying a company, bringing together four or five hundred men, with whose lives he is about to play, as if God himself had given him the right; he is marching along on the road to greatness, some day to be colonel, or governor of a fortress—who knows? it may perhaps be his lot to hold for ten minutes, an hour, or a day, the destiny of a kingdom in his hands. This much resembles a dream, as you see, and yet I shall consider it a reality until the day when some great disaster awakens me—"

"And on that day," the viscount broke in, "woe to those who awaken you, Richon; for you will be a hero."

"A hero or a traitor, according as we are the strongest or the weakest. Under the other cardinal I should have looked twice, for I should have risked my head."

"Go to, Richon; do not try to make me believe that such considerations can influence a man like you, who are pointed to as one of the bravest soldiers in the whole army!"

"Oh! of course," said Richon, with an indescribable motion of his shoulders, "I was brave when King Louis XIII., with his pale face, his blue ribbon, and his eye gleaming like a carbuncle, cried in his strident voice, biting the ends of his moustache, 'The king is looking at you; forward, messieurs!' But when I am obliged to look at the same blue ribbon on the son's breast, which I can still see on the father's, and no longer behind me, but before my face; when I am obliged to shout to my soldiers, 'Fire on the King of France!'—on that day," continued Richon, shaking his head, "on that day, viscount, I fear that I shall be afraid, and aim badly—"

"What snake have you trodden on to-day, that you persist in putting things in the worst light, my dear Richon?" the young man asked. "Civil war is a deplorable thing, I know, but sometimes necessary."

"Yes, like the plague, the yellow fever, the black fever, fever of all colors.

Do you think, for instance, Monsieur le Vicomte, that it is absolutely necessary that I, who have been so glad to grasp my good friend Canolles' hand this evening, should run my sword through his body to-morrow, because I serve Madame la Princesse de Condé, who laughs at me, and he Monsieur de Mazarin, at whom he laughs? Yet it may fall out so."

The viscount made a horrified gesture.

"Unless," pursued Richon, "I am out in my reckoning, and he makes a hole in me in one way or another. Ah! you people have no appreciation of what war is; you see nothing but a sea of intrigue, and plunge into it as if it were your natural element; as I said the other day to her Highness, and she agreed with me, 'You live in a sphere wherein the artillery fire which mows you down seems to you simple fireworks.'"

"In sooth, Richon, you frighten me," said the viscount, "and if I were not sure of having you at hand to protect me, I should not dare to start; but under your escort," he continued, holding out his little hand to the partisan, "I have no fear."

"My escort?" said Richon. "Oh, yes, you remind me of something I had forgotten; you will have to do without my escort, Monsieur le Vicomte; that arrangement has fallen through."

"Why, are you not to return to Chantilly with me?"

"I was to do so, in the event that my presence was not necessary here; but, as I was saying, my importance has increased to such a point that I received a positive command from Madame la Princesse not to leave the vicinity of the fort, upon which there are designs, it seems."

The viscount uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"What! I am to go without you?" he cried; "to go with no one but honest Pompée, who is a hundred times more a coward than I am myself? to travel half-way across France alone, or nearly so? Oh, no! I will not go, I swear it! I should die of fear before I arrived."

"Oh, Monsieur le Vicomte," rejoined Richon, laughing aloud, "do you forget the sword hanging by your side, pray?"

"Laugh if you please, but I will not budge. Madame la Princesse promised me that you should go with me, and I agreed to make the journey only on that condition."

"That's as you please, viscount," said Richon, with assumed gravity. "However, they count upon you at Chantilly; and have a care, for princes soon lose patience, especially when they expect money."

"To cap the climax," said the viscount, "I must start during the night—"

"So much the better," laughed Richon; "no one will see that you are afraid, and you will encounter greater cowards than yourself, who will run away from you."

"You think so?" said the viscount, by no means at ease, despite this reassuring suggestion.

"But there's another way of arranging the matter," said Richon; "your fear is for the money, is it not? Very well, leave the money with me, and I will send it by three or four trustworthy men. But, believe me, the best way to make sure that it arrives safely is to carry it yourself."

"You are right, and I will go, Richon; as my bravery must go all lengths, I will keep the money. I fancy that her Highness, judging by what you tell me, is even more in need of the money than of myself; so perhaps I should not be welcome if I arrived empty-handed."

"I told you, when I first came, that you have a very martial air; moreover, the king's soldiers are everywhere, and there is no war as yet; however, don't trust to them too much, but bid Pompée load his pistols."

"Do you say that simply to encourage me?"

"Of course; he who realizes his danger doesn't allow himself to be taken by surprise. You had best go now," continued Richon, rising; "the night will be fine, and you can be at Monlieu before morning."

"Will our friend, the baron, play the spy when we go?"

"Oh! at this moment he is doing what we have just done,—eating his supper, that is to say; and although his supper may not have been as good as ours, he is too much of a bon-vivant to leave the table without a weighty reason. But I will go down and keep his attention diverted."

"Apologize to him for me for my rudeness. I don't choose that he shall pick a quarrel with me, if we meet some day when he is less generously disposed than to-day; for your baron must be a very punctilious sort of fellow."

"You have hit the right word; he would be just the man to follow you to the ends of the world simply to cross swords with you; but I will make your excuses, never fear."

"Do so by all means; but wait till I am gone."

"You may be very sure that I will."

"Have you no message for her Highness?"

"Indeed I have; you remind me of the most important thing of all."

"Have you written to her?"

"No; there are but two words to say to her."

"What are they?"

"Bordeaux.—Yes."

"She will know what they mean?"

"Perfectly; and on the faith of those two words she may set out in full confidence; you may say to her that I will answer for everything."

"Come, Pompée," said the viscount to the old squire, who just then partly opened the door, and showed his head in the opening; "come, my friend, we must be off."

"Oh!" exclaimed Pompée; "can it be that Monsieur le Vicomte thinks of starting now. There is going to be a frightful storm."

"What's that you say, Pompée?" rejoined Richon. "There's not a cloud in the sky."

"But we may lose our way in the dark."

"That would be a difficult thing to do; you have simply to follow the high-road. Besides, it's a superb moonlight night."

"Moonlight! moonlight!" muttered Pompée; "you understand, of course, that what I say is not on my own account, Monsieur Richon."

"Of course not," said Richon; "an old soldier!"

"When one has fought against the Spaniards, and been wounded at the battle of Corbie—"pursued Pompée, swelling up.

"One doesn't know what fear is, eh? Oh, well, that is most fortunate, for Monsieur le Vicomte is by no means at ease, I warn you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Pompée, turning pale, "are you afraid?"

"Not with you, my good Pompée," said the viscount. "I know you, and I know that you would sacrifice your own life before anything should happen to me."

"To be sure, to be sure," rejoined Pompée; "but if you are too much afraid, we might wait until to-morrow."

"Impossible, my good Pompée. So take the gold and put it in your saddle-bags; I will join you in a moment."

"It's a large sum to expose to the risks of a journey at night," said Pompée, lifting the bag.

"There's no risk; at all events, Richon says so. Are the pistols in the holsters, the sword in the scabbard, and the musket slung on its hook?"

"You forget," replied the old squire, drawing himself up, "that when a man has been a soldier all his life, he doesn't allow himself to be caught napping. Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte, everything is in its place."

"The idea," observed Richon, "that any one could be afraid with such a companion! A pleasant journey to you, viscount!"

"Thanks for the wish; but it's a long way," replied the viscount, with a residuum of distress which Pompée's martial bearing could not dissipate.

"Nonsense!" said Richon; "every road has a beginning and an end. My respectful homage to Madame la Princesse; tell her that I am at her service and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's while I live, and do not forget the two words, —Bordeaux, Yes. I will go and join Monsieur de Canolles."

"Look you, Richon," said the viscount, laying his hand upon his companion's arm as he put his foot on the first stair, "if this Canolles is such a gallant officer and honorable gentleman as you say, why should not you make some attempt to win him over to our side? He might overtake us at Chantilly, or even on the way thither; as I have some slight acquaintance with him, I would present him."

Richon looked at the viscount with such a strange smile that he, reading upon the partisan's face what was passing through his mind, made haste to add,—

"Consider that I said nothing, Richon, and act as you think you ought to act in the premises. Adieu!"

He gave him his hand and hastily returned to his room, whether in dread that Richon would see the sudden blush that overspread his face, or that Canolles, whose noisy laughter they could plainly hear, would hear their voices.

He therefore left the partisan to descend the stairs, followed by Pompée, who carried the valise with an air of studied indifference, so that no one might suspect the nature of its contents; having waited a few moments, he cast his eye around the room to make sure that he had forgotten nothing, extinguished the candles, stole cautiously down to the ground-floor, venturing a timid glance through the half-open door of a brilliantly lighted room on that floor, and, wrapping himself closely in a heavy cloak, which Pompée handed him, placed his foot in the squire's hand, leaped lightly into the saddle, scolded the old soldier good-naturedly for his moderation, and disappeared in the darkness.

As Richon entered the room occupied by Canolles, whom he had undertaken to entertain while the little viscount was making his preparations for departure, a joyful shout issuing from the baron's mouth, as he sat uncertainly upon his chair, proved that he bore no ill-will.

Upon the table, between two transparent bodies which had once been full bottles, stood a thick-set wicker-covered vessel, proud of its rotundity, through the interstices of which the bright light of four candles caused a sparkling as of rubies and topazes. It was a flask of the old Collioure vintage, whose honeyed flavor is so delicious to the overheated palate. Appetizing dried figs, biscuit, almonds, and high-flavored cheeses bore witness to the shrewdness of the inn-keeper's reckoning, as the two empty bottles and a third but half filled demonstrated its exactitude. Indeed, it was certain that whoever should partake of that tempting dessert would necessarily, however sober he might ordinarily be, consume a great quantity of liquid food.

Now Canolles did not plume himself upon being an anchorite. Perhaps, indeed, being a Huguenot (Canolles was of a Protestant family, and mildly professed the religion of his fathers),—perhaps, we say, being a Huguenot, Canolles did not believe in canonizing the pious hermits who had won a dwelling in heaven by drinking water and eating dried roots. And so, melancholy as he was, or in love if you please, Canolles was never insensible to the fumes of a good dinner, or to the sight of those bottles of peculiar shape, with red, yellow, or green seals, which confine, with the assistance of a trusty cork, the purest blood of Gascony, Champagne, or Burgundy. Under the present circumstances, therefore, Canolles had, as usual, yielded to the fascinations of that sight; from the sight he had passed to the smell, from the smell to the taste, and, three out of the five senses with which our kindly common mother, whom we call Dame Nature, has endowed her children, being fully satisfied, the two others awaited their turn patiently, and with beatific resignation.

It was at this juncture that Richon entered and found Canolles rocking on his chair.

"Ah I my dear Richon, you come in good time," he cried. "I was in great need of somebody to whom to sing Master Biscarros' praises, and I was almost reduced to the point of doing it to this idiot of a Castorin, who only knows how to drink, and whom I have never been able to teach to eat. Just look at that sideboard, my friend, and cast your eye over this table, at which I invite you to take a seat. Is not mine host of the Golden Calf a veritable artist, a man whom I can safely recommend to my friend the Duc d'Épernon? Listen to the details of this menu, and judge for yourself, Richon, for you know how to appreciate such things: Potage de bisques; hors-d'œuvres, pickled oysters, anchovies, small fowl; capon aux olives, with a bottle of Médoc, of which you

see the corpse here; a partridge stuffed with truffles, peas au caramel, wild-cherry ice, irrigated by a bottle of Chambertin, here lying dead; furthermore, this dessert and this bottle of Collioure, which is trying hard to defend itself, but will soon go to join the others, especially if we join forces against it. Sarpejeu! I am in the best of humor, and Biscarros is a past master. Sit you down, Richon; you have supped, but what's the odds? I have supped, too, but that makes no difference, we will begin again."

"Thanks, baron," said Richon, with a laugh, "but I am not hungry."

"I grant you that; one may have ceased to be hungry, and still be athirst; taste this Collioure."

Richon held out his glass. "And so you have supped," continued Canolles,—"supped with your little rascal of a viscount? Oh! I beg your pardon, Richon, I am wrong; a charming boy, I mean, to whom I owe my present pleasure of looking at life on its beautiful side, instead of giving up the ghost through three or four holes, which the gallant Duc d'Épernon had it in contemplation to make in my skin. I am very grateful therefore to the charming viscount, the fascinating Ganymede. Ah! Richon, you have every appearance of being just what you are said to be,—a devoted servant of Monsieur de Condé."

"A truce to your pleasantries, baron," cried Richon, laughing uproariously; "don't say such things as that, or you will kill me with laughter."

"Kill you with laughter! Go to, my dear fellow! not you."

'Igne tantum perituri

Quia estes—

Landeriri.'

You know the lament, do you not? It's a Christmas carol, written by your patron upon the German river Rhenus, one morning when he was consoling one of his followers, who dreaded death by drowning. Oh! you devil of a Richon! No matter; I am shocked at your little gentleman,—to take so deep an interest in the first well-favored cavalier who passes!"

As he finished, Canolles fairly rolled off his chair, shrieking with laughter, and pulling at his moustache in a paroxysm of merriment, in which Richon could not help joining.

"Seriously, my dear Richon," Canolles resumed, "you are conspiring, aren't you?"

Richon continued to laugh, but somewhat less frankly.

"Do you know that I had a great mind to have you and your little

gentleman arrested? Corbleu! that would have been amusing, and very easy too. I had the staff-bearers of my good gossip d'Épernon at hand. Ah! Richon to the guard-house and the little gentleman too! landeriri!"

At that moment they heard two horses galloping away from the inn.

"Oho!" said Canolles; "what might that be, Richon? Do you know?"

"I have a shrewd suspicion."

"Tell me, then."

"It's the little gentleman going away."

"Without bidding me adieu!" cried Canolles. "He is a consummate boor."

"Oh no, my dear baron; he's a man in a hurry, that's all."

Canolles frowned.

"What extraordinary manners!" said he. "Where was the fellow brought up? Richon, my friend, I tell you frankly that he does you no credit. That's not the way gentlemen should treat one another. Corbleu! if I had him here, I believe I would box his ears. The devil fly away with his father, who, from stinginess, I doubt not, gave him no governor."

"Don't lose your temper, baron," said Richon, with a laugh; "the viscount isn't so ill-bred as you think; for, as he went away, he bade me express to you his deep regret, and to say a thousand complimentary things to you."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" said Canolles; "court holy water, which transforms a piece of arrant impudence into a trifling rudeness; that's all of that. Corbleu! I'm in a ferocious humor! Pick a quarrel with me, Richon! You refuse? Wait a moment. Sarpejeu! Richon, my friend, I consider you an ill-favored villain!"

Richon began to laugh.

"In this mood, baron," said he, "you would be quite capable of winning a hundred pistoles from me this evening, if we should play. Luck, you know, always favors the disappointed."

Richon knew Canolles, and designedly opened this vent for his ill-humor.

"Ah! pardieu!" he cried; "let us play. You are right, my friend, and the suggestion reconciles me to your company. Richon, you are a very agreeable fellow; you are as handsome as Adonis, Richon, and I forgive Monsieur de Cambes.—Cards, Castorin!"

Castorin hurried in, accompanied by Biscarros; together they prepared a table, and the two guests began to play. Castorin, who had been dreaming for ten years of a martingale at trente-et-quarante, and Biscarros, whose eye

gleamed covetously at the sight of money, stood on either side of the table looking on. In less than an hour, notwithstanding his prediction, Richon had won forty pistoles from his opponent, whereupon Canolles, who had no more money about him, bade Castorin bring him a further supply from his valise.

"It's not worth while," said Richon, who overheard the order; "I haven't time to give you your revenge."

"What's that? you haven't time?" exclaimed Canolles.

"No; it is eleven o'clock," said Richon, "and at midnight I must be at my post."

"Nonsense! you are joking!" rejoined Canolles.

"Monsieur le Baron," observed Richon, gravely, "you are a soldier, and consequently you know the rigorous rules of the service."

"Then why didn't you go before you won my money?" retorted Canolles, half-smiling, half-angry.

"Do you mean to reproach me for calling upon you?"

"God forbid! But consider; I haven't the slightest inclination to sleep, and I shall be frightfully bored here. Suppose I should propose to bear you company, Richon?"

"I should decline the honor, baron. Affairs of the nature of that upon which I am engaged are transacted without witnesses."

"Very good! You are going—in what direction?"

"I was about to beg you not to ask me that question."

"In what direction has the viscount gone?"

"I am obliged to tell you that I have no idea."

Canolles looked at Richon to make sure that there was no raillery in his disobliging answers; but the kindly eye and frank smile of the governor of Vayres disarmed his curiosity, if not his impatience.

"Well, well, you are a perfect treasure-house of mysteries, my dear Richon; but no compulsion. I should have been disgusted enough if any one had followed me three hours ago, although, after all, the man who followed me would have been as disappointed as I was myself. So one last glass of Callioure and good luck to you!"

With that, Canolles refilled the glasses, and Richon, having emptied his to the baron's health, took his leave; nor did it once occur to the baron to watch to see in which direction he went. Left to his own resources, amid the half-

burned candles, empty bottles, and scattered cards, he fell a prey to one of those fits of depression which no one can understand without experiencing them, for his jovial humor throughout the evening had its origin in a disappointment which he had labored to forget, with but partial success.

He dragged his feet along toward his bedroom, casting a sidelong glance, half regretful, half-angry, through the window in the hall toward the isolated house, where a single window, through which a reddish light shone, intercepted from time to time by more than one shadow, proved with sufficient certainty that Mademoiselle de Lartigues was passing a less lonely evening than himself.

On the first stair, the toe of Canolles' boot came in contact with some object; he stooped and picked up one of the viscount's diminutive pearl-gray gloves, which he had dropped in his haste to leave Master Biscarros' hostelry, and which he probably did not consider of sufficient value to waste his time in searching for it.

Whatever may have been Canolles' reflections in a moment of misanthropy not to be wondered at in an offended lover, there was not at the isolated house a whit more real satisfaction than at the Golden Calf.

Nanon was restless and anxious throughout the night, revolving in her mind a thousand schemes to warn Canolles, and she resorted to every device that a well-developed female brain could suggest in the way of cunning and trickery to extricate herself from her precarious situation. Her only object was to steal one minute from the duke to speak to Francinette, or two minutes to write a line to Canolles upon a scrap of paper.

But you would have said that the duke, suspecting all that was passing through her mind, and reading her anxiety through the mask of cheerfulness which her face wore, had sworn to himself that he would not vouchsafe to her one moment of that liberty which was so essential to her peace of mind.

Nanon had a sick-headache; Monsieur d'Épernon would not hear of her rising to get her bottle of salts, but went to look for it himself.

Nanon pricked herself with a pin, and a ruby drop appeared at the end of her taper finger; she essayed to go to her toilet-case for a piece of the famous rose-taffeta, which was just coming into favor, but Monsieur d'Épernon, with indefatigable devotion to her comfort, rose, prepared the rose-taffeta with disheartening dexterity, and locked the toilet-case.

Nanon thereupon pretended to be sleeping soundly; almost immediately the duke began to snore. At that, Nanon opened her eyes, and by the glimmer of the night-light in its alabaster vessel on a table by the bed, she tried to take the duke's own tablets from his doublet, which was within her reach; but just

as she had the pencil in her hand, and was about tearing off a leaf of paper, the duke opened one eye.

"What are you doing, my love?" he asked.

"I was looking to see if there isn't a calendar in your tablets."

"For what purpose?"

"To see when your birthday comes."

"My name is Louis, and my birthday falls on August 25th, as you know; so you have abundant time to prepare for it, dear heart."

And he took the tablets from her hands and replaced them in his doublet.

By this last manœuvre, Nanon had at all events secured pencil and paper. She stowed them away under her bolster, and very adroitly overturned the night-light, hoping to be able to write in the dark; but the duke immediately rang for Francinette, and loudly demanded a light, declaring that he could not sleep unless he could see. Francinette came running in before Nanon had had time to write half of her sentence, and the duke, to avoid another similar mishap, bade the maid place two candles on the chimney-piece. Thereupon Nanon declared that she could not sleep with so much light, and resolutely turned her face to the wall, awaiting the dawn in feverish impatience and anxiety easy to understand.

The dreaded day broke at last, and bedimmed the light of the two candles. Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, who prided himself upon his strict adherence to a military mode of life, rose as the first ray of dawn stole in through the jalousies, dressed without assistance, in order not to leave his little Nanon for an instant, donned his robe de chambre, and rang to ask if there were any news.

Francinette replied by handing him a bundle of despatches which Courtauvaux, his favorite outrider, had brought during the night.

The duke began to unseal them and to read with one eye; the other eye, to which he sought to impart the most affectionate expression he could command, he did not once remove from Nanon.

Nanon would have torn him in pieces if she could.

"Do you know what you ought to do, my dear?" said he, after he had read a portion of the despatches.

"No, monseigneur; but if you will give your orders, they shall be obeyed."

"You should send for your brother," said the duke. "I have here a letter from Bordeaux containing the information I desired, and he might start

instantly, so that when he returned, I should have an excuse for giving him the promotion you suggest."

The duke's face was a picture of open-hearted benevolence.

"Courage!" said Nanon to herself; "there is a possibility that Canolles will read in my eyes what I want to say, or will understand a hint. Send yourself, my dear duke," she said aloud, for she suspected that if she undertook to do the errand herself, he would not allow her.

D'Épernon called Francinette, and despatched her to the inn with no other instructions than these,—

"Say to Monsieur le Baron de Canolles that Mademoiselle de Lartigues expects him to breakfast."

Nanon darted a meaning glance at Francinette, but, eloquent as it was, Francinette could not read in it, "Tell Monsieur le Baron de Canolles that I am his sister."

Francinette departed on her errand, satisfied that there was a needle under the rock, and that the needle might prove to be a good, healthy serpent.

Meanwhile Nanon rose, and took up a position behind the duke, so that she might be able, at the first glance she exchanged with Canolles, to warn him to be on his guard; and she busied herself in constructing a sentence by means of which she might at the outset convey to the baron all that he ought to know, in order that he might not sing false in the family trio about to be performed.

Out of the corner of her eye she could see the whole of the road as far as the turn where Monsieur d'Épernon and his men had lain in ambush the night before.

"Ah!" exclaimed the duke, "Francinette is returning." And he fixed his eyes upon Nanon's, who was compelled to look away from the road to meet his gaze.

Nanon's heart was beating as if it would burst through her breast; she had seen no one but Francinette, and it was Canolles whom she hoped to see, and to read in his face some comforting assurance.

Steps were heard upon the stairs; the duke prepared a smile which was at once condescending and affable; Nanon forced back the flush which mounted to her cheeks, and summoned all her strength for the conflict.

Francinette tapped gently at the door.

"Come in!" said the duke.

Nanon conned the famous sentence with which she proposed to greet

Canolles.

The door opened; Francinette was alone. Nanon gazed eagerly into the reception-room; there was no one there.

"Madame," said Francinette, with the imperturbable self-possession of a comedy soubrette, "Monsieur le Baron de Canolles has left the Golden Calf."

The duke stared, and his face grew dark.

Nanon threw back her head and drew a long breath.

"What!" exclaimed the duke; "Monsieur de Canolles is not at the Golden Calf."

"You are surely mistaken, Francinette," chimed in Nanon.

"Madame," said Francinette, "I tell you what Monsieur Biscarros himself told me."

"He must have guessed the whole truth," murmured Nanon. "Dear Canolles! as quick-witted and clever as he is gallant and handsome!"

"Go at once to Master Biscarros," said the duke, with a face like a thundercloud, "and—"

"Oh! I fancy," said Nanon, hastily, "that he knew you were here, and disliked to disturb you. Poor Canolles is so timid!"

"Timid!" echoed the duke; "that isn't the reputation he bears, unless I am much mistaken."

"No, madame," said Francinette; "Monsieur le Baron has really gone."

"How does it happen, madame, I pray to know, that the baron is afraid of me, when Francinette was instructed to invite him in your name? Did you tell him I was here, Francinette? Answer!"

"I could not tell him, Monsieur le Duc, as he was not there."

Notwithstanding this rejoinder, which was uttered with an absence of hesitation that betokened sincerity, the duke seemed to have become as suspicious as ever. Nanon, in her joy at the turn the affair had taken, could not find strength to say a word.

"Must I return and summon Master Biscarros?" queried Francinette.

"Most assuredly," said the duke, in his harshest voice; "but no; wait a moment. Remain here; your mistress may need you, and I will send Courtauvaux."

Francinette vanished. Five minutes later, Courtauvaux knocked at the door.

"Go and bid the landlord of the Golden Calf come hither, and bring with him a breakfast menu! Give him these ten louis, so that the breakfast may be a good one!" said the duke.

Courtauvaux received the money on the skirt of his coat, and took himself off at once to execute his master's orders.

He was a servant of good family, and knowing enough at his trade to give lessons to all the Crispins and Mascarillos of the day. He found Biscarros, and said to him,—

"I have induced monsieur to order a good breakfast; and he gave me eight louis. I keep two, of course, for my commission, and here are six for you. Come at once."

Biscarros, tremulous with joy, tied a white apron around his loins, pocketed the six louis, and pressing Courtauvaux's hand, followed close upon his heels as he trotted away toward the little house.

VIII.

This time Nanon was without apprehension; Francinette's intelligence had reassured her completely, and she was even very anxious to talk with Biscarros. He was ushered in, therefore, immediately upon his arrival.

Biscarros entered the room with his apron politely tucked in his belt, and cap in hand.

"You had at your house yesterday a young gentleman, Monsieur le Baron de Canolles, did you not?" said Nanon.

"What has become of him?" added the duke.

Biscarros, somewhat ill at ease, for the outrider and the six louis made him more than suspect the great personage under the robe de chambre, replied evasively:

"He has gone, monsieur."

"Gone?" said the duke; "really gone?"

"Really."

"Where has he gone?" Nanon asked.

"That I cannot tell you; for, in very truth, I do not know, madame."

"You know at least in which direction he went?"

"He took the Paris road."

"At what hour did he take that road?" asked the duke.

"About midnight."

"And without saying anything?" queried Nanon, timidly.

"Without saying anything; he simply left a letter, and bade me hand it to Mademoiselle Francinette."

"Well, why haven't you handed it to her, knave?" said the duke; "is that all the respect you have for a nobleman's command?"

"I did hand it to her, monsieur; I did indeed!"

"Francinette!" roared the duke.

Francinette, who was listening at the door, made but one bound from the reception-room into the bedroom.

"Why didn't you give your mistress the letter Monsieur de Canolles left for her?"

"Why, monseigneur—" murmured the maid, in deadly terror.

"Monseigneur!" thought the amazed Biscarros, shrinking into the most remote corner of the room; "Monseigneur! it must be some prince in disguise."

"I had not asked her for it," Nanon, pale as a ghost, hastened to say.

"Give it me," said the duke, extending his hand.

Poor Francinette slowly held out the letter, turning to her mistress with a look which seemed to say,—

"You see that it's no fault of mine; that imbecile of a Biscarros has ruined everything."

Two fierce gleams shot from Nanon's eyes, and pierced Biscarros in his corner. The sweat stood in great drops on the poor wretch's brow, and he would have given the six louis he had in his pocket to be standing in front of his oven with the handle of a saucepan in his hand.

Meanwhile the duke had taken the letter and opened it, and was reading. As he read, Nanon stood beside him, paler and colder than a statue, feeling as if no part of her were alive save her heart.

"What does all this mean?" queried the duke.

Nanon knew by that question that the letter did not compromise her.

"Read it aloud, and I can explain it perhaps," said she.

"Dear Nanon," the duke began.

He turned to his companion, who became more composed with every second, and bore his gaze with admirable self-possession.

"Dear Nanon," the duke resumed:—

"I am availing myself of the leave of absence I owe to your good offices, and to divert my mind, I am going for a short gallop on the Paris road. Au revoir; I commend my fortune to your attention.'

"Ah ça! why, this Canolles is mad!"

"Mad? Why so?" rejoined Nanon.

"Does a sane man start off in this way at midnight, without a reason for so doing?"

"I should say as much," said Nanon to herself.

"Come, explain his departure to me."

"Eh! mon Dieu! monseigneur," said Nanon, with a charming smile, "nothing can be easier than that."

"She, too, calls him monseigneur," muttered Biscarros. "He is a prince, beyond question."

"Well, tell me."

"What! can you not guess which way the wind blows?"

"Not in the least."

"Canolles is twenty-seven years old; he is young, handsome, thoughtless. What particular form of madness do you suppose he prefers? Love. He must have seen some fair traveller pass Master Biscarros' door, and have followed her."

"He's in love, you think?" cried the duke, smiling at the very natural reflection that, if Canolles was in love with any traveller whatsoever, he was not in love with Nanon.

"Why, yes, of course he's in love. Isn't that it, Master Biscarros?" said Nanon, enchanted to see that the duke accepted her suggestion. "Come, answer freely; have I not guessed aright?"

Biscarros thought that the moment had come to reestablish himself in the young woman's good graces by assenting freely to whatever she might say, and with a smile about four inches wide blooming upon his lips, he said,—

"In very truth, madame may be right."

Nanon stepped toward him, shuddering in spite of herself.

"It is so; is it not?" she said.

"I think so, madame," replied Biscarros, with a knowing air.

"You think so?"

"Yes; wait a moment; indeed, you open my eyes."

"Ah! tell us about it, Master Biscarros," rejoined Nanon, beginning to feel the first pricks of jealousy; "come, tell us what fair travellers tarried at your hostelry last night."

"Yes, tell us," said Monsieur d'Épernon, stretching out his legs, and making himself comfortable in an easy chair.

"There were no lady travellers," said Biscarros.

Nanon breathed again.

"But," continued the inn-keeper, not suspecting that every word he uttered made Nanon's heart leap, "there was a little fair-haired gentleman, very plump and dainty, who didn't eat or drink, and who was afraid to resume his journey after dark. A young gentleman who was afraid," repeated Biscarros, with an extremely-cunning nod; "you understand, do you not?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the duke, condescendingly, biting freely at the hook.

Nanon answered his laughter with something very like gnashing of the teeth.

"Go on!" said she; "it's a charming story! Of course the little gentleman was awaiting Monsieur de Canolles."

"No, no; he was waiting for a tall, moustachioed gentleman to sup with him, and was even somewhat uncivil to Monsieur de Canolles when he proposed that they should sup together. But that worthy gentleman was not discouraged by so small a matter. He's an enterprising young man, apparently, and 'faith, after the departure of the tall man, who turned to the right, he rode after the short one, who turned to the left."

With this Rabelaisian conclusion, Biscarros, observing the duke's expansive features, thought that he might indulge in an ascending scale of roars of laughter, of so stentorian quality that the windows rattled.

The duke, whose mind was entirely relieved from a great weight, would have embraced Biscarros if the least drop of noble blood had flowed in his veins. As for Nanon, with pallid cheeks, and a convulsive smile frozen upon her lips, she listened to every word that fell from the inn-keeper's lips, with that devouring faith which leads the jealous to drink freely to the dregs the poison which destroys their lives.

"What leads you to think," said she, "that your little gentleman is a woman, and that Monsieur de Canolles is in love with her, rather than that he is riding about the country because he is bored, or to gratify a whim?"

"What makes me think so?" replied Biscarros, determined to bring conviction home to the minds of his hearers. "Wait, and I will tell you."

"Yes, tell us, my good friend," said the duke. "Egad! you are an amusing fellow."

"Monseigneur is too kind," said Biscarros. "It was like this."

The duke became all ears, and Nanon listened with clenched fists.

"I suspected nothing, and had taken the little fair-haired cavalier for a man readily enough, when I met Monsieur de Canolles half-way upstairs, with a candle in his left hand, and in his right a small glove, which he was examining, and passionately smelling—"

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared the duke, whose spleen vanished with amazing rapidity, as soon as he ceased to have any apprehension on his own account.

"A glove!" exclaimed Nanon, trying to remember if she had not left such a pledge in the possession of her knight; "a glove like this?"

As she spoke, she handed the inn-keeper one of her own gloves.

"No," said Biscarros, "a man's glove."

"A man's glove? Monsieur de Canolles staring at a man's glove, and passionately smelling it? You are mad!"

"No; for it belonged to the little gentleman, the pretty little blond cavalier, who neither ate nor drank, and was afraid of the dark,—a tiny glove, in which madame could hardly put her hand, although madame certainly has a pretty hand—"

Nanon gave a sharp little cry, as if she had been struck by an invisible arrow.

"I trust," said she, with a mighty effort, "that you have all the information you desire, monseigneur; that you know all you wished to know."

With trembling lips, clenched teeth, and gleaming eyes, she pointed with outstretched finger to the door, while Biscarros, noticing these indications of wrath upon the young woman's face, was altogether non-plussed, and stood with mouth and eyes wide open.

"If the young gentleman's absence is such a calamity," he thought, "his return would be a blessed thing. I will flatter this worthy nobleman with a hopeful suggestion, that he may have a hearty appetite."

In pursuance of this determination, Biscarros assumed his most gracious expression, gracefully put his right leg forward, and remarked,—

"After all, though the gentleman has gone, he may return at any moment."

The duke smiled at this beginning.

"True," he said; "why should he not return? Perhaps, indeed, he has returned already. Go and ascertain, Monsieur Biscarros, and let me know."

"But the breakfast?" said Nanon, hastily; "I am dying of hunger."

"To be sure," said the duke; "Courtauvaux will go. Come here, Courtauvaux; go to Master Biscarros' inn, and see if Monsieur le Baron de Canolles has returned. If he is not there, ask questions, find out what you can, look for him in the neighborhood. I am anxious to breakfast with him. Go!"

Courtauvaux left the room, and Biscarros, noticing the embarrassed silence of the others, prepared to put forth a new expedient.

"Don't you see that madame is motioning you to retire?" said Francinette.

"One moment! one moment!" cried the duke; "deuce take me! but you're losing your head now, my dear Nanon. What about the menu, pray? I am like you; I am half famished. Here, Master Biscarros, put these six louis with the others: they are to pay for the diverting tale you have been telling us."

Thereupon he bade the historian give place to the cook, and we hasten to say that Master Biscarros shone no less brilliantly in the second rôle than the first.

Meanwhile Nanon had reflected and realized at a glance the situation in which she was placed if Master Biscarros' supposition were well-founded. In the first place, was it well-founded? and, after all, even if it were, was not Canolles excusable? For what a cruel thing for a gallant fellow like him was this broken appointment! How insulting the espionage of the Duc d'Épernon, and the necessity imposed upon him, Canolles, of looking on, so to speak, at his rival's triumph! Nanon was so deeply in love herself that, attributing this prank to a paroxysm of jealousy, she not only forgave Canolles, but pitied him, and congratulated herself, perhaps, on being loved so well as to have incited him to take this petty revenge upon her. But the evil must be cut off at its root, and the progress of this incipient passion must be checked at all hazards.

At that point, a terrifying thought passed through Nanon's mind, and well-nigh struck her dumb.

Suppose that this meeting between Canolles and the little gentleman was by appointment.

But no; she was mad to think of it, for the little fellow awaited the arrival of a man with moustaches, and was rude to Canolles; perhaps Canolles did not himself detect the stranger's sex until he happened upon the little glove.

No matter! Canolles must be thwarted.

Summoning all her energy, she returned to the duke, who had just dismissed Biscarros, laden with compliments and instructions.

"What a misfortune, monsieur," said she, "that that madcap's folly deprives him of an honor like that you were about to bestow upon him! If he had been here, his future was assured; his absence may ruin everything."

"But," said the duke, "if we find him—"

"No danger of that," rejoined Nanon; "if there's a woman in the case, he will not have returned."

"What would you have me do, my love? Youth is the age of pleasure; he is young, and is amusing himself."

"But," said Nanon, "I am more sensible than he, and it's my opinion that we should interfere a little with his unseasonable amusement."

"Ah! scolding sister!" cried the duke.

"He will take it ill of me at the moment, perhaps; but he will unquestionably thank me for it later."

"Very well; have you a plan? I ask nothing better than to adopt it if you have."

"I have one."

"Tell it me."

"Do you not wish to send him to the queen with urgent intelligence?"

"To be sure; but if he has not returned—"

"Send a messenger after him; and as he is on the road to Paris, it will be so much time gained."

"Pardieu! you are right."

"Leave it to me, and Canolles shall have the order to-night or to-morrow morning. I will answer for it."

"Whom will you send?"

"Do you need Courtauvaux?"

"Not in the least."

"Give him to me, then, and I will send him with my instructions."

"Oh! what a head for a diplomatist! you have a future before you, Nanon."

"May I remain forever under so good a master! that is the height of my

ambition," said Nanon, throwing her arm around the old duke's neck, whereat he trembled with delight.

"What a delightful joke to play upon our Celadon!" said she.

"It will be a charming story to tell, my love."

"Upon my word! I should like to go in chase of him myself, to see how he'll receive the messenger."

"Unhappily, or rather happily, that is out of the question, and you must needs remain with me."

"True; but let us lose no time. Write your order, duke, and place Courtauvaux at my disposal."

The duke took a pen and wrote upon a bit of paper these two words:—

"Bordeaux.—No,"

and signed his name.

He then enclosed this laconic despatch in an envelope, on which he wrote the following address:—

"To her Majesty, Queen Anne of Austria, Regent of France."

Nanon meanwhile wrote a few lines, which she placed with the other, after showing them to the duke:—

My Dear Baron,—The accompanying despatch is for her Majesty the queen, as you see. On your life, carry it to her instantly; the welfare of the kingdom is at stake!

Your loving sister,

Nanon.

Nanon had hardly finished the letter, when they heard hurried footsteps at the foot of the stairs, and Courtauvaux ran up quickly and opened the door, with the expansive expression of a bearer of news which he knows to be awaited with impatience.

"Here is Monsieur de Canolles, whom I met within a hundred yards of the house," he said.

The duke uttered an exclamation of good-humored surprise. Nanon turned pale, and darted to the door, muttering,—

"It is written that I shall not escape the meeting."

At that moment a new personage appeared in the doorway, arrayed in a magnificent costume, holding his hat in his hand, and with a most gracious

smile upon his lips.

IX.

A thunder-bolt falling at Nanon's feet would certainly have caused her no greater surprise than this unexpected apparition, and would not, in all probability, have extorted from her a more sorrowful exclamation than that which escaped from her mouth involuntarily.

"He?" she cried.

"To be sure, my dear little sister," replied a most affable voice. "But I beg your pardon," added the owner of the voice, as he espied the Duc d'Épernon; "perhaps I intrude."

He bowed to the ground to the governor of Guyenne, who replied with a gracious gesture.

"Cauvignac!" muttered Nanon, but so low that the name was pronounced by her heart rather than by her lips.

"Welcome, Monsieur de Canolles," said the duke, with a most benevolent expression; "your sister and I have done naught but talk of you since last evening, and since last evening we have been most desirous of seeing you."

"Ah! you wished to see me? indeed!" said Cauvignac, turning to Nanon, with a look in which there was an indescribable expression of irony and suspicion.

"Yes," said Nanon; "Monsieur le Duc has been kind enough to express a wish that you should be presented to him."

"Naught save the fear of intruding upon you, monseigneur," said Cauvignac, bowing to the duke, "has prevented me from seeking that honor before this."

"On my word, baron," said the duke, "I admire your delicacy, but I feel bound to reproach you for it."

"Reproach me for my delicacy, monseigneur? Oho!"

"Yes; for if your good sister had not looked out for your interests—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Cauvignac, with an eloquent, reproachful glance at Nanon; "ah! my good sister has looked out for the interests of Monsieur—"

"Her brother," interposed Nanon, hastily; "what could be more natural?"

"And then to-day; to what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you?"

"True," said Cauvignac; "to what do you owe the pleasure of seeing me, monseigneur?"

"Why, to chance, to mere chance, which led you to return."

"Aha!" said Cauvignac to himself; "it seems that I had gone away."

"Yes, you went away, you bad brother; and without letting me know, except by a word or two, which had no other effect than to increase my anxiety."

"What would you have, dear Nanon? we must make allowances for a man in love," said the duke, with a smile.

"Oho! this is becoming complicated," said Cauvignac; "it seems now that I am in love."

"Come, come," said Nanon, "confess that you are."

"I won't deny it," rejoined Cauvignac, with a meaning smile, seeking to glean from some eye some hint of the truth, to guide him in constructing a lusty lie.

"Very good," said the duke; "but let us breakfast, if you've no objection. You can tell us of your love-affairs as we sit at the table, baron.—Francinette, a cover for Monsieur de Canolles. You haven't breakfasted, captain, I trust?"

"No, monseigneur; and I confess that the fresh morning air has sharpened my appetite prodigiously."

"Say the night air, you rascal," said the duke; "for you have been on the road all night."

"Faith!" muttered Cauvignac, "the brother-in-law guessed aright there. Very good! I admit it; the night air—"

"In that case," the duke continued, giving his arm to Nanon, and leading the way to the dining-room, followed by Cauvignac, "I trust that you will find here the wherewithal to defeat your appetite, however strongly constituted it may be."

It was the fact that Master Biscarros had outdone himself; the dishes were not numerous, but delicious and exquisitely served. The yellow wine of Guyenne, and the red Burgundy fell from the bottles like golden pearls and cascades of rubies.

Cauvignac ate very heartily.

"The boy handles his knife and fork very cleverly," said the duke. "But you do not eat, Nanon."

"I am no longer hungry, monseigneur."

"Dear sister!" cried Cauvignac; "to think that the pleasure of seeing me has

taken away her appetite! Indeed, I can but be grateful to her for loving me so dearly."

"This chicken-wing, Nanon?" said the duke.

"Give it to my brother, monseigneur; give it to my brother," replied Nanon, who saw Cauvignac emptying his plate with terrifying rapidity, and dreaded his raillery after the food had disappeared.

Cauvignac held out his plate with a grateful smile. The duke placed the wing upon the plate, and Cauvignac replaced the plate on the table before him.

"Well, what have you been doing that's worth the telling, Canolles?" said the duke, with a familiarity which seemed to Cauvignac of most hopeful augury. "It is understood that I am not speaking of love-affairs."

"Nay; do speak of them, monseigneur; speak of them," rejoined the younger man, whose tongue was beginning to be unloosed by successive doses of Médoc and Chambertin, and who, moreover, was in a very different situation from those people who borrow a name themselves, in that he had no fear of being interfered with by his double.

"Oh, monseigneur, he's very skilful at raillery," said Nanon.

"In that case, we can place him in the same category with the little gentleman," the duke suggested.

"Yes," said Nanon, "the little gentleman you met last evening."

"Ah! yes, in the road," said Cauvignac.

"And afterwards at Master Biscarros' hôtel," the duke added.

"And afterwards at Master Biscarros' hôtel," assented Cauvignac; "it's true, by my faith."

"Do you mean that you really did meet him?" queried Nanon.

"The little gentleman?"

"Yes."

"What sort of person was he? Tell us frankly," said the duke.

"Egad!" replied Cauvignac; "he was a charming little fellow,—fair and slender and refined, and travelling with a caricature of a squire."

"It's the same man," said Nanon, biting her lips.

"And you are in love with him?"

"With whom?"

"With this same little, fair, slender, refined gentleman."

"Oh, monseigneur!" exclaimed Cauvignac, "what do you mean?"

"Have you still the pearl-gray glove on your heart?"

"The pearl-gray glove?"

"Yes; the one you were smelling and kissing so passionately last evening."

This last phrase removed Cauvignac's perplexity.

"Ah!" he cried, "your little gentleman was a woman, was she? On my word of honor, I suspected as much."

"There can be no doubt now," murmured Nanon.

"Give me some wine, sister mine," said Cauvignac. "I can't imagine who emptied the bottle that stands beside me, but there's nothing in it."

"Go to!" exclaimed the duke; "his complaint can be cured, as his love doesn't interfere with his eating or drinking; and the king's business will not suffer."

"The king's business suffer!" cried Cauvignac. "Never! The king's business first of all! the king's business, is sacred. To his Majesty's health, monseigneur."

"I may rely upon your loyalty, baron?"

"Upon my loyalty to the king?"

"Yes."

"I should say you may rely upon it. I would gladly be drawn and quartered for him—at times."

"Your loyalty is easily understood," said Nanon, fearing that, in his enthusiasm for the Médoc and Chambertin, Cauvignac might forget the part he was playing, and clothe himself in his own individuality.

"Aren't you a captain in his Majesty's service, by virtue of Monsieur le Duc's favor?"

"I shall never forget it!" said Cauvignac, laying his hand, upon his heart, with tearful emotion.

"We will do better, baron; we will do better hereafter," said the duke.

"Thanks, monseigneur, thanks!"

"And we have already begun."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You are too bashful, my young friend," continued d'Épernon. "When

you are in need of anything, you must come to me. Now that there is no need to beat around the bush; now that you are no longer called upon to conceal your identity; now that I know that you are Nanon's brother—"

"Monseigneur," cried Cauvignac, "henceforth I will apply to you in person."

"You promise?"

"I give you my word."

"You will do well. Meanwhile, your sister will explain to you what is to be done now; she has a letter to intrust to you in my behalf. Perhaps your fortune is in the missive which I place in your hands on her recommendation. Follow your sister's advice, young man, follow her advice; she has an active brain, a keen intellect, and a noble heart. Love your sister, baron, and you will be established in my good graces."

"Monseigneur," exclaimed Cauvignac, effusively, "my sister knows how dearly I love her, and that I long for nothing so much as to see her happy, powerful, and—rich."

"Your fervor gratifies me," said the duke; "pray remain with Nanon, while I go hence to have a reckoning with a certain consummate villain. By the way, baron, perhaps you may be able to give me some information concerning the scoundrel."

"Gladly," said Cauvignac. "Only it will be necessary for me to know to what scoundrel you refer, monseigneur; there are many of them, and of every variety in these days."

"You are right; but this one is one of the most brazen-faced it has ever been my lot to fall in with."

"Indeed!"

"Imagine, if you please, that the gallows-bird extorted my signature in blank, in exchange for the letter your sister wrote you yesterday, which he procured by an infamous deed of violence."

"A signature in blank! upon my word! But what interest had you, pray, in possessing the letter of a sister to her brother?"

"Do you forget that I knew nothing of the relationship?"

"Ah! true."

"And I was idiotic enough—you will forgive me, won't you, Nanon?" continued the duke, holding out his hand to the young woman—"I was idiotic enough to be jealous of you!"

"Indeed! jealous of me! Oh! monseigneur, you were very, very wrong!"

"I was about to ask you if you had any suspicion as to the identity of the rascal who played informer?"

"No, not the slightest. But you understand, monseigneur, that such acts do not go unpunished, and some day you will know who did it."

"Oh! yes, certainly I shall know it some day, and I have taken precautions in abundance to that end; but I would have preferred to know it immediately."

"Ah!" rejoined Cauvignac, pricking up his ears; "ah! you say you have taken precautions to that end, monseigneur?"

"Yes, yes! And the villain," continued the duke, "will be very fortunate if my signature in blank doesn't lead to his being hanged."

"Why, how can you distinguish that particular signature from all the other orders you give out, monseigneur?"

"Because I made a private mark upon it."

"A mark?"

"Yes; an invisible mark, which I can render visible with the aid of a chemical process."

"Well, well!" said Cauvignac, "that is certainly a most ingenious device, monseigneur; but you must be careful that he doesn't suspect the trap."

"Oh! there's no danger of that; who do you think is likely to tell him of it?"

"True! true!" replied Cauvignac; "not Nanon, surely, nor I—"

"Nor I," said the duke.

"Nor you. So you are right, monseigneur; you cannot fail to know some day who the man is, and then—"

"Then, as I shall have kept my agreement with him, for he will have obtained whatever he chose to use the signature for, I will have him hanged."

"Amen!" said Cauvignac.

"And now," continued the duke, "as you can give me no information concerning the miscreant—"

"No, monseigneur; in very truth, I cannot."

"As I was saying, I will leave you with your sister.—Nanon, give the boy precise instructions, and above all things, see that he loses no time."

"Never fear, monseigneur."

"Adieu to you both."

He waved his hand gracefully to Nanon, bestowed a friendly nod upon her brother, and descended the stairs, saying that he should probably return during the day.

Nanon went with the duke to the head of the stairs.

"Peste!" said Cauvignac to himself, "my gallant friend did well to warn me. Ah! he's no such fool as he seems. But what shall I do with his signature? Dame! I'll do what I would do with a note; discount it."

"Now, monsieur," said Nanon, returning, and closing the door behind her, "now let us understand each other."

"My dear little sister," Cauvignac replied, "I came hither for the purpose of having a talk with you; but in order to talk at our ease, we must be seated. Sit you down, therefore, I beg."

As he spoke, he drew a chair near to his own and motioned to Nanon that it was intended for her.

Nanon seated herself with a frown, which augured ill for the harmony of the interview.

"First of all," said she, "why are you not where you should be?"

"Ah! my dear little sister, that is hardly courteous. If I were where I should be, I should not be here, and consequently you would not have the pleasure of seeing me."

"Did you not wish to take orders?"

"No, not I; say rather, that certain persons who are interested in me, notably yourself, wished to force me to take orders; but personally, I have never had a particularly earnest vocation for the Church."

"But you were educated for a religious life?"

"Yes, sister; and I believe I have piously profited by that fact."

"No sacrilege, monsieur; do not joke on sacred subjects."

"I am not joking, dear sister; I am simply stating facts. Look you; you sent me to the Minim brethren at Angoulême to prepare for the priesthood."

"Well?"

"I studied diligently there. I know Greek like Homer, Latin like Cicero, and theology like John Huss. Having nothing more to learn among those worthy monks, I left their establishment, still following out your wishes, and went to the Carmelites at Rouen, to make profession of faith."

"You forget to say that I had promised you a yearly allowance of a hundred pistoles, and that I kept my promise. A hundred pistoles for a Carmelite was more than enough, I should say."

"I don't deny it, my dear sister; but the convent always claimed my allowance on the pretext that I was not yet a Carmelite."

"Even so, did you not, when you consecrated your life to the Church, take a vow of poverty?"

"If I did make such a vow, dear sister, I give you my word that I have faithfully lived up to it; no one was ever poorer than I."

"But how did you leave the convent?"

"Ah! there you are! In the same way that Adam left the earthly paradise; it was knowledge that undid me, sister; I knew too much."

"What's that? you knew too much?"

"Yes. Imagine, if you can, that among the Carmelites, who have not the reputation of being Erasmuses or Descartes, I was looked upon as a prodigy,—of learning, be it understood. The result was that when Monsieur le Duc de Longueville came to Rouen to urge that city to declare in favor of the parliament, I was sent to harangue Monsieur de Longueville; the which I did in such elegant and well-chosen language, that Monsieur de Longueville not only expressed himself as well pleased with my eloquence, but asked me if I would be his secretary. This happened just as I was about to take the vows."

"Yes, I remember; and on the pretext that you were saying farewell to the world, you asked me for a hundred pistoles, which were given into your own hands."

"And they are the only ones I received, on the word of a gentleman!"

"But you were to renounce the world."

"Yes, such was my intention; but such was not the intention of Providence, which probably had other plans for me. It made a different disposition of me through the medium of Monsieur de Longueville; it was not its will that I should remain a monk. I therefore conformed to the will of a merciful Providence, and I am free to say that I do not repent having done so."

"Then you are no longer in the Church?"

"No, not for the moment, at least, my dear sister. I do not dare say that I may not return to it some day; for what man can say to-day what he will do to-morrow? Has not Monsieur de Rancé recently founded the Trappist order? Perhaps I shall follow in his footsteps, and found some new order. But for the moment I have dallied with war, you see, and that has made me profane and

impure for some time to come; at the first opportunity I shall purify myself."

"You a fighting man!" exclaimed Nanon, with a shrug.

"Why not? Dame! I won't pretend to say that I am a Dunois, a Duguesclin, a Bayard, a knight without fear and without reproach. No, I am not so vainglorious as to claim that I have not some trifling peccadilloes to be ashamed of, nor will I ask, like the famous condottiere Sforza, what fear is. I am a man, and, as Plautus says: 'Homo sum et nihil humani me alienum puto;' which means: 'I am a man, and nothing pertaining to mankind is strange to me.' I do know what fear is, therefore, but that does not prevent my being courageous on occasion. I handle a sword or a pistol prettily enough when I am driven to it. But my real bent, my decided vocation, is diplomacy. Unless I am sadly mistaken, my dear Nanon, I am on the way to become a great politician. A fine career is politics; Monsieur de Mazarin will rise very high if he's not hanged. And I am like Monsieur de Mazarin; so that one of my apprehensions, the greatest of them all, in fact, is, that I may be hanged. Fortunately, I have you, dear Nanon, and that gives me great confidence."

"So you are a warrior?"

"And a courtier, too, at need. Ah! my sojourn with Monsieur de Longueville was of the greatest benefit to me."

"What did you learn when you were with him?"

"What one always learns in the service of princes,—to fight, to intrigue, to betray."

"And those accomplishments—"

"Raised me to the very highest position."

"Which you have lost?"

"Dame! Hasn't Monsieur de Condé lost his? A man can't rule events. Dear sister, I, poor creature that I am, have governed Paris."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"For how long a time?"

"For an hour and three quarters, watch in hand."

"You governed Paris?"

"With despotic power."

"How did that come about?"

"In the simplest way imaginable. You must know that Monsieur le Coadjuteur, Monsieur de Gondy, the Abbé de Gondy——"

"Well?"

"Was absolute master of the city. Well, at that precise moment, I was in the service of Monsieur le Duc d'Elbœuf; he is a Lorraine prince, and one need not be ashamed to belong to him. For the time being, Monsieur d'Elbœuf was at enmity with the coadjutor. So I led an uprising in favor of Monsieur d'Elbœuf, in the course of which I captured——"

"Whom? the coadjutor?"

"No; I shouldn't have known what to do with him, and should have been much embarrassed. I captured his mistress, Mademoiselle de Chevreuse."

"Why, that was a terrible thing to do!" cried Nanon.

"Isn't it a terrible thing that a priest should have a mistress? At all events, that's what I said to myself. My purpose was, therefore, to carry her away, and carry her so far that he would never see her again. I sent word to him of my purpose; but the devil of a man uses arguments one can't resist; he offered me a thousand pistoles."

"Poor woman! to be thus bargained for!"

"Nonsense! on the contrary, she should have been overjoyed, for that proved how dearly Monsieur de Gondy loved her. None but men of the Church are so devoted as all that to their mistresses. I fancy that it's because they are forbidden to have them."

"You are rich, then?"

"Rich?"

"Of course, after all these acts of brigandage."

"Don't speak of it; look you, Nanon, I was most unlucky. Mademoiselle de Chevreuse's maid, whom no one thought of ransoming, and who consequently remained with me, took the money from me."

"I hope that you retained at least the good-will of those in whose interest you acted in putting this affront upon the coadjutor."

"Ah! Nanon, that proves how little you know of princes. Monsieur d'Elbœuf was reconciled with the coadjutor. In the treaty they entered into I was sacrificed. I was forced therefore to enter the service of Monsieur de Mazarin, who is a contemptible creature; and as the pay was by no means commensurate with the work to be done, I accepted an offer that was made me to incite another émeute in honor of Councillor Broussel, the object being to

secure the election of the Chancellor Seguier. But my men, the bunglers! only half killed him. In that affray I was in greater danger than ever before threatened me. Monsieur de la Meilleraie fired a pistol at me almost point-blank. Luckily, I stooped in time; the bullet whistled over my head, and the illustrious marshal killed no one but an old woman."

"What a tissue of horrors!" exclaimed Nanon.

"Why no, dear sister; simply the necessities of civil war."

"I can understand that a man capable of such things might have dared to do what you did yesterday."

"What did I do, pray?" queried Cauvignac with the most innocent expression; "what did I dare?"

"You dared to throw dust in the eyes of so eminent a man as Monsieur d'Épernon. But what I cannot understand, and would never have believed, is that a brother, fairly laden with favors at his sister's hands, could in cold blood form a plan to ruin that sister."

"Ruin my sister?—I?" said Cauvignac.

"Yes, you!" retorted Nanon. "I had no need to wait for the tale you have just told me, which proves that you are capable of anything, to recognize the handwriting of this letter. Tell me! do you deny that this unsigned letter was written by you?"

And Nanon indignantly held before her brother's eyes the denunciatory letter the duke had handed her the night before.

Cauvignac read it composedly.

"Well," said he, "what have you to say against this letter? Is it not couched in well-turned phrase? If you thought so, I should be very sorry for you, for it would prove that your literary taste is vitiated."

"This is not a question of the composition, monsieur, but of the fact itself. Did you, or did you not write this letter?"

"Unquestionably I did. If I had proposed to deny the fact, I should have disguised my handwriting; but it was useless. I have never intended to hide it from you; indeed, I was anxious that you should recognize the letter, as coming from me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nanon, with a horrified gesture, "you admit it!"

"It is a last relic of humility, dear sister; yes, I may as well tell you that I was actuated by a desire for revenge—"

"Revenge?"

"Yes, most naturally—"

"Revenge upon me, you wretch! Pray, consider what you are saying. What injury have I ever done you that the thought of seeking revenge should enter your mind?"

"What have you done to me? Ah! Nanon, put yourself in my place. I left Paris because I had too many enemies there; 't is the misfortune of all men who dabble in politics. I returned to you—I implored you. Do you remember? You received three letters,—you won't say that you did not recognize my hand; it was precisely the same as in this anonymous letter, and furthermore, those letters were signed,—I wrote you three letters, begging for a hundred beggarly pistoles—a hundred pistoles! to you, who had millions, it was the merest trifle. But a hundred pistoles, as you know, is my favorite figure. Very good; my sister ignored me! I presented myself at my sister's house; my sister's door was closed in my face! Naturally, I made inquiries. 'Perhaps she is in want,' I said to myself; 'if so, this is the time to show her that her benefactions have not fallen on stony soil. Perhaps she is no longer free; in that case her treatment of me is pardonable.' You see my heart sought excuses for you, until I learned that my sister was free, happy, wealthy, and rich—rich, richer, richest!—and that one Baron de Canolles, a stranger, had usurped my privileges, and was enjoying her protection in my place. Thereupon jealousy turned my head."

"Say cupidity. You sold me to Monsieur d'Épernon as you sold Mademoiselle de Chevreuse to the coadjutor! What business was it of yours, I pray to know, that I was on friendly terms with Monsieur le Baron de Canolles?"

"What business was it of mine? None at all, and I should not even have thought of interfering if you had continued to be on friendly terms with me."

"Do you know that if I were to say a single word to Monsieur d'Épernon, if I should tell him the whole truth, you would be lost?"

"Certainly."

"You heard with your own ears from his mouth a moment since, what fate is in store for the man who extorted that signature in blank from him."

"Don't speak of it; I shuddered to the very marrow of my bones; and it needed all my self-control to prevent me from betraying myself."

"And you say that you do not tremble now, although you confess your acquaintance with fear?"

"No; for such an open confession on your part would show that Monsieur de Canolles is not your brother, and that note of yours, being addressed to a

stranger, would take on very sinister meaning. It is much better, believe me, to have made the disingenuous confession you have made, ungrateful sister—I dare not say blindly, I know you too well for that; but consider, pray, how many advantages, all foreseen by me, result from this little episode, for which all the credit is due to my thoughtfulness. In the first place, you were greatly embarrassed, and dreaded the arrival of Monsieur de Canolles, who, not having been warned, would have floundered around terribly in the midst of your little family romance. My presence, on the other hand, has made everything smooth; your brother is no longer a mystery. Monsieur d'Épernon has adopted him, and in a very flattering way, I am bound to say. Now, therefore, the brother is under no further necessity of skulking in corners; he is one of the family; ergo, correspondence, appointments without, and why not within?—provided always that the brother with black eyes and hair is careful not to come face to face with Monsieur d'Épernon. One cloak bears an astonishing resemblance to another, deuce take it! and when Monsieur d'Épernon sees a cloak leave your house, who is to tell him whether it is or is not a brother's cloak? So there you are, free as the wind. But to do you this service, I have unbaptized myself; my name is Canolles, and that's a nuisance. You ought to be grateful to me for the sacrifice."

Nanon was struck dumb by this resistless flood of eloquence, the fruit of inconceivable impudence, and she could think of no arguments to oppose to it. Cauvignac made the most of his victory, and continued,—

"And now, dear sister, as we are united once more after so long a separation; as you have found a real brother, after so many disappointments, confess that henceforth you will sleep in peace,—thanks to the shield which love stretches over you; you will lead as tranquil a life as if all Guyenne adored you, which is not precisely the fact, you know; but Guyenne must bend to our will. In short, I have taken my station at your threshold; Monsieur d'Épernon procures a colonel's commission for me; instead of six men, I have two thousand. With those, two thousand men I will perform again the twelve tasks of Hercules; I shall be created duke and peer; Madame d'Épernon dies; Monsieur d'Épernon marries you—"

"Before all this happens you must do two things," said Nanon, shortly.

"What are they, dear sister? Tell me; I am listening."

"First of all, you must return the duke's signature in blank to him; otherwise, you will be hanged. You heard your sentence from his own lips. Secondly, you must leave this house instantly, or not only am I ruined forever, for which you care nothing, but you will be involved in my ruin,—a consideration which will cause you to think twice, I trust, before you decide."

"These are my answers, dear lady: the signature in blank is my property,

and you can't prevent my getting myself hanged, if such is my good pleasure."

"God forbid!"

"Thanks! I shall do nothing of the kind; never fear. I declared my aversion to that kind of death a few moments since; I shall keep the document, therefore, unless you have a craving to purchase it from me, in which case we may come to terms."

"I have no use for it; I give them away."

"Lucky Nanon!"

"You will keep it, then?"

"Yes."

"At the risk of what may happen to you?"

"Don't be alarmed; I have a place for it. As to taking my leave, I shall make no such blunder, being here by the duke's invitation. Furthermore, in your desire to be rid of me, you forget one thing."

"What is that?"

"The important commission the duke mentioned, which is likely to make my fortune."

Nanon turned pale.

"Why, you know perfectly well that it was not intended for you," she said. "You know that to abuse your present position would be a crime, for which you would have to pay the penalty one day or another."

"For that reason I don't propose to abuse it. I am anxious to use it, nothing more."

"Besides, Monsieur de Canolles is named in the commission."

"Very good; am I not Baron de Canolles?"

"Yes; but his face, as well as his name, is known at court. Monsieur de Canolles has been there several times."

"A la bonne heure! that's a strong argument; it's the first you have put forward, and you see that I yield to it."

"Moreover, you might fall in with your political opponents there," said Nanon; "and perhaps your face, although under a different name, is as well known as Monsieur de Canolles'."

"Oh! that would amount to nothing, if, as the duke says, the mission is destined to result advantageously to France. The message will be the

messenger's safeguard. A service of such importance implies pardon for him who renders it, and amnesty for the past is always the first condition of political conversions. And so, dear sister, it is not for you, but for me, to impose conditions."

"Well, what are yours?"

"In the first place, as I was saying, the first condition of every treaty,—general amnesty."

"Is that all?"

"Secondly, the adjustment of our accounts."

"It would seem that I owe you something, then?"

"You owe me the hundred pistoles, which you inhumanly refused me."

"Here are two hundred."

"Good! I recognize the real Nanon in that."

"But I give them to you on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you repair the wrong you have done."

"That is no more than fair. What must I do?"

"You must take horse and ride along the Paris road until you overtake Monsieur de Canolles."

"In that case, I lose his name."

"You restore it to him."

"And what am I to say to him?"

"You will hand him this order, and make sure that he sets out instantly to execute it."

"Is that all?"

"Absolutely."

"Is it necessary that he should know who I am?"

"On the contrary, it is of the utmost importance that he should not know."

"Ah! Nanon, do you blush for your brother?"

Nanon did not reply; she was lost in thought.

"How can I be sure," she began, after a moment's silence, "that you will do my errand faithfully? If you held anything sacred, I would require your oath."

"You can do better than that."

"How?"

"Promise me a hundred more pistoles after the errand is done."

"It's a bargain," said Nanon, with a shrug.

"Mark the difference. I ask you for no oath, and your simple word is enough for me. We will say a hundred pistoles to the man who hands you from me Monsieur de Canolles' receipt."

"Yes; but you speak of a third person; do you not expect to return yourself?"

"Who knows? I have business myself which requires my presence in the neighborhood of Paris."

Nanon could not restrain an exclamation of delight

"Ah! that's not polite," said Cauvignac, with a laugh; "but never mind, dear sister, no malice."

"Agreed; but to horse!"

"Instantly; simply time to drink a stirrup cup."

Cauvignac emptied the bottle of Chambertin into his glass, saluted his sister deferentially, vaulted into the saddle, and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

X.

The moon was just rising as the viscount, followed by the faithful Pompée, left Master Biscarros' hostelry behind him, and started off on the road to Paris.

After about quarter of an hour, which the viscount devoted to his reflections, and during which they made something like a league and a half, he turned to the squire, who was gravely bobbing up and down in his saddle, three paces behind his master.

"Pompée," the young man asked, "have you my right glove by any chance?"

"Not that I am aware of, monsieur," said Pompée.

"What are you doing to your portmanteau, pray?"

"I am looking to see if it is fastened on securely, and tightening the straps, for fear the gold may rattle. The rattle of gold is a fatal thing, monsieur, and leads to unpleasant meetings, especially at night."

"It's well done of you, Pompée, and I love to see that you are so prudent and careful."

"Those are very natural qualities in an old soldier, Monsieur le Vicomte, and are well adapted to go with courage; however, as rashness is not courage, I confess my regret that Monsieur Richon couldn't come with us; for twenty thousand livres is a risky burden, especially in such stormy times as these."

"What you say is full of common-sense, Pompée, and I agree with you in every point," the viscount replied.

"I will even venture to say," continued Pompée, emboldened in his fear by the viscount's approbation, "that it is imprudent to take the chances we are taking. Let us halt a moment, if you please, while I inspect my musket."

"Well, Pompée?"

"It seems to be in good condition, and the man who undertakes to stop us will have a bad quarter of an hour. Oho! what do I see yonder?"

"Where?"

"A hundred yards ahead of us, to the right; look, over there."

"I see something white!"

"Yes, yes!" said Pompée, "white; a cross-belt, perhaps. I am very anxious, on my honor, to get behind that hedge on the left. In military language that is called intrenching; let us intrench ourselves, Monsieur le Vicomte."

"If those are cross-belts, Pompée, they are worn by the king's soldiers; and the king's soldiers don't rob peaceful travellers."

"Don't you believe it, Monsieur le Vicomte, don't you believe it! On the contrary, we hear of nothing but road-agents, who use his Majesty's uniform as a cloak under which to commit innumerable villanies, each one more damnable than the last; and lately, at Bordeaux, two of the light-horse were broken on the wheel. I think I recognize the uniform of the light-horse, monsieur."

"Their uniform is blue, Pompée, and what we see is white."

"True; but they often put on a blouse over their uniform; that's what the villains did who were recently broken on the wheel at Bordeaux. It seems to me that they are gesticulating a great deal; they are threatening. That's their tactics, you see, Monsieur le Vicomte; they lie in ambush like this, by the road, and, carbine in hand, compel the traveller to throw his purse to them from a distance."

"But, my good Pompée," said the viscount, who, although considerably alarmed, kept his presence of mind, "if they threaten from a distance with their carbines, do the same with yours."

"Yes; but they don't see me," said Pompée; "so any demonstration on my part would be useless."

"Well, if they don't see you, they can hardly be threatening you, I should say."

"You understand absolutely nothing of war," retorted the squire, ill-humoredly; "the same thing is going to happen to me here that happened at Corbie."

"Let us hope not, Pompée; for, if I remember aright, Corbie is where you were wounded."

"Yes, and a terrible wound. I was with Monsieur de Cambes, and a rash gentleman he was! We were doing patrol duty one night to investigate the place where the battle was to be fought. We spied some cross-belts. I urged him not to do a foolhardy thing that would do no good; he persisted and marched straight up to the cross-belts. I turned my back angrily. At that moment, a cursed ball—viscount, let us be prudent!"

"Prudent we will be, Pompée: I ask nothing better. But it seems to me that they do not move."

"They are scenting their prey. Wait."

The travellers, luckily for them, had not to wait long. In a moment the moon shone out from behind a black cloud, and cast a bright light upon two or three shirts drying behind a hedge, with sleeves outstretched, some fifty paces away.

They were the cross-belts which reminded Pompée of his ill-fated patrol at Corbie.

The viscount laughed heartily, and spurred his horse; Pompée followed him, crying:—

"How fortunate that I did not follow my first impulse; I was going to send a ball in that direction, and it would have made me a second Don Quixote. You see, viscount, the value of prudence and experience in warfare!"

After a period of deep emotion, there is always a period of repose; having safely passed the shirts, the travellers rode on two or three leagues peacefully enough. It was a superb night; a clump of trees by the roadside made a broad shadow, black as ebony, across the road.

"I most assuredly do not like the moonlight," said Pompée. "When you can be seen from a distance you run the risk of being taken by surprise. I have always heard men versed in war say that of two men who are looking for each other the moon never helps but one at a time. We are in the bright light,

Monsieur le Vicomte, and it isn't prudent."

"Very well, let us ride in the shadow, Pompée."

"Yes, but if men were lying hidden in the edge of the wood, we should literally run into their mouths. In war time you never approach a wood until it has been reconnoitred."

"Unfortunately," rejoined the viscount, "we lack scouts. Isn't that what they call the men who reconnoitre woods, brave Pompée?"

"Yes, yes," muttered the squire. "Deuce take Richon, why didn't he come? We could have sent him forward as advance-guard, while we formed the main body of the army."

"Well, Pompée, what shall we do? Shall we stay in the moonlight, or go over into the shadow?"

"Let us get into the shadow, Monsieur le Vicomte; it's the most prudent way, I think."

"Shadow it is."

"You are afraid, Monsieur le Vicomte, aren't you?"

"No, my dear Pompée, I swear I'm not."

"You would be foolish, for I am here and on the watch; if I were alone, you understand, this would trouble me very little. An old soldier fears neither God nor devil. But you are a companion as hard to watch as the gold I have on behind; and the double responsibility alarms me. Ah! what is that black form I see over there? This time it is moving."

"There's no doubt about that," said the viscount.

"See what it is to be in the shadow; we see the enemy, and he doesn't see us. Doesn't it seem to you as if the villain has a musket?"

"Yes; but he's alone, Pompée, and there are two of us."

"Monsieur le Vicomte, men who travel alone are most to be feared; for their being alone indicates a determined character. The famous Baron des Adrets always went by himself. Look! he's aiming at us, or I'm much mistaken! He 's going to fire; stoop!"

"Why, no, Pompée, he's simply changing his musket from one shoulder to the other."

"Never mind, we must stoop all the same; it's the custom; let us receive his fire with our noses on our saddles."

"But you see that he doesn't fire, Pompée."

"He doesn't fire?" said the squire, raising his head. "Good! he must be afraid; our determined bearing has intimidated him. Ah! he's afraid! Let me speak to him, and do you speak after me, and make your voice as gruff as possible."

The shadow was coming toward them.

"Holé! friend, who are you?" cried Pompée.

The shadow halted with a very perceptible start of terror.

"Do you shout now," said Pompée.

"It's useless," said the viscount; "the poor devil is frightened enough already."

"Ah! he's afraid!" said Pompée, raising his weapon.

"Mercy, monsieur!" exclaimed the man, falling on his knees, "mercy! I am only a poor pedler, and I haven't sold as much as a pocket-handkerchief for a week; I haven't a sou about me."

What Pompée had taken for a musket was the yard-stick with which the poor devil measured off his wares.

"Pray understand, my friend," said Pompée, majestically, "that we are no thieves, but fighting men, travelling at night because we are afraid of nothing; go your way in peace; you are free."

"Here, my friend," the milder voice of the viscount interposed, "here's a half-pistole for the fright we gave you, and may God be with you!"

As he spoke, the viscount, with his small white hand, gave the poor devil a half-pistole, and he walked away, thanking Heaven for the lucky meeting.

"You were wrong, Monsieur le Vicomte, you were very wrong," said Pompée, a few steps farther on.

"Wrong, wrong! wherein, pray?"

"In giving that man a half-pistole. At night you should never admit that you have money about you; look you, wasn't it that coward's first cry that he hadn't a sou?"

"True," said the viscount, smiling; "but he's a coward, as you say, while we, as you also said, are fighting men, who fear nothing."

"Between being afraid and being suspicious, Monsieur le Vicomte, there is as great a distance as between fear and prudence. Now, it isn't prudent, I say again, to let a stranger whom you meet on the high-road see that you have money."

"Not when the stranger is alone and unarmed?"

"He may belong to an armed band; he may be only a spy sent forward to see how the land lies. He may return with a crowd, and what can two men, however brave they may be, do against a crowd?"

This time the viscount realized the reasonableness of Pompée's reproof, or rather, to cut the lecture short, pretended to admit his guilt, and they rode on until they reached the bank of the little river Saye, near Saint-Genès.

There was no bridge, and they were obliged to ford the stream.

Pompée, thereupon, delivered a learned discourse upon the passage of rivers, but as a discourse is not a bridge, they were not the less obliged to ford the stream after the discourse was concluded.

Fortunately, the river was not deep, and this latest incident afforded the viscount further proof that things seen at a distance, especially at night, are much more alarming than when seen at close quarters.

He was really beginning, therefore, to feel safe, especially as the day would break in about another hour, when, as they were in the midst of the wood which lies about Marsas, the two travellers suddenly drew rein; they could hear, far in their rear, but distinctly, the hoof-beats of galloping horses.

At the same moment their own horses raised their heads, and one of them neighed.

"This time," said Pompée, in a stifled voice, seizing the bridle of his companion's horse, "this time, Monsieur le Vicomte, you will show a little docility, I trust, and be guided by the experience of an old soldier. I hear a troop of mounted men; they are pursuing us. Of course it's your pretended pedler's band; I told you so, imprudent youth that you are! Come, no useless bravado, but let us save our lives and our money! Flight is often a means of winning the battle; Horace pretended to fly."

"Very well, let us fly, Pompée," said the viscount, trembling from head to foot.

Pompée drove in his spurs; his horse, an excellent roan, leaped forward with a zeal that inflamed the ardor of the viscount's barb, and they dashed away at full speed, followed by a train of sparks, as their iron-shod hoofs flew along the hard road.

This race lasted about half an hour; but instead of gaining ground, it seemed to the fugitives that their enemies were coming nearer.

Suddenly a voice issued from the darkness,—a voice which, mingling with the hissing sound produced by the speed at which they were riding, seemed

like the muttered menace of the spirits of the night.

It made the gray hair stand erect on Pompée's head.

"They cried 'Stop!'" he muttered; "they cried 'Stop!'"

"Well, shall we stop?" asked the viscount.

"By no means!" cried Pompée; "let us double our speed, if possible. Forward! forward!"

"Yes, yes! forward! forward!" cried the viscount, as thoroughly terrified now as his defender.

"They are gaining, they are gaining!" said Pompée; "do you hear them?"

"Alas! yes."

"They are not more than thirty—Listen, they are calling us again. We are lost!"

"Founder the horses, if we must," said the viscount, more dead than alive.

"Viscount! viscount!" shouted the voice. "Stop! stop! stop, old Pompée!"

"It is some one who knows us, some one who knows we are carrying money to Madame la Princesse, some one who knows we are conspirators; we shall be broken on the wheel alive!"

"Stop! stop!" the voice persisted.

"They are shouting to some one to stop us," said Pompée; "they have some one ahead of us; we are surrounded!"

"Suppose we turn into the field, and let them pass?"

"A good idea," said Pompée; "let us try it."

They guided their horses with rein and knee at the same time, and turned to the left; the viscount's mount, skilfully handled, leaped the ditch, but Pompée's heavier beast took off too late, the ground gave way under his feet, and he fell, carrying his rider down with him. The squire emitted a shriek of despair.

The viscount, who was already fifty paces away, heard his cry of distress, and although sadly frightened himself, turned and rode back to his companion.

"Mercy!" howled Pompée. "Ransom! I surrender; I belong to the house of Cambes!"

A loud shout of laughter was the only response to this pitiful appeal; and the viscount, riding up at that moment, saw Pompée embracing the stirrup of the conqueror, who, in a voice choking with laughter, was trying to reassure him.

"Monsieur le Baron de Canolles!" exclaimed the viscount.

"Sarpejeu! yes. Go to, viscount, it isn't fair to lead people who are looking for you such a race as this."

"Monsieur le Baron de Canolles!" echoed Pompée, still doubting his good luck; "Monsieur le Baron de Canolles and Monsieur Castorin!"

"Why, yes, Monsieur Pompée," said Castorin, rising in his stirrups to look over his master's shoulder, as he bent forward, laughing, over his saddle-bow; "what are you doing in that ditch?"

"You see!" said Pompée. "My horse fell just as I was about to intrench myself, taking you for enemies, in order to make a vigorous defence! Monsieur le Vicomte," he continued, rising and shaking himself, "it's Monsieur de Canolles."

"You here, monsieur!" murmured the viscount, with something very like joy, which was reflected in his tone in spite of himself.

"Faith, yes, it's myself," replied Canolles, gazing at the viscount with a degree of pertinacity which his finding of the glove sufficiently explained. "I was bored to death in that inn. Richon left me after winning my money. I learned that you had taken the Paris road. Luckily I had business in the same direction, so I set out to overtake you; I didn't suspect that I should have to run such a race to do it! Peste! my young gentleman, what a horseman you are!"

The viscount smiled, and stammered a few words.

"Castorin," continued Canolles, "assist Monsieur Pompée to mount. You see that he can't quite manage it, notwithstanding his skill."

Castorin dismounted and lent a hand to Pompée, who finally regained his seat.

"Now," said the viscount, "we will ride on, by your leave."

"One moment," said Pompée, much embarrassed; "one moment, Monsieur le Vicomte; it seems to me that I miss something."

"I should say as much," said the viscount; "you miss the valise."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" ejaculated Pompée, feigning profound astonishment.

"Wretch!" cried the viscount, "can you have lost it?"

"It can't be far away, monsieur," Pompée replied.

"Isn't this it?" inquired Castorin, picking up the object in question, which he found some difficulty in lifting.

"It is," said the viscount.

"It is," echoed Pompée.

"It isn't his fault," said Canolles, anxious to make a friend of the old squire; "in his fall the straps broke and the valise fell off."

"The straps are not broken, monsieur, but cut," said Castorin. "Look!"

"Oho! Monsieur Pompée," said Canolles, "what does that mean?"

"It means," said the viscount, sternly, "that, in his terror at being pursued by robbers, Monsieur Pompée cleverly cut the straps of the valise so that he might not have the responsibility of being the treasurer. In military parlance, what is that ruse called, Monsieur Pompée?"

Pompée tried to excuse himself by putting the blame on his hunting-knife which he had imprudently drawn; but, as he could give no satisfactory explanation, he remained under the suspicion, in the viscount's eyes, of having chosen to sacrifice the valise to his own safety.

Canolles was more lenient.

"Nonsense! nonsense!" said he; "that may or may not be; but strap the valise on again. Come, Castorin, help Monsieur Pompée. You were right, Master Pompée, to be afraid of robbers; the valise is heavy, and would be a valuable prize."

"Don't joke, monsieur," said Pompée, with a shudder; "all joking is equivocal at night."

"You are right, Pompée, always right; and so I propose to act as escort to you and the viscount. A re-enforcement of two men may be of some use to you."

"Yes, indeed!" cried Pompée, "there is safety in numbers."

"What say you to my offer, viscount?" said Canolles, who observed that the viscount welcomed his obliging suggestion with less enthusiasm than the squire.

"I, monsieur," was the reply, "recognize therein your usual desire to oblige, and I thank you very sincerely; but our roads are not the same, and I should dislike to put you to inconvenience."

"What!" said Canolles, greatly disappointed to find that the struggle at the inn was to begin again in the high-road; "what! our roads are not the same? Aren't you going to—"

"Chantilly," said Pompée, hastily, trembling at the thought of pursuing his journey with no other companion than the viscount.

That gentleman made an impatient gesture, and if it had been daylight, an

angry flush might have been seen to mount to his cheeks.

"Why," cried Canolles, without seeming to notice the furious glance with which the viscount blasted poor Pompée,— "why, Chantilly lies directly in my way. I am going to Paris, or rather," he added with a laugh, "I have no business, my dear viscount, and I don't know where I am going. Are you going to Paris? so am I. Are you going to Lyons? I am going to Lyons. Are you going to Marseilles? I have long had a passionate desire to see Provence, and I am going to Marseilles. Are you going to Stenay, where his Majesty's troops are? let us go to Stenay together. Though born in the South, I have always had a predilection for the North."

"Monsieur," rejoined the viscount, in a determined tone, due doubtless to his irritation against Pompée, "you force me to remind you that I am travelling alone on private business of the utmost importance; and forgive me, but if you insist, you will compel me, to my great regret, to tell you that you annoy me."

Nothing less than the thought of the little glove, which lay hidden upon his breast between his shirt and doublet, would have restrained the baron, who was as quick-tempered and impulsive as any Gascon, from an outburst of wrath. However, he did succeed in controlling himself.

"Monsieur," he replied in a more serious tone, "I have never heard it said that the high-road belonged to one person more than to another. Indeed, if I mistake not, it is called the king's road, as an indication that all his Majesty's subjects have an equal right to use it. I am, therefore, upon the king's road with no purpose of annoying you; indeed I am here to make myself useful to you, for you are young, weak, and practically undefended. I did not suppose that I looked like a highway-man. But since you so imply, I must needs admit my unprepossessing appearance. Forgive my intrusion, monsieur. I have the honor of presenting my respects to you. Bon voyage!"

With that, Canolles, having saluted the viscount, rode to the other side of the road, followed by Castorin in the flesh and by Pompée in spirit.

Canolles acted throughout this scene with such perfect courtesy his gestures were so graceful, the brow which his broad felt hat shaded was so unruffled, and surrounded by such silky black hair, that the viscount was even less impressed by his words than by his lofty bearing. He had moved away, as we have said, followed by Castorin, sitting stiff and straight in his saddle. Pompée, who remained with the viscount, sighed in a heartrending way, fit to break the hearts of the stones in the road. Thereupon the viscount, having duly reflected, urged his horse forward, joined Canolles, who pretended not to see or hear him, and whispered in an almost inaudible voice,—

"Monsieur de Canolles!"

Canolles started and turned his head; a thrill of pleasure ran through his veins; it seemed to him as if all the music of the heavenly spheres were taking part in a divine concert for his benefit alone.

"Viscount!" said he.

"Listen, monsieur," continued the viscount, in a soft, sweet voice; "really I am distressed at the thought of being guilty of any discourtesy to one so courteous and obliging as yourself. Forgive my timidity, I pray you; I was brought up by relatives whose affection for me made them reluctant to let me out of their sight; I ask you once more, therefore, to forgive me; I have not intended to offend you, and I trust you will permit me to ride beside you, as a proof of our sincere reconciliation."

"Marry! that I will!" cried Canolles, "a hundred and a thousand times, yes! I bear no malice, viscount, and to prove it—"

He put out his hand, into which fell or slipped a little hand as soft and shrinking as a sparrow's claw.

During the rest of the night the baron talked incessantly. The viscount listened, and laughed now and then.

The two servants rode behind,—Pompée explaining to Castorin how the battle of Corbie was lost, when it might perfectly well have been won, if they had not neglected to summon him to the council of war held in the morning.

"But how did you get out of your affair with Monsieur d'Épernon?" said the viscount, as the first rays of daylight appeared.

"It was no difficult matter," Canolles replied; "according to what you told me, viscount, it was he who had business with me, not I with him; either he got tired of waiting for me and went his way, or he was obstinate about it and is waiting still."

"But what of Mademoiselle de Lartigues?" queried the viscount, with some hesitation.

"Mademoiselle de Lartigues cannot be at home with Monsieur d'Épernon, and at the Golden Calf with me, at one and the same time. We mustn't ask a woman to do the impossible."

"That is no answer, baron. I ask you how it is that you could bear to leave Mademoiselle de Lartigues, being so fond of her as you are."

Canolles gazed at the viscount with eyes which already saw too clearly, for it was quite light by this time, and there was no other shadow on the young man's face than that cast by his hat.

The baron felt a mad impulse to reply by speaking his thoughts; but the

presence of Pompée and Castorin, and the viscount's serious expression held him back; moreover, he was not yet absolutely free from doubt.

"Suppose that I am mistaken, and that it should prove to be a man, despite the little glove and little hand; upon my soul, I never should dare look him in the face again!"

He took patience therefore and answered the viscount's question with one of those smiles which serve to answer any question.

They stopped at Barbézieux for breakfast and to breathe their horses. Canolles breakfasted with the viscount, and as they sat at table gazed admiringly at the hand whose perfumed envelope had caused him such lively emotion. Furthermore, the viscount was bound in common courtesy to remove his hat before taking his seat, and as he did so he disclosed such a wealth of lovely, soft hair that any other than a man in love, and consequently blind, would have been relieved of all uncertainty; but Canolles dreaded the awakening too keenly not to prolong the dream as much as possible. There was something fascinating to him in the viscount's disguise, which permitted him to indulge in a multitude of little familiarities which a more thorough acquaintance or a complete confession would have forbidden. He therefore said not a word to lead the viscount to think that his incognito was detected.

After breakfast they resumed their journey, and rode until dinner. Gradually, a feeling of weariness, which he found more and more difficulty in concealing, caused a haggard look to appear on the viscount's face, and a slight shivering of his whole body, of which Canolles in a friendly way asked him the cause. Thereupon Monsieur de Cambes would smile and pretend that the feeling had passed away, and even suggest quickening their pace; which Canolles refused to do, saying that they had a long distance still to travel, and that they must therefore spare their horses.

After dinner the viscount found some difficulty in rising. Canolles darted to his assistance.

"You need rest, my young friend," said he; "a continuous journey like this would kill you before you finish the third stage. We will not ride to-night, but go to bed. I propose that you shall have a good night's sleep, and may I die if the best room in the inn is not given you!"

The viscount looked at Pompée with such an expression of terror that Canolles could not conquer his desire to laugh.

"When we undertake so long a journey," said Pompée, "we ought each to have a tent."

"Or one tent for two," observed Canolles, with the most natural air; "that

would be quite enough."

The viscount shivered from head to foot.

The blow struck home, and Canolles saw that it did; out of the corner of his eye he noticed that the viscount made a sign to Pompée. Pompée went to his master's side, who said a few words to him in an undertone, and a moment later the old squire, muttering some excuse, rode on ahead and disappeared.

An hour and a half after this incident, which Canolles did not seek to have explained, as they rode into a considerable village the two travellers spied the squire standing in the doorway of a hostelry of decent appearance.

"Aha!" said Canolles, "it would seem that we are to pass the night here, eh, viscount?"

"Why, yes, baron, if you choose."

"Nonsense! it is for you to choose. As I told you I am travelling for pleasure, while you tell me that you are travelling on business. I'm afraid that you won't fare very well in this hovel."

"Oh! a night is soon passed."

They halted, and Pompée, more alert than Canolles, darted forward and took his master's stirrup; moreover, it occurred to Canolles that such an attention would be absurd from one man to another.

"Show me to my room at once," said the viscount. "In truth, you are right, Monsieur de Canolles," he continued, turning to his companion, "I am really extremely fatigued."

"Here it is, monsieur," said the hostess, throwing open the door of a good-sized room on the ground-floor, looking on the court-yard, but with bars at the windows, and nothing but the garret above.

"Where is mine, pray?" cried Canolles, casting his eyes cautiously at the door next the viscount's, and at the thin partition, which would have been very slender protection against a curiosity so thoroughly sharpened as his.

"Yours?" said the hostess. "Come this way, monsieur, and I'll take you to it."

Without apparently noticing Canolles' ill-humor, she led him to the farther end of an exterior corridor, lavishly supplied with doors, and separated from the viscount's room by the width of the court-yard.

The viscount stood at his door looking after them.

"Now," said Canolles, "I am sure of my fact; but I have acted like a fool. To put a bad face on the matter would ruin me irretrievably; I must assume my

most gracious air."

He went out again upon the sort of gallery formed by the exterior corridor, and cried,—

"Good-night, my dear viscount; sleep well! you sadly need it. Shall I wake you in the morning? No? Very well, then, do you wake me when you choose. Good-night!"

"Good-night, baron!"

"By the way," continued Canolles, "is there nothing you lack? shall I lend you Castorin to wait upon you?"

"Thanks! I have Pompée; he sleeps in the next room."

"A wise precaution; I will see that Castorin does the same. A prudent measure, eh, Pompée? One can't take too many precautions at an inn. Good-night, viscount!"

The viscount replied by echoing the compliment, and closed his door.

"Very good, very good, viscount," murmured Canolles; "to-morrow it will be my turn to engage quarters for the night, and I'll have my revenge. Aha! he pulls both curtains close at his window; he hangs up a cloth to intercept his shadow! Peste! a very modest youth is this little gentleman; but it's all the same. To-morrow."

Canolles entered his room grumbling, undressed in high dudgeon, went to sleep swearing, and dreamed that Nanon found the viscount's pearl-gray glove in his pocket.

XI.

The next morning Canolles was in even more jovial humor than on the preceding day; the Vicomte de Cambes too gave freer rein to his natural animation. Even the dignified Pompée became almost playful in describing his campaigns to Castorin. The whole morning passed in pleasant conversation.

At breakfast Canolles apologized for leaving the viscount; but he had, he said, a long letter to write to one of his friends who lived in the neighborhood, and he told him also that he intended to call upon another friend of his, whose house was situated three or four leagues beyond Poitiers, almost on the high-road. Canolles inquired about this last-named friend, whose name he mentioned to the inn-keeper, and was told that he would find his house just before reaching the village of Jaulnay, and could easily identify it by its two towers.

Thereupon, as Castorin was to leave the party to deliver the letter, and as Canolles too was to make a *détour*, the viscount was asked to decide where

they should pass the night. He glanced at a little map which Pompée carried in a case, and suggested the village of Jaulnay. Canolles made no objection, and even carried his perfidy so far as to say aloud:—

"Pompée, if you are sent on before as quarter-master, as you were yesterday, secure a room for me, if possible, near your master's, so that we may talk together a little."

The crafty squire exchanged a glance with the viscount and smiled, fully determined to do nothing of the sort. Castorin, meanwhile, who had received his instructions beforehand, took the letter and was told to join the rest of the party at Jaulnay.

There was no danger of mistaking the inn, as Jaulnay could boast but one, —the Grand Charles-Martel.

The horses were saddled, and they set out. About five hundred yards beyond Poitiers, where they dined, Castorin took a cross-road to the right. They rode on for about two hours. At last they came to a house, which Canolles, from the description given him, recognized as his friend's. He pointed it out to the viscount, repeated his request to Pompée as to the location of his room, and took a cross-road to the left.

The viscount was entirely reassured. His manœuvre of the previous evening had been successful without a contest, and the whole day had passed without the slightest allusion to it. He no longer feared that Canolles would place any obstacle in the way of his wishes, and as soon as he saw in the baron nothing more than a kindly, jovial, witty travelling companion, he desired nothing better than to finish the journey in his company. And so, whether because the viscount deemed it a useless precaution, or because he did not wish to part company with his squire, and remain alone in the high-road, Pompée was not even sent on ahead.

They reached the village at nightfall; the rain was falling in torrents. As good luck would have it, there was a vacant room with a good fire. The viscount, who was in haste to change his clothes, took it, and sent Pompée to engage a room for Canolles.

"It is already done," said Pompée, the selfish, who was beyond measure anxious to go to bed himself; "the hostess has agreed to look out for him."

"T is well. My toilet-case?"

"Here it is."

"And my bottles?"

"Here they are."

"Thanks. Where do you sleep, Pompée?"

"At the end of the corridor."

"Suppose I need you?"

"Here is a bell; the hostess will come—"

"That will do. The door has a good lock, has it not?"

"Monsieur can see for himself."

"There are no bolts!"

"No, but there's a stout lock."

"Good; I will lock myself in. There's no other entrance?"

"None that I know of."

Pompée took the candle and made the circuit of the room.

"See if the shutters are secure."

"They are all hooked."

"Very well. You may go, Pompée."

Pompée went out, and the viscount turned the key in the lock.

An hour later, Castorin, who had arrived first at the inn, and was quartered near Pompée, without his knowledge, left his room on tiptoe, and opened the door to admit Canolles.

Canolles, with beating heart, glided into the inn, and leaving Castorin to secure the door, inquired the location of the viscount's room and went upstairs.

The viscount was just about to retire when he heard footsteps in the corridor.

The viscount, as we have seen, was very timid; the footsteps startled him, and he listened with all his ears?

The footsteps stopped at his door. An instant later some one knocked.

"Who's there?" inquired a voice, with such a terrified accent, that Canolles could not have recognized it, had he not already had occasion to study all its variations.

"I!" said Canolles.

"What! you?" rejoined the voice, passing from terror to dismay.

"Yes. Fancy, viscount, that there's not a single unoccupied room in the inn. Your idiot of a Pompée didn't think of me. Not another inn in the whole village

—and as your room has two beds—"

The viscount glanced in dismay at the two twin beds standing side by side in an alcove, and separated only by a table.

"Well, do you understand?" continued Canolles. "I claim one of them. Open the door quickly, I beg, for I am dead with cold—"

At that there was a great commotion inside the room, the rustling of clothes and hurried steps.

"Yes, yes, baron," said the viscount's voice, more dismayed than ever, "yes, I am coming, I—"

"I am waiting. But in pity's name make haste, dear friend, if you don't wish to find me frozen stiff."

"Forgive me; but I was asleep, you see—"

"What! I thought I saw a light."

"No, you were mistaken."

And the light was at once extinguished. Canolles made no complaint.

"I am here—I can't find the door," the viscount continued.

"I should think not," said Canolles. "I hear your voice at the other end of the room. This way, this way—"

"Oh! I am looking for the bell to call Pompée."

"Pompée is at the other end of the corridor, and will not hear you. I tried to wake him to find out something, but 't was impossible. He is sleeping like the deaf idiot he is."

"Then I will call the hostess."

"Nonsense! the hostess has given up her bed to one of her guests, and has gone to the attic to sleep. So no one will come, my dear friend. After all, why call anybody? I need no assistance."

"But I—"

"Do you open the door, and I will thank you. I will feel my way to the bed, turn in, and that's the whole of it. Open the door, I beg."

"But there must be other rooms," said the viscount, in despair, "even if they are without beds. It's impossible that there are no other rooms. Let us call and inquire."

"But it's after half-past ten, my dear viscount. You will rouse the whole establishment. They will think the house is on fire. The result would be to

keep everybody awake all night, and I am dying for want of sleep."

These last words seemed to reassure the viscount to some extent. Light steps approached the door, and it was softly opened.

Canolles entered and locked the door behind him. The viscount had fled precipitately.

The baron found himself in almost total darkness, for the last embers of the fire, which was dying out, gave out but a feeble flickering light. The atmosphere was warm and heavy with the perfumes which denote the most assiduous attention to the toilet.

"Ah! thanks, viscount," said Canolles; "in truth, one is much more comfortable here than in the corridor."

"You are anxious to go to sleep, baron?"

"Yes, most assuredly. Tell me which is my bed, or let me light the candle."

"No, no, it's useless!" said the viscount, hastily. "Your bed is here at the left."

As the viscount's left was the baron's right, the baron turned to the left, fell in with a window, near the window a small table, and upon the table the bell which the agitated viscount had sought in vain. To make assurance doubly sure, he put the bell in his pocket.

"What did you say?" he cried. "Are we playing at blind-man's buff? You ought at least to cry casse-cou. What the devil are you fumbling for there in the dark?"

"I am looking for the bell, to call Pompée."

"But what the devil do you want of Pompée?"

"I want—I want him to make up a bed beside mine."

"For whom?"

"For himself."

"For himself! What are you talking about, viscount? Servants in our room! Go to! you act like a frightened girl. Fie, fie! we are old enough to defend ourselves. No; just give me your hand and guide me to my bed, which I cannot find—or else let us light the candle."

"No, no, no!" cried the viscount.

"If you won't give me your hand, you ought at least to pass me the end of a thread; for I am in a veritable labyrinth."

He walked, with arms outstretched, in the direction from which the voice came; but he saw something like a shadow flit by him, accompanied by a wave of sweetest perfume; he closed his arms, but, like Virgil's Orpheus, embraced nothing but air.

"There! there!" said the viscount at the other end of the room; "you are close beside your bed, baron."

"Which of the two is mine?"

"It matters little! I shall not go to bed."

"What's that! you won't go to bed?" exclaimed Canolles, turning about at this imprudent speech; "what will you do, pray?"

"I shall pass the night on a chair."

"Nonsense!" said Canolles. "I certainly shall not allow any such child's play; come, viscount, come!"

As the fire on the hearth blazed up for an instant before dying altogether, Canolles caught sight of the viscount crouching in a corner between the window and the commode, wrapped in his cloak.

The blaze was no more than a flash; but it was sufficient to guide the baron and to make the viscount understand that he was lost. Canolles walked straight toward him with arms outstretched, and although the room was dark once more, the poor fellow realized that he could not again elude his pursuer.

"Baron! baron!" he faltered; "come no nearer, I implore you; not a step nearer, if you are a gentleman!"

Canolles stopped; the viscount was so near him that he could hear his heart beat, and could feel his warm breath coming in gasps; at the same time a delicious, intoxicating perfume, a blending of all the perfumes which emanate from youth and beauty, a perfume ten thousand times sweeter than that of the sweetest flowers, seemed to envelop him and make it impossible for him to obey the viscount, even had he desired to do so.

However, he stood for an instant where he was, his hands stretched out toward those other hands, which were ready to repulse him, and with the feeling that he had but to take one step more to touch that charming body, whose suppleness and grace he had so much admired during the last two days.

"Mercy! mercy!" murmured the viscount; "mercy!"

His voice died away upon his lips and Canolles felt his body glide by the curtains of the window and fall at his feet.

His breast dilated; there was a something in the imploring voice that told

him that his adversary was half vanquished.

He stepped forward, put out his hands and met the young man's clasped in supplication; he had not the strength to cry out, but heaved a pitiful sigh.

Suddenly the galloping of a horse was heard beneath the window; there was a hurried knocking at the door, followed by a great outcry.

"M. le Baron de Canolles!" a voice shouted.

"Ah! God, I thank thee! I am saved!" murmured the viscount.

"The devil take the beast!" exclaimed Canolles; "couldn't he have waited until to-morrow morning?"

"M. le Baron de Canolles!" cried the voice. "M. le Baron de Canolles! I must speak with him on the instant."

"Well, what's the matter?" said the baron, stepping toward the window.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" called Castorin at the door; "they are asking for you,—you are wanted."

"But who is it, varlet?"

"A courier."

"From whom?"

"M. le Duc d'Épernon."

"What does he want with me?"

"The king's service."

At that magic phrase, which it was impossible not to heed, Canolles, still grumbling, opened the door and went downstairs.

Pompée's snoring could be distinctly heard.

The courier had entered the inn, and was waiting below: Canolles joined him, and turned pale as he read Nanon's letter; for, as the reader will have guessed, the courier was Cauvignac himself, who, having started nearly ten hours after Canolles, was unable to overtake him before the second night, ride as hard as he might.

Cauvignac's answers to his questions left Canolles in no doubt as to the necessity of losing no time. He read the letter a second time, and the phrase, Your loving sister, Nanon, told him what had happened; that is to say, that Mademoiselle had cleared her skirts by passing him off as her brother.

Canolles had frequently heard Nanon herself speak in most unflattering terms of this brother whose place he had taken. This fact added not a little to

the ill grace with which he prepared to obey the duke's behest.

"T is well," said he to Cauvignac, without opening a credit for him at the inn, or emptying his purse into his hands, which he would have been certain to do under other circumstances; "t is well; tell your master that you overtook me, and that I obeyed him instantly."

"Shall I say nothing to Mademoiselle de Lartigues?"

"Yes; tell her that her brother appreciates the feeling which dictates her action, and is deeply indebted to her.—Castorin, saddle the horses."

Without another word to the messenger, who was thunderstruck by this ungracious reception, Canolles went up once more to the viscount's room, and found him pale and trembling, and completely dressed.

"You may set your mind at rest, viscount," said Canolles; "you are rid of me for the rest of your journey. I am about to take my leave in the king's service."

"When?" the viscount asked with a vestige of apprehension.

"Instantly; I am going to Mantes, where the court now is."

"Adieu, monsieur."

The young man could hardly utter the words, and sank upon a chair, not daring to meet his companion's eye.

Canolles stepped up to him.

"I shall never see you again in all probability," he said, with deep emotion.

"Who knows?" said the viscount, trying to smile.

"Promise one thing to a man who will never forget you," said Canolles, laying his hand upon his heart; and his tone and his gesture alike indicated absolute sincerity.

"What is it?"

"That you will sometimes think of him."

"I promise."

"Without anger?"

"Yes."

"Will you give me any token in support of your promise?"

The viscount put out his hand.

Canolles took the trembling hand in his own, with no purpose to do aught

but press it, but in obedience to an impulse stronger than his will, he put it to his lips and imprinted an ardent kiss upon it, then rushed from the room, murmuring:—

"Ah! Nanon! Nanon! can you ever make up to me what you have caused me to lose?"

XII.

If we now turn aside for a moment and cast a glance at the princesses of the house of Condé in their exile at Chantilly, of which Richon drew such a distressing picture to the viscount, this is what we shall see.

Beneath the spreading chestnuts, powdered with snowy blossoms, on the smooth, velvety lawns sloping down to the peaceful blue ponds, a swarm of laughing, chatting, singing promenaders wandered to and fro. Here and there amid the tall grass could be seen the figure of a solitary reader, lost in waves of verdure, where naught could be distinctly seen save the white page of the book in her hand, which belonged perhaps to M. de la Calprenède's *Cléopâtre*, to M. d'Urfé's *Astrée*, or to Mademoiselle de Scudéry's *Grand Cyrus*. Beneath the arbors of honeysuckle and clematis could be heard the sweet strains of lutes, and invisible voices singing. At intervals a horseman, bearing a despatch, passed like a flash along the main avenue leading to the château.

Meanwhile, upon the terrace, three women, dressed in satin, and followed at a distance by mute and respectful equerries, were walking gravely to and fro with ceremonious, majestic gestures: in the middle, a lady of noble and stately figure, despite her fifty-seven years, was holding forth magisterially upon affairs of state; at her right, a young lady clad in garments of sombre hue, and holding herself stiffly erect, listened with contracted brows to her neighbor's learned views; at her left another older lady, the stiffest and primmest of the three, because she was of less illustrious rank, was talking, listening, and meditating all at once.

The lady in the middle was the dowager princess, mother of the victor of Rocroy, Norlingen and Lens, who was just beginning, since he had become an object of persecution, and the persecution had landed him at Vincennes, to be called the Great Condé, a name which posterity has continued to bestow upon him. This lady, upon whose features could still be detected traces of that beauty which made her the object of the last and maddest of all the passions of Henri IV., had been wounded in her mother love, and in her pride as princess of the blood, by a *facchino Italiano*, who was called Mazarini when he was Cardinal Bentivoglio's servant, but who was now called His Eminence Cardinal Mazarin, since he had become Anne of Austria's lover, and First Minister of the Kingdom of France.

He it was who dared to imprison Condé, and to send the noble prisoner's wife and mother into exile at Chantilly.

The lady at her right was Claire-Clémence de Maillé, Princesse de Condé, who, in accordance with an aristocratic custom of the time, was called Madame la Princesse simply, to signify that the wife of the head of the Condé family was the first princess of the blood, the princess par excellence: she was always proud, but her pride had gained in intensity since her persecution, and she had become haughty and supercilious.

It was the fact that her husband's imprisonment raised her to the rank of a heroine, after being compelled to play only a secondary part so long as he was free; her state was more deplorable than widowhood, and her son, the Duc d'Enghien, just completing his seventh year, was more interesting than an orphan. The eyes of the nation were upon her, and without fear of being laughed at, she dressed in mourning. Since the forced exile of these two weeping women by direction of Anne of Austria their piercing shrieks had changed to muttered threats: from being the victims of oppression they had become rebels. Madame la Princesse, Themistocles in a mobcap, had her Miltiades in petticoats, and the laurels of Madame de Longueville, for an instant Queen of Paris, disturbed her slumbers.

The duenna at the left was the Marquise de Tourville, who did not venture to write novels, but exercised her pen upon political subjects: she did not make war in person like the valorous Pompée, nor did she, like him, receive a bullet at the battle of Corbie; but her husband, who was a highly esteemed officer, was wounded at La Rochelle and killed at Fribourg,—the result being that she inherited his fortune, and fancied that she inherited at the same time his genius for war. Since she joined the Princesses de Condé at Chantilly she had sketched three plans of campaign, all of which had successively aroused the enthusiasm of the ladies of the suite, and had been, not abandoned, but postponed until the moment when the sword should be drawn and the scabbard thrown away. She did not dare put on her husband's uniform, although she sometimes longed to do so; but she had his sword hanging in her room over the head of her bed, and now and then, when she was alone, she would draw it from its sheath with an exceedingly martial air.

Chantilly, notwithstanding its holiday aspect, was in reality nothing but a vast barrack, and a diligent search would have discovered powder in the cellars, and bayonets in the hedgerows.

The three ladies, in their lugubrious promenade, bent their steps toward the main door of the château, and seemed to be expecting the arrival of some messenger with important news. Several times the princess dowager had said, shaking her head and sighing:—

"We shall fail, my daughter! we shall be humiliated."

"We must expect to pay something as the price of the great glory we are to win," said Madame de Tourville, without relaxing the stiffness of her demeanor in any respect; "there is no victory without a combat!"

"If we fail, if we are vanquished," said the young princess, "we will avenge ourselves!"

"Madame," said the princess dowager, "if we fail, it will be that God has vanquished Monsieur le Prince. Pray, would you dream of seeking to be revenged on God?"

The younger princess bowed her head before her mother-in-law's superb humility; indeed, these three personages, saluting one another thus and offering incense at one another's shrine, were not unlike a bishop and two deacons, who make God the pretext of their mutual homage.

"Neither Monsieur de Turenne, Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, nor Monsieur de Bouillon," murmured the dowager; "they all fail us at once!"

"And no money!" added Madame de Tourville.

"On whom can we rely," said Madame la Princesse, "if Claire herself has forgotten us?"

"Who tells you, my daughter, that Madame de Cambes has forgotten us?"

"She does not return."

"Perhaps she has been prevented; the roads are watched by Monsieur de Saint-Aignan's army, you know."

"At all events she could write."

"How can you wish that she should put upon paper a reply of such moment,—the adhesion of a city like Bordeaux to the party of the princes? No, that is not the aspect of the affair which disturbs me most by any means."

"Moreover," suggested Madame de Tourville, "one of the three plans which I had the honor to lay before your Highness proposed an uprising in Guyenne as a certain means of accomplishing an object."

"Yes, yes, and we will recur to it, if necessary," replied Madame la Princesse: "but I agree with Madame my mother, and I begin to think that Claire must have fallen under suspicion; otherwise she would be here before this. Perhaps her farmers have failed to keep their word; a peasant will always seize an opportunity to avoid paying his debts. And who can say what the Guyenne people may or may not have done despite their promises? Gascons!"

"Braggarts!" said Madame de Tourville; "brave individually, it may be, but

bad soldiers en masse. They do very well to shout, 'Vive Monsieur le Prince!' when they're afraid of the Spaniard; that's all."

"They have a thorough detestation for Monsieur d'Épernon, however," said the princess dowager; "they hanged him in effigy at Agen, and promised to hang him in person at Bordeaux, if he ever returned there."

"He will return there, and hang the braggarts themselves," said Madame la Princesse, indignantly.

"And all this," rejoined Madame de Tourville, "is the fault of Monsieur Lenet—Monsieur Pierre Lenet," she repeated affectedly, "the stubborn adviser whom you persist in keeping by you, and who is good for nothing but to thwart all our plans. If he had not frowned upon my second plan, the purport of which was, you remember, to take by surprise the château de Vayres, Île Saint-Georges, and the fort of Blaye, we should be besieging Bordeaux ere now, and Bordeaux would be obliged to capitulate."

"I prefer, with deference to their Highnesses' opinion, that Bordeaux should open its gates of its own free will," said a voice behind Madame de Tourville, in a tone of respect, not unmixed with a tinge of irony. "A city that capitulates yields to force and incurs no obligation; whereas a city which opens its gates freely, thereby compromises itself, and must needs follow to the end the fortunes of those to whom it has offered itself."

The three ladies turned and saw Pierre Lenet, who, as they were taking one of their turns toward the main door of the château upon which their eyes were constantly fixed, had emerged from a smaller door on a level with the terrace, and approached them from behind.

What Madame de Tourville said was true in part. Pierre Lenet, one of Monsieur le Prince's advisers, a cold, grave, but very shrewd man, was commissioned by the prisoner to keep an eye on his friends and foes alike, and it must be said that he had much more difficulty in preventing the prince's friends from compromising his cause than in foiling the evil designs of his foes. But, being endowed with the cleverness and craft of a lawyer, and accustomed to the sharp practice and jugglery of the tribunals, he usually triumphed, either by some timely counterplot or by passive opposition. It was at Chantilly itself that the battles had to be fought which taxed his powers to the utmost. The self-esteem of Madame de Tourville, the impatience of Madame la Princesse, and the aristocratic inflexibility of the dowager were quite as hard to deal with as the astuteness of Mazarin, the pride of Anne of Austria, and the indecision of the parliament.

Lenet, to whom the princes addressed their correspondence, had established a rule that he would give the princesses no news except at what he

himself deemed an opportune time; for, as feminine diplomacy is not always shrouded in mystery, which is the cardinal principle of the masculine variety, many of Lenet's plans had been in this way betrayed by his friends to his enemies.

The two princesses, who, notwithstanding the opposition they encountered at his hands, none the less appreciated Pierre Lenet's devotion, and especially his usefulness, welcomed him with a friendly gesture; there was even the shadow of a smile upon the dowager's lips.

"Well, my dear Lenet," she said, "you heard Madame de Tourville complaining, or rather commiserating us. Everything is going from bad to worse. Ah! my dear Lenet, our affairs! our affairs!"

"Madame," said Lenet, "I am very far from taking so gloomy a view of our affairs as your Highness. I hope much from time, and from a change in the tide of fortune. You know the proverb: 'Everything succeeds with him who knows how to wait.'"

"Time, and a change in the tide of fortune!" exclaimed Madame la Princesse; "that's philosophy, and not politics, Monsieur Lenet!"

Lenet smiled.

"Philosophy is useful in all things, madame, especially in politics; it teaches us not to be over-elated with success, and to be patient in adversity."

"I care not!" said Madame de Tourville. "I would give more to see a courier than for all your maxims; don't you say the same, Madame la Princesse?"

"Yes, I confess it," replied Madame de Condé.

"Your Highness will be satisfied in that case, for you will receive three to-day," rejoined Lenet, as coolly as before.

"What, three?"

"Yes, madame. The first has been seen on the Bordeaux road, the second is coming from Stenay, and the third from La Rochefoucauld."

The two princesses uttered an exclamation of joyful surprise. Madame de Tourville bit her lips.

"It seems to me, my dear Monsieur Pierre," she said in a wheedling tone, to conceal her vexation, and wrap in a coating of sugar the bitter remark she was about to make, "it seems to me that a skilful necromancer like yourself ought not to stop short after such a fine start, and that, having announced the arrival of the couriers, you should tell us the contents of their despatches."

"My knowledge, madame, doesn't extend as far as you think," said he, modestly, "it confines itself to being a faithful servitor. I announce, but I do not guess."

At the same moment, as if Lenet were in reality served by a familiar spirit, they spied two horsemen, who came riding through the great gate of the château, and galloped up the avenue. Immediately a swarm of idlers, deserting the lawns and flower-gardens, swooped down to the avenue railings to have their share of the news.

The horsemen dismounted, and one of them, tossing to the other, who seemed to be his servant, the bridle-rein of his foam-covered steed, ran rather than walked toward the princesses who came forward to meet him, and stepped upon the balcony at one end as he stepped upon it at the other.

"Claire!" cried Madame la Princesse.

"Yes, your Highness. Accept my most humble respects, madame."

Kneeling upon one knee, the young man tried to take the princess's hand to imprint a respectful kiss upon it.

"Come to my arms, dear viscountess, to my arms!" cried Madame de Condé, raising her.

Having submitted to Madame la Princesse's embrace with all possible respect, the cavalier turned to the princess dowager, to whom he made a low bow.

"Speak quickly, dear Claire!" said she.

"Yes, speak," added Madame de Condé. "Have you seen Richon?"

"Yes, madame, and he entrusted me with a message for you."

"Good news or bad?"

"I do not know myself; the message consists of two words."

"What are they? Quick! I am dying with impatience."

The keenest anxiety was depicted on the features of both princesses.

"Bordeaux—Yes," said Claire, herself anxious as to the effect the two words would produce.

But she was soon reassured, for the princesses received them with a triumphant exclamation, which brought Lenet from the other end of the balcony.

"Lenet! Lenet! come! come!" cried Madame la Princesse, "you do not know the news our good Claire brings us."

"Yes, madame," said Lenet, smiling; "I do know it; that is why I did not hurry to meet her."

"What! you know it?"

"Bordeaux—Yes,—isn't that it?"

"In truth, my dear Pierre, you must be a sorcerer!" said the dowager.

"If you knew it, Lenet," said Madame la Princesse, reproachfully, "why, seeing our anxiety, did you not relieve it with those two words!"

"Because I wished to allow Madame de Cambes to receive the reward of her fatiguing journey," replied Lenet, with a motion of his head toward Claire, who was deeply moved, "and also because I feared an explosion of joy on the part of your Highnesses, out on the terrace in everybody's sight."

"You are right, Pierre, always right, my good Pierre!" said Madame la Princesse. "Let us say nothing."

"And we owe this to the gallant Richon," said the princess dowager. "Hasn't he done well, Compère Lenet, and aren't you content with him?"

Compère was the princess dowager's pet word; it was a reminiscence of Henri IV., who used it frequently.

"Richon is a man of brain and energy, madame, and I pray your Highness to believe that if I had not been as sure of him as of myself I would not have recommended him."

"What shall we do for him?" said Madame la Princesse.

"We must give him some important post," said the dowager.

"Some important post? Your Highness cannot think of doing so," interposed Madame de Tourville, sourly; "you forget that Monsieur Richon is not of gentle birth!"

"Nor am I, madame," retorted Lenet; "which fact does not prevent Monsieur le Prince from having some confidence in me, I believe. Most assuredly do I admire and respect the nobility of France; but there are circumstances in which a noble heart, I venture to say, is worth more than an ancient coat of arms."

"Why did not good Richon come himself to tell us this joyful tidings?" asked Madame la Princesse.

"He remained in Guyenne to raise troops. He told me that he could already count upon nearly three hundred men, but he says that, from want of time, they will be but ill equipped to take the field, and he would much prefer that we should obtain for him the command of a place like Vayres, or Île Saint-

George. There, he says, he would be sure of making himself useful to your Highnesses."

"But how can we obtain it?" asked the princess. "We are in too bad odor at court at this moment to recommend any one, and if we should undertake it, whoever we might recommend would become on the instant an object of suspicion."

"Perhaps, madame," said the viscountess, "a method which Monsieur Richon himself suggested to me may be practicable."

"What is that?"

"Monsieur d'Épernon is, it appears," continued the viscountess, blushing, "very much in love with a certain young woman."

"Ah! yes, the fair Nanon," said Madame la Princesse, disdainfully; "we know about that."

"Well, it seems that the duc d'Épernon can refuse nothing to this young woman, and that she disposes of whatever any one chooses to purchase from her. Could not you purchase a commission for Monsieur Richon?"

"It would be money well placed," said Lenet.

"True, but the chest is empty, as you well know, Monsieur le conseiller," said Madame de Tourville.

Lenet turned with a smile to Madame de Cambes.

"This is the moment, madame," said he, "to prove to their Highnesses that you have forgotten nothing."

"What do you mean, Lenet?"

"He means, madame, that I am fortunate enough to be able to offer you a paltry sum, which I have collected with much difficulty from my farmers. The offering is a very modest one, but I could do no more,—twenty thousand livres!" she continued, hesitating and lowering her eyes, ashamed to offer so small a sum to the two first ladies in the realm next to the queen.

"Twenty thousand livres!" they cried with one accord.

"Why, it's a fortune in times like these," continued the dowager.

"Dear Claire!" exclaimed Madame la Princesse, "how can we ever repay our obligation to her?"

"Your Highness will think of that later."

"Where is this money?" inquired Madame de Tourville.

"In her Highness's apartment, whither I bade Pompée, my squire, to carry it."

"Lenet," said Madame la Princesse, "you will remember that we owe this sum to Madame de Cambes."

"It is already carried to her credit," said Lenet, producing his tablets, and pointing out the viscountess's twenty thousand livres set down, under that date, in a column, the total of which would have alarmed the princesses somewhat if they had taken the trouble to add it.

"Pray how did you succeed in reaching here, dear Claire?" said Madame la Princesse; "for we are told that Monsieur de Saint-Aignan is watching the road, and searching every traveller, for all the world like a customs officer."

"Thanks to Pompée's superior wisdom, madame, we avoided that danger, by making a tremendous détour, which delayed us a day and a half, but assured our safety. Except for that I should have arrived day before yesterday."

"Have no uneasiness on that score, madame," said Lenet, "there is no time lost as yet; but we must see to it that we make good use of to-day and to-morrow. To-day, as your Highnesses will remember, we expect three couriers; one has already arrived, the other two are still to come."

"May we know the names of these others, monsieur?" asked Madame de Tourville, still hoping to catch the counsellor at fault, for she was constantly at war with him; and though the war was not declared, it was none the less real.

"The first, if my expectations are fulfilled, will be Gourville; he comes from the Duc de La Rochefoucauld."

"From the Prince de Marsillac, you mean," rejoined Madame de Tourville.

"Monsieur le Prince de Marsillac is now Duc de La Rochefoucauld, madame."

"His father is dead, then?"

"A week since."

"Where did he die?"

"At Verteuil."

"And the second?" asked Madame la Princesse.

"The second is Blanchefort, captain of Monsieur le Prince's guards. He comes from Stenay, from Monsieur de Turenne."

"In that case," said Madame de Tourville, "I think that, to avoid any loss of time, we should recur to the first plan I suggested in the probable event of the

adhesion of Bordeaux, and the alliance of Messieurs de Turenne and de Marsillac."

Lenet smiled as usual.

"Pardon me, madame," said he, in his most courteous tone; "but the plans formed by Monsieur le Prince himself are at this moment in process of execution, and bid fair to be entirely successful."

"The plans formed by Monsieur le Prince," retorted Madame de Tourville, sharply; "by Monsieur le Prince, who is in the donjon of Vincennes, and has no communication with anybody!"

"Here are his Highness's orders, written by his own hand, dated yesterday," said Lenet, taking from his pocket a letter from the Prince de Condé, "and received by me this morning; we are in correspondence."

The paper was almost snatched from his hands by the two princesses, who devoured, with tears of joy, all that it contained.

"Ah! do Lenet's pockets contain the whole kingdom of France?" said the princess dowager, laughingly.

"Not yet, madame, not yet; but with God's help I will so act as to make them large enough for that. Now," continued Lenet, with a significant glance at the viscountess, "Madame la Vicomtesse must stand in need of rest; for her long journey—"

The viscountess understood that Lenet wished to be left alone with the princesses, and at a smile from the dowager which confirmed that impression, she courtesied respectfully and took her leave.

Madame de Tourville remained and promised herself an ample harvest of mysterious information; but upon an almost imperceptible sign from the dowager to her daughter-in-law, the two princesses spontaneously, by a stately reverence, executed in accordance with all the rules of etiquette, signified to Madame de Tourville that the political conclave in which she was summoned to take part had reached its term. The lady of theories understood the hint perfectly, returned their salute by a reverence even more solemn and ceremonious than theirs, and withdrew, calling upon God to bear witness to the ingratitude of princes.

The ladies passed into their study, and Pierre Lenet followed them.

"Now," said he, after making sure that the door was securely locked, "if your Highnesses care to receive Gourville, he has arrived and changed his clothes, not daring to present himself in his travelling costume."

"What news does he bring?"

"That Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld will be here this evening or to-morrow with five hundred gentlemen."

"Five hundred gentlemen!" cried the princess; "why, 't is a veritable army!"

"Which will add to the difficulties of our journey. I should have preferred five or six faithful servitors only to all this display; we could more easily conceal our movements from Monsieur de Saint-Aignan. Now it will be almost impossible to reach the South without being molested."

"If we are molested, so much the better!" cried the princess; "for if we are molested we will fight, and we shall win; Monsieur de Condé's spirit will march with us."

Lenet glanced at the dowager as if to ask her opinion also; but Charlotte de Montmorency, who grew to womanhood during the civil wars of Louis XIII. and had seen so many noble heads bend to enter a prison, or roll upon the scaffold for having sought to hold themselves erect, sadly passed her hand across her brow, laden with painful memories.

"Yes," said she, "we are reduced to that alternative; to hide or to fight,—a frightful state of things! We were living in peace, with such glory as God had bestowed upon our house; we had no other desire, at least I hope that no one of us had any other, than to remain in the station to which we were born,—and lo! the exigencies of the time force us to contend against our master."

"Madame," interposed the younger princess, impetuously, "I look with less anguish than your Highness upon the necessity to which we are reduced. My husband and my brother are undergoing confinement unworthy of their rank; that husband and that brother are your sons; furthermore, your daughter is proscribed. These facts assuredly justify whatever enterprises we may undertake."

"True," said the dowager, with melancholy resignation; "true, I endure it all with more patience than yourself, madame; but it is because it seems as if it were our destiny to be proscribed or imprisoned. I had no sooner become the wife of your husband's father, than I was compelled to leave France, pursued by the love of King Henri IV. We had no sooner returned than we were consigned to Vincennes, pursued by the hatred of Cardinal de Richelieu. My son, who is in prison to-day, was born in prison, and after thirty-two years has renewed his acquaintance with the room in which he was born. Alas! your father-in-law, Monsieur le Prince, was right in his gloomy prophecies. When the result of the battle of Rocroy was made known to him, when he was taken into the great hall hung with flags captured from the Spaniards, he said, turning to me: 'God knows the joy that my son's exploit affords me; but remember, madame, that the more glory our family acquires, the greater will

be the misfortunes that overtake it. If it were not that I bear the arms of France, too noble a blazonry to be cast aside, I would take for my crest a falcon betrayed and recaptured by the ringing of his bells, with this legend: Fama nocet.' We have made too much noise in the world, my daughter, and that is what injures us. Do not you agree with me, Lenet?"

"Madame," Lenet replied, deeply afflicted by the memories awakened by the princess, "your Highness is right; but we have gone too far to retreat now; more than that; in circumstances like our present ones, it is most essential to make up our minds promptly. We must not deceive ourselves as to our situation. We are free only in appearance; the queen has her eye upon us, and Monsieur de Saint-Aignan is blockading us. The question we have to solve is, how we are to leave Chantilly despite the queen's vigilance and Monsieur de Saint-Aignan's blockade."

"Leave Chantilly! why, we will leave it with heads erect!" cried Madame la Princesse.

"I am of the same opinion," said the princess dowager. "The Condés are not Spaniards, and they do not play false. They are not Italians, and they do not resort to trickery. What they do, they do in broad daylight, with heads erect."

"Madame," said Lenet, in a tone of conviction, "God is my witness that I will be the first to execute your Highness's commands, whatever they may be; but in order to leave Chantilly in the way you describe, we must fight our way. You do not intend, of course, to become women again in the day of battle, after taking a man's part in council. You will march at the head of your supporters, and you will be the ones to furnish your soldiers with their war-cry. But you forget that closely connected with your precious lives, another life, no less precious, is beginning to assume prominence; that of the Duc d'Enghien, your son and grandson. Will you incur the risk of burying in the same grave the present and the future of your family? Do you imagine that Mazarin will not make use of the father as a hostage, when such rash enterprises are undertaken in the name of the son? Have you forgotten the secrets of the donjon of Vincennes, which were investigated under such melancholy circumstances by the Grand Prior of Vendôme, by Marshal d'Ornano, and by Puylaurens? Have you forgotten the fatal chamber, which, as Madame de Rambouillet says, is worth its weight in arsenic? No, mesdames," continued Lenet, clasping his hands, "no; you will hearken to the advice of your faithful counsellor; you will take your departure from Chantilly as it is fitting that persecuted women should do. Remember that your surest weapon is weakness. A child bereft of its father, a woman bereft of her husband, a mother bereft of her son, escape as they may from the snare in which they are caught. Before you act or speak openly, wait until you no longer serve as guaranties to the

stronger party. Prisoners, your supporters will remain mute; free, they will declare themselves, having no further reason to fear that any one will dictate to them the conditions of your ransom. Our plan is concerted with Gourville. We are sure of a strong escort, which will protect us from insult on the road; for to-day twenty different factions are in the field, and preying indiscriminately upon friend and foe. Give your consent. Everything is in readiness."

"Leave Chantilly in disguise! like malefactors!" cried the young princess. "Oh! what will my husband say when he learns that his mother, his wife, and his son have done such a shameful thing?"

"I know not what he will say, madame, but if you succeed he will owe his liberty to you! if you fail, you risk the loss of none of your advantages, especially not your position, as you would do by a battle."

The dowager reflected a moment before she said sadly:—

"Dear Monsieur Lenet, convince my daughter; for, so far as I personally am concerned, I am compelled to remain here. I have struggled on until now, but at last, I must succumb; the pain which is consuming me, and which I try in vain to hide, that I may not bring discouragement on those about me, will soon hold me fast upon a bed of suffering, which will perhaps be my death-bed. But, as you have said, we must, before everything, look to the fortune of the Condés. My daughter and my grandson will leave Chantilly, and will, I trust, be sufficiently well-advised to abide by your counsel,—I say more,—by your commands. Command, Lenet, and you will be obeyed!"

"You are pale, madame!" cried Lenet, supporting the dowager, as Madame la Princesse, alarmed at her sudden pallor, took her in her arms.

"Yes," said the dowager, growing manifestly weaker; "yes, the glad tidings of to-day have done me more harm than the anguish of the last few days. I feel that an internal fever is consuming me, but let us make no sign; at such a moment, it might work severe injury to our cause."

"Madame," said Lenet, in a low voice, "your Highness's indisposition would be a blessing from heaven, if it did not cause you to suffer. Keep your bed, and spread the report that you are ill. Do you, madame," he continued, addressing the young princess, "summon your physician Bourdelot, and as we shall soon need to make a requisition upon the stables, let it be known everywhere that it is your purpose to have a stag-hunt in the park. In that way no one will be surprised to see men, weapons, and horses in large numbers."

"Do it yourself, Lenet. But how can it be that so clear-sighted a man as you are does not feel that this hunting-party, given at the very moment that my mother falls ill, will cause remark?"

"That is all provided for, madame. Is not day after to-morrow Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien's seventh birthday, when he is to be taken from the charge of women?"

"Yes."

"Very well! we will say that this hunting-party is given to celebrate the young prince's first pair of breeches, and that her Highness was so determined that her illness should not interfere with this function that you could but yield to her wishes."

"An excellent idea!" cried the dowager, with a joyful smile, proud and delighted at the thought of this manner of proclaiming the virility of her grandson; "yes, it's an excellent suggestion, and you are indeed a worthy counsellor, Lenet."

"But should Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien follow the hunt in a carriage?" asked the princess.

"No, madame, on horseback. Oh! let not your mother's heart take alarm. I have devised the expedient of a small saddle, which Vialas, his equerry, will place immediately in front of his own; in that way, Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien will be seen, and in the evening we can take our departure in all security; for Monsieur d'Enghien will be able to go anywhere on foot or in the saddle; whereas, in a carriage he would be arrested at the first obstacle."

"You think, then, that we should go?"

"Day after to-morrow in the evening, if your Highness has no reason for postponing your departure."

"Oh, no! on the contrary, let us escape from our prison at the earliest possible moment, Lenet."

"Once away from Chantilly, what is your plan?" the dowager inquired.

"We shall pass through Monsieur de Saint-Aignan's forces, finding some means to tie a bandage over his eyes. We shall join Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld and his escort, and go on to Bordeaux, where we are expected. Once in the possession of the second city in the realm, the capital of the South, we can negotiate or make war, as seems best to your Highness. However, I have the honor to remind you, madame, that, even at Bordeaux, we shall have no chance of holding out for a considerable time, unless we have control of some posts in the vicinity to divert the attention of the royal troops. Two of these posts especially are of the greatest importance: Vayres, which commands the Dordogne, and would keep open a way to send supplies into the city; and Île Saint-Georges, which the Bordelais themselves consider the key of their city. But we will think of that later; for the moment let us confine ourselves to

the method of leaving this place."

"Nothing can be simpler, I think," said Madame la Princesse. "We are alone and masters here, whatever you may say, Lenet."

"Rely upon nothing, madame, until you are at Bordeaux. Nothing is simple, in a contest with the diabolical mind of Monsieur de Mazarin, and if I waited until we were alone to describe my plan to your Highness, it was to satisfy my conscience, I assure you; for I tremble at this moment for the secrecy of my plan, which my single brain conceived, and which no ears but yours have heard. Monsieur de Mazarin doesn't learn things, he divines them."

"Oh! I defy him to divine this," said the princess. "But let us assist my mother to her apartment; I will immediately give out the fact of a hunting-party for day after to-morrow. Do you look to the matter of invitations, Lenet."

"Rely upon me, madame."

The dowager went to her apartment, and at once took to her bed. Bodelot, family physician to the Condés, and preceptor to Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, was summoned; the report of her sudden indisposition was quickly circulated, and within half an hour arbors, balconies, gardens were deserted, all the guests hastening to the princess dowager's antechamber.

Lenet passed the whole day in writing, and that same evening above fifty invitations were sent out in all directions in the hands of the numerous retainers of that royal establishment.

XIII.

The next day but one following, which was the day appointed for putting Pierre Lenet's plans in execution, was one of the gloomiest of spring days, a season which is traditionally called the most beautiful of the year, but which is always, especially in France, the most disagreeable.

A fine, soaking rain was falling in the parterres of Chantilly, streaking the clumps of trees in the garden and the hedge-rows in the park with a grayish mist. In the great court-yards fifty horses, all ready saddled, were standing about the hitching posts, sad-eyed, with ears drooping, impatiently pawing the ground; packs of hounds in couples were waiting in groups of twelve, breathing noisily, gaping between whiles, and striving by their united efforts to run away with the groom, who was wiping the rain-soaked ears of his favorites.

The whippers-in, in chamois livery, with their hands behind their backs and their horns slung over their shoulders, wandered hither and thither. Some few officers, inured to storms by their experience at Rocroy or Lens, defied the rain, and whiled away the weary time of waiting by talking together in groups

upon the terraces and outer staircases.

Every one was notified that it was a ceremonious occasion, and had assumed his most solemn expression to see Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien wearing his first pair of breeches, hunt his first stag. Every officer in the prince's service, every adherent of the illustrious family, invited by Lenet's circular letter, had fulfilled what he considered his bounden duty by hastening to Chantilly. The anxiety aroused in the first instance by the condition of the princess dowager was dissipated by a favorable bulletin from Bourdelot. She had been bled, and had that morning taken an emetic, the universal panacea at that period.

At ten o'clock all Madame de Condé's personal guests had arrived; each one was admitted upon presenting his letter of invitation, and those who, by any chance, had neglected to bring it, upon being recognized by Lenet were admitted by the Swiss at a nod from him. These guests, with the household staff, constituted a body of eighty or ninety men, most of whom were gathered about the superb white horse, upon whose back, just in front of the great French saddle, was a little velvet seat with a back, intended for Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, where he was to take his place when Vialas, his equerry, should have taken his seat upon the principal saddle.

However, there was as yet no suggestion of beginning the hunt, but they seemed to await the arrival of additional guests.

About half-past ten, three gentlemen, followed by six valets all armed to the teeth, and carrying valises so swollen that one would have said they were starting out to make the tour of Europe, rode in at the gate and noticing the posts in the court-yard, apparently put there for that purpose, attempted to hitch their horses to them.

Immediately a man dressed in blue, with a silver baldric, halberd in hand, accosted the new-comers, who, by their drenched clothing and their mud-stained boots, were easily recognized as travellers from a distance.

"Whence come you, messieurs?" said this functionary.

"From the North," one of them replied.

"Whither go you?"

"To the burial."

"The proof?"

"You see our crêpe."

It was a fact that the three masters had each a piece of crêpe on their swords.

"Excuse me, messieurs," said the halberdier; "the château is yours. There is a table spread, an apartment warmed, servants awaiting your orders; your people will be entertained in the servants' quarters."

The gentlemen, who were honest rustics, half-starved and inquisitive, bowed, dismounted, threw their reins to their servants, and having been shown the way to the dining-hall, betook themselves thither. A chamberlain awaited them at the door, and acted as their guide.

Meanwhile the horses were taken off the hands of the strange servants by the servants of the house, taken to the stables, rubbed down, brushed, watered, and confronted with a trough well supplied with oats and a rack filled with hay.

The three gentlemen had hardly taken their places at the table, when six other horsemen, followed by six lackeys armed and equipped like those we have described, rode in as they did, and like them, seeing the posts, essayed to hitch their horses to the rings. But the man with the halberd, who had received strict orders, approached them and repeated his questions.

"Whence come you?" said he.

"From Picardy. We are officers in Turenne."

"Whither go you?"

"To the burial."

"The proof."

"You see our crêpe."

And like their predecessors, they pointed to the crêpe attached to the hilt of their rapiers.

The same attention was shown to them, and they followed the others to the dining-hall; the same care was bestowed upon their horses, who followed the other horses to the stables.

Behind them came four others, and the same scene was renewed.

Between half-past ten and noon, two by two, four by four, five by five, alone or in parties, shabbily or sumptuously dressed, but all well mounted, well armed, and well equipped, a hundred cavaliers made their appearance, all of whom were questioned according to the same formula, and replied by stating whence they came and that they were going to the burial, and by exhibiting their crêpe.

When they had all dined, and become acquainted with one another, while their people were being entertained and their horses were resting, Lenet

entered the room where they were all assembled, and said to them:—

"Messieurs, Madame la Princesse thanks you by my mouth for the honor you have done her by calling upon her on your way to join Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld, who awaits your coming to celebrate the obsequies of his late father. Look upon this house as your own, and deign to take part in the diversion of a stag hunt, ordered to take place this afternoon by Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, who dons to-day his first pair of breeches."

A murmur of approbation and gratitude welcomed the first part of Lenet's harangue, who, like a practised orator, paused for that purpose.

"After the hunt," he continued, "you will sup with Madame la Princesse, who desires to thank you in person; thereafter you will be at liberty to continue your journey."

Some of the gentlemen paid particular attention to the announcement of this programme, which seemed to some extent to impose fetters on their free will; but in all likelihood they had been warned by Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld to expect something of the sort, for not one of them murmured. Some went to inspect their horses; others had recourse to their portmanteaux to put themselves in fit condition to appear before the princesses; while others remained at table, talking about the state of affairs in the country, which seemed to have some affinity with the events of the day.

Many walked about beneath the main balcony where Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, his toilet completed, was expected to appear for the last time before his final farewell to female attendants.

The young prince in his nursery, surrounded by nurses and playthings, did not realize his own importance. But the pride of birth manifested itself in full measure, and he gazed impatiently at the rich, yet simple costume in which he was to be dressed for the first time. It was a black velvet suit trimmed with unpolished silver, which made it appear as if he were dressed in mourning: indeed his mother, who was determined at all hazards to pose as a widow, thought seriously of speaking of him in a certain harangue as the "poor orphaned prince."

But there was one who eyed these splendid garments even more longingly than the prince. A few feet from him, another child, a few months older than he, with red cheeks and light hair, overflowing with health and strength and childish petulance, was devouring with hungry eyes the luxurious surroundings of his more fortunate playfellow. Several times, unable to repress his curiosity, he had ventured to approach the chair upon which the fine clothes were spread out, and had slyly patted the velvet and caressed the trimming, while the little prince was looking in another direction. But at last it

happened that he brought back his eyes in time, and Pierrot drew his hand away too late.

"Take care!" cried the prince, sharply: "take care, Pierrot, you'll spoil my new breeches; they're 'broidered velvet, Pierrot, and it fades when you touch it. I forbid you touching my breeches!"

Pierrot hid the guilty hand behind his back, twisting his shoulders this way and that, as children of all ranks do when they are crossed.

"Don't be angry, Louis," said Madame la Princesse to her son, whose features were disfigured by an ugly grimace. "If Pierrot touches your suit again, he shall be whipped."

Pierrot changed his sulky expression for a threatening one.

"Monseigneur's a prince," he said, "but I'm a gardener; and if monseigneur is to keep me from touching his clothes, I won't let him play with my Guinea hens. Ah! I'm stronger than monseigneur, and he knows it."

These imprudent words were no sooner out of Pierrot's mouth, than the prince's nurse, who was Pierrot's mother, seized the independent youngster by the wrist, and said:—

"Pierrot, you forget that monseigneur is your master, the master of everything in the château and around the château, and so your Guinea hens are his."

"Why, I thought he was my brother," said Pierrot.

"Your foster-brother, yes."

"If he's my brother, we ought to share; and if my Guinea hens are his, his clothes are mine."

The nurse was about to reply by a demonstration of the difference between a uterine brother and a foster-brother, but the young prince, who wished Pierrot to witness his triumph from beginning to end, because he was especially desirous to excite Pierrot's admiration and envy, did not give her time.

"Don't be afraid, Pierrot," said he; "I am not angry with you, and you shall see me in a little while on my fine white horse, and my nice little saddle! I am going to hunt, and I shall kill the stag!"

"Oh! yes," retorted the irreverent Pierrot, "you'll stay a long while on horseback! You wanted to ride my donkey the other day, and my donkey threw you off on to the ground!"

"Yes, but to-day," rejoined the prince, with all the majesty he could

summon to his assistance and find in his memory,—"to-day I represent my papa, and I shall not fall. Besides, Vialas will hold me in his arms."

"Come, come," said Madame la Princesse, to cut short the discussion between the children, "come and dress the prince! One o'clock is striking, and all our friends are waiting impatiently. Lenet, bid them give the signal for departure."

XIV.

At the same instant the blast of the horn rang out in the court-yard and reached the most distant corners of the château. Thereupon each guest ran to his horse, finding him fresh and well-rested, thanks to the care that had been bestowed upon him, and vaulted into the saddle. The huntsman with his stag-hounds, the whippers-in with their packs, were the first to set out. Then the gentlemen drew up in line, and the Duc d'Enghien, mounted on the white horse, and held in his seat by Vialas, made his appearance, surrounded by maids of honor, equerries, and gentlemen in waiting, and followed by his mother in a dazzling costume and riding a jet-black horse. By her side, upon a horse which she rode with charming grace, was the Vicomtesse de Cambes, adorable in her female garb, which she had at last resumed to her great joy.

All search for Madame de Tourville had been made in vain since the night before; she had disappeared: like Achilles, she was sulking in her tent.

This brilliant cavalcade was greeted with unanimous acclamations. The guests stood up in their stirrups, pointing out Madame la Princesse, and Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, who were strangers to most of the gentlemen, they having never been to court, and being unfamiliar with all this royal pomp. The child bowed with a fascinating smile, Madame la Princesse with majestic affability; they were the wife and son of the man whom his bitterest enemies called the first general in Europe. The first general in Europe was persecuted, pursued, imprisoned by the self-same persons whom he had saved from a foreign foe at Lens, and defended against the rebels at Saint-Germain. This was more than was necessary to arouse enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm knew no bounds.

Madame la Princesse drank in with avidity all these proofs of her popularity; then, upon Lenet's whispering a few words in her ear, she gave the signal for departure, and they soon passed from the gardens into the park, all the gates of which were guarded by soldiers of the Condé regiment. Behind the hunters the wickets were locked; and as if that precaution were insufficient to make sure that no false brother should take part in the festivities, the soldiers remained on sentry duty behind the wicket, and a halberdier, dressed and armed like the one in the court-yard, stood beside each of them, with orders to open to none but those who could answer the three questions which

composed the countersign.

A moment after the gates were locked, the notes of the horn, and the furious baying of the hounds, announced that the stag was away.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the park, opposite the wall built by the Constable Anne de Montmorency, six horsemen had halted in the road to listen to the horns and the dogs, and seemed to be taking counsel together as they patted the necks of their panting steeds.

In view of their entirely new costumes, the glistening accoutrements of their horses, the glossy cloaks which fell jauntily from their shoulders over their horses' tails, the magnificence of the weapons which could be seen through artistically devised openings, it was rather astonishing that such smart, well-favored cavaliers should hold aloof at a time when all the nobility of the neighborhood were assembled at the château of Chantilly.

These resplendent worthies were eclipsed, however, by their leader, or by him who appeared to be their leader; plumed hat, gilded baldric, elegant boots with golden spurs, a long sword with carved, open-work hilt,—such, with the accompaniment of a superb sky-blue cloak à l'Espagnole, was this gentleman's equipment.

"Pardieu!" he exclaimed, after a moment of deep reflection, during which his five comrades gazed at one another in astonishment, "how do we get into the park? By the gate or the wicket? Let us present ourselves at the first gate or the first wicket, and we shall get in all right. Cavaliers of our cut are not left outside when men dressed like those we met this morning are admitted."

"I tell you again, Cauvignac," replied one of the five, "that those same ill-clad men, who, notwithstanding their dress and their rustic bearing, are in the park at this moment, had a great advantage over us,—the countersign. We haven't it, and we can't get in."

"You think so, Ferguzon?" said the first speaker, with some deference for the opinion of his lieutenant; our readers will have recognized in him the adventurer whom they met in the early pages of this narrative.

"Do I think so? I am sure of it. Do you imagine that these people are hunting for the sake of hunting? Tarare! they are conspiring, that's certain."

"Ferguzon is right," said a third; "they are conspiring, and we sha'n't be able to get in."

"A stag-hunt isn't a bad thing, however, when one falls in with it on the road."

"Especially when one is tired of hunting men, eh, Barrabas?" said Cauvignac. "Well, it shall not be said that we allowed this one to pass under

our noses. We are all that any one need be to cut a decent figure at this fête; we are as shiny as new crown-pieces. If Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien needs soldiers, where will he find smarter ones than we? If he needs conspirators, where will he find any more fashionably dressed? The least gorgeous of us has the bearing of a captain!"

"And you, Cauvignac," rejoined Barrabas "would pass at need for a duke and peer."

Ferguzon said nothing; he was reflecting.

"Unfortunately," continued Cauvignac, laughing, "Ferguzon is not inclined to hunt to-day."

"Peste!" said Ferguzon, "I've no special objection to hunting; it's a gentlemanly amusement which suits me to a T. So I don't despise it myself, nor try to dissuade others. I simply say that an entrance to the park where they are hunting is made impossible by locked gates."

"Hark!" cried Cauvignac, "there are the horns sounding the tally-ho."

"But," continued Ferguzon, "what I say doesn't necessarily mean that we may not hunt."

"How can we hunt, blockhead, if we can't get in?"

"I don't say that we can't get in," rejoined Ferguzon.

"How the devil can we get in, if the gates, which are open to others, are locked in our faces?"

"Why shouldn't we make a breach in this little wall, for our private use,—a breach through which we and our horses can pass, and behind which we certainly shall find no one to call us to account?"

"Hourra!" cried Cauvignac, waving his hat joyfully. "Full reparation! Ferguzon, you are the one brainy man among us! And when I have overturned the King of France, and placed Monsieur le Prince on his throne, I will demand Signor Mazarino Mazarini's place for you. To work, my boys, to work!"

With that, Cauvignac sprang to the ground, and, assisted by his companions, one of whom sufficed to hold all the horses, he began to tear down the wall, already in a somewhat shaky condition.

In a twinkling the five workers opened a breach three or four feet wide. Then they remounted and followed Cauvignac into the park.

"Now," said he, riding in the direction whence the sound of the horns seemed to come, "now, be refined and courteous, and I invite you to take

supper with Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien."

XV.

We have said that our six gentlemen of recent manufacture were well mounted; their horses also had the advantage over those of the cavaliers who arrived in the morning, that they were fresh. They therefore soon overtook the main body of the hunt, and took their places among the hunters without the least objection from any quarter. The great majority of the guests were from different provinces, and were not acquainted with one another; so that the intruders, once in the park, might easily pass for guests.

Everything would have passed off as well as they could have wished, if they had kept to their proper station, or even if they had been content with outstripping the others and riding among the huntsmen and whippers-in. But it was not so. In a very few moments Cauvignac seemed to reach the conclusion that the hunt was given in his honor; he snatched a horn from the hands of one of the whippers-in, who did not dare refuse to give it to him, took the lead of the huntsmen, rode in front of the captain of the hunt again and again, cut through woods and hedges, blowing the horn in any but the right way, confusing the *vue* with the *lancer*, the *debuché* with the *rembuché*, running down the dogs, overturning the whippers-in, saluting the ladies with a jaunty air when he rode by them, swearing, yelling, and losing his head when he lost sight of them, and at the last coming upon the stag, just as the animal, after swimming across the great pond, turned upon his pursuers and stood at bay.

"Hallali! Hallali! cried Cauvignac, "the stag is ours! Corbleu! we have him."

"Cauvignac," said Ferguzon, who was only a length behind him. "Cauvignac, you'll get us all turned out of the park. In God's name be more quiet!"

But Cauvignac heard not a word, and, seeing that the animal was getting the best of the dogs, dismounted and drew his sword, shouting with all the strength of his lungs:—

"Hallali! Hallali!"

His companions, excepting always the prudent Ferguzon, encouraged by his example, were preparing to swoop down upon their prey, when the captain of the hunt interposed.

"Gently, monsieur," he said, waving Cauvignac aside with his knife; "Madame la Princesse directs the hunt. It is for her, therefore, to cut the stag's throat, or to concede that honor to such person as she may please."

Cauvignac was recalled to himself by this sharp reprimand; and as he fell

back with decidedly bad grace, he found himself suddenly surrounded by the crowd of hunters, the delay having given them time to come up. They formed a great circle about the beast, driven to bay at the foot of an oak, and surrounded by all the dogs.

At the same moment Madame la Princesse was seen galloping up, preceding Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, the gentlemen in waiting and the ladies, who had made it a point of honor not to leave her. She was greatly excited, and it was easy to imagine that she looked upon this simulacrum of war as the prelude to a real war.

When she reached the centre of the circle she stopped, cast a haughty glance about her, and noticed Cauvignac and his comrades, whom the officers of the hunt were eying uneasily and suspiciously.

The captain drew near to her, knife in hand. It was the knife ordinarily used by Monsieur le Prince; the blade was of the finest steel and the handle of silver-gilt.

"Does your Highness know yonder gentleman?" he said in a low tone, glancing at Cauvignac out of the corner of his eye.

"No," said she, "but he was admitted, so he is undoubtedly known to some one."

"He is known to no one, your Highness; every one whom I have questioned sees him to-day for the first time."

"But he could not pass the gates without the countersign."

"No, of course not," replied the captain; "and yet I venture to advise your Highness to be on your guard."

"First of all, we must know who he is," said the princess.

"We shall soon know, madame," Lenet, who had ridden up with the princess, observed with his habitual smile. "I have sent a Norman, a Picard, and a Breton to talk with him, and he will be closely questioned; but for the moment, do not seem to be talking about him, or he will escape us."

"Cauvignac, said Ferguzon, "I think that we are being discussed in high places. We shall do well to suffer an eclipse."

"Do you think so?" said Cauvignac. "'Faith, what's the odds? I propose to be in at the death, come what come may."

"It's a stirring spectacle, I know," said Ferguzon, "but we may have to pay more for our places than at the Hôtel de Bourgogne."

"Madame," said the captain, presenting the knife to the princess, "to whom

is your Highness pleased to grant the honor of putting the stag to death?"

"I reserve it for myself, monsieur," said the princess; "a woman of my station should accustom herself to the touch of steel and the sight of blood."

"Namur," said the captain to the arquebusier, "be ready."

The arquebusier stepped forward, arquebuse in hand, and took up his position within twenty feet of the animal. This manœuvre was intended to ensure the princess's safety if the stag, driven to despair, as sometimes happens, should attack her instead of waiting meekly to be killed.

Madame la Princesse dismounted, and with sparkling eyes, glowing cheeks, and lips slightly parted, walked toward the animal, who was almost entirely buried under the dogs, and seemed to be covered with a carpet of a thousand colors. Doubtless the animal did not believe that death was to come to him from the hand of the lovely princess, from which he had eaten many and many a time; he had fallen upon his knees, and he tried to rise, letting fall from his eyes the great tear-drop which accompanies the death agony of the stag and the deer. But he had not time; the blade of the knife, glistening in the sun's rays, disappeared to the hilt in his throat; the blood spurted out into the princess's face; the stag raised his head, and, casting a last reproachful glance at his beautiful mistress, fell forward and died.

At the same instant all the horns blew the death-blast, and a mighty shout arose: "Vive Madame la Princesse!" while the young prince stood up in his saddle and clapped his little hands in high glee.

Madame la Princesse withdrew the knife from the animal's throat, glanced around with the look of an Amazon in her eyes, handed the dripping knife to the captain of the hunt, and remounted. Lenet thereupon drew nigh.

"Does Madame la Princesse wish me to tell her," said he, with a smile, "of whom she was thinking when she cut the poor beast's throat a moment since?"

"Yes, Lenet, I should be glad to have you tell me."

"She was thinking of Monsieur de Mazarin, and would have been glad to have him in the stag's place."

"Yes," cried the princess, "that is quite true, and I would have cut his throat without pity, I swear to you: but really, Lenet, you are a sorcerer!"

She turned to the rest of the company.

"Now that the hunt is at an end, messieurs," said she, "please follow me. It is too late now to start another stag, and besides, supper awaits us."

Cauvignac acknowledged this invitation by a most graceful bow.

"Pray, what are you doing, captain?" queried Ferguzon.

"Pardieu I am accepting! Didn't you hear Madame la Princesse invite us to supper, as I promised you that she would?"

"Cauvignac, you may take my advice or not, but if I were in your place I would make for the breach in the wall."

"Ferguzon, my friend, your natural perspicacity plays you false. Didn't you notice the orders given by yonder gentleman in black, who has the expression of a fox when he laughs, and of a badger when he doesn't laugh? Ferguzon, the breach is guarded, and to make for the breach is to indicate a purpose to go out as we came in."

"But if that's the case, what is to become of us?"

"Never fear! I will answer for everything."

With that assurance the six adventurers took their places in the midst of the gentlemen, and rode with them toward the château.

Cauvignac was not mistaken; they were closely watched.

Lenet rode on the outskirts of the cavalcade. On his right was the captain of the hunt, and on his left the intendant of the Condé estates.

"You are sure," said he, "that no one knows those men?"

"No one; we have questioned more than fifty gentlemen, and the reply is always the same; perfect strangers to everybody."

The Norman, the Picard, and the Breton had no further information to impart. But the Norman had discovered a breach in the park wall, and like an intelligent man had stationed guards there.

"We must have recourse, then, to a more efficacious method," said Lenet. "We must not allow a handful of spies to compel us to send away a hundred gallant fellows without accomplishing anything. Look to it, Monsieur l'Intendant, that no one is allowed to leave the court-yard, or the gallery where the horsemen are to be entertained. Do you, Monsieur le Capitaine, as soon as the door of the gallery is closed, station a picket guard of twelve men with loaded muskets, in case of accident. Go! I will not lose sight of them."

Lenet had no great difficulty in performing the duties he had imposed upon himself. Cauvignac and his companions evinced no desire to fly. Cauvignac rode among the foremost, twisting his moustache with a killing air; Ferguzon followed him, relying upon his promise, for he knew his leader too well not to be sure that he would not be caught in that trap, even if it had no second issue. Barrabas and the other three followed their captain and lieutenant, thinking of nothing but the excellent supper that awaited them; they were in fact rather

dull fellows, who with absolute indifference abandoned the intellectual portion of their social relations to their two leaders, in whom they had full and entire confidence.

Everything took place in accordance with Lenet's intention, and his orders were carried out to the letter. Madame la Princesse took her place in the great reception-room under a canopy, which served her for a throne. Her son was beside her, dressed as we have described.

The guests exchanged glances; they had been promised a supper, but it was evident that they were to listen to a speech.

The princess at last rose and began to speak. Her harangue was well calculated to arouse enthusiasm and make converts to her cause. On this occasion Clémence de Maillé-Brézé gave free rein to her feelings, and openly attacked Mazarin. Her hearers, electrified by the reminder of the insult offered to the whole nobility of France in the persons of the princes, and even more, it may be, by the hope of making an advantageous bargain with the court in case of success, interrupted the discourse again and again, calling God to witness, at the tops of their voices, that they would do faithful service in the cause of the illustrious house of Condé, and would help to rescue it from the state of degradation to which Mazarin wished to reduce it.

"And so, messieurs," cried the princess, bringing her harangue to an end, "the support of your valor, the free offering of your devotion is what the orphan before you asks of your noble hearts. You are our friends—at all events you present yourselves here as such. What can you do for us?"

After a moment of solemn silence began one of the grandest and most affecting scenes that can be imagined.

One of the gentlemen bowed with deep respect to the princess.

"My name," said he, "is Gérard de Montalent; I bring with me four gentlemen, my friends. We have among us five good swords and two thousand pistoles, which we place at Monsieur le Prince's service. Here are our credentials, signed by Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld."

The princess bowed, took the letter from the hands of the speaker, passed it to Lenet, and motioned to the gentlemen to take their places at her right.

As soon as they had obeyed her command another gentleman rose.

"My name is Claude-Raoul de Lessac, Comte de Clermont. I come with six gentlemen, my friends. We have each a thousand pistoles, which we ask to be allowed to pour into your Highness's treasure-chest. We are well armed and equipped, and a small daily wage will suffice for our needs. Here are our credentials, signed by Monsieur le Duc de Bouillon."

"Step to my right, gentlemen," said the princess, taking Monsieur de Bouillon's letter, which she read, as she read the other, and passed to Lenet, "and accept my grateful thanks."

The gentlemen obeyed.

"My name is Louis-Ferdinand de Lorges, Comte de Duras," said a third. "I come without friends and without money, my sword my only wealth and my only strength; with it I cut my way through the enemy, when I was besieged in Bellegarde. Here are my credentials from Monsieur le Vicomte de Turenne."

"Come hither, monsieur," said the princess, taking the letter with one hand, and giving him the other to kiss. "Come and stand by my side: I make you one of my brigadiers."

The same course was followed by all the gentlemen; all were provided with credentials, from Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, Monsieur de Bouillon, or Monsieur de Turenne; all delivered their letters and passed to the right of the princess; when there was no more room on that side they took their places at her left.

The centre of the great hall became gradually empty. Soon there remained only Cauvignac and his fellows, a solitary group, and upon them many suspicious and threatening glances were cast, accompanied by angry murmurs.

Lenet glanced toward the door. It was securely locked. He knew that the captain and twelve armed men were on the other side. Bringing his piercing gaze to bear upon the strangers, he said:—

"And you, messieurs; who are you? Will you do us the honor to tell us your names, and show us your credentials?"

The beginning of this scene, the probable ending of which disturbed him beyond measure, had cast a shadow over the face of Ferguzon, and his uneasiness gradually infected his companions, who, like Lenet, glanced in the direction of the door; but their leader, majestically enveloped in his cloak, had maintained throughout an impassive demeanor. At Lenet's invitation he stepped forward, and said, saluting the princess with ostentatious gallantry:—

"Madame, my name is Roland de Cauvignac, and I bring with me for your Highness's service these five gentlemen, who belong to the first families of Guyenne, but desire to retain their incognito."

"But you did not, of course, come to Chantilly, without being recommended to us by some one," said the princess, thinking with dismay of the terrible tumult which would result from the arrest of these six men. "Where are your credentials?"

Cauvignac bowed as if he recognized the justness of the question, felt in

the pocket of his doublet, and took from it a folded paper which he handed to Lenet with a low bow.

Lenet opened and read it and a joyful expression overspread his features, contracted a moment before by very natural apprehension.

While Lenet was reading, Cauvignac cast a triumphant glance upon the assemblage.

"Madame," said Lenet, stooping to whisper in the princess's ear, "see what unexpected good fortune; a paper signed in blank by Monsieur d'Épernon!"

"Monsieur," said the princess, with her most gracious smile; "thrice I thank you,—for my husband, for myself, for my son."

Surprise deprived all the spectators of the power of speech.

"Monsieur," said Lenet, "this paper is so valuable that it cannot be your intention to give it into our hands unconditionally. This evening, after supper, we will talk together, if you please, and you can then tell me in what way we can be of service to you."

With that, Lenet put the precious paper in his pocket and Cauvignac had the requisite delicacy to abstain from asking him for it.

"Well," said he to his companions, "did I not invite you to take supper with Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien?"

"Now, to supper!" said the princess.

At the word the folding doors were thrown open and disclosed a table spread with a sumptuous repast in the great gallery of the château.

The feast was very animated and noisy; the health of Monsieur le Prince, proposed again and again, was drunk each time by all the guests on their knees, sword in hand, and uttering imprecations against Mazarin fierce enough to bring the walls down on their heads.

Every one did honor to the good cheer of Chantilly. Even Ferguzon, the prudent Ferguzon, yielded to the charms of the vintage of Burgundy, with which he became acquainted for the first time. Ferguzon was a Gascon, and had previously been in a position to appreciate no other wines than those of his own province, which he considered excellent, but which had achieved no great renown at that period, if the Duc de Saint-Simon is to be believed.

But it was not so with Cauvignac. Cauvignac, while appreciating at their full worth the vintages of Moulin-à-Vent, Nuits, and Chambertin, was very moderate in his libations. He had not forgotten Lenet's cunning smile, and he thought that he needed all his faculties in order to make a bargain with the crafty counsellor which he would not have occasion to repent having made.

He aroused the admiration of Ferguzon, Barrabas, and the other three, who, failing to appreciate the reason of his temperance, were simple enough to think that he was beginning to reform.

Toward the close of the banquet, as the toasts were becoming more frequent, the princess vanished, taking the Duc d'Enghien with her, and leaving her guests free to prolong the revelry as far into the night as they chose. Everything had taken place according to her wishes, and she gives a circumstantial narrative of the scene in the salon, and the banquet in the gallery, omitting nothing save the words Lenet whispered in her ear as she rose from the table:—

"Do not forget, your Highness, that we start at ten o'clock."

It was then close upon nine, and the princess began her preparations.

Meanwhile Lenet and Cauvignac exchanged glances. Lenet rose, Cauvignac did the same. Lenet left the gallery by a small door in a corner; Cauvignac understood the manœuvre and followed him.

Lenet led Cauvignac to his cabinet. The adventurer strode along behind with a careless, confident air. But his hand toyed negligently with the hilt of a long dagger thrust in his belt, and his keen, quick eye peered through half-opened doors, and scanned every fluttering curtain.

He did not fear treachery precisely, but it was a matter of principle with him always to be prepared for it.

Once in the cabinet, which was dimly lighted by a lamp, but was quite untenanted, as a swift glance showed him, Cauvignac took the seat to which Lenet waved him on one side of the table whereon the lamp was burning. Lenet took his seat on the other side.

"Monsieur," said Lenet, to win the adventurer's confidence at the outset, "in the first place, here is your signature in blank, which I return to you. It is yours, is it not?"

"It belongs, monsieur," replied Cauvignac, "to him in whose possession it happens to be, for, as you see, it bears no other name than that of Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

"When I ask if it is yours, I mean to ask if it is in your possession with Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon's consent."

"I have it from his own hand, monsieur."

"It was neither stolen, then, nor extorted from him by violence?—I do not say by you, but by some other person from whom you received it. Perhaps you have it only at second hand?"

"It was given me by the duke himself, I tell you,—voluntarily, in exchange for a paper which I handed him."

"Did you agree with Monsieur d'Épernon to use this signature of his for any particular purpose, and for no other?"

"I made no agreement whatsoever with Monsieur d'Épernon."

"The person in whose hands it is may use it, then, with perfect safety?"

"He may."

"If that is so, why do you not make use of it yourself?"

"Because if I keep it I can use it for but one purpose, while by giving it to you, I can purchase two things with it."

"What are these two things?"

"Money, first of all."

"We have almost none."

"I will be reasonable."

"And the second thing?"

"A commission in the army of the princes."

"The princes have no army."

"They soon will have one."

"Would you not prefer a commission to raise a company?"

"I was about to make that very suggestion to you."

"The question of the money is left for decision, then."

"Yes, the question of the money."

"What amount do you expect?"

"Ten thousand livres. I told you that I would be reasonable."

"Ten thousand livres?"

"Yes. You must surely advance me something toward arming and equipping my men."

"Indeed, it's not an exorbitant request."

"You agree, then?"

"It's a bargain."

Lenet produced a commission all signed, inserted the names given him by

the young man, affixed Madame la Princesse's seal, and handed it to Cauvignac; he then opened a strong-box which contained the treasure of the rebels, and took out ten thousand livres in gold pieces, which he arranged in piles of twenty each.

Cauvignac counted them scrupulously one after another; when that task was completed he nodded to Lenet, to signify that the paper with Monsieur d'Épernon's signature was his. Lenet took it and placed it in the strong-box, thinking, doubtless, that so precious a treasure could not be too carefully guarded.

Just as he was placing the key of the chest in his pocket, a valet came running in, all aghast, to tell him that his presence was required on business of importance.

Consequently Lenet and Cauvignac left the cabinet,—Lenet to follow the servant, Cauvignac to return to the banqueting-hall.

Meanwhile Madame la Princesse was making her preparations for departure, which consisted in changing her party dress for an Amazonian costume, equally suitable for the carriage or the saddle; in assorting her papers so that she might burn those that were worthless, and set aside the valuable ones to be taken with her; lastly, in collecting her diamonds, which she had had removed from their settings, that they might occupy less space, and be more easily available in case of an emergency.

Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien was to travel in the suit he had worn at the hunt, as there had been no time to order another one made. His equerry, Vialas, was to remain constantly at the carriage door, riding a white horse of the purest racing blood, so that he might take him upon the little saddle and gallop away with him, if need were. They were afraid at first that he would fall asleep, and sent for Pierrot to come and play with him; but it was an unnecessary precaution; the proud satisfaction of being dressed as a man was quite enough to keep him awake.

The carriages, which were ordered to be made ready as if to drive Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes to Paris, were driven to a dark avenue of chestnuts, where it was impossible to see them, and were waiting there, doors open and coachmen in their places, within twenty paces of the main gate. They were all ready for the signal, which was to be given by a blast from the hunting-horns. Madame la Princesse, with her eyes fixed upon the clock, which marked five minutes less than ten o'clock, had already left her seat and was walking toward her son to take him by the hand, when the door was hastily thrown open, and Lenet burst into, rather than entered the room.

Madame la Princesse, seeing his pale face, and his anxious expression, lost

color herself.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" said she, running to meet him, "what has happened? What is the matter?"

"The matter is," Lenet replied in a voice choked with excitement, "that a gentleman has arrived, and requests speech of you on behalf of the king."

"Great God!" ejaculated the princess, "we are lost! Dear Lenet, what are we to do?"

"There is but one thing to be done."

"What is it?"

"Undress Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien immediately and dress Pierrot in his clothes."

"But I won't have you take off my clothes and give them to Pierrot!" cried the young prince, ready to burst into tears at the mere thought, while Pierrot, in an ecstasy of joy, feared that he could not have heard aright.

"We must do it, monseigneur," said Lenet, in the impressive tone which comes to one in emergencies, and which has the power of inspiring awe even in a child, "or else they will take you and your mamma this very moment to the same prison where your father is."

The prince said no more, while Pierrot, on the other hand, was quite unable to control his feelings, and indulged in an indescribable explosion of joy and pride; they were-both taken to a room on the ground-floor near the chapel, where the metamorphosis was to take place.

"Luckily," said Lenet, "the princess dowager is here; otherwise we were surely outwitted by Mazarin."

"How so?"

"Because the messenger was in duty bound to begin by calling upon her, and he is in her antechamber at this moment."

"This messenger is a mere spy, of course, sent here from the court to watch us?"

"Your Highness has said it."

"His orders, then, are not to lose sight of us."

"Yes; but what care you, if you are not the person he keeps in sight?"

"I fail to understand you, Lenet."

Lenet smiled.

"I understand myself, madame, and I will answer for everything. Dress Pierrot as a prince, and the prince as a gardener, and I will undertake to teach Pierrot his lesson."

"Oh, mon Dieu! let my son go away alone!"

"Your son will go with his mother, madame."

"Impossible!"

"Why so? If they find a false Duc d'Enghien here, they may well find a false Princesse de Condé!"

"Oh! splendid! Now I understand, good Lenet! dear Lenet! But who will represent me?" added the princess, anxiously.

"Have no fear on that score, madame," replied the imperturbable counsellor. "The Princesse de Condé whom I propose to make use of, and who I intend shall be kept in sight by Monsieur de Mazarin's spy, has just undressed in hot haste, and is getting into your bed at this moment."

Let us go back for a moment, and see what had taken place prior to Lenet's conversation with the princess.

While the guests were still sitting about the festive board, toasting the princes and cursing Mazarin, while Lenet was bargaining with Cauvignac in his cabinet for the possession of Monsieur d'Épernon's signature, and while Madame la Princesse was making her preparations for departure, a horseman made his appearance at the main gate of the château, followed by his servant, and rang the bell.

The concierge opened the gate, but behind the concierge the new-comer found the halberdier whom we already know.

"Whence come you?" he demanded.

"From Mantes," was the reply.

So far all was well.

"Whither go you?" the halberdier continued.

"To wait upon the princess dowager of Condé, then upon Madame la Princesse, and lastly upon Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien."

"You cannot enter!" said the halberdier, barring the way with his halberd.

"By order of the king!" rejoined the new-comer, taking a paper from his pocket.

At these awe-inspiring words the halberd was lowered, the sentinel called an usher, that official hurried to the spot, and his Majesty's messenger, having

delivered his credentials, was immediately ushered into the château.

Fortunately, it was a very extensive structure, and the apartments of the dowager were far removed from the gallery, where the last scene of the noisy festival we have described was still in progress.

If the messenger had requested an interview with Madame la Princesse in the first place, the whole plan of escape would in truth have been thwarted. But etiquette demanded that he should first pay his respects to the elder princess; so the first valet de chambre ushered him into a large cabinet, adjoining her Highness's bedroom.

"Pray accept her Highness's apologies, monsieur," said he, "but her Highness was taken suddenly ill day before yesterday, and was bled for the third time less than two hours since. I will make known your arrival to her, and I shall have the honor of ushering you into her presence in a moment."

The gentleman bowed in token of acquiescence, and was left alone, entirely unaware that three curious pairs of eyes were observing his countenance through the key-hole and trying to recognize him.

These three pairs of eyes belonged to Lenet, to Vialas, the princess's equerry, and to La Roussière, captain of the hunt. In the event that either one of the three had recognized the gentleman, that one was to enter the room, and on the pretext of entertaining him while he waited, to divert his attention and thus gain time.

But no one of the three was able to recognize the man whom they were so deeply interested in winning over to their cause. He was a well-favored youth in the uniform of an officer of infantry; he gazed about, with an indifferent air which might easily have been attributed to distaste for his errand, at the family portraits and the furniture of the cabinet, paying particular attention to the portrait of the dowager, to whom he was soon to be introduced,—a portrait which was made when she was in the very flower of her youth and beauty.

It was but a very few minutes before the valet de chambre returned, as he had promised, and conducted the messenger to the princess dowager's bedroom.

Charlotte de Montmorency was sitting up in bed; her physician, Bourdelot, was just leaving her bedside. He met the officer at the door and saluted him ceremoniously; the officer returned his salutation in the same manner.

When the princess heard the visitor's footsteps and the few words he exchanged with the physician, she made a rapid sign with her hand in the direction of the passage beside the bed, whereupon the heavily fringed hangings which enveloped the bed except on the side where they were drawn

apart for the reception of her visitor, moved slightly for two or three seconds.

In the passage were the younger princess and Lenet, who had entered by a secret door cut in the wainscoting, eager to ascertain the purport of the king's messenger's visit to Chantilly.

The officer walked into the room, and halting a few feet from the door, bowed with a greater show of respect than etiquette absolutely demanded.

The princess dowager's great black eyes were dilated with the superb expression of a queen about to give free rein to her wrath; her silence was heavy with impending storms. With her white hand, made even whiter than usual by the blood-letting, she motioned to the messenger to deliver to her the letter of which he was the bearer.

The officer extended his hand toward hers, and respectfully placed therein Anne of Austria's letter; then waited until the princess should have read the four lines it contained.

"Very good," muttered the dowager, folding the paper with affected coolness; "I understand the queen's meaning, shrouded as it is in polite phrases; I am your prisoner."

"Madame," the officer began, in dire embarrassment.

"A prisoner easy to guard, monsieur," continued Madame de Condé, "for I am in no condition to fly very far; and I have, as you must have seen as you came in, a stern keeper in the person of my physician, Monsieur Bourdelot."

As she spoke the dowager looked more attentively at the messenger, whose countenance was sufficiently pre-possessing to soften somewhat the harsh reception due the bearer of such a communication.

"I knew," she continued, "that Monsieur de Mazarin was capable of much unseemly violence; but I did not believe him to be so faint-hearted as to fear a sick old woman, a helpless widow, and an infant, for I presume that the order of which you are the bearer, applies to the princess my daughter, and the duke my grandson, as well as to myself?"

"Madame," returned the young man, "I should be in despair were your Highness to judge me by the functions which I am unhappily compelled to perform. I arrived at Mantes bearing a message for the queen. The postscript of the message recommended the messenger to her Majesty; the queen thereupon graciously bade me remain in attendance upon her, as she would in all probability have need of my services. Two days later the queen sent me hither; but while accepting, as in duty bound, the mission, whatever it might be, which her Majesty deigned to intrust to me, I will venture to say that I did not solicit it, and furthermore that I would have refused it if kings were

accustomed to brook a refusal."

With that the officer bowed again, with no less respect than before.

"I augur well from your explanation, and, since you have given it, I have some hope that I may be permitted to be ill without being molested. But no false shame, monsieur; tell me the truth at once. Shall I be watched even in my own apartments, as my poor son is at Vincennes? Shall I be allowed to write, and will my letters be opened, or not? If, contrary to all appearance, I am ever able to leave my bed again, will my walks be restricted?"

"Madame," replied the officer, "these are the instructions which the queen did me the honor to give me with her own mouth: 'Go,' said her Majesty, 'and assure my cousin of Condé that I will do whatever the welfare of the realm will permit me to do for the princes. In this letter I beg her to receive one of my officers, who will serve as intermediary between her and myself for such communications as she may wish to make to me. You will be that officer.' Such, madame," added the young man, with renewed demonstrations of respect, "were her Majesty's own words."

The princess listened to this recital with the careful attention of one seeking to detect in a diplomatic note the hidden meaning often depending upon the use of a certain word, or upon the placing of a comma in a particular spot.

After a moment's reflection, having discovered, doubtless, in the message the meaning that she had feared from the first to find therein, that is to say, espionage pure and simple, she said, pressing her lips together:

"You will take up your abode at Chantilly, monsieur, as the queen desires; furthermore, if you will say what apartment will be most agreeable to you, and most convenient for executing your commission, that apartment shall be yours."

"Madame," rejoined the officer, with a slight frown, "I have had the honor of explaining to your Highness many things not included in my instructions. Between your Highness's wrath and the queen's command I am in a dangerous position, being naught but a poor officer, and above all a wretched courtier. However, it seems to me that your Highness would be more generous to abstain from humiliating a man who is merely a passive instrument. It is distasteful to me, madame, to have to do what I am doing. But the queen has so ordered, and it is for me to obey the queen's commands to the letter. I did not seek the position,—I should have been glad had it been given to another; it seems to me that that is much to say."

And the officer raised his head with a blush which caused a similar blush to overspread the princess's haughty countenance.

"Monsieur," she replied, "whatever our social station, we owe obedience to her Majesty, as you have said. I will therefore follow the example set by you, and will obey as you obey. You must understand, however, how hard it is to be unable to receive a worthy gentleman like yourself without being at liberty to do the honors of one's house as one would like. From this moment you are master here. Order, and you shall be obeyed."

The officer bowed low as he replied:—

"God forbid, madame, that I should forget the distance which separates me from your Highness, and the respect I owe to your illustrious family! Your Highness will continue to be mistress in your own house, and I will be the first of your servants."

Thereupon the young gentleman withdrew, without embarrassment, without servility or arrogance, leaving the dowager a prey to anger, which was the more intense in that she found it impossible to vent it upon one so discreet and respectful as the messenger.

The result was that Mazarin was the theme that evening of a conversation which would have struck the minister down if curses had the power to kill from a distance, like projectiles.

The gentleman found in the antechamber the servant who announced him.

"Now, monsieur," said the latter, "Madame la Princesse de Condé, with whom you have requested an audience on the queen's behalf, consents to receive you; be pleased to follow me."

The officer understood that this form of speech served to spare the pride of the princess, and seemed as grateful for the honor bestowed upon him as if it were not made compulsory by the terms of his commission. He followed the valet through divers apartments until they reached the door of the princess's bedroom.

There the valet turned about.

"Madame la Princesse," he said, "retired upon returning from the hunt, and as she is greatly fatigued she will receive you in bed. Whom shall I announce to her Highness?"

"Announce Monsieur le Baron de Canolles on behalf of her Majesty the queen regent," was the reply.

At this name, which the pseudo-princess heard from her bed, she uttered a smothered exclamation, which, had it been overheard, would sadly have compromised her identity, and hastily pulled her hair over her eyes with the right hand, while with the left she pulled the rich coverlid of her bed well over her face.

"Admit the gentleman," she said, in a disguised voice.

The officer stepped inside the door.

MADAME DE CONDÉ

I.

The room into which Canolles was ushered was a vast apartment, with hangings of sombre hue, and lighted by a single night-lamp upon a bracket between two windows; the feeble light which it cast was, however, sufficient to enable one to make out a large picture immediately above the lamp, representing a woman holding a child by the hand. At the four corners of the frame shone the three golden fleurs-de-lys, from which it was necessary only to take away the heart-shaped bend to make of them the three fleurs-de-lys of France. In the depths of a large alcove, which the light hardly reached at all, could be seen, beneath the heavy coverlid of a magnificent bed, the woman upon whom the name of the Baron de Canolles had produced so striking an effect.

The gentleman began once more to go through with the customary formalities; that is to say, he took the requisite three steps toward the bed, bowed, and took three steps more. Thereupon, two maids, who had doubtless been assisting to disrobe Madame de Condé, having withdrawn, the valet closed the door and Canolles was left alone with the princess.

It was not for Canolles to begin the conversation, and he waited until he should be spoken to; but as the princess seemed determined to maintain silence, the young officer concluded that it would be better for him to disregard the proprieties than to remain in such an embarrassing position. He was fully alive, however, to the fact that the storm portended by this disdainful silence would probably burst forth at the first words which should break it, and that he was about to be submerged by a second flood of princely wrath, even more to be feared than the first, in that this princess was younger and more interesting.

But the extreme nature of the insult put upon him of itself emboldened the young gentleman, and bowing a third time, in accordance with his feelings, that is to say, with stiff formality, indicative of the ill-humor which was brewing in his Gascon brain, he began:—

"Madame, I have had the honor to request, on behalf of her Majesty the queen regent, an audience of your Highness; your Highness has deigned to grant my request. Now, may I not beg that your Highness will crown your

gracious reception by letting me know by a word, by a sign, that you are aware of my presence and are ready to listen to me?"

A movement behind the curtains and beneath the bed-clothes warned Canolles that he might expect a reply; and a moment later he heard a voice so choked with emotion as to be almost inaudible.

"Speak, monsieur," said the voice; "I am listening."

Canolles assumed an oratorical tone, and began:—

"Her Majesty the queen sends me to you, madame, to assure your Highness of her desire to continue upon friendly terms with you."

There was a very perceptible stir in the passage beside the bed, and the princess, interrupting the orator, said in a broken voice:—

"Monsieur, say no more of her Majesty the queen's friendly feeling for the family of Condé; there is direct proof of the contrary feeling in the vaults of the donjon of Vincennes."

"Well, well," thought Canolles, "it seems that they have talked the matter over, for they all say the same thing."

Meanwhile there was more stir in the passage, which the messenger did not notice, on account of the embarrassment caused by his peculiar situation.

"After all, monsieur," the princess continued, "what do you desire?"

"I desire nothing, madame," said Canolles, drawing himself up. "It is her Majesty the queen who desires that I should come to this château, that I should be admitted to the honor of your Highness's society, unworthy as I am, and that I should contribute to the utmost of my ability to restore harmony between two princes of the blood royal, at enmity for no cause at such a sad time as this."

"For no cause?" cried the princess; "do you say that there was no cause for our rupture?"

"I beg pardon, madame," rejoined Canolles. "I say nothing; I am not a judge, but an interpreter simply."

"And until the harmony of which you speak is restored the queen sets spies upon me, on the pretext—"

"And so I am a spy!" exclaimed Canolles, exasperated beyond measure. "The word is out at last! I thank your Highness for your frankness."

As a feeling of desperation began to take possession of him he fell into one of those superb attitudes which painters seek so earnestly to impart to the figures in their inanimate tableaux, and which actors endeavor to assume in

their tableaux vivants.

"So it is definitely decided that I am a spy!" he continued. "In that case, madame, I pray you treat me as such wretches are commonly treated; forget that I am the envoy of a queen, that that queen is responsible for every act of mine, that I am simply an atom obeying her breath. Order me turned out of doors by your servants, order your gentlemen to put me to death, place me face to face with people whom I can answer with club or sword; but do not, I pray you, madame, who are placed so high by birth, by merit, and by misfortune, do not insult an officer who but fulfils his bounden duty as soldier and as subject!"

These words straight from the heart, sad as a moan, and harsh as a reproach, were calculated to produce and did produce a profound impression. While listening to them the princess raised herself upon her elbow, with glistening eyes and trembling hand.

"God forbid," said she, extending her hand almost imploringly toward the messenger when he had ceased to speak. "God forbid that I should intentionally insult so gallant a gentleman as yourself! No, Monsieur de Canolles, I do not suspect your loyalty; consider my words unsaid; they were unkind, I admit, and I have no wish to wound you. No, no, you are a noble-hearted gentleman, Monsieur le Baron, and I do you full and entire justice."

As the princess, in the act of uttering these words, impelled, doubtless, by the same generous impulse which drew them from her heart, had involuntarily thrust her head forward out of the shadow of the heavy curtains, thereby exposing to view her white forehead, her luxuriant blond hair, her bright red lips, and her lovely eyes, wet with tears, Canolles started back, for it was as if a vision had passed before his eyes, and it seemed to him as if he were once more inhaling a perfume the memory of which alone sufficed to intoxicate him. It seemed to him that one of the golden doors through which pass lovely dreams, opened to bring back to him the vanished swarm of gladsome thoughts and joys of love. He gazed with more assurance and with new light at the bed, and in a second, by the passing glare of a flash which lighted up the whole past, he recognized in the princess lying before him the Vicomte de Cambes.

For some moments his agitation had been so great that the princess could attribute it to the stern reproach which had stung him so deeply, and as her impulsive movement lasted but an instant, as she drew back almost immediately into the shadow, covered her eyes once more, and hid her slender white hand, she essayed, not without emotion, but without anxiety, to take up the conversation where she had left it.

"You were saying, monsieur?" said she.

But Canolles was dazzled, fascinated; visions were passing and repassing before his eyes, and his brain was in a whirl; his senses forsook him; he was on the point of throwing respect to the wind, and of asking questions. But an instinctive feeling, perhaps that which God implants in the hearts of those who love, which women call bashfulness, but which is nothing more nor less than avarice, counselled Canolles to dissemble still and wait; not to put an end to his dream, not to compromise by an imprudent, hasty word the happiness of his whole life.

He did not add a gesture or a word to what he was called upon to do or say. Great God! what would become of him if this great princess should suddenly recognize him; if he should inspire her now with horror as he had inspired her with suspicion at Master Biscarros' inn; if she should recur to the accusation she had abandoned; and if she should conclude that it was his purpose to avail himself of his official position, of a royal command, to continue a pursuit, which was pardonable so long as the Vicomte or Vicomtesse de Cambes was its object, but became rank insolence, almost a crime, when directed, against a princess of the blood?

"But," he suddenly reflected, "is it possible that a princess of her name and station could have been travelling about alone with a single attendant?"

Thereupon, as always happens under such circumstances, when a wavering, despairing hope seeks something to revive it, Canolles in desperation let his eyes wander about the room until they fell upon the portrait of the woman holding her son by the hand.

At the sight a ray of light flashed through his mind, and he instinctively stepped nearer to the portrait. The pseudo-princess could not restrain a slight exclamation, and when Canolles, hearing her voice, turned his head, he saw that her face was altogether hidden from him.

"Oho!" said Canolles to himself, "what does that mean? Either it was the princess whom I met in the Bordeaux road, or I am the victim of a trick, and the person in that bed is not the princess. At all events, we will soon see."

"Madame," he said, abruptly, "I know not what to think of your present silence, and I recognize—"

"Whom do you recognize?" hastily exclaimed the lady in the bed.

"I recognize the fact," continued Canolles, "that I have been so unfortunate as to inspire in you the same feeling I inspired in the princess dowager."

"Ah!" the voice involuntarily gave utterance to this sigh of relief.

Canolles' remark was not strictly logical, perhaps, and had little relevancy to their conversation, but his purpose was accomplished. He noticed the

sensation of terror which prompted the interruption, and the joyful sensation with which his last words were received.

"But," he continued, "I am none the less compelled to say to your Highness, distasteful as it is to me, that I am to remain at the château and accompany your Highness wherever it may be your pleasure to go."

"So that I cannot be alone even in my own apartments?" cried the princess. "Ah! monsieur, that is worse than an indignity!"

"I have informed your Highness that such are my instructions; but I beg you to have no fears on that score," added Canolles, with a piercing glance at the occupant of the bed, and emphasizing every word; "you should know better than any one that I am not slow to yield to a woman's entreaties."

"I?" cried the princess, whose tone denoted more embarrassment than surprise. "In truth, monsieur, I cannot fathom your meaning; I have no idea to what circumstance you allude."

"Madame," rejoined Canolles, bowing, "I thought that the servant who announced me to your Highness mentioned my name. I am Baron de Canolles."

"Indeed," said the princess in a more confident voice; "what matters it to me, monsieur?"

"I thought that having already had the honor of obliging your Highness—"

"Of obliging me! how, I pray to know?" retorted the voice, in a changed tone, which reminded Canolles of a certain very wrathful, but at the same time very timorous voice, which he remembered too well.

"By carrying out my instructions to the letter," he replied with the utmost respect.

The princess's apprehension seemed to be allayed once more.

"Monsieur," said she, "I have no wish to make you remiss in your duty; carry out your instructions, whatever they may be."

"Madame, I am as yet, I am happy to say, entirely unskilled in the persecution of women, and know even less of the method to be employed in insulting a princess. I have the honor therefore to repeat to your Highness what I have already said to the princess dowager, that I am your very humble servant. Deign to give me your word that you will not leave the château unaccompanied by me, and I will relieve you of my presence, which, as I can well understand, is hateful to your Highness."

"But in that case, monsieur," said the princess, quickly, "you will not carry out your orders."

"I shall do what my conscience tells me that I ought to do."

"Monsieur de Canolles, I swear that I will not leave Chantilly without giving you due notice."

"Then, madame," said Canolles, bowing to the ground, "forgive me for having been the involuntary cause of arousing your wrath for an instant. Your Highness will not see me again until you are pleased to summon me."

"I thank you, baron," said the voice, with a joyful inflection, which seemed to find an echo in the passage. "Go, go! I thank you; to-morrow I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again."

This time the baron recognized, beyond possibility of mistake, the voice, the eyes, and the unspeakably delicious smile of the fascinating being who slipped between his fingers, so to speak, the night that the courier brought him the order from the Duc d'Épernon. A last glance at the portrait, dimly lighted as it was, showed the baron, whose eyes were beginning to be accustomed to the half-darkness, the aquiline nose of the Maillé family, the black hair and deep-set eyes of the princess; while the woman before him, who had just played through the first act of the difficult part she had undertaken, had the eye level with the face, the straight nose with dilated nostrils, the mouth dimpled at the corners by frequent smiling, and the plump cheeks which denote anything rather than the habit of serious meditation.

Canolles knew all that he wished to know; he bowed once more as respectfully as if he still believed that he was in the princess's presence, and withdrew to the apartment set apart for him.

II.

Canolles had formed no definite plan of action. Once in his own quarters he began to stride rapidly back and forth, as undecided folk are wont to do, without noticing that Castorin, who was awaiting his return, rose when he saw him, and was following him, holding in his hands a robe de chambre, behind which he was hardly visible.

Castorin stumbled over a chair and Canolles turned about.

"Well," said he, "what are you doing with that robe de chambre?"

"I am waiting for monsieur to take off his coat."

"I don't know when I shall take off my coat. Put the robe de chambre on a chair and wait."

"What! monsieur does not propose to take off his coat?" queried Castorin, who was by nature a capricious rascal, but seemed on this occasion more intractable than ever. "Monsieur does not intend to retire at once?"

"No."

"When does monsieur intend to retire, pray?"

"What's that to you?"

"It's a great deal to me, as I am very tired."

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed Canolles, pausing in his walk, and looking Castorin in the face, "you are very tired, are you?"

It was easy to read upon the lackey's face the impertinent expression common to all servants who are dying with the longing to be turned out of doors.

Canolles shrugged his shoulders.

"Go and wait in the antechamber," said he; "when I have need of you I will ring."

"I forewarn monsieur that if he delays long, he will not find me in the antechamber."

"Where shall you be, I pray to know?"

"In my bed. It seems to me that after travelling two hundred leagues it is high time to go to bed."

"Monsieur Castorin," said Canolles, "you are a clown."

"If monsieur considers a clown unworthy to be his servant, monsieur has but to say the word, and I will relieve him of my services," rejoined Castorin, with his most majestic air.

Canolles was not in a patient mood, and if Castorin had possessed the power to catch a glimpse even of the shadow of the storm that was brewing in his master's mind, it is certain that, however anxious he might have been to be free, he would have chosen another time to hazard the suggestion. Canolles walked up to him, and took one of the buttons of his doublet between his thumb and forefinger,—the familiar trick, long afterwards, of a much greater man than poor Canolles ever was.

"Say that again," said he.

"I say," rejoined Castorin with unabated impudence, "that if monsieur is not content with me I will relieve monsieur of my services."

Canolles let go the button, and went gravely to get his cane. Castorin was not slow to grasp the meaning of that manœuvre.

"Monsieur," he cried, "beware what you do! I am no longer a common valet; I am in the service of Madame la Princesse!"

"Oho!" said Canolles, lowering the cane which was already in the air; "oho! you are in the service of Madame la Princesse?"

"Yes, monsieur, since half an hour ago."

"Who engaged you to take service with her?"

"Monsieur Pompée, her intendant."

"Monsieur Pompée?"

"Yes."

"Well! why didn't you tell me so at once?" cried Canolles. "Yes, yes, my dear Castorin, you are quite right to leave my service, and here are two pistoles to indemnify you for the blows I was on the point of giving you."

"Oh!" ejaculated Castorin, not daring to take the money; "what does that mean? Is monsieur making sport of me?"

"Not so. On the contrary I bid you by all means be Madame la Princesse's servant. When is your service to begin, by the way?"

"From the moment that monsieur gives me my liberty."

"Very well; I give you your liberty from to-morrow morning."

"And until then?"

"Until to-morrow morning you are my servant and must obey me."

"Willingly! What are monsieur's orders?" said Castorin, deciding to take the two pistoles.

"I order you, as you are so desirous to sleep, to undress and get into my bed."

"What? what is monsieur's meaning? I do not understand,"

"You don't need to understand, but simply to obey. Undress at once; I will assist you."

"Monsieur will assist me?"

"To be sure; as you are to play the part of the Baron de Canolles, I must needs play the part of Castorin."

Thereupon, without awaiting his servant's leave, the baron removed his doublet and hat and put them on himself, and locking the door upon him before he had recovered from his surprise, ran rapidly downstairs.

He was at last beginning to see through the mystery, although certain parts of it were still enveloped in mist. For two hours past it had seemed to him as if nothing of all that he had seen or heard was perfectly natural. The attitude of

every one at Chantilly was constrained and stiff; everybody that he met seemed to be playing a part, and yet the various details all seemed to harmonize in a way which indicated to the queen's envoy that he must redouble his watchfulness if he did not choose to be himself the victim of some grand mystification.

The presence of Pompée in conjunction with that of the Vicomte de Cambes cleared away many doubts, and the few which still remained in Canolles' mind were completely dissipated when, as he left the court-yard, he saw, notwithstanding the profound darkness of the night, four men coming toward him and about to enter the door through which he had just passed. They were led by the same valet who ushered him into the presence of the princess. Another man wrapped in a great cloak followed behind.

The little party halted in the doorway awaiting the orders of the man in the cloak.

"You know where he lodges," said the latter, in an imperious tone, addressing the valet, "and you know him, for you introduced him. Do you watch him, therefore, and see that he doesn't leave his apartment; station your men on the stairway, in the corridor, anywhere, so that, without suspecting it, he may be watched himself, instead of watching their Highnesses."

Canolles made himself more invisible than a ghost in the darkest corner he could find; from there, unseen himself, he saw his five keepers pass through the door, while the man in the cloak, having made sure that they were carrying out his orders, returned the same way that he came.

"This gives me no very definite information," said Canolles to himself as he looked after him, "for it may be simply their indignation that leads them to return like for like. If that devil of a Castorin won't cry out or do some idiotic thing! I did wrong not to gag him; unluckily it's too late now. Well, I must commence my round."

With that, Canolles cast a keen glance around, then crossed the court-yard to that wing of the building behind which the stables were located.

All the life of the château seemed to have taken refuge in that locality. He could hear horses pawing the ground, and hurried footsteps. In the harness-room there was a great clashing of bits and spurs. Carriages were being rolled out of the sheds, and voices, stifled by apprehension, but which could be distinguished by listening attentively, were calling and answering one another. Canolles stood still for a moment listening. There was no room for doubt that preparations for departure were in progress.

He swiftly traversed the distance between the wings, passed through an arched gateway, and reached the front of the château.

There he stopped.

The windows of the ground-floor apartments were too brilliantly illuminated for him not to divine that a large number of torches were lighted inside, and as they went and came, causing great patches of light to sweep across the level turf, Canolles understood that that was the centre of activity, and the true seat of the enterprise.

He hesitated at first to pry into the secret which they were trying to hide from him. But he reflected that his position as an agent of the queen, and the responsibility thereby imposed upon him, would excuse many things to the satisfaction of the most scrupulous conscience. So he crept cautiously along the wall, the base of which was made all the darker by the brilliantly lighted windows, which were some six or seven feet from the ground. He stepped upon a stepping-stone, thence to a projection in the wall, clung with one hand to a ring, with the other to the window-sill, and darted through a corner of the window the keenest and most searching glance that ever made its way into the sanctuary of a conspiracy.

This is what he saw.

A woman standing before a toilet-table and putting in place the last pin necessary to hold her travelling-hat upon her head, and near by, several maids dressing a child in hunting costume. The child's back was turned to Canolles, and he could see nothing but his long, blond curls. But the light of two six-branched candelabra, held upon either side of the toilet-table by footmen in the attitude of caryatides, shone full upon the lady's face, in which Canolles at once recognized the original of the portrait he had recently examined in the half-light of the princess's apartment. There were the long face, the stern mouth, the imperiously curved nose of the woman whose living image stood before Canolles. Everything about her betokened the habit of domination,—her imperious gesture, her sparkling eye, the abrupt movement of her head.

In like manner everything in the bearing of those about her betokened the habit of unquestioning obedience,—their frequent bowing, the haste with which they ran to bring whatever she might ask for, their promptness in responding to the voice of their sovereign, or anticipating her commands.

Several officials of the household, among whom Canolles recognized the valet de chambre, were pouring into portmanteaux, trunks, and chests, some jewels, others money, and others the various portions of that woman's arsenal known as the toilet. The little prince, meanwhile, was playing about among the assiduous servitors, but by a strange fatality Canolles was unable to catch a glimpse of his face.

"I suspected it," he muttered; "they are putting a trick upon me, and these

people are making preparations to go away. Very good: but I can with a wave of my hand change this scene of mystification into a scene of lamentation; I have only to run out upon the terrace and blow this silver whistle three times, and in five minutes two hundred men will have burst into the château in answer to its shrill blast, will have arrested the princesses and bound all these fellows hand and foot who are laughing together so slyly. Yes," he continued, but now it was his heart that spoke rather than his lips; "yes, but I should bring irretrievable ruin upon that other, who is sleeping, or pretending to sleep, over yonder; she will hate me, and it will be no more than I deserve. "Worse than all, she will despise me, saying that I have acted the spy to the end—and yet, if she obeys the princess, why should not I obey the queen?"

At that moment, as if chance were determined to combat these symptoms of returning resolution, a door of the apartment where the princess was dressing opened, and gave admittance to two persons, a man of fifty years and a woman of twenty, who hurried in with joyful faces. At that sight Canolles' whole heart passed into his eyes, for he recognized the lovely hair, the fresh lips, the speaking eye of the Vicomte de Cambes, as that individual, with smiling face, respectfully kissed the hand of Clémence de Maillé, Princesse de Condé. But on this occasion the viscount wore the garments of her own sex, and made the loveliest viscountess on the face of the earth.

Canolles would have given ten years of his life to hear their conversation; but to no purpose did he glue his ear to the glass; an unintelligible buzzing was all that he could hear. He saw the princess bid the younger woman adieu, and kiss her on the brow, saying as she did so something which made all the others laugh; he then saw the viscountess return to the state apartments with some inferior officials clothed in the uniforms of their superiors. He even saw the worthy Pompée, swollen with pride, in orange coat trimmed with silver-lace, strutting about with noble mien, and like Don Jophet of Armenia, leaning upon the hilt of an enormous rapier, in attendance upon his mistress, as she gracefully raised the train of her long satin robe.

Then, through another door at the left, the princess's escort began to file out noiselessly, led by Madame de Condé herself, whose bearing was that of a queen, not of a fugitive. Next to her came Vialas, carrying in his arms the little Duc d'Enghien, wrapped in a cloak; then Lenet, carrying a carved casket and divers bundles of papers, and last of all the intendant of the château, closing the procession, which was preceded by two officers with drawn swords.

They all left the room by a secret passageway. Canolles immediately leaped down from his post of observation and ran to the gateway, where the lights had meanwhile been extinguished; and he saw the whole cortège pass silently through on the way to the stables; the hour of departure was at hand.

At that moment Canolles thought only of the duties imposed upon him by the mission with which the queen had intrusted him. In the person of this woman who was about to leave the château, he was allowing armed civil war to go abroad and gnaw once more at the entrails of France. Certes, it was a shameful thing for him, a man, to become a spy upon a woman, and her keeper; but the Duchesse de Longueville, who set fire to the four corners of France, she was a woman too.

Canolles rushed toward the terrace, which overlooked the park, and put the silver whistle to his lips.

It would have been all up with the preparations for departure! Madame de Condé would not have left Chantilly, or, if she had done so, would not have taken a hundred steps before she and her escort were surrounded by a force thrice her own; and thus Canolles would have fulfilled his mission without the least danger to himself; thus, at a single blow, he would have destroyed the fortune and the future of the house of Condé, and would by the same blow have built up his own fortune upon the ruins of theirs, and have laid the foundations of future grandeur, as the Vitrys and Luynes did in the old days, and more recently the Guitauts and Miossens, under circumstances which were perhaps of less moment to the welfare of the realm.

But Canolles raised his eyes to the apartment where the soft, sad light of the night-lamp shone behind curtains of red velvet, and he fancied that he could see the shadow of his beloved outlined upon the great white window-blinds.

Thereupon all his resolutions, all his selfish arguments faded away before the gentle beams of that light, as the dreams and phantoms of the night fade away before the first beams of the rising sun.

"Monsieur de Mazarin," he said to himself in a passionate outburst, "is so rich that he can afford to lose all these princes and princesses who seek to escape him; but I am not rich enough to lose the treasure which belongs henceforth to me, and which I will guard as jealously as a dragon. At this moment she is alone, in my power, dependent upon me; at any hour of the day or night I can enter her apartment; she will not fly without telling me, for I have her sacred word. What care I though the queen be deceived and Monsieur de Mazarin lose his temper? I was told to watch Madame la Princesse, and I am watching her. They should have given me her description or have set a more practised spy than myself upon her."

With that, Canolles put the whistle in his pocket, listened to the grinding of the bolts, heard the distant rumbling of the carriages over the bridge in the park, and the clattering of many horses' hoofs, growing gradually fainter, until it died away altogether. When everything had disappeared, when there was

nothing more to see or hear, heedless of the fact that he was staking his life against a woman's love,—that is to say, against a mere shadow of happiness,—he glided into the second deserted court-yard, and cautiously ascended the staircase leading to his apartment, the darkness being unrelieved by the faintest gleam of light.

But, cautious as his movements were, when he reached the corridor he unavoidably stumbled against a person who was apparently listening at his door, and who uttered a muffled cry of alarm.

"Who are you? Who are you?" demanded the person in question, in a frightened voice.

"Pardieu!" said Canolles, "who are you yourself, who prowl about this staircase like a spy?"

"I am Pompée."

"Madame la Princesse's intendant?"

"Yes, yes,—Madame la Princesse's intendant."

"Ah! that's a lucky chance; I am Castorin."

"Castorin, Monsieur de Canolles' valet?"

"Himself."

"Ah! my dear Castorin," said Pompée, "I'll wager that I gave you a good fright."

"Fright?"

"Yes! Dame! when one has never been a soldier—Can I do anything for you, my dear friend?" continued Pompée, resuming his air of importance.

"Yes."

"Tell me what it is."

"You can inform Madame la Princesse immediately that my master desires to speak with her."

"At this hour?"

"Even so."

"Impossible!"

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then she will not receive my master?"

"No."

"By order of the king, Monsieur Pompée! Go and tell her that."

"By order of the king!" cried Pompée. "I will go."

He ran precipitately downstairs, impelled at once by respect and fear, two greyhounds which are quite capable of making a tortoise run at their pace.

Canolles kept on and entered his room, where he found Castorin snoring lustily, stretched out magisterially in a large easy-chair. He resumed his uniform and awaited the result of his latest step.

"Faith!" he said to himself, "if I don't do Monsieur de Mazarin's business very successfully, it seems to me that I don't do badly with my own."

He waited in vain, however, for Pompée's return; and after ten minutes, finding that he did not come, nor any other in his stead, he resolved to present himself unannounced. He therefore aroused Monsieur Castorin, whose bile was soothed by an hour's sleep, bade him, in a tone which admitted no reply, to be ready for any thing that might happen, and bent his steps toward the princess's apartments.

At the door he found a footman in very ill humor, because the bell rang just as his service was at an end, and he was looking forward, like Monsieur Castorin, to a refreshing slumber after the fatiguing day.

"What do you wish, monsieur?" he asked when he saw Canolles.

"I request the honor of paying my respects to Madame la Princesse."

"At this hour, monsieur?"

"What's that? 'at this hour'?"

"Yes, it seems to me very late."

"How dare you say that, villain?"

"But, monsieur—" stammered the footman.

"I no longer request, I demand," said Canolles, in a supremely haughty tone.

"You demand? Only Madame la Princesse gives orders here."

"The king gives orders everywhere. By the king's order!"

The lackey shuddered and hung his head.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said, trembling from head to foot, "but I am only a poor servant, and cannot take it upon myself to open Madame la Princesse's door; permit me to go and awaken a chamberlain."

"Are the chamberlains accustomed to retire at eleven o'clock at the château of Chantilly?"

"They hunted all day," faltered the footman.

"In truth," muttered Canolles, "I must give them time to dress some one as a chamberlain. Very well," he added aloud; "go; I will wait."

The footman started off on the run to carry the alarm through the château, where Pompée, terrified beyond measure by his unfortunate encounter, had already sown unspeakable dismay.

Canolles, left to his own devices, pricked up his ears and opened his eyes.

He heard much running to and fro in the salons and corridors; he saw by the light of expiring torches men armed with muskets taking their places at the angles of the stairways; on all sides he felt that the silence of stupefaction which reigned throughout the château a moment before was succeeded by a threatening murmur.

Canolles put his hand to his whistle and drew near a window, whence he could see the dark mass of the trees, at the foot of which he had stationed the two hundred men he brought with him.

"No," said he, "that would simply lead to a pitched battle, and that is not what I want. It's much better to wait; the worst that can happen to me by waiting is to be murdered, while if I act hastily I may ruin her."

Canolles had no sooner come to the end of this reflection than the door opened and a new personage appeared upon the scene.

"Madame la Princesse is not visible," said this personage, so hurriedly that he had not time to salute the gentleman; "she is in bed, and has given positive orders that no one be admitted."

"Who are you?" said Canolles, eying the new-comer from head to foot. "And who taught you to speak to a gentleman with your hat on your head?"

As he asked the question Canolles coolly removed the man's hat with the end of his cane.

"Monsieur!" cried the latter, stepping back with dignity.

"I asked you who you are."

"I am—I am, as you can see by my uniform, captain of her Highness's guards."

Canolles smiled. He had had time to scrutinize his interlocutor, and saw that he was dealing with some butler with a paunch as round as his bottles, some prosperous Vatel imprisoned in an official doublet, which, from lack of

time, or superabundance of belly, was not properly secured.

"Very good, master captain of the guards," said Canolles, "pick up your hat and answer."

The captain executed the first branch of Canolles' injunction like one who had studied that excellent maxim of military discipline: "To know how to command, one must know how to obey."

"Captain of the guards!" continued Canolles. "Peste! that's a fine post to hold!"

"Why, yes, monsieur, well enough; but what then?" observed that official, drawing himself up.

"Don't swell out so much, Monsieur le Capitaine," said Canolles, "or you will burst off the last button, and your breeches will fall down about your heels, which would be most disgraceful."

"But who are you, monsieur?" demanded the pretended captain, taking his turn at asking questions.

"Monsieur, I will follow the example of urbanity set by you, and will answer your question as you answered mine. I am captain in the regiment of Navailles, and I come hither in the king's name as his ambassador, clothed with powers—which will be exerted in a peaceful or violent manner, according as his Majesty's commands are or are not obeyed."

"Violent!" cried the pretended captain. "In a violent manner?"

"Very violent, I give you warning."

"Even where her Highness is personally concerned?"

"Why not? Her Highness is his Majesty's first subject, nothing more."

"Monsieur, do not resort to force; I have fifty men-at-arms ready to avenge her Highness's honor."

Canolles did not choose to tell him that his fifty men-at-arms were simply footmen and scullions, fit troops to serve under such a leader, and that, so far as the princess's honor was concerned, it was at that moment riding along the Bordeaux road with the princess.

He replied simply, with that indifferent air which is more terrifying than an open threat, and is familiar to brave men and those who are accustomed to danger:—

"If you have fifty men-at-arms, Monsieur le Capitaine, I have two hundred soldiers, who form the advance-guard of the royal army. Do you propose to put yourself in open rebellion against his Majesty?"

"No, monsieur, no!" the stout man hastened to reply, sadly crestfallen; "God forbid! but I beg you to bear me witness that I yield to force alone."

"That is the least I can do for you as your brother-in-arms."

"Very well; then I will take you to Madame the Princess Dowager, who is not yet asleep."

Canolles had no need to reflect to appreciate the terrible danger that lay hidden in this snare; but he turned it aside without ceremony, thanks to his omnipotence.

"My orders are, not to see Madame the Princess Dowager, but the younger princess."

The captain of the guards once more bent his head, imparted a retrograde movement to his great legs, trailed his long sword across the floor, and stalked majestically through the door between two sentries, who stood trembling there throughout the scene we have described, and were very near quitting their post when they heard of the presence of two hundred men,—so little disposed were they to become martyrs to fidelity in the sacking of the château of Chantilly.

Ten minutes later the captain returned, followed by two guards, and with wearisome formality undertook to escort Canolles to the apartment of the princess, to which he was at last introduced without further delay.

He recognized the room itself, the furniture, the bed, and even the perfume, but he looked in vain for two things: the portrait of the true princess which he had noticed at the time of his first visit, and to which he owed his first suspicion of the trick they proposed to play him; and the figure of the false princess, for whom he had made so great a sacrifice.

The portrait had been removed; and as a precautionary measure, somewhat tardily adopted, the face of the person on the bed was turned toward the wall with true princely impertinence. Two women were standing in the passage between the bed and the wall.

The gentleman would willingly have passed over this lack of courtesy; but as the thought came to his mind that possibly some new substitution had enabled Madame de Cambes to take flight as the princess had done, his hair stood on end with dismay, and he determined to make sure at once of the identity of the person who occupied the bed, by exerting the supreme power with which he was clothed by his mission.

"Madame," said he with a low bow, "I ask your Highness's pardon for presenting myself at this hour, especially after I had given you my word that I would await your commands; but I have noticed a great stir in the château—"

The person in the bed started, but did not reply. Canolles looked in vain for

some indication that the woman before him was really the one he sought, but amid the billows of lace and the soft mass of quilts and coverlets it was impossible for him to do anything more than distinguish a recumbent form.

"And," he continued, "I owe it to myself to satisfy myself that this bed still contains the same person with whom I had the honor of half an hour's conversation."

These words were followed, not by a simple start, but by a downright contortion of terror. The movement did not escape the notice of Canolles, who was alarmed by it.

"If she has deceived me," he thought, "if, despite her solemn promise, she has fled, I will leave the château. I will take horse, I will place myself at the head of my two hundred men, and I will capture my runaways, though I have to set fire to thirty villages to light my road."

He waited a moment longer; but the person in the bed did not speak or turn toward him; it was evident that she wished to gain time.

"Madame," said Canolles, at last giving vent to a feeling of impatience, which he had not the courage to conceal, "I beg your Highness to remember that I am sent hither by the king, and in the king's name I demand the honor of seeing your face."

"Oh! this inquisition is unendurable," exclaimed a trembling voice, which sent a thrill of joy through the young officer's veins; for he recognized therein a quality which no other voice could counterfeit. "If it is, as you say, the king who compels you to act thus, the king is still a mere child, and does not yet know the duties of a gentleman; to force a woman to show her face is no less insulting than to snatch away her mask."

"There is a phrase, madame, before which women bend the knee when it is uttered by a king, and kings when it is uttered by destiny. That phrase is: 'It must be.'"

"Very well, since it must be, since I am alone and helpless against the king's order and his messenger's persistence, I obey, monsieur; look at me."

Thereupon the rampart of pillows, bed-clothes, and laces which protected the fair besieged was suddenly put aside, and through the improvised breach appeared the blond head and lovely face which the voice led him to expect to see,—the cheeks flushed with shame, rather than with indignation. With the swift glance of a man accustomed to equivalent, if not strictly similar situations, Canolles satisfied himself that it was not anger which kept those eyes, veiled by velvety eyelashes, bent upon the ground, or made that white hand tremble, as it confined the rebellious waves of hair upon an alabaster

neck.

The pseudo-princess remained for an instant in that attitude, which she would have liked to make threatening, but which expressed nothing more than vexation, while Canolles gazed at her, breathing ecstatically, and repressing with both hands the tumultuous, joyful beating of his heart.

"Well, monsieur," said the ill-used fair one after a few seconds of silence, "has my humiliation gone far enough? Have you scrutinized me at your leisure? Your triumph is complete, is it not? Show yourself a generous victor, then, and retire."

"I would be glad to do so, madame; but I must carry out my instructions to the end. Thus far I have performed only that part of my mission which concerns your Highness; but it is not enough to have seen you; I must now see Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien."

A terrible silence followed these words, uttered in the tone of a man who knows that he has the right to command, and who proposes to be obeyed. The false princess raised herself in bed, leaning upon her hand, and fixed upon Canolles one of those strange glances which seemed to belong to none but her, they expressed so many things at once. It seemed to say: "Have you recognized me? Do you know who I really am? If you know, forgive me and spare me; you are the stronger, so take pity on me."

Canolles understood all that her glance said to him; but he hardened himself against its seductive eloquence, and answered it in spoken words:—

"Impossible, madame; my orders are explicit."

"Let everything be done as you choose, then, monsieur, as you have no consideration for rank or position. Go; these ladies will take you to my son's bedside."

"Might not these ladies, instead of taking me to your son, bring your son to you, madame? It seems to me that that would be infinitely preferable."

"Why so, monsieur?" inquired the false princess, evidently more disturbed by this latest request than by any previous one.,

"Because, in the meantime, I could communicate to your Highness a part of my mission which must be communicated to you alone."

"To me alone?"

"To you alone," Canolles replied, with a lower reverence than any he had achieved as yet.

The princess's expression, which had changed from dignity to supplication, and from supplication to anxiety, now changed once more to abject terror, as

she fixed her eyes upon Canolles' face.

"What is there to alarm you so in the idea of a tête-à-tête with me, madame?" said he. "Are you not a princess, and am not I a gentleman?"

"Yes, you are right, monsieur, and I am wrong to be alarmed. Yes, although I now have the pleasure of seeing you for the first time, your reputation as a courteous, loyal gentleman has come to my ears. Go, mesdames, and bring Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien to me."

The two women came forth from the passage beside the bed, and walked toward the door; they turned once to be sure that the order was intended to be obeyed, and at a gesture confirming the words of their mistress, or of her locum tenens, left the room.

Canolles looked after them until they had closed the door. Then his eyes, sparkling with joy, returned to the princess.

"Tell me, Monsieur de Canolles," said she, sitting up and folding her hands, "tell me why you persecute me thus."

As she spoke she looked at the young officer, not with the haughty gaze of a princess, which she had tried with but poor success, but with a look so touching and so full of meaning that all the details of their first meeting, all the intoxicating episodes of the journey, all the memories of his nascent love came rushing over him, and enveloped his heart as with perfumed vapor.

"Madame," said he, stepping toward the bed, "it is Madame de Condé whom I am here to watch in the king's name,—not you, who are not Madame de Condé."

The young woman to whom these words were addressed gave a little shriek, became pale as death, and pressed one of her hands against her heart.

"What do you mean, monsieur?" she cried; "who do you think I am?"

"Oh! as for that," retorted Canolles, "I should be much embarrassed to explain; for I would be almost willing to swear that you are the most charming of viscounts were you not the most adorable of viscountesses."

"Monsieur," said the pretended princess, hoping to awe Canolles by reasserting her dignity, "of all you say to me I understand but one thing, and that is that you insult me!"

"Madame," said Canolles, "we do not fail in respect to God because we adore him. We do not insult angels because we kneel before them."

And Canolles bent forward as if to fall on his knees.

"Monsieur," said the countess, hastily, checking him with a gesture,

—"monsieur, the Princesse de Condé cannot suffer—"

"The Princesse de Condé, madame, is at this moment riding along the Bordeaux road on a good horse, accompanied by Monsieur Vialas her equerry, Monsieur Lenet her adviser, her gentlemen in waiting, her officers, her whole household, in short; and she has no concern in what is taking place between the Baron de Canolles and the Vicomte, or Vicomtesse, de Cambes."

"What are you saying, monsieur? Are you mad?"

"No, madame; I am simply telling you what I have myself seen and heard."

"In that case, if you have seen and heard all that you say, your mission should be at an end."

"You think so, madame? Must I then return to Paris, and confess to the queen that, rather than grieve the woman whom I love (I name no one, madame, so do not look so angrily at me), I have violated her orders, allowed her enemy to escape, and closed my eyes to what I saw,—that I have, in a word, betrayed, yes, betrayed the cause of my king?"

The viscountess seemed to be touched, and gazed at the baron with almost tender compassion.

"Have you not the best of all excuses," said she, "the impossibility of doing otherwise? Could you, alone, stop Madame la Princesse's imposing escort? Do your orders bid you to fight fifty gentlemen single-handed?"

"I was not alone, madame," said Canolles, shaking his head. "I had, and still have, in the woods yonder, not five hundred yards away, two hundred soldiers, whom I can summon in a moment by blowing my whistle. It would have been a simple matter, therefore, for me to stop Madame la Princesse, who would have found resistance of no avail. But even if the force under my command had been weaker than her escort, instead of four times stronger, I could still have fought, and sold my life dearly. That would have been as easy to me," the young man continued, bending forward more and more, "as it would be sweet to me to touch that hand if I dared."

The hand upon which the baron's glowing eyes were fixed, the soft, plump, white hand, had fallen outside the bed, and moved nervously at every word the baron spoke. The viscountess herself, blinded by the electric current of love, the effects of which she had felt in the little inn at Jaulnay, could not remember that she ought to withdraw the hand which had furnished Canolles with so happy a simile; she forgot her duty in the premises, and the young man, falling upon his knees, put his lips timidly to the hand, which was sharply withdrawn at the contact, as if a red-hot iron had burned it.

"Thanks, Monsieur de Canolles," said she. "I thank you from the bottom of

my heart for what you have done for me; believe that I shall never forget it. But I pray you to double the value of the service by realizing my position and leaving me. Must we not part, now that your task is ended?"

This we, uttered in a tone so soft that it seemed to contain a shade of regret, made the most secret fibres of Canolles' heart vibrate painfully. Indeed, excessive joy is almost always accompanied by something very like pain.

"I will obey, madame," said he; "but I will venture to observe, not as a pretext for disobedience, but to spare you possible remorse hereafter, that if I obey I am lost. The moment that I admit my error, and cease to pretend to be deceived by your stratagem, I become the victim of my good-nature. I am declared a traitor, imprisoned—shot, it may be; and it will be no more than just, for I am a traitor."

Claire cried out in dismay, and herself seized Canolles' hand, which she immediately let fall again with charming confusion.

"Then what are we to do?"

The young man's heart swelled. That blessed we seemed in a fair way to become Madame de Cambes' favorite pronoun.

"What! ruin you!—you, who are so kind and generous!" she exclaimed. "I ruin you? Oh! never! At what sacrifice can I save you? Tell me! tell me!"

"You must permit me, madame, to play my part to the end. It is essential, as I told you but now, that I seem to be your dupe, and that I report to Monsieur de Mazarin what I see, not what I know."

"Yes, but if it is discovered that you have done all this for me, that we have met before, that you have seen my face, then I shall be the one to be ruined: do not forget that!"

"Madame," said Canolles, with admirably simulated melancholy, "I do not think, judging from your coldness, and the dignity which it costs you so little to maintain in my presence, that you are likely to divulge a secret which, after all, has no existence in your heart, at all events."

Claire made no reply; but a fleeting glance, an almost imperceptible smile, replied in a way to make Canolles the happiest of men.

"I may remain, then?" he said, with an indescribable smile.

"Since it must be so!" was the reply.

"In that case, I must write to Monsieur de Mazarin."

"Yes, go."

"What's that?"

"I told you to go and write to him."

"Not so. I must write to him here, from your room; I must date my letter at the foot of your bed."

"But it's not proper."

"Here are my instructions, madame; read them for yourself."

And Canolles handed a paper to the viscountess, who read:—

"Monsieur le Baron de Canolles will keep Madame la Princesse and her son, Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien, in sight—"

"In sight," said Canolles.

"In sight; yes, so it says."

Claire realized all the advantage that a man as deeply in love as Canolles was might take upon the strength of such instructions, but she also realized how great a service she would render the princess by prolonging the deception of the court.

"Write, then," she said, resignedly.

Canolles questioned her with his eyes, and in the same way she indicated a secretary, which contained all the essentials for writing. Canolles opened it, took therefrom pen, ink, and paper, placed them upon a table, moved the table as near as possible to the bed, asked permission to be seated, as if Claire were still in his eyes Madame la Princesse, and wrote the following despatch to Monsieur de Mazarin:—

"MONSEIGNEUR,—I arrived at the château of Chantilly at nine o'clock in the evening; you will see that I travelled with all diligence, as I had the honor to take leave of your Eminence at half-past six.

"I found the two princesses in bed,—the princess dowager quite seriously ill, Madame la Princesse tired out after hunting all day.

"According to your Eminence's instructions I waited upon their Highnesses, who immediately dismissed all their guests, and I am at this moment keeping watch upon Madame la

Princesse and her son."

"And her son," Canolles repeated, turning to the viscountess. "The devil! that sounds like a lie, and yet I would prefer not to lie."

"Have no fear," rejoined Claire, laughing; "if you haven't seen my son yet, you shall see him very soon."

"And her son," resumed Canolles, echoing her laugh.

"I have the honor of writing this letter to your Eminence
in Madame la Princesse's bedroom, sitting by her bedside."

He signed his name, and, having respectfully asked Claire's permission, pulled a bell-cord. A valet de chambre answered the bell.

"Call my servant," said Canolles; "and when he is in the antechamber inform me."

Within five minutes the baron was informed that Monsieur Castorin was waiting.

"Take this letter," said Canolles, "and carry it to the officer in command of my two hundred men; bid him send an express to Paris with it."

"But, Monsieur le Baron," rejoined Castorin, who looked upon such an errand in the middle of the night as one of the most disagreeable things imaginable, "I thought that I told you that Monsieur Pompée had engaged me to take service with Madame la Princesse."

"Very good; I transmit this order to you on behalf of Madame la Princesse. —Will not your Highness deign to confirm what I say?" he added, turning toward the bed. "You are aware how important it is that this letter be delivered at once."

"Go," said the spurious princess, with a majestic accent and gesture.

Castorin bowed to the ground and left the room.

"Now," said Claire, holding out both her little hands imploringly to Canolles, "you will leave me, will you not?"

"Pardon me; but your son, madame?"

"True," replied Claire, with a smile; "you shall see him."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when some one scratched at the door, as the custom was at that time. It was Cardinal de Richelieu, influenced, doubtless, by his love for cats, who introduced this style of knocking. During his long reign people scratched at Monsieur de Richelieu's door; afterwards at Monsieur de Chavigny's, who was entitled to succeed him in this regard, were

it only as his natural heir; and, lastly, at Monsieur de Mazarin's. Therefore they might well scratch at Madame la Princesse's door.

"They are coming," said Madame de Cambes.

"T is well. I resume my official character."

He moved the table away and the chair, put on his hat, and stood in a respectful attitude, four steps from the princess's bed.

"Come in," said Claire.

Thereupon the stateliest procession imaginable filed into the room. There were ladies' in waiting, chamberlains, functionaries of all grades,—the whole ordinary retinue of the princess.

"Madame," said the first valet de chambre, "Monseigneur le Duc d'Enghien has been awakened. He can now receive his Majesty's messenger."

Canolles' eyes, as he looked at Madame de Cambes, said as plainly as his voice could have done:—

"Is this in accordance with our agreement?"

This look, eloquent with the entreaty of a heart in distress, was perfectly understood, and in gratitude, doubtless, for all that Canolles had done,—perhaps in some measure to gratify the love for mischief which is invariably hidden in the depths of the best woman's heart,—

"Bring Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien hither," said Claire; "monsieur will see my son in my presence."

They hastened to obey, and a moment later the young prince was led into the room.

We have seen that, while he was watching every detail of the last preparations for Madame la Princesse's departure, Canolles saw the young prince playing and running about, but did not see his face. He did, however, notice his costume, which was a simple hunting-suit. He thought, therefore, that it could not be in his honor that he was arrayed in the magnificent costume in which he now saw him. His former idea, that the prince had gone with his mother, became almost a certainty; but he gazed at the heir of the illustrious Prince de Condé for some time in silence, and an imperceptible smile played about his lips, although his demeanor was no less respectful than before.

"I am too happy," he said, with a low bow, "to be vouchsafed the honor of presenting my respects to Monseigneur le Duc d'Enghien."

Madame de Cambes, upon whose face the child's great wondering eyes

were fixed, motioned to him to bow; and as it seemed to her that the air with which Canolles was following the scene was too scornful by half, she said, with a malicious deliberation which made the baron shudder, "My son, this gentleman is Monsieur de Canolles, sent hither by his Majesty. Give Monsieur de Canolles your hand to kiss."

At that command Pierrot, who had been taken in charge and drilled by Lenet, as he had agreed, put out a hand which he had had neither the time nor the means to transform into a gentleman's hand, and Canolles had no choice but to bestow, amid the stifled laughter of the spectators, a kiss upon that hand, which one less skilled in such matters than he would have had no difficulty in identifying as anything but an aristocratic member.

"Ah! Madame de Cambes!" muttered Canolles, "you shall pay me for that kiss!" And he bowed respectfully to Pierrot in acknowledgment of the honor done him. Realizing that after this trial, which was the last upon the programme, it was impossible for him to remain longer in a woman's bedroom, he turned toward the bed and said:—

"My duties for this evening are fulfilled, and it remains for me to ask your permission to retire."

"Go, monsieur," said Claire; "you see that we are very quiet here, so that nothing need disturb the tranquillity of your slumbers."

"Before I retire I venture to solicit a very great boon, madame."

"What might it be?" asked Madame de Cambes, uneasily, for the baron's tone indicated that he was planning to take revenge upon her.

"To grant me the same favor that I have received from the prince your son."

The viscountess was fairly caught. It was impossible to refuse an officer in the king's service the formal favor he thus solicited in public, and Madame de Cambes extended her trembling hand to Canolles.

He walked toward the bed as he might have walked toward the throne of a queen, took by the ends of the fingers the hand that was held out to him, knelt upon one knee, and imprinted upon the soft, white, trembling flesh a long kiss, which all the bystanders attributed to profound respect, and which the viscountess alone recognized as the equivalent of an ardent loving embrace.

"You promised me, you swore, indeed," said Canolles in an undertone, as he rose, "not to leave the château without informing me. I rely upon your promise and your oath."

"You may rely upon them, monsieur," said Claire, falling back upon her pillow, almost in a swoon.

Canolles, through whose whole being her tone sent a thrill of joy, tried to read in his fair prisoner's eyes confirmation of the hope her tone gave him. But those eyes were hermetically closed.

Canolles reflected that locked caskets are the ones which contain the most precious treasures, and he left the room with paradise in his heart.

To tell how our gentleman passed that night; to tell how his sleep and his waking were one long dream, during which he lived over and over again in his mind all the details of the chimerical adventure which had placed in his keeping the most precious treasure that a miser could ever hide away beneath the wings of his heart; to tell of the plans he devised for making the future subservient to the needs of his love and the whims of his imagination; to set forth the arguments that he used to convince himself that he was doing what he ought,—would be an utter impossibility; for folly is a wearisome thing to any other mind than a fool's.

Canolles fell asleep very late, if the feverish delirium which alternated with his waking moments can be called sleep; and yet the dawn had scarcely whitened the tops of the poplar-trees, and had not descended to the tranquil surface of the lovely ponds, where sleep the water-lilies, whose flowers open only in the sunlight, when he leaped out of bed, and, dressing himself in haste, went down into the garden. His first visit was to the wing occupied by the princess; his first glance at the window of her apartment. Either the princess was not yet asleep, or she was already awake, for a light, too bright to be produced by a mere night-lamp, shone through the closely drawn damask curtains. Canolles stopped short at the sight, which undoubtedly caused a number of insane conjectures to pass through his mind at the same instant, and, abandoning his tour of inspection, he stepped behind the pedestal of a statue which hid him from view; there, alone with his chimera, he began that everlasting dialogue of true lovers, who see the beloved object in all the poetic emanations of nature.

The baron had been at his observatory for half an hour, or thereabout, and was gazing with unspeakable bliss at the curtains which any other than he would have passed indifferently by, when a window upon the gallery opened, and the honest face of Master Pompée appeared in the opening. Everything connected with the viscountess possessed the deepest interest for Canolles; so he turned his gaze away from the seductive curtains, and thought he could detect a desire on Pompée's part to establish communication with him by signs. At first Canolles was not sure that the signs were addressed to him, and looked about to discover if any other person was near; but Pompée, observing his uncertainty, accompanied his motions with a whistle, which would have been a decidedly unseemly method for a squire to adopt to attract the attention of the ambassador of his Majesty the King of France, had it not had an excuse

in the shape of a small white object almost imperceptible to any other eyes than those of a lover, who immediately recognized in the white object a folded paper.

"A note!" thought Canolles? "she's writing to me. What does that mean?"

He drew near, trembling with apprehension, although his first sentiment was exceeding joy; but there always is a certain tincture of dread in the great joys of a lover, which is perhaps its chiefest charm: to be sure of one's happiness is to be happy no longer.

As Canolles approached, Pompée ventured to expose the paper more and more, and at last he put out his arm while Canolles held his hat. The two men understood each other to admiration, as we see; the former let the note fall, and the other caught it very skilfully, and then darted into a clump of trees to read it at his leisure, while Pompée, fearful of taking cold, no doubt, quickly closed the window.

But one does not read like that the first note he has ever received from the woman of his choice, especially when there can be no reason for its unforeseen arrival, unless it be to aim a blow at his happiness. For what could the viscountess have to say to him if there had been no change in the programme agreed upon between them the night before? The note therefore must of necessity contain some distressing news.

Canolles was so thoroughly convinced of this that he did not even put the paper to his lips as a lover would ordinarily do in the like circumstances. On the contrary, he turned it over and over with increasing dread. However, it must be opened at some time, so he summoned all his courage, broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"Monsieur,—I hope you will agree with me that to remain longer in our present position is altogether impossible. It must be excessively disagreeable to be looked upon as a detestable spy by the whole household; on the other hand I have reason to fear that, if I receive you more affably than Madame la Princesse would be likely to do in my place, we shall be suspected of playing a comedy, which would inevitably end in the loss of my reputation."

Canolles wiped his brow; his presentiments had not deceived him. With the daylight, the great banisher of visions, all his golden dreams disappeared. He shook his head, heaved a sigh, and read on:—

"Pretend to discover the stratagem to which we resorted; there is a very simple method of making that discovery, and I will myself furnish the materials if you will promise to do as I ask. You see that I do not seek to conceal how much I rely upon you. If you will do as I ask I will send you a portrait of myself, upon which are my crest and my name. You can say that

you found it on one of your night rounds, and that you discovered in that way that I am not the princess.

"Need I say that you have my permission, if indeed you attach any value to the portrait, to keep it as a token of my heartfelt, undying gratitude to you, if you take your departure this morning?"

"Leave us without seeing me again, if possible, and you will take with you all my gratitude, while I shall always remember you as one of the noblest and most loyal gentlemen I have ever known."

Canolles read the note through once more, and stood as if turned to stone. Whatever favor a letter of dismissal may contain, no matter how sweet the honey in which a farewell or a refusal is clothed, refusal, farewell, dismissal, are none the less cruel to the heart of a lover. The portrait was a lovely thing to have, no doubt about that; but the motive for offering it detracted greatly from its value. And then, of what use is a portrait when the original is at hand, when one holds her fast and need not let her go?

True; but Canolles, who did not hesitate to risk incurring the wrath of the queen and Mazarin, trembled at the thought of Madame de Cambes' frown.

And yet, how the woman had made sport of him, first of all on the road, then at Chantilly, by taking the place of Madame la Princesse, and again, only the night before, by giving him a hope which she snatched away again in the morning! But, of all her deceptions, this was the most heartless. On the road she did not know him, and simply got rid of an inconvenient companion, nothing more. In taking Madame de Condé's place, she obeyed orders, and played the part assigned her by her suzerain,—she could not do otherwise; but this time she did know him, and after she had expressed her appreciation of his self-sacrifice, and had twice uttered that *we* which had touched the deepest chords of his heart, to retrace her steps, disavow her kindly feeling, deny her gratitude, in a word, write such a letter as that, was, in Canolles' sight, worse than cruelty,—it was almost mockery. So he lost his temper, and raged inwardly, heedless of the fact that behind those curtains—the lights having been all extinguished as the daylight rendered them useless—a fair spectator, well hidden by the heavy hangings, looked on at the pantomime of his despair, and shared it perchance.

"Yes, yes," he thought, and accompanied the thought with expressive gestures,—*"yes, 't is a dismissal in due form, a commonplace ending to a great event, a poetic hope changed to brutal disappointment. But I will not submit to the ridicule she proposes to heap upon me. I prefer her hatred to this pretended gratitude she prates of. Ah! yes, I imagine myself relying upon her promise now! As well rely upon the constancy of the wind and the tranquillity of the ocean. Ah! madame, madame,"* he continued, turning toward the window,

"you have escaped me twice; but I give you my word that if I ever have another such opportunity you shall not escape me the third time."

With that, Canolles returned to his apartment, intending to dress and gain access to the viscountess, though he were obliged to resort to force. But upon glancing at the clock, he discovered that it was barely seven. No one had yet risen in the château.

Canolles dropped into an arm-chair and closed his eyes, to collect his thoughts, and, if possible, drive away the phantoms that were dancing about him; he opened them again at short intervals to consult his watch.

Eight o'clock struck and the château began to show signs of life. Canolles waited another half-hour with infinite impatience; at last he could contain himself no longer, but went downstairs and accosted Pompée, who was proudly taking the air in the main court-yard, surrounded by lackeys to whom he was describing his campaigns in Picardy under the late king.

"You are her Highness's intendant?" said Canolles, as if he then saw poor Pompée for the first time.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the wondering squire.

"Be good enough to inform her Highness that I crave the honor of paying my respects to her."

"But, monsieur, her Highness—"

"Has arisen."

"But—"

"Go!"

"But I thought that monsieur's departure—"

"My departure will depend upon the interview I propose to have with her Highness."

"I say that because I have no orders from my mistress."

"And I say this," retorted Canolles, "because I have an order from the king."

As he spoke he majestically clapped his hand upon the pocket of his doublet,—a gesture which he adopted as the most satisfactory in its results of all those he had employed since his arrival.

But even as he executed this coup d'état, our ambassador felt that his courage was deserting him. In fact, since the preceding night, his importance had greatly diminished. Twelve hours, or very nearly that, had elapsed since

Madame la Princesse left Chantilly; doubtless she had travelled all night; she must therefore be twenty or twenty-five leagues away. Let Canolles and his men make what speed they might, they could not hope to overtake her; and if they should overtake her, what assurance was there that the escort of a hundred gentlemen with which she set out was not ere this increased to three or four hundred devoted adherents? To be sure, Canolles might still, as he said the night before, die in the performance of his duty; but had he the right to lead to certain death the men who accompanied him, and thus force them to pay the bloody penalty of his amorous caprice? Madame de Cambes, if he had been in error as to her feeling for him, if her distress was mere comedy,—Madame de Cambes might then openly make sport of him; he would have to endure the jeering of the lackeys and of the soldiers hidden in the forest; the wrath of Mazarin and the queen; and worse than all, his new-born passion would be nipped in the bud, for never did woman love a man whom she designed, though but for an instant, to make ridiculous.

As he was turning these thoughts over and over in his mind, Pompée returned, with lowered crest, to say that his mistress was awaiting him.

On this occasion all ceremony was done away with; the viscountess received him in a small salon adjoining her apartment, fully dressed, and standing. Traces of a sleepless night, which she had tried in vain to efface, were plainly visible upon her charming features. A slight dark circle about her eyes was an especially eloquent indication that those eyes had hardly been closed during the night.

"You see, monsieur," she began, without giving him time to speak, "that I comply with your wish, but in the hope, I confess, that this interview will be the last, and that you will reciprocate by complying with mine."

"Forgive me, madame," said Canolles; "but after what took place between us last evening, I made bold to hope that your demands would be less severe, and I was confident that, after what I had done for you,—for you alone, for I do not know Madame de Condé,—you would deign to endure my further presence at Chantilly."

"Yes, monsieur, I confess that on the impulse of the moment—in the perplexity necessarily consequent upon my present position—the thought of the great sacrifice you were making for me, and the interests of Madame la Princesse, which demanded that I should gain time for her, drew from my lips certain words which accorded but ill with my thought. But during this long night I have reflected; it is out of the question that both of us should remain longer at the château."

"Out of the question, madame!" said Canolles. "Do you forget that everything is possible for him who speaks in the king's name?"

"Monsieur de Canolles, I hope that before all else you are a gentleman, and that you will not take unfair advantage of the position in which my devotion to her Highness has placed me."

"Madame," rejoined Canolles, "before all else I am a madman. Mon Dieu! you must have seen it, for no one but a madman could do what I have done. So take pity on my madness, madame; do not send me away, I implore you!"

"Then I will leave the place, monsieur; yes, I will bring you back to your duty, in spite of yourself. We will see if you will resort to force to stop me, if you will expose us both to public scandal. No, no, monsieur," the viscountess continued, in a tone which Canolles had not heard before. "No, you will see upon reflection that you cannot remain forever at Chantilly; you will remember that you are expected elsewhere."

This last phrase cast a bright light upon Canolles' perplexity. It recalled to his mind the scene at Biscarros' inn, and Madame de Cambes' discovery of his liaison with Nanon, and everything was made clear.

This insomnia was caused by memories of the past, not by present anxiety. This determination of the morning, which led her to avoid Canolles, was not the result of reflection, but was a manifestation of jealousy.

For a moment there was silence between them, as they stood there face to face; but during that silence both were listening to the thoughts which whispered with the beating of their hearts.

"Jealous!" Canolles was saying; "jealous! Ah! now I understand it all. Yes, yes, she would make sure that I love her enough to sacrifice all other love! This is a test!"

Meanwhile Madame de Cambes communed thus with herself:—

"I am simply a passing fancy for Monsieur de Canolles. He met me on the road just when he was obliged to leave Guyenne, and followed me as the traveller follows a jack-o'-lantern; but his heart is in that little house among the trees, whither he was going the evening that I met him. It is impossible for me to keep by my side a man who loves another, and whom I might perchance be weak enough to love myself, if I were to be longer in his company. Oh! not only should I betray my honor, but the interests of Madame la Princesse, were I to sink so low as to love the agent of her persecutors."

As if replying to her own thoughts she cried abruptly:—

"No, no, you must go, monsieur: go, or I go!"

"You forget, madame, that I have your promise not to leave the château without informing me of your purpose."

"Very well, monsieur, I now inform you that I propose to leave Chantilly instantly."

"And do you imagine that I will allow it?"

"What!" cried the viscountess; "you will detain me by force?"

"Madame, I know not what I may do, but I do know that it is impossible for me to part from you."

"Then I am your prisoner?"

"You are a woman whom I have already lost twice, and whom I do not propose to lose a third time."

"Aha! violence?"

"Yes, madame, violence," replied Canolles, "if there is no other way to keep you."

"Oh! what extreme felicity," cried Madame de Cambes, "to detain by force a woman who shrieks, who demands her freedom, who does not love you, who detests you!"

Canolles started back, and made a rapid mental effort to distinguish between the words and the thought that prompted them. He realized that the moment had come to stake his all upon a single cast.

"Madame," said he, "the words that you have just uttered, with such evident sincerity that there is no mistaking their meaning, have removed all uncertainty from my mind. You shrieking, you a slave! I detain a woman who does not love me, who detests me! Nay, nay, madame, have no fear; that shall never be. I did think, judging from my own happiness in being with you, that you would perhaps endure my presence; I hoped that, after I had thrown away my reputation, my peace of mind, my future, mayhap my honor, you would reward me for this sacrifice by the gift of a few brief hours, which I am fated never to enjoy. All this might have been had you loved me,—yes, even had I been indifferent to you; for you are kind of heart, and would have done for compassion's sake what another would have done for love. But I find that I have not mere indifference to reckon with, but hatred; that puts a different face upon the matter, as you say. I crave your pardon, madame, for failing to realize that one who loves so madly could be hated in return. It is for you to remain here, queen, mistress, and free in this château as everywhere; it is for me to withdraw, and I withdraw accordingly. In ten minutes you will be fully at liberty once more. Adieu, madame, adieu, forever!"

And Canolles, whose despair, assumed at first, had become quite genuine and distressful toward the close of his address, saluted Madame de Cambes and turned upon his heel, groping blindly for the door, which he could not

find, and repeating the word, "Adieu! adieu!" with an accent of such profound melancholy that, coming from the heart, it went straight to the heart. Unfeigned affliction has a voice of its own as truly as the tempest.

Madame de Cambes did not anticipate this unquestioning obedience on the part of Canolles; she had marshalled her forces for a struggle, not for a victory, and her calculations were all set at naught by this combination of humility and love. As the baron was walking toward the door, putting out his arms at random, and giving utterance to something very like a sob, he suddenly felt that a hand was laid upon his shoulder with a most significant pressure; it did not touch him, simply, it stopped him.

He turned his head. She was still standing in front of him. Her arm still rested gracefully upon his shoulder, and the dignified expression which her face wore an instant before had melted away in a lovely smile.

"Well, well, monsieur!" said she, "is this the way you obey the queen? You would go hence when your orders bid you stay, traitor that you are!"

Canolles with a sharp cry fell upon his knees, and pressed his burning brow against the hands she held out to him.

"Oh! I shall die with joy!" he exclaimed.

"Alas! do not be overjoyful yet," said the viscountess; "for my object in stopping you is simply that we might not part thus, that you might not go hence with the idea that I am an ingrate, that you might voluntarily give back the promise I gave you, that you might come to look upon me as a friend, at least, since the fact that we belong to opposite parties will prevent our ever being anything more to each other."

"Oh! mon Dieu!" cried Canolles, "am I deceived again? You do not love me?"

"Let us not talk about our sentiments, baron; rather let us talk of the risk we both run by remaining here. Go yourself, or allow me to go; it must be."

"What do you say, madame?"

"The truth. Leave me here; return to Paris; tell Mazarin, tell the queen what has happened. I will assist you to the best of my ability; but go, go!"

"Must I tell you again," cried Canolles, "that to leave you would be death to me?"

"No, no, you will not die, for you will retain the hope that in happier days we shall meet again."

"Chance has thrown me in your way, madame, or, rather, has placed you in my way twice already; but chance will have grown weary in well-doing, and if

I leave you now I shall never see you again."

"Then I will seek you out."

"Oh! madame, ask me to die for you; death is an instant's suffering, and all is over. But do not ask me to leave you again. At the bare thought my heart is breaking. Why, consider, pray, that I have hardly seen you, hardly spoken with you."

"Well, then, if I allow you to remain to-day, if you are at liberty to see me and talk to me throughout the day, will you be content? Tell me."

"I make no promises."

"Nor I, if that is so. But, as I did some time since promise to give you due notice of my departure, know that I leave this place an hour hence."

"Must I do whatever you wish? Must I obey you in every point? Must I set aside my own volition and follow yours blindly? If I must do all that, be content. You have before you a slave, ready to obey. Command me, madame, command me."

Claire gave the baron her hand, and said, in her softest and most winning voice:—

"I ask a new promise in exchange for mine; if I do not leave your side from now until nine o'clock this evening, will you go at nine o'clock?"

"I swear it."

"Come, then; the sky is blue and gives promise of a beautiful day; there is dew upon the grass, sweet perfume in the air, and balm among the trees. Holé! Pompée."

The worthy intendant, who had doubtless been instructed to remain outside the door, made his appearance at once.

"My saddle-horses," said Madame de Cambes, assuming her princely expression; "I will ride this morning to the ponds, and return by the farm, where I will breakfast. You will accompany me, Monsieur le Baron," she continued; "it is a part of your duties, as you have received her Majesty's commands never to lose sight of me."

A suffocating cloud of joy blinded the baron, and enveloped him, like the masses of vapor in which the immortal gods of old were carried up to heaven; he went where he was led, unresistingly, almost without volition; he was intoxicated, he was mad. Soon, amid a charming wood, through shadowy avenues, where hanging branches softly swept across his brow, he opened once again his eyes to things of earth. He was on foot, his heart oppressed by pleasure so intense that it was well-nigh pain, his hand in hers, and she as pale,

as silent, and as happy, too, as he.

Behind them Pompée stalked along, so near that he could see, so far away that he could not hear.

III.

This blissful day came to an end at last, as every dream must do; the hours had passed like seconds to the thrice happy gentleman, and yet it seemed to him as if enough memorable incidents were crowded into that one day to fill three ordinary lives. Every avenue in the park was enriched with the memory of a word or a smile from the viscountess; a look, a gesture, a finger laid upon the lip, everything had its meaning. As they stepped aboard the boat she pressed his hand; when they stepped ashore again she leaned upon his arm; as they walked along by the park wall, she was tired and sat down; and again and again, as a thrill of pleasure swept like a lightning flash before the young man's eyes, the landscape, lighted up by a fantastic gleam, was indelibly imprinted on his mind in its least details.

Canolles was not to leave the viscountess during the day; at breakfast she invited him to dinner, at dinner she invited him to supper.

Amid all the pomp which the pretended princess displayed in her reception of the king's messenger, Canolles could discern the winning attentions of the woman who loves. He forgot the valets, etiquette, the world; he even forgot the promise he had given to take his departure, and fancied himself installed for a blissful eternity in this terrestrial paradise, of which he would be the Adam, and Madame de Cambes the Eve.

But when night fell, when the supper came to an end, after passing off, like all the other incidents of that day, in ineffable bliss, when a maid of honor had duly introduced Monsieur Pierrot, still disguised as the Duc d'Enghien, who seized the opportunity to eat as much as four princes of the blood together would have done, when the clock began to strike, and Madame de Cambes, glancing up at it, made sure that it was about to strike ten times, she said, with a sigh:—

"Now it is time."

"Time for what?" rejoined Canolles, trying to smile, and to ward off a great disaster by a jest.

"Time to keep the promise you gave me."

"Ah! madame," said Canolles, sadly, "you forget nothing, do you?"

"Perhaps I might have forgotten, like yourself; but here is something that refreshes my memory;" and she took from her pocket a letter that was handed her just as they took their seats at the table.

"From whom is that letter?" queried Canolles.

"From Madame la Princesse, who bids me join her."

"I understand that this is a mere pretext! I am grateful to you for showing me such consideration."

"Make no mistake, Monsieur de Canolles," rejoined the viscountess, taking no pains to conceal her sadness. "Had I not received this letter, I should have reminded you of your promise at the proper time, just as I have done now. Do you think that the people about us can much longer avoid detecting the understanding between us? Our relations, you will agree, are not those of a persecuted princess with her persecutor. But if this separation is so painful to you as you pretend, let me tell you, Monsieur le Baron, that it rests with you to make it unnecessary that we should separate."

"Say what you mean! oh, say!" cried Canolles.

"Do you not guess?"

"Yes, madame, I do, indeed; I cannot be mistaken. You mean to suggest that I should espouse the cause of Madame la Princesse."

"She speaks of it herself in this letter," said Madame de Cambes, eagerly.

"I am glad that the idea did not originate with you, and I thank you for the embarrassment with which you broached the subject. Not that my conscience revolts at the thought of following this or that party; no, I have no convictions; indeed, who, save those personally interested, have convictions in this war? When the sword has once left the scabbard, what care I whether the blow comes from one side or another? I do not know the court, nor do I know the princes; with an independent fortune and without ambition, I have no expectations from either party. I am an officer, and that's the end of it."

"In that case you will consent to go with me?"

"No."

"But why not, pray, if things are as you say?"

"Because you would esteem me less."

"Is that the only obstacle?"

"My word for it."

"Then you need have no fear."

"You don't yourself believe what you are saying now," rejoined Canolles, shaking his finger at her with a smile. "A turncoat is the same thing as a traitor; the first word is a little softer, but they are synonymous."

"Ah, well! perhaps you are right," said Madame de Cambes, "and I will urge you no further. If you had been in any ordinary position I would have tried to win you over to the cause of the princes; but as an envoy of the king, intrusted with a confidential mission by her Majesty the queen regent and the first minister of the crown, honored with the good-will of Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, who, notwithstanding the suspicions I entertained at first, is your very zealous patron, so I am told—"

Canolles blushed.

"I will say no more on that subject, but listen to me, baron; we do not part forever, be sure; I have a presentiment that we shall meet again."

"Where?" asked Canolles.

"I have no idea; but meet again we certainly shall."

Canolles sadly shook his head.

"I dare not count upon it, madame," said he; "there is war between us, and that is too great an obstacle when, at the same time, there is no love."

"Pray, do you count this day as nothing?" asked the viscountess, in a soul-thrilling tone.

"It is the only day that I am sure that I have lived since I came into the world."

"Then you see that you are ungrateful."

"Grant me a second day like this one—"

"I cannot; I must leave Chantilly to-night."

"I don't ask it for to-morrow, nor for the day after to-morrow; I simply ask you for some day in the future. Select whatever time you choose, whatever place you choose, but give me a certainty to live upon; I should suffer too much if I had naught but a hope."

"Where shall you go upon leaving me?"

"To Paris, to report upon the success of my mission."

"And then?"

"To the Bastille, perhaps."

"But assuming that you do not go there?"

"I shall return to Libourne, where my regiment should be."

"And I to Bordeaux, where I expect to find Madame la Princesse. Do you know any out-of-the-way village on the road from Bordeaux to Libourne?"

"I know one, the memory of which is almost as dear to me as that of Chantilly."

"Jaulnay?" queried the viscountess, with a smile.

"Jaulnay," echoed Canolles.

"Very well; I shall need four days to go to Jaulnay; it is now Tuesday. I will stop there all day on Sunday."

"Oh! thanks, thanks!" cried Canolles, pressing against his lips a hand which Madame de Cambes had not the courage to withdraw.

"Now," said she, after a moment's pause, "we must play out our little comedy to the end."

"Ah, yes, madame; the comedy which is to cover me with ridicule in the eyes of all Prance. But I have nothing to say; it was I who would have it so, it was I who—I cannot say selected the part that I play therein—but arranged the catastrophe which brings it to a close."

Madame de Cambes lowered her eyes.

"Now tell me what I have still to do," said Canolles, coolly; "I await your orders, and am ready for anything."

Claire was so deeply moved that Canolles could see the velvet folds of her dress rise and fall with the uneven, hurried beating of her heart.

"You are making a very great sacrifice for me, I know; but pray believe me when I say that my gratitude will live forever. Yes, you are about to incur disgrace at court for my sake, and to be severely censured. Monsieur, care nothing for that, I beg you, if it affords you any pleasure to know that you have made me happy."

"I will try, madame."

"Believe me, baron," continued Madame de Cambes, "the bitter grief which I read upon your face causes me no less bitter remorse. It may be that others would recompense you more fully than I; but, monsieur, a recompense accorded so readily would not worthily pay for your self-sacrifice."

As she spoke, Claire hung her head with a sigh.

"Is that all you have to say to me?"

"Stay," said the viscountess, taking from her breast a portrait which she handed to Canolles; "take this portrait, and at every pang that this unhappy affair causes you, look at it, and say to yourself that you suffer for her whose image is before you, and that every such pang is paid for in regret."

"Is that all?"

"In esteem."

"Is that all?"

"In sympathy."

"Ah! madame, one word more!" cried Canolles. "Why should it cost you so dear to make me altogether happy?"

Claire stepped quickly toward him, put out her hand, and opened her mouth to add:—

"In love."

But simultaneously with her mouth, the door was thrown open and the pseudo-captain of the guards appeared upon the threshold, accompanied by Pompée.

"I will finish at Jaulnay," said the viscountess.

"Your sentence, or your thought?"

"Both; one always expresses the other."

"Madame," said the captain of the guards, "your Highness's carriage is waiting."

"Feign astonishment," said Claire, in an undertone.

"Where does your Highness propose to go?" he asked, with a smile of pity for his own plight.

"I am going away."

"But does your Highness forget that I am instructed by her Majesty not to leave you for an instant?"

"Monsieur, your mission is at an end."

"What does this mean?"

"That I am not her Highness, Madame la Princesse de Condé, but Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes, her first maid of honor. Madame la Princesse left Chantilly last evening, and I go to join her."

Canolles did not stir. It was plainly most distasteful to him to continue to play this comedy before an audience of lackeys.

Madame de Cambes, to encourage him, bestowed one of her sweetest glances upon him; that glance restored his courage in some measure.

"So the king has been deceived," he said. "And where is Monsieur le Duc

d'Enghien?"

"I have given orders that Pierrot return to his flower-beds," said a grave voice at the door.

It was the voice of the princess dowager, who was standing near the door, supported by two of her tire-women.

"Return to Paris, to Mantes, to the court, in a word, wherever it may be; your mission here is at an end. You will say to the king that the persecuted have resorted to stratagem, which renders fruitless the use of force. You are at liberty, however, to remain at Chantilly, to stand guard over me, who have not left, and shall not leave the château, because such is not my design. With this, Monsieur le Baron, I take my leave of you."

Canolles, red with shame, could hardly summon strength to bend his head, as he glanced at the viscountess, and murmured reproachfully:—

"O, madame! madame!"

She understood the glance and heard the words.

"I crave your Highness's permission," she said, "to play the part of Madame la Princesse one moment more. I desire to thank Monsieur le Baron de Canolles, in the name of his illustrious hosts who have left this château, for the respect he has shown, and the great delicacy he has exhibited in the performance of so difficult a mission. I venture to believe, madame, that your Highness has the same opinion, and to hope, therefore, that you will add your acknowledgments to mine."

The dowager was touched by these earnest words, and it may be that her profound sagacity suggested to her some part of this new secret grafted upon the old; so it was that her voice was not entirely free from emotion as she uttered the following words:—

"For all that you have done against us, monsieur, oblivion; for all that you have done for my family, gratitude."

Canolles knelt upon one knee at the feet of the princess, who gave him that hand to kiss whereon Henri IV. had imprinted so many kisses.

It was the last act of the play, it was an irrevocable dismissal. There was nothing left for Canolles to do but to take his leave. And so he withdrew to his apartment, and lost no time in writing to Mazarin the most despairing report imaginable; he preferred not to be present to suffer the consequences of the first outburst of anger. That done he passed out through the servants of the château, with some apprehension that he might be insulted by them, to the court-yard, where his horse awaited him.

As he was about to put his foot in the stirrup, these words were uttered by an imperious voice:—

"Do honor to the envoy of his Majesty, the king, our master!"

Thereupon every head was bent before Canolles, who, with a low bow toward the window at which the princess was standing, drove his spurs into his horse, and disappeared, with head erect.

Castorin, awakened from the seductive dream which he owed to Pompée, the false intendant, followed his master with lowered crest.

IV.

It is full time to return to one of the most important personages of this narrative, whom we shall find riding an excellent horse along the road from Paris to Bordeaux, with five companions, whose eyes sparkled at every sound that came from a bag filled with gold crowns, hanging at Ferguzon's saddle-bow. The melody rejoiced and refreshed the little troop, as the music of the drum and fife imparts renewed life to the soldier on the march.

"Never mind, never mind," one of the men was saying; "ten thousand livres is a pretty little sum."

"You might say," rejoined Ferguzon, "that it is a magnificent sum, if it owed nothing to anybody; but it owes a company to Madame la Princesse. *Nimium satis est*, as the ancients used to say; which may be translated thus: 'Nothing less than too much is enough. Now, my dear Barrabas, we haven't that desirable enough which is equivalent to too much.'"

"How much it costs to appear to be an honest man!" said Cauvignac; "all that we took from the royal tax-gatherer has gone into equipments, doublets, and trimming. We cut as fine a figure as any nobleman, and we carry luxury so far as to have purses; to be sure, there's nothing in them. Oh, appearances!"

"Speak for us, captain, and not for yourself," said Barrabas. "You have the purse and ten thousand livres to boot."

"My good fellow," said Cauvignac, "did you not hear, or did you misunderstand what Ferguzon just said touching our obligation to Madame la Princesse? I am not of those who promise one thing and do another. Monsieur Lenet paid over ten thousand livres to me to raise a company, and if I don't raise it may the devil fly away with me! On the day when it is raised he will owe me forty thousand more. When that time comes, if he doesn't pay the forty thousand livres we will see."

"With ten thousand livres!" cried four satirical voices in chorus; for Ferguzon, whose confidence in his leader's resources was unbounded, seemed to be the only one of the troop convinced that Cauvignac would attain the

promised result; "with ten thousand livres you will raise a company?"

"Yes," said Cauvignac, "when some one thinks fit to add something to it."

"Who is there, pray, to add anything to it?" asked a voice.

"Not I," said Ferguzon.

"Who, then?" Barrabas asked.

"Pardieu! the first comer. Stay, I see a man yonder on the road. You will see—"

"I understand," said Ferguzon.

"Is that all?" queried Cauvignac.

"And admire."

"Yes," said one of the horsemen, drawing nigh Cauvignac, "yes, I understand that you can always be depended on to keep your promises, captain; but we may lose by being too honest. To-day we are necessary; but if the company is raised to-morrow, officers in the confidence of the princes will be assigned to it, and we, who have had all the trouble of raising it, shall be dismissed."

"You are an idiot, in five letters, my dear Carrotel, and this isn't the first time I have told you so," said Cauvignac. "The pitiful logic you have just perpetrated deprives you of the rank I proposed to give you in the company; for it is evident that we shall be the six officers of this nucleus of an army. I should have appointed you sub-lieutenant at the outset, Carrotel; now you will be only a sergeant. Thanks to the nonsense you just heard, Barrabas, you, who have held your tongue, will hold that position until, Ferguzon having been hanged, you are promoted to the lieutenancy by right of seniority. But let us not lose sight of my first recruit, whom I see yonder."

"Have you any idea who the man is, captain?" Ferguzon asked.

"Not the slightest."

"He should be a tradesman; he wears a black cloak."

"Are you sure?"

"Look when the wind raises it; do you see?"

"If he wears a black cloak, he's a wealthy citizen; so much the better. We are recruiting for the service of the princes, and it is important that the company should be made up of good men. If it were for that wretch of a Mazarin, anything would be good enough; but for the princes, deuce take me! —Ferguzon, I have an idea that my company will do me honor, as Falstaff

says."

The whole troop spurred forward to overtake the citizen, who was riding peaceably along in the middle of the road.

When the worthy man, who was mounted upon a sleek mule, observed the magnificently arrayed horsemen galloping up behind him, he rode off to the side of the road with due respect, and saluted Cauvignac.

"He is well-mannered," said that worthy; "that's a great point. "He doesn't know the military salute, but we will teach him that."

He returned the salute, then rode up beside the traveller.

"Monsieur," he began, "be good enough to tell us if you love the king."

"Parbleu! yes," was the reply.

"Admirable!" said Cauvignac, rolling his eyes in delight. "And the queen?"

"The queen! I have the greatest veneration for her."

"Excellent! and Monsieur de Mazarin?"

"Monsieur de Mazarin is a great man, monsieur, and I admire him."

"Perfect! In that case, we have had the good fortune to fall in with a faithful servitor of his Majesty?"

"I pride myself upon it, monsieur."

"And are prepared to prove your zeal for him?"

"On every occasion."

"How luckily this comes about! such meetings as this never happen except on the high-road."

"What do you mean?" queried the tradesman, beginning to eye Cauvignac with some uneasiness.

"I mean, monsieur, that you must come with us."

The tradesman almost leaped out of his saddle in surprise and terror.

"Go with you! Whither, monsieur, in God's name?"

"I am not altogether sure, myself; wherever we go."

"Monsieur, I travel only with people whom I know."

"That is quite right, and shows you to be a prudent man; so I will proceed to tell you who we are."

The tradesman made a gesture, as if to say that he had already guessed.

Cauvignac continued, without seeming to notice the gesture:—

"I am Roland de Cauvignac, captain of a company, which is not present, it is true, but is worthily represented by Louis-Gabriel Ferguzon, my lieutenant, by Georges-Guillaume Barrabas, my sub-lieutenant, by Zéphérin Carrotel, my sergeant, and by these two gentlemen, one of whom is my quartermaster and the other my sergeant-major. You know us now, monsieur," continued Cauvignac, with his most benign smile, "and I venture to hope that you feel no antipathy for us."

"But, monsieur, I have already served his Majesty in the urban guard, and I pay my taxes, tithes, and so forth, regularly."

"Very good, monsieur," rejoined Cauvignac; "and I do not propose to enlist you in his Majesty's service, but in that of Messieurs les Princes, whose unworthy representative you see before you."

"In the service of the princes, the king's enemies!" cried the honest fellow, more and more amazed; "then why did you ask me if I loved his Majesty?"

"Because, monsieur, if you did not love the king, if you had accused the queen or blasphemed against Monsieur de Mazarin, I should not have dreamed of disturbing you; in that case you would have been sacred to me as a brother."

"But, monsieur, I am not a slave; I am not a serf."

"No, monsieur, you are a soldier; that is to say, you have it in your power to become a captain like myself, or a marshal of France like Monsieur de Turenne."

"Monsieur, I have had a large amount of experience of courts in my life."

"Ah! so much the worse, monsieur, so much the worse! it's a wretched habit to get into, this going to law. I never did any of it myself; it may have been because I studied for the bar."

"But by having so many lawsuits I have learned the laws of the kingdom."

"There are great numbers of them. You know, monsieur, that from the Pandects of Justinian down to the decree of Parliament, which provided, apropos of the death of Maréchal d'Ancre, that no foreigner should ever be first minister of France, there have been eighteen thousand seven hundred and seventy-two laws, to say nothing of ordinances; but there are privileged brains which have an astounding memory; Pico della Mirandole spoke twelve languages at eighteen. What good has your knowledge of these laws ever done you, monsieur?"

"The good of knowing that people are not to be kidnapped on the high-road without warrant."

"I have such warrant, monsieur, and here it is."

"From Madame la Princesse?"

"From her Highness in person."

And Cauvignac respectfully raised his hat.

"Then there are two kings in France?" cried the tradesman.

"Even so, monsieur; that is why I do myself the honor of asking you to accord your preference to mine, and why I deem it my duty to enlist you in my service."

"Monsieur, I will appeal to the Parliament."

"There's a third king, and you will probably have occasion to serve it as well. Our politics are built upon broad lines! Forward, monsieur!"

"But it's impossible, monsieur; I have an appointment upon important business."

"Where?"

"At Orléans."

"With whom?"

"My attorney."

"What is the business?"

"It concerns certain financial transactions."

"The service of the State should be every man's first business, monsieur."

"Can't the State do without me?"

"We relied upon you, and we should miss you, in good sooth! However, if, as you say, money matters occasion your visit to Orléans—"

"Yes, monsieur, money matters."

"How much money is concerned?"

"Four thousand livres."

"Which you are going to receive?"

"No, which I am going to pay."

"To your attorney?"

"Even so, monsieur."

"On account of a lawsuit?"

"On account of a lawsuit lost."

"Pon my word, this deserves consideration. Four thousand livres!"

"Four thousand livres."

"That is just the sum you would pay out in case Messieurs les Princes would consent that your place should be filled by a mercenary."

"Nonsense! I could procure a substitute for a hundred crowns."

"A substitute of your commanding appearance, a substitute who rides muleback with his toes turned out like you, a substitute who knows eighteen thousand seven hundred and seventy-two laws! Go to, monsieur! for an ordinary man a hundred crowns would certainly be enough; but if we are to be content with ordinary men, it's not worth while to enter into competition with the king. We need men of your merit, of your rank, of your stature. What the devil! don't cry yourself down; it seems to me that you are worth fully four thousand livres!"

"I see what you are coming at," cried the tradesman; "this is downright robbery with force and arms."

"Monsieur, you insult us," said Cauvignac, "and we would flay you alive by way of reparation for the insult, if we were less anxious to maintain the reputation of the adherents of the princes. No, monsieur; give me your four thousand livres, but do not look upon it as extortion, I beg; it is a necessity."

"Who will pay my attorney?"

"We will."

"You?"

"We."

"But will you bring me a receipt?"

"In due form."

"Signed by him?"

"Signed by him."

"That puts a different face on the matter."

"As you see. So you accept?"

"I must, as I can't do otherwise."

"Give us your attorney's address, then, and such other information as we can't do without."

"I told you that it was a judgment resulting from the loss of a lawsuit."

"Against whom?"

"Against a certain Biscarros, claimant, as heir of his wife, who was a native of Orléans."

"Attention!" said Ferguzon.

Cauvignac winked at him as if to say "Never fear, I am on the watch."

"Biscarros," he repeated; "isn't he an inn-keeper in the outskirts of Libourne?"

"Just so,—between Libourne and Saint-Martin-de-Cubzac."

"At the sign of the Golden Calf?"

"The same. Do you know him?"

"A little."

"The villain! to get judgment against me for a sum—"

"Which you didn't owe him?"

"Oh! yes. I owed it—but I hoped never to pay it."

"I understand; it's very hard."

"For that reason, I give you my word that I would much rather see the money in your hands than in his."

"If that is so, I think you will be content."

"But my receipt?"

"Come with us, and you shall have it in due form."

"How will you go to work to get it?"

"That's my affair."

They pursued their journey toward Orléans, where they arrived two hours later. The tradesman conducted his captors to the inn nearest his attorney's office. It was a frightful den, with the appropriate name of the Dove of the Ark.

"Now," said he, "what are we to do? I would be very glad not to part from my four thousand livres except as against a receipt."

"Don't let that disturb you. Do you know your attorney's handwriting?"

"Perfectly."

"When we bring you his receipt, you will make no objection to handing the money over to us?"

"None! But my attorney will never give his receipt without the money; I know him too well."

"I will advance the sum," said Cauvignac. As he spoke he took from his wallet four thousand livres, half in louis, and the rest in half-pistoles, and arranged them in piles before the wondering eyes of the tradesman.

"Now," said he, "tell us your attorney's name."

"Master Rabodin."

"Very good; take a pen and write."

The tradesman obeyed.

"MASTER RABODIN,—I send you the four thousand livres, damages and costs due upon the judgment in favor of Master Biscarros, whom I strongly suspect of a purpose to make an improper use of it. Be kind enough to hand the bearer your receipt—"

"What next?" queried the tradesman.

"Date and sign it."

The tradesman did as he was bid.

"Now," said Cauvignac to Ferguzon, "take this letter and money, disguise yourself as a miller, and call upon the attorney."

"What shall I do there?"

"Give him the money and take his receipt."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"I don't understand."

"So much the better! the errand will be done all the better for that."

Ferguzon's confidence in his captain was unbounded, so he walked toward the door without another word.

"Order up some wine, and of the best," said Cauvignac; "monsieur must be thirsty."

Ferguzon bowed and went out. Within the half-hour he returned, and found Cauvignac at table with the tradesman, both doing honor to that famous Orléans wine which rejoiced the Gascon palate of Henri IV.

"Well?" said Cauvignac, inquiringly.

"Here is the receipt."

"Is that what you desire?"

And Cauvignac passed the piece of stamped paper to the tradesman.

"Precisely."

"Is the receipt in proper form?"

"It is."

"Then you have no objection to giving me your money in exchange for it?"

"None at all."

"Give it me, then."

The tradesman counted out the four thousand livres. Cauvignac placed them in his bag, where they replaced the four thousand recently taken therefrom.

"And now my release is paid for, is it?"

"Mon Dieu, yes, unless you absolutely insist upon serving."

"No, not personally; but—"

"But what? Let us hear," said Cauvignac. "I have a presentiment that we sha'n't part until we have done some more business together."

"It is very possible," said the tradesman, whose serenity was completely restored the instant the receipt was in his hands. "I have a nephew—"

"Aha!"

"A stubborn, troublesome fellow."

"Of whom you would gladly be rid?"

"No, not just that; but who would make an excellent soldier, I am sure."

"Send him to me, and I'll make a hero of him."

"You will take charge of him?"

"With pleasure."

"I have also a godson, a deserving lad, who is anxious to take orders, and for whom I am obliged to pay heavily for board."

"So that you would prefer that he should take the musket, eh? Send me the godson and the nephew; it will cost you only five hundred livres for the two."

"Five hundred livres! I don't understand."

"Why, of course, they have to pay on entering the company."

"Then why did you make me pay for the privilege of not entering it?"

"There were special reasons for that. Your nephew and your godson will pay two hundred and fifty livres each, and you will never hear of them again."

"The devil! that's an alluring prospect, do you know? They will be well cared for?"

"I give you my word that when they have once tasted service under my orders, they wouldn't change places with the Emperor of China. Ask these good fellows how I keep them. Tell him, Barrabas; tell him, Carrotel."

"In truth," said Barrabas, "we live like lords."

"And how are they clothed? Look for yourself."

Carrotel executed a pirouette in order to exhibit his resplendent costume from every point of view.

"Certainly there is nothing to be said in the matter of equipment," said the tradesman.

"So you will send me your two youths?"

"I am very anxious to do so. Do you make a long stay here?"

"No, we shall leave to-morrow morning; but we will go slowly so that they may overtake us. Give us the five hundred livres and the bargain's made."

"I have only two hundred and fifty."

"Give them the other two hundred and fifty; indeed that will furnish you with an excuse for sending them to me; if you had no pretext for sending them they might suspect something."

"But they may say that one of them alone can do the errand."

"You must tell them that the roads are not safe, and give them each twenty-five livres; that will be by way of advance on their pay."

The tradesman stared at him in wondering admiration.

"Upon my word," said he, "it takes a soldier to find a way out of every difficulty!"

Having counted out the two hundred and fifty livres to Cauvignac, he withdrew, overjoyed to have found an opportunity to be rid, for five hundred livres, of a nephew and godson who cost him more than two hundred pistoles a year.

V.

"Now, Master Barrabas," said Cauvignac, "have you in your valise a coat

something less elegant than the one you are wearing,—one in which you might pass for an employee of the custom-house?"

"I have the tax-collector's coat, you know, that we—"

"Very good! and you have his commission, too, no doubt?"

"Lieutenant Ferguzon bade me not lose it, and I have taken great care of it."

"Lieutenant Ferguzon is the most farseeing man of my acquaintance. Array yourself as a tax-collector and take the commission with you."

Barrabas went out, and returned ten minutes later, completely transformed.

He found Cauvignac dressed wholly in black, and looking enough like a court officer to deceive anybody.

They went together to the attorney's quarters. Master Rabodin lived in a third-floor apartment, consisting of a reception-room, an office, and a closet. There were other rooms, no doubt, but as they were not open to clients we will say nothing about them.

Cauvignac passed through the reception-room, left Barrabas in the study, cast a sympathetic glance in passing at the two clerks who were pretending to write busily while playing at marelle, and entered the sanctum sanctorum.

Master Rabodin was sitting in front of a desk so laden with papers that the respectable attorney seemed to be literally buried up in writs and records and judgments. He was a tall, gaunt, sallow man, clad in a black coat which fitted as closely to his body as an eel's skin. When he heard Cauvignac's footsteps, he straightened up his long, bent backbone, and raised his head, which then appeared above the breastwork by which he was surrounded.

For an instant Cauvignac thought that he had discovered the basilisk, an animal regarded as fabulous by modern scientists, so brightly did the attorney's little eyes shine with the ominous glitter of avarice and cupidity.

"Monsieur," said Cauvignac, "I ask your pardon for calling upon you without previous appointment; but," he added with his most charming smile, "it is a privilege of my office."

"A privilege of your office!" exclaimed Master Rabodin. "What is your office, pray?"

"I am an exempt in his Majesty's service, monsieur."

"An exempt in his Majesty's service?"

"I have that honor."

"I do not understand, monsieur."

"You will understand in a moment. You know Monsieur Biscarros, do you not?"

"Certainly I know him; he is my client."

"What do you think of him?"

"What do I think of him?"

"Yes."

"Why, I think—I think—I think that he's a very worthy man."

"Well, monsieur, you are mistaken."

"What's that?—mistaken?"

"Your worthy man is a rebel."

"A rebel?"

"Yes, monsieur, a rebel, who takes advantage of the isolated situation of his inn to make it a hotbed of conspiracy."

"God bless my soul!"

"Who has bound himself to poison the king, the queen, and Monsieur de Mazarin, if they happen to put up at his inn."

"You don't mean it!"

"And whom I have arrested and taken to the prison at Libourne, on a charge of lèse-majesté."

"Monsieur, you horrify me," said Master Rabodin, falling back in his chair.

"That is not all, monsieur," continued the false exempt; "you, also, are involved in the affair."

"I, monsieur!" cried the attorney, turning from orange-yellow to apple-green; "I involved in it! how, in God's name?"

"You have in your possession a sum of money which the villain Biscarros destined for the payment of an army of rebels."

"It is true, monsieur, that I have received for him—"

"Four thousand livres! he was subjected to the torture of the brodequins, and at the eighth wedge he admitted that you had that sum."

"I have it, monsieur, but I have had it only an instant."

"So much the worse, monsieur, so much the worse!"

"Why so much the worse?"

"Because I shall be obliged to make sure of your person."

"Of my person?"

"Certainly; the complaint names you as accomplice."

The attorney turned from apple-green to bottle-green.

"Ah! if you hadn't received that sum," continued Cauvignac, "it would be a different matter; but you admit having received it, and that is against you, you see."

"Monsieur, suppose I agree to give it up; suppose I hand it to you instantly; suppose I make oath that I have no connection with this villain Biscarros?"

"You would lie under grave suspicion none the less. However, I think I may say that immediate surrender of the money—"

"Monsieur, I will give it to you this very moment!" cried Master Rabodin. "It is still there, in the bag in which it was handed to me. I have verified the amount, and that's all."

"Is it exact?"

"Count it yourself, monsieur, count it yourself."

"Nay, monsieur, by your leave, nay; for I am not empowered to touch his Majesty's money; but I have with me the tax-collector of Libourne, who was assigned to accompany me in order to take charge of the different sums which Biscarros scattered broadcast to be collected again at need."

"It is a fact that he was very urgent that I should send the four thousand livres to him the moment that I received them."

"You see! Doubtless he is already informed that Madame la Princesse has left Chantilly, and is on her way to Bordeaux, and is getting together all his resources in order to make himself prominent among her adherents."

"The wretch!"

"And you suspected nothing?"

"Nothing, monsieur, nothing."

"Had nobody warned you?"

"Nobody."

"What's that you say?" said Cauvignac, pointing to the tradesman's letter which lay open on Master Rabodin's desk, with a number of other papers. "How dare you say that when you yourself furnish me with proof to the

contrary?"

"Proof?"

"Damnation! read."

Rabodin read, in a trembling voice:—

"I Master Rabodin,—I send you the four thousand livres damages and costs due upon the judgment in favor of Master Biscarros, whom I strongly suspect of a purpose to make an improper use of it."

"An improper use!" Cauvignac repeated. "You see that your client's unsavory reputation has reached as far as this."

"Monsieur, I am overwhelmed," said the attorney.

"I cannot conceal from you, monsieur," said Cauvignac, "that my orders are strict."

"Monsieur, I swear that I am innocent."

"Pardieu! Biscarros said the same until he was put to the question; but at the fifth wedge he changed his tone."

"I tell you, monsieur, that I am ready to hand you the money. Here it is; take it, for it burns my hands."

"Let us do things regularly," said Cauvignac. "I have already told you that it's no part of my business to handle the king's money."

He walked to the door leading to the office.

"Come in, Monsieur le Receveur," said he; "each to his own duty."

Barrabas came forward.

"Monsieur admits everything," said Cauvignac.

"What's that?—I admit everything?" cried the attorney.

"Yes, you admit that you were in correspondence with Biscarros."

"Monsieur, I have never received more than two letters from him, and I have written him only one."

"Monsieur admits that he was in possession of funds belonging to the accused."

"Here they are, monsieur. I have never received any money for him except these four thousand livres, and I am ready to hand them to you."

"Monsieur le Receveur," said Cauvignac, "as your commission authorizes you to do, take this money and give a receipt in his Majesty's name."

Barrabas handed his commission to the attorney, who pushed it away with his hand, not choosing to insult him by reading it.

"Now," said Cauvignac, while Barrabas, for fear of an error, was counting the money, "now you must come with me."

"I must go with you?"

"Certainly; didn't I tell you that you are under suspicion?"

"But, monsieur, I swear to you that his Majesty has no more faithful servitor than myself."

"It's not enough to swear to it, you must furnish proofs."

"Very well, monsieur, I will furnish proofs."

"Let's see them."

"My whole past life."

"That's not enough; we require a guaranty for the future."

"Point out to me what I can do, and I will do it."

"There is one infallible way of proving your devotion."

"What is that?"

"There is one of my friends, a captain, in Orléans at this moment, raising a company for the king."

"Well?"

"It would be well done of you to enlist in his company."

"I, monsieur!—an attorney?"

"The king is sorely in need of attorneys, monsieur, for his affairs are terribly involved."

"I would do it willingly, monsieur; but what about my office?"

"You can leave it to be run by your clerks."

"Impossible! How could they arrange to procure my signature?"

"Pardon, messieurs, if I venture to say a word," said Barrabas.

"Most assuredly!" said the attorney; "say on, monsieur, say on."

"It seems to me that if monsieur, who would make but a sorry soldier—"

"Yes, monsieur, you are right; sorry, indeed," interposed the attorney.

"If monsieur would offer your friend, or the king, in his stead—"

"What, monsieur? what can I offer the king?"

"His two clerks."

"Why, certainly!" cried the attorney; "certainly, and with great pleasure. Let your friend take them both. I give them to him; they are two delightful fellows."

"One of them seemed a mere child."

"Fifteen, monsieur; he's fifteen; and a first-class performer on the drum.—Fricotin, step this way," he shouted.

Cauvignac made a gesture with his hand, indicating that he desired Monsieur Fricotin to be left where he was.

"What of the other?" he asked.

"Eighteen, monsieur; five feet six inches tall, aspiring to become a porter at Saint-Sauveur, and, consequently, already familiar with the mode of handling a halberd.—This way, Chalumeau."

"But he squints horribly, unless I am much mistaken," said Cauvignac, making a second gesture similar to the first.

"So much the better, monsieur; so much the better! You can make him do sentry duty; and as he squints out, he can see both to right and left, while an ordinary man can only see straight ahead."

"That's an advantage, I agree; but you understand that the king is in sore straits financially; pleading with cannon-balls is much more costly than pleading with words. The king cannot burden himself with the equipment of these two youngsters; it's quite all he can do to undertake to train and pay them."

"Monsieur," said Rabodin, "if that is all that is necessary to prove my devotion to the king—why, I will make the sacrifice."

Cauvignac and Barrabas looked at each other.

"What do you think, Monsieur le Receveur?" said Cauvignac.

"I think that monsieur seems to be acting in good faith," Barrabas replied.

"And that we must be considerate with him, eh? Give monsieur a receipt for five hundred livres."

"Five hundred livres!"

"A receipt for that sum to pay for the equipment of two young soldiers, whom Master Rabodin in his zeal offers his Majesty."

"May I expect to be left at peace in consideration of this sacrifice, monsieur?"

"I think so."

"Shall I not be molested?"

"I hope not."

"And suppose that I am prosecuted, without regard to justice?"

"You are at liberty to make use of my testimony. But will your two clerks consent?"

"They will be overjoyed."

"You are sure of it?"

"Yes. But it would be best not to tell them—"

"Of the honor in store for them, eh?"

"It would be more prudent."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Oh! it's a simple matter enough. I will send them to your friend. What is his name?"

"Captain Cauvignac."

"I will send them to your friend Captain Cauvignac, upon some pretext or other; it had better be somewhere outside of Orléans, to avoid a possible scandal."

"Yes, and so that the Orléanais may not be seized with the desire to scourge you with rods, as Camillus did the schoolmaster in ancient times."

"I will send them to him, then, outside the city."

"On the high-road from Orléans to Tours, for example."

"At the first public-house."

"Yes; they will find Captain Cauvignac at table. He will offer them a glass of wine and they will accept. He will propose the king's health, which they will drink with enthusiasm, and there they are soldiers! Now you may call them."

The attorney called the young men. Fricotin was a little fellow, hardly four feet tall, thick-set, quick and active; Chalumeau was a great booby of five feet six, thin as an asparagus-stalk, and red as a carrot.

"Messieurs," said Cauvignac, "Master Rabodin here proposes to show his

confidence in you by sending you upon an errand of importance. To-morrow morning you will go to the first inn outside the city on the Tours road, to fetch a package of papers relating to the suit of Captain Cauvignac against Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld. Master Rabodin will give you twenty-five livres each for the service."

Fricotin, who was a credulous youth, leaped three feet into the air. But Chalumeau, who was by nature suspicious, looked at Cauvignac and the attorney at the same moment, with an expression of doubt which made him squint three times as badly as usual.

"Stay, stay!" exclaimed Master Rabodin; "one moment. I didn't agree to pay the fifty livres."

"Which sum," continued the false exempt, "Master Rabodin will recoup in his fees in the suit between Captain Cauvignac and Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld."

Master Rabodin hung his head; he was fairly caught. He must go through the door that was pointed out to him, or else through the door of a prison.

"Very good," said he. "I consent; but I hope you will give me a receipt for all this."

"Look at this," said Barrabas, "and see if I haven't anticipated your desire;" and he handed him a paper on which these words were written:—

"Received from Master Rabodin, his Majesty's faithful subject,
the sum of five hundred livres, as a voluntary offering, to
assist him in his war against the princes."

"If you insist," said Barrabas, "I will put the two clerks in the receipt."

"No, no," said the attorney, hastily; "it's quite right as it is."

"By the way," said Cauvignac, "tell Fricotin to bring his drum, and Chalumeau his halberd; it will be so much less to buy."

"But on what pretext shall I tell them to do that?"

"Pardieu! as a means of amusing themselves on the road."

With that the pretended exempt and pretended collector took their departure, leaving Master Rabodin bewildered at the thought of the danger he had escaped, and only too happy to have come so well out of it.

VI.

The next morning everything passed off as Cauvignac had planned. The nephew and godson were the first to arrive, both mounted on the same horse;

then came Fricotin and Chalumeau, one with his drum, the other with his halberd. There was some little opposition to be overcome when it was explained to them that they had the honor of being enrolled in the service of the princes; but all opposition vanished before the threats of Cauvignac, the promises of Ferguzon, and the logic of Barrabas.

The horse of the nephew and godson was assigned to the duty of carrying the baggage, and as Cauvignac's commission authorized him to raise a company of infantry, the two raw recruits could say nothing.

They set out at once. Cauvignac's march resembled a triumph. The ingenious freebooter had found a way to bring into the war the most persistent advocates of peace. Some he induced to embrace the cause of the king, others the cause of the princes. Some believed they were enlisting in the service of the Parliament, others in that of the King of England, who was talking of a descent upon Scotland to attempt the conquest of his dominions. There was naturally, at first, some little lack of uniformity in the colors, some discord in the sentiments of the troops, whom Lieutenant Ferguzon, despite his persuasive powers, found it difficult to reduce to the level of passive obedience. However, by resorting constantly to secrecy and mystery, which were necessary, so Cauvignac said, to the success of the operation, they were induced to go forward, soldiers and officers alike, without knowing where they were going, or what they were to do.

Four days after leaving Chantilly Cauvignac had collected twenty-five men; a very pretty little nucleus of an army. Many rivers which make a great noise when they flow into the sea, have a less imposing origin.

Cauvignac was in search of a convenient centre of operations. He reached a little village between Châtellerault and Poitiers, which seemed to suit his purposes. It was the village of Jaulnay. Cauvignac recognized it as the place where he had delivered an order to Canolles on a certain evening, and he established his headquarters there at the inn, where he remembered that he had supped very comfortably on the evening in question. As to that, he had no choice, for, as we have said before, it was the only inn in the place.

Thus established, on the principal highway from Paris to Bordeaux, Cauvignac had behind him the troops of Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, who was besieging Saumur, and before him those of the king, who were concentrated in Guyenne. Holding out a hand to either, and abstaining from hoisting any colors whatsoever until the proper time, he set about collecting a hundred men, with whom at his back he might make the most of his opportunities. Recruiting went merrily forward, and in a very short time his task was well-nigh half done.

One day, having passed the whole morning in hunting men, he was

standing, as usual, on the watch, at the door of the inn, talking with his lieutenant and sub-lieutenant, when he spied a young lady on horseback at the end of the village street, followed by a squire, also on horseback, and two mules laden with trunks.

The ease with which the fair Amazon handled her steed, and the stiff, haughty bearing of the squire, awakened a slumbering memory in Cauvignac's mind. He laid his hand upon Ferguzon's arm,—his lieutenant was indisposed that day, and his manner was somewhat dejected,—and said, pointing to the traveller:—

"There's the fiftieth soldier of the Cauvignac regiment, or I'm damned!"

"Who? that young lady?"

"Precisely."

"Nonsense! we already have a nephew who was to be an advocate, a godson who was to be a priest, two attorney's clerks, two druggists, a doctor, three bakers, two country bumpkins; that's enough of that kind of soldiers, God knows! without adding a woman to them; for some day or other we shall have to fight."

"Very true; but our cash only amounts to twenty-five thousand livres" (it appears that the cash as well as the troop had taken pattern by the snowball), "and if we could reach a good round figure, thirty thousand livres, say, it seems to me that it wouldn't be a bad scheme."

"Ah! if you look at it from that point of view, I am with you, and haven't a word to say."

"Hush! you will see."

Cauvignac approached the young woman, who, having drawn rein in front of one of the windows of the inn, was questioning the hostess, who assured her that she could be accommodated with a room.

"Your servant, young gentleman," he said, with a cunning expression, putting his hand to his hat in a free and easy way.

"Young gentleman, did you say?" said the lady, with a smile.

"Yes, viscount."

The lady blushed.

"I am at a loss to know what you mean, monsieur," she said.

"Oh! yes, you do, and the half-inch of blush on your cheeks proves it."

"You certainly are mistaken, monsieur."

"Nay, nay! on the contrary, I am perfectly sure of what I say."

"A truce to your jesting, monsieur."

"I am not jesting, monsieur, and if you wish for proofs, you shall have them. I had the honor to meet you, it will soon be three weeks ago, dressed according to your sex, on the banks of the Dordogne, on which occasion you were attended by your faithful squire, Monsieur Pompée. Is Monsieur Pompée still in your service?—Why, yes, there he is now, dear Monsieur Pompée! Will you tell me that I don't know him either?"

The squire and the young woman looked at each other in speechless amazement.

"Oh! yes, that astonishes you, my gallant viscount," Cauvignac continued; "but dare to say that it was not you whom I met on the road to Saint-Martin de Cubzac, a fourth of a league from the hostelry of Master Biscarros."

"I do not deny the meeting, monsieur."

"What did I say?"

"But that was the time when I was disguised."

"Nay, nay, you are disguised now. I quite understand that, as the description of the Vicomte de Cambes has been given out all through Guyenne, you deemed it more prudent, in order to avoid suspicion, to adopt, for the moment, this costume, which, to do you justice, my fair sir, is extremely becoming to you."

"Monsieur," said the viscountess, with an anxiety which she tried in vain to conceal, "except that your conversation contains a word or two of sense now and then, I should think you mad."

"I will not pay you the same compliment, for it seems to me a most judicious thing to disguise one's self when one is conspiring."

The young woman gazed at Cauvignac with increasing uneasiness.

"Indeed, monsieur," she said, "it seems to me that I have seen you somewhere; but I cannot remember where."

"The first time, as I have told you, was on the banks of the Dordogne."

"And the second?"

"The second was at Chantilly."

"On the day of the hunt?"

"Even so."

"In that case, monsieur, I have nothing to fear, for you are one of us."

"Why so?"

"Because you were at Chantilly."

"Permit me to observe that that is no reason."

"It seems to me to be."

"There were too many there to be sure that they were all friends."

"Beware, monsieur, or you will force me to form a strange opinion of you."

"Oh! form whatever opinion you choose; I am not sensitive."

"But, when all is said, what do you desire?"

"To do the honors of the inn, if you have no objection."

"I am deeply grateful to you, monsieur, but I do not require your services. I am expecting a friend."

"Very good; dismount, and while you are waiting, we will talk."

"What am I to do, madame?" interposed Pompée.

"Dismount, engage a room, and order supper," said Cauvignac.

"Monsieur," rejoined the viscountess, "if I mistake not, it is for me to give orders to my servant."

"That depends upon circumstances, viscount. I command at Jaulnay, and have fifty men at my beck and call. Pompée; do as I bid you."

Pompée lowered his crest and entered the inn.

"Do you presume to arrest me, monsieur?" demanded the young woman.

"Perhaps."

"What do you mean by perhaps?"

"It will depend upon the conversation we are about to have. Pray take the trouble to dismount, viscount; so! that's right. Now accept my arm; the inn people will take your horse to the stable."

"I obey, monsieur; for, as you say, you are the stronger. I have no means of resisting, but I tell you now that the person I am expecting will soon be here, and that he is an officer of the king."

"Very well, viscount; you will do me the honor to present me to him, and I shall be charmed to make his acquaintance."

The viscountess realized that resistance was useless at present, and she led

the way into the inn, making a sign to her strange interlocutor that he was at liberty to follow her if he chose.

Cauvignac escorted her to the door of the room bespoken by Pompée, and was about to follow her in, when Ferguson ran quickly up the stairs and whispered to him:—

"Captain, a carriage with three horses, a young man, masked, inside, and two servants at the doors."

"Good!" said Cauvignac; "it is probably the gentleman expected."

"Ah! do we expect a gentleman?"

"Yes, and I will go down to meet him. Do you remain in this corridor; don't lose sight of the door; let everybody in, but see that nobody goes out."

"Very well, captain."

A travelling-carriage had stopped at the door of the inn, escorted by four men of Cauvignac's company, who joined it a quarter of a league outside the town, and had not since parted company with it.

A young gentleman, dressed in blue velvet, and wrapped in a great furred cloak, was lying rather than sitting inside the carriage. From the time that the four men surrounded his vehicle he had plied them with questions; but, finding that he could obtain no answer, despite his persistence, he seemed to have resigned himself to wait, and simply raised his head from time to time to see if somebody had not come up from whom he could demand an explanation of the strange conduct of these people in his regard.

It was impossible, however, to make a just estimate of the impression produced upon the young traveller by this episode, as one of the black satin masks, called lous, which were very much in vogue at that time, hid half of his face. Those portions which could be seen, however,—that is to say, the upper part of his forehead, and his mouth and chin,—denoted youth, beauty, and intelligence. His teeth were small and white, and a pair of bright eyes shone through the holes in the mask.

Two tall footmen, pale and trembling, although each held a blunderbuss across his knee, sat as if glued to their saddles at either door of the carriage. The whole scene would have made an excellent picture of brigands stopping travellers on the highway, except for the bright daylight, the inn, the smiling features of Cauvignac, and the imperturbability of the pretended thieves.

At sight of Cauvignac, who, as we have said, when notified by Ferguson, made his appearance at the door, the young man uttered a little shriek of surprise, and hastily put his hand to his face, as if to make sure that his mask was in place; finding that it was, he recovered his tranquillity.

Swift as the movement was, it did not escape Cauvignac. He gazed at the traveller with the eye of a man skilful in tracing resemblances even upon the most disguised features, and the next moment started, in spite of himself, apparently as much surprised as the young gentleman in blue. He recovered himself, however, and said, removing his hat with a grace that was peculiar to him:—

"Welcome, fair lady."

The traveller's eyes shone with surprise through the holes in his mask.

"Where are you going in this guise, pray?" continued Cauvignac.

"Where am I going?" replied the traveller, taking no notice of Cauvignac's salutation,— "where am I going? You ought to know better than I, as it seems that I am not at liberty to continue my journey. I am going where you take me."

"Permit me to remark," continued Cauvignac, with a greater show of politeness than ever, "that that does not answer my question, fair lady! Your arrest is only momentary. When we have talked together a few moments upon certain matters in which we are mutually interested, with our hearts and our faces laid bare, you may resume your journey unmolested."

"Pardon me," rejoined the traveller, "but before going any farther, let us rectify an error. You pretend to take me for a woman, although you can see from my dress that I am a man."

"You know the Latin proverb: *Ne nimium crede colori*,—the wise man doesn't judge by appearances. Now I make some pretensions to wisdom, and the consequence is that, under this deceitful costume, I have recognized—"

"What?" demanded the traveller, impatiently.

"Why, I have already told you,—a woman!"

"Well, if I am a woman, why do you stop me?"

"Peste! Because, in times like these, women are more dangerous than men; indeed, the war in which we are engaged might, properly speaking, be called the war of women. The queen and Madame de Condé are the two belligerent powers. They have taken for lieutenant-generals Mademoiselle de Chevreuse, Madame de Montbazon, Madame de Longueville—and yourself. Mademoiselle de Chevreuse is Monsieur le Coadjuteur's general, Madame de Montbazon is Monsieur de Beaufort's, Madame de Longueville Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's, and you—you have every appearance of being Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon's."

"You are mad, monsieur," said the young traveller, shrugging his shoulders.

"I should not be inclined to believe you, fair lady, were it not for the fact that a handsome youth paid me the same compliment a moment since."

"Perhaps he was a woman whom you persisted in calling a man."

"Even so. I recognized my fine gentleman from having seen him on a certain evening early in May, prowling around Master Biscarros' inn, and I was not to be taken in by his petticoats and his wigs and his little soft voice, any more than I am taken in by your gray felt, and your fancy boots; and I said to him: 'My young friend, take what name you choose, wear what costume you choose, assume what voice you choose, you will be the Vicomte de Cambes none the less. '"

"The Vicomte de Cambes!" cried the traveller.

"Ah! the name seems to make an impression upon you. Do you happen to know him?"

"A very young man, almost a child?"

"Seventeen or eighteen years old, at most."

"Very fair?"

"Very fair."

"Large blue eyes?"

"Very large, very blue."

"Is he here?"

"He is here."

"And you say that he is—"

"Disguised as a woman, the rascal,—as you are as a man, slyboots."

"Why is he here, pray?" cried the young man, vehemently, and with evident distress, which increased perceptibly as Cauvignac assumed a more serious tone, and became more sparing of his words.

"Why," he replied, enunciating every syllable with great distinctness, "he claims to have an appointment with one of his friends."

"One of his friends?"

"Yes."

"A gentleman?"

"Probably."

"A baron?"

"Perhaps."

"And his name is—"

Cauvignac's brow contracted beneath a weighty thought which then first presented itself to his mind, and caused a perceptible commotion in his brain.

"Oho!" he muttered, "that would be a pretty kettle offish."

"And his name?" the traveller repeated.

"Wait a moment," said Cauvignac; "wait a moment—his name ends in olles."

"Monsieur de Canolles!" cried the traveller, whose lips became deathly pale, making a ghastly contrast with the black silk mask.

"That's the name! Monsieur de Canolles," said Cauvignac, following, upon the visible portions of the young man's face and in the convulsive movement of his whole body, the revolution which was taking place in his mind. "Do you know Monsieur de Canolles, too? In God's name, do you know everybody?"

"A truce to jesting," faltered the young man, who was trembling all over, and seemed on the point of fainting.

"Where is this lady?"

"In that room yonder; look, the third window from this,—where the yellow curtains are."

"I want to see her!" cried the traveller.

"Oho! have I made a mistake, and can it be that you are this Monsieur de Canolles whom she expects? Or, rather, isn't this Monsieur de Canolles, this gallant cavalier just trotting up, followed by a lackey who looks to me like a consummate idiot?"

The young traveller jumped forward so precipitately to look through the glass in the front of the carriage that he broke it with his head.

"'T is he! 'tis he!" he cried, utterly regardless of the fact that the blood was flowing from a slight wound. "Oh! the villain! he is here to meet her; I am undone!"

"Ah! didn't I say that you were a woman?"

"They meet here by appointment," the young man continued, wringing his hands. "Oh! I will have my revenge!"

Cauvignac would have indulged in some further pleasantry; but the young man made an imperious gesture with one hand, while with the other he tore off his mask, and the pale, threatening face of Nanon was revealed to Cauvignac's

impassive gaze.

VII.

"Good-day to you, little sister," said Cauvignac, offering the young woman his hand with imperturbable phlegm.

"Good-day! So you recognized me, did you?"

"The instant I laid my eyes on you. It wasn't enough to hide your face; you should have covered up that charming dimple, and your pearly teeth. When you wish to disguise yourself, coquette, cover your whole face! but you were not careful—*et fugit ad salices*—"

"Enough!" said Nanon, imperiously; "let us talk seriously."

"I ask nothing better; only by talking seriously can business be properly transacted."

"You say that the Vicomtesse de Cambes is here?"

"In person."

"And that Monsieur de Canolles is entering the inn at this moment?"

"Not yet; he dismounts and throws his rein to his servant. Ah! he has been seen yonder also. See, the window with the yellow curtains opens, and the viscountess puts out her head. Ah! she gives a little shriek of delight. Monsieur de Canolles darts into the house; get out of sight, little sister, or all will be lost."

Nanon threw herself back, convulsively pressing Cauvignac's hand, as he gazed at her with an air of paternal compassion.

"And I was going to Paris to join him!" cried Nanon. "I risked everything for the sake of seeing him again!"

"Ah! such a sacrifice, little sister, and for an ingrate, into the bargain! Upon my word, you might bestow your favors to better purpose."

"What will they say to each other, now they are together? What will they do?"

"Faith, dear Nanon, you embarrass me sorely by putting such a question to me; they will—*pardieu*! they will love each other dearly, I suppose."

"Oh! that shall not be!" cried Nanon, frantically gnawing at her nails, which shone like polished ivory.

"On the contrary, I fancy that it will be," rejoined Cauvignac. "Ferguson has orders to let no one come out, but not to keep anybody out. At this moment, in all probability, the viscountess and Baron de Canolles are

exchanging all sorts of endearing terms, each more charming than the last. Peste! dear Nanon, you are too late."

"Do you think so?" retorted the young woman with an indefinable expression of irony and malignant cunning; "do you think so? Very good; just come in and sit beside me, you wretched diplomatist."

Cauvignac obeyed.

"Bertrand," said Nanon to one of her retainers, "tell the coachman to turn quietly about, and draw up under the clump of trees we left at the right as we entered the village.—Won't that be a safe place to talk?" she asked Cauvignac.

"There could be no better. But permit me to take a few precautions on my own account."

"Go on."

Cauvignac made signs to four of his men, who were strutting about the inn, buzzing and puffing like hornets in the sun, to follow him.

"You do well to take those men," said Nanon, "and if you follow my advice you will take six rather than four; there may be work cut out for them."

"Good!" said Cauvignac; "work of that kind is what I want."

"Then you will be content," said Nanon.

The coachman turned the carriage, and drove away, with Nanon, red with the flame of her thoughts, and Cauvignac, apparently calm and cold, but ready, nevertheless, to lend an attentive ear to his sister's suggestions.

Meanwhile, Canolles, attracted by the joyous cry uttered by Madame de Cambes when she caught sight of him, had darted into the inn, and to the viscountess's room, without noticing Ferguzon, whom he passed in the corridor, but who made no objection to his entering, as he had received no instructions concerning him.

"Ah! monsieur," cried Madame de Cambes, "come in quickly; I have been so impatient for you to come!"

"Those words would make me the happiest man in the world, madame, if your pallor and your evident distress did not tell me as plainly as words could do that you were not expecting me for myself alone."

"Yes, monsieur, you are right," said Claire with her charming smile, "and I desire to lay myself under still greater obligation to you."

"How so?"

"By begging you to save me from some peril, I know not what, which

threatens me."

"Peril?"

"Yes. Wait."

She went to the door, and threw the bolt.

"I have been recognized," she said, returning to Canolles.

"By whom?"

"By a man whose name I do not know, but whose face and voice are familiar to me. It seems as if I heard his voice the evening that you, in this very room, received the order to repair at once to Mantes. It seems also as if I had seen his face at the hunting party at Chantilly, the day that I took Madame de Condé's place."

"Whom do you take the man to be?"

"An agent of Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, and therefore an enemy."

"The devil!" exclaimed Canolles. "You say that he recognized you?"

"Yes; he called me by name, although he insisted that I was a man. There are officers of the king's party all over the country hereabout; I am known to belong to the party of the princes, and it may be that they proposed to make trouble for me. But you are here, and I no longer have any fear. You are an officer yourself, and belong to the same party that they do, so you will be my safeguard."

"Alas!" said Canolles, "I greatly fear that I can offer you no other defence or protection than that of my sword."

"How is that?"

"Because from this moment I cease to belong to the king's party."

"Do you mean what you say?" cried Claire, delighted beyond measure.

"I promised myself that I would forward my resignation from the place where I next met you. I have met you, and my resignation will be forwarded from Jaulnay."

"Oh! free! free! you are free! you can embrace the cause of justice and loyalty; you can join the party of the princes, that is to say, of all the nobility. Oh! I knew that you were too noble-hearted not to come to it at last."

Canolles kissed with transport the hand Claire offered him.

"How did it come about?" she continued. "Tell me every detail."

"Oh! it's not a long story. I wrote Monsieur de Mazarin to inform him of

what had taken place. When I arrived at Mantes, I was ordered to wait upon him; he called me a poor fool, I called him a poor fool; he laughed, I lost my temper; he raised his voice, I bade him go to the devil. I returned to my hôtel; I was waiting until he thought fit to consign me to the Bastille; he was waiting until prudence should bid me begone from Mantes. After twenty-four hours prudence bade me take that course. And even that I owe to you, for I thought of what you promised me, and that you might be waiting for me. So it was that I threw away all responsibility, all thought of party, and with my hands free, and almost without preference, I remembered one thing only, that I loved you, madame, and that at last I might tell you so, aloud and boldly."

"So you have thrown away your rank for me, you are disgraced, ruined, all for my sake! Dear Monsieur de Canolles, how can I ever pay my debt? How can I prove my gratitude to you?"

With a smile and a tear which gave him back a hundred times more than he had lost, Madame de Cambes brought Canolles to her feet.

"Ah! madame," said he, "from this moment I am rich and happy; for I am to be always with you, I am never to leave you more, I shall be happy in the privilege of seeing you, and rich in your love."

"There is no further obstacle, then?"

"No."

"You belong to me absolutely, and, while keeping your heart, I may offer your arm to Madame la Princesse?"

"You may."

"You have sent your resignation, do you say?"

"Not yet; I wished to see you first; but, as I told you, now that I have seen you again, I propose to write it here, instantly. I preferred to wait until I could do it in obedience to your orders."

"Write, then, before anything else! If you do not write, you will be looked upon as a turncoat; indeed, you must wait, before taking any decisive step, until your resignation is accepted."

"Dear little diplomatist, have no fear that they will not accept it, and very gladly. My bungling at Chantilly will spare them any great regret. Did they not tell me," laughed Canolles, "that I was a poor fool?"

"Yes; but we will make up to you for any opinion they may entertain, never fear. Your affair at Chantilly will be more thoroughly appreciated at Bordeaux than at Paris, I assure you. But write, baron, write, so that we may leave this place! for I confess that I am not at ease by any means in this inn."

"Are you speaking of the past; is it the memory of another time that terrifies you so?" said Canolles, gazing fondly about the room.

"No. I am speaking of the present, and you do not enter into my fears to-day."

"Whom do you fear, pray? What have you to fear?"

"Mon Dieu! who knows?"

At that moment, as if to justify the viscountess's apprehension, three blows were struck upon the door with appalling solemnity.

Claire and Canolles ceased their conversation and exchanged an anxious, questioning glance.

"In the king's name!" said a voice outside. "Open!"

The next moment the fragile door was shattered. Canolles attempted to seize his sword, but a man had already stepped between his sword and him.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"You are Monsieur le Baron de Canolles, are you not?"

"I am."

"Captain in the Navailles regiment?"

"Yes."

"Sent upon a confidential mission by the Duc d'Épernon?"

Canolles nodded his head.

"In that case, in the names of the king, and her Majesty the Queen Regent, I arrest you."

"Your warrant?"

"Here it is."

"But, monsieur," said Canolles, handing back the paper after he had glanced over it rapidly, "it seems to me that I know you."

"Know me! Parbleu! Wasn't it in the same village where I arrest you to-day, that I brought you an order from Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon to betake yourself to the court? Your fortune was in that commission, my young gentleman. You have missed it; so much the worse for you!"

Claire turned pale, and fell weeping upon a chair; she had recognized the impertinent questioner.

"Monsieur de Mazarin is taking his revenge," muttered Canolles.

"Come, monsieur, we must be off," said Cauvignac.

Claire did not stir. Canolles, undecided as to the course he should pursue, seemed near going mad. The catastrophe was so overpowering and unexpected that he bent beneath its weight; he bowed his head and resigned himself.

Moreover, at that period the words "In the king's name!" had not lost their magic effect, and no one dared resist them.

"Where are you taking me, monsieur?" he said.

"Are you forbidden to afford me the poor consolation of knowing where I am going?"

"No, monsieur, I will tell you. We are to escort you to Île-Saint Georges."

"Adieu, madame," said Canolles, bowing respectfully to Madame de Cambes; "adieu!"

"Well, well," said Cauvignac to himself, "things aren't so far advanced as I thought. I will tell Nanon; it will please her immensely."

"Four men to escort the captain!" he cried, stepping to the door. "Forward, four men!"

"And where am I to be taken?" cried Madame de Cambes, holding out her arms toward the prisoner. "If the baron is guilty, I am still more guilty than he."

"You, madame," replied Cauvignac, "are free, and may go where you choose." And he left the room with the baron.

Madame de Cambes rose, with a gleam of hope, and prepared to leave the inn at once, before contrary orders should be issued.

"Free!" said she. "In that case I can watch over him; I will go at once."

Darting to the window, she was in time to see Canolles in the midst of his escort, and to exchange a farewell wave of the hand with him. Then she called Pompée, who, hoping for a halt of two or three days, had established himself in the best room he could find, and bade him make ready for immediate departure.

VIII.

It was an even more melancholy journey for Canolles than he had anticipated. The most carefully guarded prisoner has a false feeling of freedom in the saddle, but the saddle was soon succeeded by a carriage, a leathern affair, the shape of which and its capacity for jolting are still retained in Touraine. Furthermore, Canolles' knees were interlocked with those of a man with the beak of an eagle, whose hand rested lovingly on the butt of a pistol.

Sometimes, at night, for he slept during the day, he hoped to be able to elude the vigilance of this new Argus; but beside the eagle's beak were two great owl's-eyes, round, flaming, and most excellently adapted for nocturnal observations, so that, turn which way he would, Canolles would always see those two round eyes gleaming in that direction.

While he slept, one of the two eyes also slept, but only one. Nature had endowed this man with the faculty of sleeping with one eye open.

Two days and two nights Canolles passed in gloomy reflections; for the fortress of Île Saint-Georges—an inoffensive fortress enough, by the way—assumed terrifying proportions in the prisoner's eyes, as fear and remorse sank more deeply into his heart.

Remorse, because he realized that his mission to Madame la Princesse was a confidential mission, which he had made the most of to further his own interests, and that he had committed a terrible indiscretion on that occasion. At Chantilly, Madame de Condé was simply a fugitive. At Bordeaux, Madame de Condé was a rebel princess. Fear, because he knew by tradition the appalling vengeance of which Anne of Austria, in her wrath, was capable.

There was another source of perhaps even keener remorse than that we have mentioned. There was, somewhere in the world, a young woman, a beautiful, clever young woman, who had used her great influence solely to put him forward; a woman who, through her love for him, had again and again imperilled her position, her future, her fortune; and that woman, not only the most charming of mistresses, but the most devoted of friends, he had brutally abandoned, without excuse, at a time when her thoughts were busy with him, and instead of revenging herself upon him she had persistently bestowed additional tokens of her favor upon him; and her voice, instead of sounding reproachfully in his ears, had never lost the caressing sweetness of an almost regal favor. It is true that that favor had come to him at an inauspicious moment, at a moment when Canolles would certainly have preferred disgrace; but was that Nanon's fault? Nanon had looked upon that mission to his Majesty as a method of augmenting the fortune and worldly position of the man with whom her mind was constantly filled.

All those who have loved two women at once,—and I ask pardon of my lady-readers, but this phenomenon, which they find it so hard to understand, because they never have but one love, is very common among us men,—all those who have loved two women at once, I say, will understand that as Canolles reflected more and more deeply, Nanon recovered more and more of the influence over his mind which he thought she had lost forever. The harsh asperities of character which wound one in the constant contact of daily intercourse, and cause momentary irritation, are forgotten in absence; while,

on the other hand, certain sweeter memories resume their former intensity with solitude. Fair and lost to him, kind and ill-treated,—in such guise did Nanon now appear to Canolles.

The fact was that Canolles searched his own heart ingenuously, and not with the bad grace of those accused persons who are forced to a general confession. What had Nanon done to him that he should abandon her? What had Madame de Cambes done that he should follow her? What was there so fascinating and lovable in the little cavalier of the Golden Calf? Was Madame de Cambes so vastly superior to Nanon? Are golden locks so much to be preferred to black that one should be a perjured ingrate to his mistress, and a traitor to his king, all for the sake of exchanging black locks for golden? And yet, oh, pitiable human nature! Canolles brought all these eminently sensible arguments to bear upon himself, but Canolles was not convinced. The heart is full of such mysteries, which bring happiness to lovers and despair to philosophers. All this did not prevent Canolles from hating himself, and berating his own folly soundly.

"I am going to be punished," he said, thinking that the punishment effaces the crime; "I am going to be punished, and so much the better. I suppose I shall have to do with some very rough-spoken, very insolent, very brutal captain, who will read to me, from the supreme height of his dignity as jailer-in-chief, an order from Monsieur de Mazarin, who will point out a dungeon for me, and will send me to forgather with the rats and toads fifteen feet underground, while I might have lived in the light, and flourished in the sun's rays, in the arms of a woman who loved me, whom I loved, and whom it may be that I still love. Cursed little viscount! why need you have served as envelope to such a fascinating viscountess? But is there anywhere in all the world a viscountess who is worth what this particular one is likely to cost me? For it's not simply the governor, and the dungeon fifteen feet under ground; if they think me a traitor, they won't leave matters half-investigated; they will pick a quarrel with me about that Chantilly affair, which I could not pay too heavy a penalty for, if it had been more fruitful of results for me; but it has brought me in just three kisses upon her hand. Triple idiot, when I had the power, not to use it! Poor fool! as Monsieur de Mazarin says,—to be a traitor, and not collect the pay for his treason! Who will pay me now?"

Canolles shrugged his shoulders contemptuously in reply to this mental question.

The man with the round eyes, clear-sighted as he was, could not understand this pantomime, and gazed at him in amazement.

"If they question me," Canolles continued, "I'll not answer; for what answer can I make? That I was not fond of Monsieur de Mazarin? In that case

I was under no obligation to enter his service. That I did love Madame de Cambes? A fine reason that to give a queen and a first minister! So I won't reply at all. But these judges are very sensitive fellows; when they ask questions they like to be answered. There are brutal wedges in these provincial jails; they'll shatter my slender knees, of which I was so proud, and send me back to my rats and my toads a perfect wreck. I shall be bandy-legged all my life, like Monsieur le Prince de Conti, and that would make me extremely ugly, even supposing that his Majesty would cover me with his wing, which he will take good care not to do."

Besides the governor and the rats and toads and wedges, there were certain scaffolds whereon rebels were beheaded, certain gallows whereon traitors were hanged, and certain drill grounds where deserters were shot. But all this was of small consequence to a well-favored youth like Canolles, in comparison with bandy legs.

He resolved, therefore, to keep his mind clear and to question his companion upon the subject.

The round eyes, the eagle's beak, and the frowning expression of that personage gave him but slight encouragement to accost him. However, no matter how stolid a man's face may be, it must soften a little at times, and Canolles took advantage of an instant when a grimace resembling a smile passed across the features of the subaltern who watched him so sharply.

"Monsieur!" said he.

"Monsieur?" was the reply.

"Excuse me if I take you away from your reflections."

"Make no excuses, monsieur, for I never reflect."

"The devil! you are surely endowed with a fortunate mental organization, monsieur."

"And therefore I never complain."

"Ah, well, you're not like me in that; for I am very much inclined to complain."

"Of what, monsieur?"

"Because I was arrested just when I was least expecting it, to be taken I don't know where."

"Oh! yes, monsieur, you do know, for you were told."

"So I was. We are going to Île Saint-Georges, aren't we?"

"Precisely."

"Do you think I shall remain there long?"

"I have no idea, monsieur; but from the way in which you were recommended, I think it's likely."

"Oho! Is it a very forbidding place, this Île Saint-Georges?"

"Don't you know the fortress?"

"On the inside, no; I have never been inside."

"It's not very attractive, monsieur; and, aside from the governor's apartments, which have been newly furnished and are very pleasant, as I am informed, it's rather a gloomy abode."

"Very good. Do you suppose they will question me?"

"It's the custom."

"And suppose I don't answer?"

"Suppose you don't answer?"

"Yes."

"The devil! in that case there's the torture, you know."

"Ordinary?"

"Ordinary or extraordinary, according to the charge. What is the charge against you, monsieur?"

"Why," said Canolles, "I am much afraid that I am accused of offences against the State."

"Oho! in that case you will enjoy the extraordinary torture. Ten pots—"

"What's that? ten pots?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you will have the ten pots of water poured down your throat."

"So the torture by water is in vogue at Île Saint-Georges, is it?"

"Dame! monsieur, you understand that on the Garonne—"

"To be sure, where the water is right at hand. How many pailfuls in the ten pots?"

"Three to three and a half."

"I shall swell up in that case."

"A little. But if you take the precaution to arrange matters with the jailer —"

"What then?"

"You will have an easy time of it."

"In what does the service that the jailer has it in his power to render me consist, I beg to know?"

"He can give you oil to drink."

"Is oil a specific?"

"Of sovereign efficacy."

"Do you think so?"

"I speak from experience. I have drunk (bu)—"

"You have drunk?"

"Pardon me; I meant to say, I have seen (vu). The habit of talking with Gascons makes me pronounce v like b sometimes, and vice versa."

"You were saying," said Canolles, unable to repress a smile, notwithstanding the gravity of the conversation,— "you were saying that you had seen—?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have seen a man drink the ten pots of water with great facility, thanks to the oil which he had taken to put the canals in proper condition. To be sure, he swelled up, as they all do; but with a good fire they disinflated him without much damage. That is the essential thing in the second part of the operation. Be sure and remember these words: to heat without burning."

"I understand," said Canolles. "Mayhap monsieur was the executioner?"

"No, monsieur," replied his interlocutor, with courtesy seasoned with modesty.

"His assistant, perhaps?"

"No, monsieur; an onlooker, simply."

"Ah! and monsieur's name is—?"

"Barrabas."

"A fine name, an old name, too; made famous in the Scriptures."

"In the Passion, monsieur."

"That's what I meant; but from habit I used the other expression."

"Monsieur prefers to say 'the Scriptures.' Is monsieur a Huguenot?"

"Yes, but a very ignorant Huguenot. Would you believe that I know hardly three thousand verses of the Psalms?"

"Indeed, it is very little."

"I succeeded better in remembering the music. There has been much hanging and burning in my family."

"I hope that no such fate is in store for monsieur."

"No, there is a much more tolerant spirit to-day; they will submerge me probably, nothing more."

Barrabas began to laugh.

Canolles' heart leaped for joy; he had won over his keeper. If this jailer ad interim should become his permanent jailer, he stood a fair chance to obtain the oil; he determined, therefore, to take up the conversation where he had left it.

"Monsieur Barrabas," said he, "are we destined to be soon separated, or shall you do me the honor to continue to bear me company?"

"Monsieur, when we arrive at Île Saint-Georges, I shall be obliged, I deeply regret to say, to leave you; I must return to our company."

"Indeed; do you belong to a company of archers?"

"No, monsieur, to a company of soldiers."

"Levied by the minister?"

"No, monsieur, by Captain Cauvignac, the same man who had the honor of arresting you."

"Are you in the king's service?"

"I think so, monsieur."

"What the devil do you mean by that? Are you not sure?"

"One is sure of nothing in this world."

"Well, if you are in doubt there is one thing that you should do, in order to set your doubts at rest."

"What is that?"

"Let me go."

"Impossible, monsieur."

"But I will pay you handsomely for your kindness."

"With what?"

"Pardieu! with money,"

"Monsieur has none."

"I have no money?"

"No."

Canolles hastily felt in his pockets.

"Upon my word, my purse has disappeared," he said. "Who has taken my purse?"

"I, monsieur," replied Barrabas with a low bow.

"Why did you do it?"

"So that monsieur could not corrupt me."

Canolles stared at the honest keeper in open-mouthed admiration, and as the argument seemed to admit of no reply, he made none.

The result was that the travellers relapsed into silence, and the journey, as it drew near its close, resumed the depressing characteristics which marked its beginning.

IX.

Day was breaking when the clumsy vehicle reached the village nearest to its island destination. Canolles, feeling that it had ceased to move, passed his head through the little loophole intended to furnish air to those who were free, and conveniently arranged to shut it off from prisoners.

A pretty little village, consisting of some hundred houses grouped about a church on a hillside, and overlooked by a château, was sharply outlined in the clear morning air, gilded by the first rays of the sun, which put to flight the thin, gauzy patches of vapor.

Just then the wagon started on up the incline, and the coachman left the box and walked beside the vehicle.

"My friend," said Canolles, "are you of this province?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am from Libourne."

"In that case you should know this village. What is yonder white house, and those pretty cottages?"

"The château, monsieur," was the reply, "is the manor house of Cambes, and the village is one of its dependencies."

Canolles started back, and his face instantly changed from the deepest red

to deathly white.

"Monsieur," interposed Barrabas, whose round eye nothing escaped, "did you hurt yourself against the window?"

"No—thanks," said Canolles, and continued his examination of the peasant. "To whom does the property belong?" he asked.

"The Vicomtesse de Cambes."

"A young widow?"

"Very beautiful and very rich."

"And, consequently, much sought after?"

"Of course; a handsome dowry and a handsome woman; with that combination one doesn't lack suitors."

"Of good reputation?"

"Yes, but a furious partisan of the princes."

"I think I have heard so."

"A demon, monsieur, a downright demon!"

"An angel!" murmured Canolles, whose thoughts, whenever they recurred to Claire, recurred to her with transports of adoration,—*"an angel!"*

"Does she live here some of the time?" he inquired, raising his voice.

"Rarely, monsieur; but she did live here for a long while. Her husband left her here, and as long as she remained, her presence was a blessing to the whole countryside. Now she is said to be with the princess."

The carriage, having reached the top of the hill, was ready to go down again on the other side; the driver made a motion with his hand to ask permission to resume his place upon the box, and Canolles, who feared that he might arouse suspicion by continuing his questions, drew his head back into the lumbering vehicle, which started down hill at a slow trot, its most rapid gait.

After a quarter of an hour, during which time Canolles, still under the eye of Barrabas, was absorbed in gloomy reflection, the wagon halted again.

"Do we stop here for breakfast?" Canolles asked.

"We stop here altogether, monsieur. We have reached our destination. Yonder is Île Saint-Georges. We have only the river to cross now."

"True," muttered Canolles; "so near and yet so far!"

"Monsieur, some one is coming to meet us," said Barrabas; "be good

enough to prepare to alight."

The second of Canolles' keepers, who was sitting on the box beside the driver, climbed down and unlocked the door, to which he had the key.

Canolles removed his eyes from the little white château, upon which he had kept them fixed, to the fortress which was to be his abode. He saw in the first place, on the other side of a swiftly flowing arm of the river, a ferry-boat, and beside it a guard of eight men and a sergeant. Behind them were the outworks of the citadel.

"Ah!" said Canolles to himself, "I am expected, it seems, and due precautions are taken.—Are those my new guards?" he asked Barrabas, aloud.

"I would be glad to answer monsieur's question intelligently; but really I have no idea."

At that moment, after exchanging signals with the sentinel on duty at the entrance to the fortress, the eight soldiers and the sergeant entered the ferry-boat, crossed the Garonne, and stepped ashore just as Canolles stepped to the ground.

Immediately the sergeant, seeing an officer, approached him and gave the military salute.

"Have I the honor of addressing Monsieur le Baron de Canolles, captain in the Navailles regiment?" he asked.

"Himself," replied Canolles, marvelling at the man's politeness.

The sergeant turned to his men, ordered them to present arms, and pointed with the end of his pike to the boat. Canolles took his place between his two guards, the eight men and the sergeant embarked after him, and the boat moved away from the shore, while Canolles cast a last glance at Cambes, which was just passing out of sight behind some rising ground.

The island was almost covered with scarps, counter-scarps, glacés, and bastions; a small fort in reasonably good condition overlooked all these outworks. The entrance was through an arched gateway, in front of which a sentinel was pacing back and forth.

"Qui vive?" he cried.

The little troop halted, the sergeant walked up to the sentinel, and said a few words to him.

"To arms!" cried the sentinel.

Immediately a score of men, who composed the picket, issued from a guard-house, and hastily drew up in line in front of the gateway.

"Come, monsieur," said the sergeant to Canolles. The drum began to beat.

"What does this mean?" said the young man to himself.

He walked toward the fort, quite at a loss to understand what was going on; for all these preparations resembled military honors paid to a superior much more than precautionary measures concerning a prisoner.

Nor was this all. Canolles did not notice that, just as he stepped from the carriage, a window in the governor's apartments was thrown open, and an officer stationed thereat watched attentively the movements of the boat and the reception given to the prisoner and his two keepers.

This officer, when Canolles stepped from the boat upon the island, hastily left the window, and hurried down to meet him.

"Aha!" said Canolles, as his eye fell upon him, "here comes the commandant to inspect his new boarder."

"I should say, monsieur," said Barrabas, "judging from appearances, that you'll not be left to languish a week in the anteroom like some people; you will be entered on the books at once."

"So much the better!" said Canolles.

Meanwhile the officer was drawing near. Canolles assumed the haughty, dignified attitude of a persecuted man.

A few steps from Canolles the officer removed his hat.

"Have I the honor of addressing Monsieur le Baron de Canolles?" he asked.

"Monsieur," the prisoner replied, "I am truly overwhelmed by your courtesy. Yes, I am Baron de Canolles; treat me, I beg you, as one officer might treat another, and assign me as comfortable quarters as possible."

"Monsieur," said the officer, "the place is not in the best of condition, but, as if in anticipation of your wishes, all possible improvements have been made."

"Whom should I thank for such unusual attention?" Canolles asked with a smile.

"The king, monsieur, who does well all that he does."

"To be sure, monsieur, to be sure. God forbid that I should slander his Majesty, especially on this occasion; I should not be sorry, however, to obtain certain information."

"If you so desire, monsieur, I am at your service; but I will take the liberty

of reminding you that the garrison is waiting to make your acquaintance."

"Peste!" muttered Canolles, "a whole garrison to make the acquaintance of a prisoner who is to be shut up! Here's a deal of ceremony, I should say."

He added, aloud:—

"I am at your service, monsieur, and ready to follow you wherever you choose to take me."

"Permit me then to walk in advance to do the honors."

Canolles followed him, congratulating himself upon having fallen into the hands of so courteous a gentleman.

"I fancy you will be let off with the ordinary question, only four pots of water," Barrabas whispered in his ear.

"So much the better," said Canolles. "I shall swell up only half as much."

When they reached the court-yard of the citadel, Canolles found part of the garrison under arms. Thereupon the officer who escorted him drew his sword and saluted him.

"Mon Dieu! how tedious!" muttered Canolles.

At the same instant a drum beat under an archway near by. Canolles turned, and a second file of soldiers issued from the archway and took up a position behind the first.

The officer thereupon handed Canolles two keys.

"What does this mean?" the baron demanded; "what are you doing?"

"We are going through with the customary formalities in accordance with the most rigorous laws of military etiquette."

"For whom do you take me, in God's name?" exclaimed Canolles, amazed beyond expression.

"Why, for who you are,—for Monsieur le Baron de Canolles, Governor of Île Saint-Georges."

A cloud passed before Canolles' eyes, and he was near falling.

"I shall have the honor in a moment," continued the officer, "of turning over to Monsieur le Gouverneur his commission, which arrived this morning, accompanied by a letter announcing monsieur's arrival for to-day."

Canolles glanced at Barrabas, whose round eyes were fixed upon him with an expression of speechless amazement impossible to describe.

"So I am Governor of Île Saint-Georges?" faltered Canolles.

"Yes, monsieur, and his Majesty has made us very happy by his choice."

"You are sure that there's no mistake?"

"If you will deign to go with me to your apartments, monsieur, you will find there your commission."

Canolles, completely staggered by a dénouement so utterly different from that which he anticipated, followed the officer without a word, amid the beating of drums, soldiers presenting arms, and all the inhabitants of the fortress, who made the air resound with acclamations. Pale and excited, he saluted to right and left, and questioned Barrabas with dismayed glance.

At last he was introduced into a salon furnished with some pretensions to elegance, from the windows of which he noticed first of all that he could see the château de Cambes; and there he read his commission, drawn up in proper form, signed by the queen, and countersigned by the Duc d'Épernon.

At that sight Canolles' legs altogether failed him, and he fell helplessly upon a chair.

After all the fanfares and presenting arms and noisy demonstrations of respect in the military fashion, and after the first feeling of surprise which these demonstrations produced in him, Canolles was anxious to know just what to think with reference to the office the queen had bestowed upon him, and raised his eyes which for some time had been fastened upon the floor.

He then saw standing in front of him, no less thunderstruck than himself, his former keeper, become his very humble servant.

"Ah! is it you, Master Barrabas?" said he.

"Myself, Monsieur le Gouverneur."

"Will you explain what has happened? for I have all the difficulty in the world not to take it for a dream."

"I will explain to you, monsieur, that when I talked about the extraordinary question and the ten pots of water I thought, on my honor, that I was gilding the pill."

"You mean to say that you were convinced—?"

"That I was bringing you here to be broken on the wheel, monsieur."

"Thanks!" said Canolles, shuddering in spite of himself. "But have you any opinion now as to what has happened?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Do me the favor to tell me what it is, monsieur."

"It is this, monsieur. The queen must have realized what a difficult mission it was that she intrusted to you. As soon as the first angry outburst had spent itself, she must have repented, and as you are not a repulsive fellow, all things considered, her gracious Majesty has thought fit to reward you because she had punished you too severely."

"Impossible!" said Canolles.

"Impossible, you think?"

"Improbable, at least."

"Improbable?"

"Yes."

"In that case, monsieur, it only remains for me to offer you my very humble respects. You can be as happy as a king at Île Saint-Georges,—excellent wine, abundance of game, and fresh fish at every tide, brought by boats from Bordeaux and by the women of Saint-Georges. Ah, monsieur, this is a miraculous ending!"

"Very good; I will try to follow your advice. Take this order signed by myself, and go to the paymaster, who will give you ten pistoles. I would give them to you myself, but since you took all my money as a measure of precaution—"

"And I did well, monsieur," cried Barrabas; "for if you had succeeded in corrupting me you would have fled, and if you had fled you would naturally have sacrificed the elevated position which you have now attained, and I should never have forgiven myself."

"Very cleverly argued, Master Barrabas. I have already noticed that you are a past master in logic. But take this paper as a token of my appreciation of your eloquence. The ancients, you know, represented Eloquence with chains of gold issuing from her mouth."

"Monsieur," rejoined Barrabas, "if I dared I would remark that I think it useless to call upon the paymaster—"

"What! you refuse?" cried Canolles.

"No, God forbid! I have no false pride, thank Heaven! But I can see certain strings, which look to me much like purse-strings, protruding from a box on your chimney-piece."

"You are evidently a connoisseur in strings, Master Barrabas," said Canolles. "We will see if your previsions are correct."

There was a casket of old faience, incrustated with silver, upon the chimney-

piece. Canolles raised the lid, and found within, a purse, and in the purse a thousand pistoles with this little note:—

"For the privy purse of Monsieur le Gouverneur of Île Saint-Georges."

"Corbleu!" said Canolles, blushing; "the queen does things very well."

Instinctively the thought of Buckingham came into his mind. Perhaps the queen had seen the handsome features of the young captain from behind some curtain; perhaps a tender interest in him led her to extend her protecting influence over him. Perhaps—We must remember that Canolles was a Gascon.

Unfortunately, the queen was twenty years older than in Buckingham's time.

Whatever the explanation, wherever the purse came from, Canolles put his hand in it and took out ten pistoles, which he handed to Barrabas, who left the room with a profusion of most respectful reverences.

X.

When Barrabas had gone, Canolles summoned the officer, and requested him to act as his guide in the inspection he proposed to make of his new dominions.

The officer at once placed himself at his command.

At the door he found a sort of staff composed of the other principal functionaries of the citadel. Escorted by them, talking with them, and listening to descriptions of all the half-moons, casemates, cellars, and attics, the morning wore away, and about eleven o'clock he returned to his apartments, having made a thorough inspection. His escort disappeared, and Canolles was left alone with the officer whose acquaintance he had first made.

"Now," said that officer, drawing near him with an air of mystery, "there remains but a single apartment and a single person for Monsieur le Gouverneur to see."

"I beg your pardon?" said Canolles.

"That person's apartment is yonder," said the officer, pointing to a door which Canolles had not yet opened.

"Ah! it is yonder, is it?"

"Yes."

"And the person too?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Pardon me, I beg, but I am greatly fatigued, having travelled

night and day, and my head's not very clear this morning; so pray explain your meaning a little more fully."

"Well, Monsieur le Gouverneur," rejoined the officer, with a most knowing smile, "the apartment—"

"—of the person—" said Canolles.

"—who awaits you, is yonder. You understand now, don't you?"

Canolles started, as if he were returning from the land of dreams.

"Yes, yes. Very good," said he; "and I may go in?"

"To be sure, as you are expected."

"Here goes, then!" said Canolles; and with his heart beating fit to burst its walls, hardly able to see, his fears and his desires inextricably confused in his mind, he opened the door and saw behind the hangings, with laughing face and sparkling eyes, Nanon de Lartigues, who cried out with joy, as she threw her arms around the young man's neck.

Canolles stood like a statue, with his arms hanging at his sides, and lifeless eye.

"You?" he faltered.

"I!" said she, redoubling her smiles and kisses.

The remembrance of the wrong he had done her passed through Canolles' mind, and as he divined instantly that he owed to this faithful friend his latest good-fortune, he was utterly crushed by the combined weight of remorse and gratitude.

"Ah!" said he; "you were at hand to save me while I was throwing myself away like a madman; you were watching over me; you are my guardian angel."

"Don't call me your angel, for I am a very devil," said Nanon; "but I appear only at opportune times, you will admit."

"You are right, dear friend; in good sooth, I believe that you have saved me from the scaffold."

"I think so too. Ah! baron, how could you, shrewd and far-sighted as you are, ever allow yourself to be taken in by those conceited jades of princesses?"

Canolles blushed to the whites of his eyes; but Nanon had adopted the plan of not noticing his embarrassment.

"In truth," said he, "I don't know. I can't understand myself."

"Oh, they are very cunning! Ah, messieurs, you choose to make war on women! What's this I have heard? They showed you, in place of the younger princess, a maid of honor, a chambermaid, a log of wood—what was it?"

Canolles felt the fever rising from his trembling fingers to his confused brain.

"I thought it was the princess," he said; "I didn't know her."

"Who was it, pray?"

"A maid of honor, I think."

"Ah, my poor boy! it's that traitor Mazarin's fault. What the devil! when a man is sent upon a delicate mission like that, they should give him a portrait. If you had had or seen a portrait of Madame la Princesse, you would certainly have recognized her. But let us say no more about it. Do you know that that awful Mazarin, on the pretext that you had betrayed the king, wanted to throw you to the toads?"

"I suspected as much."

"But I said: 'Let's throw him to the Nanons.' Did I do well? Tell me!"

Preoccupied as he was with the memory of the viscountess, and although he wore the viscountess's portrait upon his heart, Canolles could not resist the bewitching tenderness, the charming wit that sparkled in the loveliest eyes in the world; he stooped and pressed his lips upon the pretty hand which was offered him.

"And you came here to await me?"

"I went to Paris to find you, and bring you here. I carried your commission with me. The separation seemed very long and tedious to me, for Monsieur d'Épernon alone fell with his full weight upon my monotonous life. I learned of your discomfiture. By the way, I had forgotten to tell you; you are my brother, you know."

"I thought so from reading your letter."

"Yes, somebody betrayed us. The letter I wrote you fell into bad hands. The duke arrived in a rage. I told him your name, and that you were my brother, poor Canolles; and we are now united by the most legitimate bond. You are almost my husband, my poor boy."

Canolles yielded to her incredible powers of fascination. Having kissed her white hands he kissed her black eyes. The ghost of Madame de Cambes should have taken flight, veiling her eyes in sorrow.

"After that," continued Nanon, "I laid my plans, and provided for

everything. I made of Monsieur d'Épernon your patron, or rather your friend. I turned aside the wrath of Mazarin. Lastly, I selected Saint-Georges as a place of retirement, because, dear boy, you know, they are forever wanting to stone me. Dear Canolles, you are the only soul in the whole world who loves me ever so little. Come, tell me that you love me!"

And the captivating siren, throwing her arms about the young man's neck, gazed ardently into his eyes, as if she would read to the very depths of his heart.

Canolles felt in his heart, which Nanon was seeking to read, that he could not remain insensible to such boundless devotion. A secret presentiment told him that there was something more than love in Nanon's feeling for him, that there was generosity too, and that she not only loved him, but forgave him.

He made a motion of his head which answered her question; for he would not have dared to say with his lips that he loved her, although at the bottom of his heart all his memories pleaded in her favor.

"And so I made choice of Île Saint-Georges," she continued, "as a safe place for my money, my jewelry, and my person. 'What other than the man I love,' I said to myself, 'can defend my life? What other than my master can guard my treasures?' Everything is in your hands, my own love,—my life and my wealth. Will you keep a jealous watch over it all? Will you be a faithful friend and faithful guardian?"

At that moment a bugle rang out in the court-yard, and awoke a sympathetic vibration in Canolles' heart. He had before him love, more eloquent than it had ever been; a hundred yards away was war,—war, which inflames and intoxicates the imagination.

"Yes, Nanon, yes!" he cried. "Your person and your treasure are safe in my hands, and I would die, I swear it, to save you from the slightest danger."

"Thanks, my noble knight," said she; "I am as sure of your courage as of your nobleness of heart. Alas!" she added with a smile, "I would I were as sure of your love."

"Oh!" murmured Canolles, "you may be sure—"

"Very well, very well," said Nanon, "love is proved by deeds, not by oaths; by what you do, monsieur, we will judge of your love."

Throwing the loveliest arms in the world around Canolles' neck, she laid her head against his throbbing breast.

"Now, he must forget," she said to herself, "and he will forget—"

XI.

On the day that Canolles was arrested at Jaulnay, under the eyes of Madame de Cambes, she set out with Pompée to join Madame la Princesse, who was in the neighborhood of Coutras.

The worthy squire's first care was to try and prove to his mistress that the failure of Cauvignac's band to hold the fair traveller to ransom, or to commit any act of violence in her regard, was to be attributed to his resolute bearing, and his experience in the art of war. To be sure, Madame de Cambes was less easily convinced than Pompée hoped would be the case, and called his attention to the fact that for something more than an hour he had entirely disappeared; but Pompée explained to her that during that time he was hiding in a corridor, where he had prepared everything for the viscountess's flight, having a ladder in readiness; but he was compelled to maintain an unequal struggle with two frantic soldiers, who tried to take the ladder away from him; the which he did, of course, with his well-known indomitable courage.

This conversation naturally led Pompée to bestow a warm eulogium upon the soldiers of his day, who were savage as lions in face of the enemy, as they had proved at the siege of Montauban and the battle of Corbie; but gentle and courteous to their compatriots,—qualities of which the soldiers of that day could hardly boast, it must be confessed.

The fact is that, without suspecting it, Pompée narrowly escaped a great danger, that of being kidnapped. As he was strutting about, as usual, with gleaming eyes, puffed-out chest, and the general appearance of a Nimrod, he fell under Cauvignac's eye; but, thanks to subsequent events; thanks to the two hundred pistoles he had received from Nanon to molest no one save Baron de Canolles; and thanks to the philosophical reflection that jealousy is the most magnificent of passions, and must be treated with respect when one finds it in his path, the dear brother passed Pompée disdainfully by, and allowed Madame de Cambes to continue her journey to Bordeaux. Indeed, in Nanon's eyes Bordeaux was very near Canolles. She would have been glad to have the viscountess in Peru or Greenland or the Indies.

On the other hand, when Nanon reflected that henceforth she would have her dear Canolles all to herself within four strong walls, and that excellent fortifications, inaccessible to the king's soldiers, made a prisoner of Madame de Cambes to all intent, her heart swelled with the unspeakable joy which none but children and lovers know on this earth.

We have seen how her dream was realized, and Nanon and Canolles were united at Île Saint-Georges.

Madame de Cambes pursued her journey sadly and fearfully. Notwithstanding his boasting, Pompée was very far from reassuring her, and she was terrified beyond measure to see a considerable party of mounted-men

approaching along a cross-road, toward evening of the day that she left Jaulnay.

They were the same gentlemen returning from the famous burial of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, which afforded Monsieur le Prince de Marsillac an opportunity, under the pretext of rendering due honor to his father's memory, to get together all the nobility of France and Picardy, who hated Mazarin even more than they loved the princess. But Madame de Cambes and Pompée were struck by the fact that some of these horsemen carried an arm in a sling; others had a leg hanging limp and swathed in bandages; several had bloody bandages around their heads. It was necessary to look very closely at these cruelly maltreated gentlemen to recognize in them the active, spruce cavaliers who hunted the stag in the park at Chantilly.

But fear has keen eyes; and Pompée and Madame de Cambes recognized some familiar faces under the bloody bandages.

"Peste! madame," said Pompée, "the funeral procession must have travelled over very rough roads. I should say that most of these gentlemen had had a fall! see how they've been curried."

"That's just what I was looking at," said Claire.

"It reminds me of the return from Corbie," said Pompée, proudly; "but on that occasion I was not among the gallant fellows who returned, but among those who were brought back."

"But aren't these gentlemen commanded by any one?" Claire asked, in some anxiety as to the success of an enterprise which seemed to have had such inauspicious results. "Have they no leader? Has their leader been slain, that we do not see him? Pray look!"

"Madame," replied Pompée, rising majestically in his stirrups, "nothing is easier than to distinguish a leader among the people he commands. Ordinarily, on the march, the officer rides in the centre, with his staff; in action, he rides behind or on the flank of his troop. Cast your eyes at the different points that I mention and you can judge for yourself."

"I can see nothing, Pompée; but I think that some one is following us. Pray look back—"

"Hm! no, madame," said Pompée, clearing his throat, but omitting to turn his head lest he might really see some one. "No, there is nobody. But, stay, may that not be the leader with that red plume? No. That gilded sword? No. That piebald horse like Madame de Turenne's? No. It's a strange thing; there's no danger, and the commanding officer might venture to show himself; it isn't here as it was at Corbie—"

"You are mistaken, Master Pompée," said a harsh, mocking voice behind the poor squire, who nearly lost his seat in his fright; "you are mistaken, it's much worse than at Corbie."

Claire quickly turned her head, and saw within five feet of her a horseman of medium stature, dressed with an affectation of simplicity, who was looking at her with a pair of small, gleaming eyes, as deep set as a ferret's. "With his thick, black hair, his thin, twitching lips, his bilious pallor, and his frowning brow, this gentleman had a depressing effect even in broad daylight; at night his appearance would perhaps have inspired fear.

"Monsieur le Prince de Marsillac!" cried Claire, deeply moved. "Ah! well met, monsieur."

"Say Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld, madame; for now that the duke my father is dead I have succeeded to that name, under which all the actions of my life, good or bad, are to be set down."

"You are returning?" said Claire, with some hesitation.

"We are returning beaten, madame."

"Beaten! great Heaven!"

"I say that we are returning beaten, madame, because I am naturally little inclined to boast, and I tell the truth to myself as well as to others; otherwise I might claim that we are returning victorious; but, in point of fact, we are beaten because our design upon Saumur failed. I arrived too late; we have lost that important place, which Jarzé has surrendered. Henceforth, assuming that Madame la Princesse has Bordeaux, which has been promised her, the war will be concentrated in Guyenne."

"But, monsieur," said Claire, "if, as I understand you to say, the capitulation of Saumur took place without a blow, how does it happen that all these gentleman are wounded?"

"Because," said La Rochefoucauld, with pride, which he could not conceal, despite his power over himself, "we fell in with some royal troops."

"And you fought with them?" demanded Madame de Cambes, eagerly.

"Mon Dieu! yes, madame."

"So the first French blood has already been spilled by Frenchmen!" murmured the viscountess. "And you, Monsieur le Duc, were the one to set the example?"

"I was, madame."

"You, so calm and cool and shrewd!"

"When one upholds an unjust cause against me it sometimes happens that I become very unreasonable because I am so earnest in my support of what is reasonable."

"You are not wounded, I trust?"

"No, I was more fortunate this time than at Lignes and Paris. Indeed, I thought that I had had my fill of civil war, and was done with it forever; but I was mistaken. What would you have? Man always forms his plans without consulting his passions, the true architects of his life, which give an entirely different shape to the structure, when they do not overturn it altogether."

Madame de Cambes smiled, for she remembered that Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld had said that for Madame de Longueville's lovely eyes he had made war on kings, and would make war on the gods.

This smile did not escape the duke, and he gave the viscountess no time to follow up the thought which gave it birth.

"Allow me to offer you my congratulations, madame," he continued, "for you are, in truth, a very model of valor."

"Why so?"

"Good lack! to travel thus alone, or with a single attendant, like a Clorinda or a Bradamante! Oh! by the way, I have heard of your admirable conduct at Chantilly. They tell me that you fooled a poor devil of a royal officer to perfection. An easy victory, was it not?" added the duke, with the smile and the look which, upon his face, meant so much.

"How so?" Claire asked with emotion.

"I say easy," continued the duke, "because he did not fight on equal terms with you. There was one thing, however, that impressed me particularly in the version that was given me of that episode,"—and the duke fixed his little eyes upon the viscountess more sharply than ever.

There was no way for Madame de Cambes to retreat with honor, so she prepared to make as vigorous a defence as possible.

"Tell me what it was that struck you so forcibly, Monsieur le Duc," said she.

"It was the very great skill, madame, with which you played that little comic part; in fact, if I am to believe what I hear, the officer had already seen your squire and yourself."

These last words, although uttered with the studied indifference of a man of tact, did not fail to produce a deep impression upon Madame de Cambes.

"He had seen me, monsieur, do you say?"

"One moment, madame; let us understand each other; it's not I who say it, but that indefinite personage called 'they' to whose power kings are as submissive as the lowest of their subjects."

"Where had he seen me, may I ask?"

"They say that it was on the way from Libourne to Chantilly, at a village called Jaulnay; but the interview was cut short, as the gentleman received an order from Monsieur d'Épernon to start at once for Mantes."

"But if this gentleman had seen me before, Monsieur le Duc, how could he have failed to recognize me?"

"Ah! the famous they of whom I spoke just now, and who have an answer for every question, would say that the thing was possible, as the interview took place in the dark."

"Really, Monsieur le Duc," said the viscountess, in dismay, "I am at a loss to understand what you mean by that."

"In that case," rejoined the duke, with assumed good-nature, "I must have been ill-informed; and then, what does a mere momentary encounter amount to, after all? It is true, madame," he added gallantly, "that your face and figure are calculated to leave a deep impression, even after an interview lasting only an instant."

"But that would not be possible," the viscountess retorted, "if, as you yourself say, the interview took place in the dark."

"Very true, and you parry cleverly, madame. I must be the one who is mistaken, then, unless the young man had noticed you even before the interview at Jaulnay, which in that case would not be precisely a meeting."

"What would it be, then? Be careful of your words, Monsieur le Duc."

"As you see, I am hesitating; our dear French language is so poor that I seek in vain for a word to express my thought. It would be what is called, in Italian, an *appuntamento*; in English, an *assignation*."

"If I am not mistaken, Monsieur le Duc," said Claire, "those two words are translated in French by *rendez-vous*?"

"Go to!" exclaimed the duke; "here I have said a foolish thing in two foreign languages, and lo! I stumble upon a person who understands them both! Pardon me, madame; it seems that Italian and English are as poor as French."

Claire pressed her hand to her heart to breathe more freely; she was

suffocating. One thing was made clear to her mind which she had always suspected; namely, that Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld had for her been unfaithful to Madame de Longueville, in thought and in desire at least, and that it was a feeling of jealousy which led him to speak as he had been speaking. In fact, two years before, the Prince de Marsillac had paid court to her as assiduously as was consistent with his crafty nature, and his constant indecision and timidity, which made him the most vindictive of foes, when he was not the most grateful of friends. So it was that the viscountess preferred not to break a lance with the man who held public and private affairs in the hollow of his hand.

"Do you know, Monsieur le Duc," said she, "that you are an invaluable man, especially under circumstances like the present; and that Monsieur de Mazarin, much as he prides himself upon his police, is no better served in that regard than yourself?"

"If I knew nothing, madame," retorted Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld, "I should resemble that dear statesman too closely, and should have no reason for making war upon him. And so I try to keep myself posted on everything."

"Even the secrets of your allies, if they have any?"

"You used a word then which might be construed to your disadvantage, if it should be overheard,—'secrets.' So that journey and that meeting were secrets, were they?"

"Let us understand each other, Monsieur le Duc, for you are no more than half right. The meeting was an accident. The journey was a secret, yes, and a woman's secret too, for it was known to none but Madame la Princesse and myself."

The duke smiled. This sturdy defence made him sharpen up his own wits.

"And to Lenet," he said, "and Richon, and Madame de Tourville, to say nothing of a certain Vicomte de Cambes, whose name I heard for the first time in connection with this matter. To be sure, as he is your brother, you might tell me that the secret was all in the family."

Claire began to laugh, to avoid irritating the duke, whose smile was beginning to show signs of vanishing.

"Do you know one thing, duke?" said she.

"No, tell it me; and if it is a secret, madame, I promise to be as discreet as yourself, and tell it to no one but my staff."

"Do as you please about that; I ask nothing better, although I thereby run the risk of making an enemy of a great princess, whose hatred would be no pleasant thing to incur."

The duke blushed imperceptibly.

"Well, what is this secret?" said he.

"Do you know whom Madame la Princesse selected for my companion in the journey I was asked to undertake?"

"No,"

"Yourself."

"Indeed! I remember that Madame la Princesse asked me if I could act as escort to a person returning from Libourne to Paris."

"And you refused?"

"I was unavoidably detained in Poitou by important business."

"Yes, you had to receive couriers from Madame de Longueville."

La Rochefoucauld gazed earnestly at the viscountess, as if to search the lowest depths of her heart before the trace of her words had disappeared, and said, riding closer to her side: "Do you reproach me for it?"

"Not at all; your heart is so well disposed in that place, Monsieur le Duc, that you have a right to expect compliments rather than reproaches."

"Ah!" said the duke, with an involuntary sigh; "would to God I had made that journey with you!"

"Why so?"

"Because then I should not have gone to Saumur," he replied, in a tone which indicated that he had another response ready, which he did not dare, or did not choose, to make.

"Richon must have told him everything," thought Claire.

"However, I do not repine at my private ill-fortune, since it has resulted to the public good."

"What do you mean, monsieur? I do not understand you."

"I mean that if I had been with you, you would not have fallen in with the officer, who happened, so clear it is that Heaven is on our side, to be the same one sent by Mazarin to Chantilly."

"Ah! Monsieur le Duc," said Claire, in a voice choked by the memory of the harrowing scene so recently enacted, "do not jest concerning that unfortunate officer!"

"Why? Is his person sacred?"

"Now, yes; for to noble hearts great misfortunes are no less sanctified than

great good-fortune. That officer may be dead at this hour, monsieur, and he will have paid for his error, or his devotion, with his life."

"Dead with love?" queried the duke.

"Let us speak seriously, monsieur; you are well aware that if I give my heart away it will not be to people whom I meet on the high-road. I tell you that the unhappy man was arrested this very day by order of Monsieur de Mazarin."

"Arrested!" exclaimed the duke. "How do you know that?—still by accident?"

"Mon Dieu, yes! I was passing through Jaulnay—Do you know Jaulnay, monsieur?"

"Perfectly; I received a sword-cut in the shoulder there. You were passing through Jaulnay. Why, wasn't that the village where, as the story goes—?"

"Let us have done with the story, Monsieur le Duc," replied Claire, blushing. "I was passing through Jaulnay, as I tell you, when I saw a party of armed men halting with a prisoner in their midst; the prisoner was he."

"He, do you say? Ah! madame, take care, you said he!"

"The officer, I mean. Mon Dieu! Monsieur le Duc, how deep you are! A truce to your subtleties, and if you have no pity for the poor fellow—"

"Pity! I!" cried the duke. "In God's name, madame, have I time to have pity, especially for people I do not know?"

Claire cast a sidelong glance at La Rochefoucauld's pale face, and his thin lips curled by a joyless smile, and she shuddered involuntarily.

"Madame," he continued, "I would be glad to have the honor of escorting you farther; but I must throw a garrison into Montrond, so forgive me if I leave you. Twenty gentlemen, more fortunate than I, will look to your safety until you have joined Madame la Princesse, to whom I beg you to present my respects."

"Are you not going to Bordeaux?" Claire asked.

"No; just now I am on my way to Turenne to join Monsieur de Bouillon. We are engaged in a contest of courtesy to see which shall not be general; he's a doughty antagonist, but I am determined to get the better of him, and remain his lieutenant."

Upon that the duke ceremoniously saluted the viscountess and rode slowly away in the direction taken by his little band of horsemen. Claire followed him with her eyes, murmuring:—

"His pity! I invoked his pity! He spoke the truth; he has no time to feel pity."

A group of horsemen left the main body and came toward her, while the rest rode into the woods near by.

Behind them, with his reins over his horse's neck, La Rochefoucauld rode dreamily along, the man of the false look and the white hands, who wrote at the head of his memoirs this sentence, which sounds strangely enough in the mouth of a moral philosopher:—

"I think that one should content himself with making a show of compassion, but should be careful to have none. It is a passion which serves no useful purpose within a well-constituted mind, which serves only to weaken the heart, and which should be left to the common people, who, as they never do anything by reason, need to have passion in order to do anything."

Two days later Madame de Cambes was in attendance upon Madame la Princesse.

XII.

Many, many times had Madame de Cambes instinctively reflected upon what might be the result of a hatred like Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's; but feeling strong in her youth, her beauty, her wealth, and her high favor, she did not realize that that hatred, supposing it to exist, was likely to have a baleful effect upon her life.

But when Madame de Cambes knew beyond question that she occupied a sufficient place in his thoughts to lead him to take the trouble to find out all that he knew, she lost no time in broaching the subject to Madame la Princesse.

"Madame," said she, in reply to the compliments with which she was overwhelmed, "do not congratulate me overmuch upon the address which I am said to have exhibited upon that occasion; for there are those who claim that the officer, our dupe, knew the real state of the case as to the true and the false Princesse de Condé."

But as this supposition deprived Madame la Princesse of all credit for her part in the execution of the stratagem, she naturally refused to listen to it.

"Yes, yes, my dear Claire," said she; "now that our gentleman finds that we deceived him, he would be glad to pretend that he favored our plans; unfortunately, it's a little late to make that claim, as he has been disgraced for his fiasco. à propos, I am told that you fell in with Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld on your way hither."

"Yes, madame."

"What news did he tell you?"

"That he was going to Turenne, to come to terms with Monsieur de Bouillon."

"There is a struggle between them, I know, as to which of the two shall be generalissimo of our armies, both making a show of declining the honor. The fact is that when we make peace, the man who has made himself most feared as a rebel will have to pay the heaviest price for his return to favor. But I have a plan of Madame de Tourville's to bring them to terms."

"Oho!" said the viscountess, smiling at that name; "your Highness is reconciled, I judge, to your counsellor in ordinary."

"I was driven to it; she joined us at Montrond, carrying her roll of papers with a gravity which made Lenet and myself almost die of laughing."

"Although your Highness," she said, "pays no attention to these reflections of mine, the fruit of many laborious nights' work, I bring my contribution to the general welfare."

"Was it a veritable harangue?"

"Under three heads."

"And your Highness replied to it?"

"Not I; I left that to Lenet. 'Madame,' said he, 'we have never doubted your zeal, still less your extensive knowledge; they are both so invaluable to us that Madame la Princesse and I have regretted your absence every day.' In a word, he said a multitude of such pleasant things to her that he won her heart, and she ended by giving him her plan."

"Which is—?"

"To appoint neither Monsieur de Bouillon nor Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld generalissimo, but Monsieur de Turenne."

"Well," said Claire, "it seems to me that the counsellor counselled wisely then, at all events; what do you say to it, Monsieur Lenet?"

"I say that Madame la Vicomtesse is right, and that she brings one more judicious voice to our deliberations," replied Lenet, who entered the room at that moment with a roll of paper, and with as serious an expression as Madame de Tourville's face could have worn. "Unfortunately, Monsieur de Turenne cannot leave the army of the North, and our plan provides for his marching upon Paris when Mazarin and the queen march upon Bordeaux."

"You will notice, my dear girl, that Lenet is the man of impossibilities. In

fact, neither Monsieur de Bouillon, nor Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, nor Monsieur de Turenne is our generalissimo, but Lenet!—What has your Excellency there,—a proclamation?"

"Yes, madame."

"Madame de Tourville's, of course?"

"Of course, madame; except for a few necessary changes, in her own words,—the style of the chancellor's office, you know."

"Nonsense!" said the princess, laughing; "let us not attach too much importance to the letter: if the spirit is there, that is all we need."

"It is there, madame."

"And where is Monsieur de Bouillon to sign?"

"On the same line with Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld."

"But you do not tell me where Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld will sign."

"Immediately below Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien."

"Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien should not sign such a document. A child!—think of it, Lenet."

"I have thought of it, madame. When the king dies, the dauphin succeeds him, though it be but for a single day. Why should it not be with the house of Condé as with the house of France?"

"But what will Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld say? What will Monsieur de Bouillon say?"

"The first has said, madame, and went away after he had said; the second will know nothing about it until it is done, and consequently will say what he pleases; it matters little."

"There is the cause of the duke's coolness to you, Claire."

"Let him be cool, madame," said Lenet; "he will warm up at the first gun Maréchal de la Meilleraie fires upon us. These gentlemen long to fight: very well, let them fight."

"Be careful not to irritate them too far, Lenet," said the princess; "we have only them."

"And they have only your name; just let them try to fight on their own account, and you will see how long they will hold out; give and take."

Madame de Tourville had entered the room a few seconds before, and the radiant expression of her countenance had given place to an anxious

expression, which was deepened by the last words of her rival, the councillor.

She stepped forward hastily.

"Is the plan I laid before your Highness," she said, "so unfortunate as not to meet the approval of Monsieur Lenet?"

"On the contrary, madame," Lenet replied with a bow, "I have carefully retained the larger part of your draft; the only difference is that, instead of being signed in chief by the Duc de Bouillon or the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, the proclamation will be signed by Monseigneur le Duc d'Enghien; the names of those gentlemen will come after the prince's name."

"You will compromise the young prince, monsieur."

"It is only just that he should be compromised, madame, since the troops are fighting for him."

"But the Bordelais love the Duc de Bouillon, they adore the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, and they do not know the Duc d'Enghien."

"You are wrong," said Lenet, as usual taking a paper from that pocket whose enormous capacity had amazed Madame la Princesse, "for here is a letter from the President of the Parliament of Bordeaux, in which he begs me to have the young duke sign the proclamation."

"Oh! a fig for the Parliaments, Lenet!" cried the princess; "it's not worth while to escape from the power of Monsieur de Mazarin if we are to fall into the power of the Parliaments."

"Does your Highness wish to enter Bordeaux?"

"To be sure."

"Very good; then that is the sine qua non; they will not burn a match for any other than Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien."

Madame de Tourville bit her lips.

"And so," said the princess, "you induced us to fly from Chantilly, you caused us to travel a hundred and fifty leagues, to expose us at the last to insult from the Bordelais?"

"What you style an insult, madame, is an honor. Indeed, what could be more flattering to Madame la Princesse de Condé than to be assured that it is she who is made welcome at Bordeaux, and not these others?"

"You say that the Bordelais will not receive the two dukes?"

"They will receive your Highness only."

"What can I do alone?"

"What! Mon Dieu!—go in, to be sure; and as you go in leave the gates open so that the others may enter behind you."

"We cannot do without them."

"That is my opinion, and a fortnight hence it will be the opinion of the Parliament. Bordeaux repulses your army, which it fears, and within a fortnight it will call upon it for defence. You will then have the twofold merit of having done twice what the Bordelais requested you to do; and when that is so, have no fear; they will face death for you from the first man to the last."

"Is Bordeaux threatened?" asked Madame de Tourville.

"Very seriously threatened," Lenet replied; "that is why it is of such pressing importance to effect a lodgment there. So long as we are not there, Bordeaux can, without compromising its honor, refuse to open its gates to us; but when we are once there, Bordeaux cannot, without dishonoring itself, drive us outside its walls."

"Who is threatening Bordeaux, pray?"

"The king, the queen, Monsieur de Mazarin. The royal forces are levying recruits; our enemies are getting into position. Île Saint-Georges, which is but three leagues from the city, has received a re-enforcement of troops, a fresh supply of ammunition, and a new governor. The Bordelais propose to try and take the island, and will naturally be beaten back, as they will have to do with the king's best troops. Having been well and duly whipped, as becomes peaceable citizens who undertake to mimic soldiers, they will cry out loudly for the Ducs de Bouillon and de La Rochefoucauld. Then, madame, you, who hold those two dukes in your hand, will make your own terms with the Parliament."

"But would it not be better to try and win this new governor over to our side, before the Bordelais have undergone a defeat, which may discourage them?"

"If you are in Bordeaux when this defeat is sustained, you have nothing to fear. As for winning over the governor, it's an impossibility."

"An impossibility! Why so?"

"Because he is a personal enemy of your Highness."

"A personal enemy?"

"Yes."

"Pray what is the cause of his enmity?"

"He will never forgive your Highness the mystification of which he was

the victim at Chantilly. Oh! Monsieur de Mazarin is no such fool as you think him, mesdames, although I wear myself out by constant efforts to convince you of your error! He has proved it by sending to Île Saint-Georges, that is to say, the most advantageous position in the province—whom do you guess?"

"I have already told you that I cannot imagine who it can be."

"Well, it's the officer at whom you laughed so much, and who, with inconceivable stupidity, allowed your Highness to escape from Chantilly."

"Monsieur de Canolles?" cried Claire.

"Yes."

"Monsieur de Canolles governor of Île Saint-Georges?"

"Himself."

"Impossible! He was arrested before my very eyes!"

"True. But he has a powerful protector, no doubt, and his disgrace is changed to favor."

"And you fancied him dead ere this, my poor Claire," said Madame la Princesse, laughingly.

"Are you quite sure?" asked the viscountess, amazed beyond measure.

As usual, Lenet put his hand into the famous pocket and produced a paper.

"Here is a letter from Richon," he said, "giving me all the details of the new governor's installation, and expressing his regret that your Highness did not station him at Île Saint-Georges."

"Madame la Princesse station Monsieur Richon at Île Saint-Georges!" exclaimed Madame de Tourville, with a smile of triumph. "Pray, do we dispose of governor-ships of his Majesty's fortresses?"

"We can dispose of one, madame," Lenet replied, "and that is enough."

"Of what one, I pray to know?"

Madame de Tourville shuddered as she saw Lenet put his hand in his pocket.

"Monsieur d'Épernon's signature in blank!" cried the princess. "True; I had forgotten it."

"Bah! what does that amount to?" said Madame de Tourville, disdainfully. "A scrap of paper, nothing more."

"That scrap of paper, madame," said Lenet, "is the appointment we need as a counterpoise to the one recently made. It is a counterpoise to Île Saint-

Georges; in fine, it is our salvation, for it means some place on the Dordogne, as Saint-Georges is on the Garonne."

"You are sure," said Claire, who had heard nothing for the last five minutes, and whose mind had remained stationary at the intelligence announced by Lenet and confirmed by Richon; "you are sure, monsieur, that it is the same Monsieur de Canolles who was arrested at Jaulnay, who is now governor of Île Saint-Georges?"

"I am sure of it, madame."

"Monsieur de Mazarin has a peculiar way," she continued, "of escorting his governors to their governments."

"True," said the princess, "and there certainly is something behind all this."

"To be sure there is," said Lenet; "there is Mademoiselle Nanon de Lartigues."

"Nanon de Lartigues!" cried Claire, stung to the heart by a terrible memory.

"That courtesan!" said the princess, with the utmost contempt.

"Yes, madame," said Lenet, "that courtesan, whom your Highness refused to see, when she solicited the honor of being presented to you, and whom the queen, less punctilious than yourself in matters of etiquette, did receive; which caused her to make answer to your chamberlain that it was possible that Madame la Princesse de Condé was a more exalted personage than Anne of Austria, but that Anne of Austria most assuredly had more prudence than the Princesse de Condé."

"Your memory is failing, Lenet, or else you wish to spare my feelings," cried the princess. "The insolent creature was not content to say 'more prudence,' she said 'more sense,' as well."

"Possibly," said Lenet, with a smile. "I stepped into the antechamber at that moment, and did not hear the end of the sentence."

"But I was listening at the door," said Madame la Princesse, "and I heard the whole of it."

"At all events you understand, madame, that it is a woman who will wage relentless war upon you. The queen would have sent soldiers to fight against you; Nanon will send insidious enemies, whom you must unearth and crush."

"Perhaps," said Madame de Tourville, sourly, to Lenet, "if you had been in her Highness's place you would have received her with reverential awe?"

"No, madame," said Lenet, "I would have received her with a smile, and

would have bought her."

"Oh well, if it's a question of buying her, there is still time."

"Certainly there is still time; but at this time she would probably be too dear for our resources."

"How much is she worth?" the princess asked.

"Five hundred thousand livres before the war."

"But to-day?"

"A million."

"Why, for that price I could buy Monsieur de Mazarin!"

"'Tis possible," said Lenet; "things that have already been sold and resold are apt to grow cheaper."

"But, if we can't buy her, we must take her!" said Madame de Tourville, still in favor of violent measures.

"You would render her Highness an inestimable service, madame, could you attain that object; but it would be difficult of attainment, as we have absolutely no idea where she is. But let us leave that for the present; let us first of all effect an entrance into Bordeaux, then we will find a way into Île Saint-Georges."

"No, no!" cried Claire; "no, we will effect an entrance at Île Saint-Georges first!"

This exclamation, evidently from the heart, caused the other women to turn toward the viscountess, while Lenet gazed at her as earnestly as Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld could have done, but with a kindlier interest.

"Why, you are mad!" said the princess; "you have heard Lenet say that the place is impregnable!"

"That may be," said Claire, "but I think that we can take it."

"Have you a plan?" said Madame de Tourville, with the air of one who fears the erection of an altar in opposition to her own.

"Perhaps," said Claire.

"But," laughed the princess, "if Île Saint-Georges is held at so high a figure as Lenet says, perhaps we are not rich enough to buy it."

"We will not buy it," said Claire, "but we will have it all the same."

"By force, then," said Madame de Tourville; "my dear friend, you are coming around to my plan."

"That's it," said the princess. "We will send Richon to besiege Saint-Georges; he is of the province, he knows the locality, and if any man can take this fortress which you deem of such importance, he is the man."

"Before resorting to that means," said Claire, "let me try the experiment, madame. If I fail, then you can do as you think best."

"What!" said the amazed princess, "you will go to Île Saint-Georges?"

"I will."

"Alone?"

"With Pompée."

"You have no fear?"

"I will go as a flag of truce, if your Highness will deign to intrust me with your instructions."

"Upon my word! this is a novelty!" cried Madame de Tourville; "for my own part I should say that diplomatists do not spring up like this, and that one must have gone through a long course of study of that science, which Monsieur de Tourville, one of the greatest diplomatists, as he was one of the greatest soldiers of his time, declared to be the most difficult of all sciences."

"However ill-informed I may be," said Claire, "I will make the trial, nevertheless, if Madame la Princesse is pleased to allow me to do so."

"Certainly Madame la Princesse will allow you to do it," said Lenet, with a significant glance at Madame de Condé; "indeed, I am convinced that if there is any person on earth who can succeed in such a negotiation, you are that person."

"Pray what can madame do that another cannot do?"

"She will simply drive a bargain with Monsieur de Canolles, which a man could not do without getting himself thrown out of the window."

"A man if you please!" retorted Madame de Tourville; "but a woman?"

"If a woman is to go to Île Saint-Georges," said Lenet, "it is quite as well, indeed much better, that it should be madame rather than any other, because it is her idea."

At that moment a messenger entered, bringing a letter from the Parliament of Bordeaux.

"Ah!" cried the princess, "the reply to my request, I presume."

The two women drew near, impelled by a common sentiment of curiosity and interest. Lenet remained where he stood, as phlegmatic as always,

knowing beforehand, in all probability, what the letter contained.

The princess read it with avidity.

"They ask me to come, they summon me, they expect me!" she cried.

"Ah!" ejaculated Madame de Tourville, triumphantly.

"But the dukes, madame, and the army?" queried Lenet.

"They say nothing of them."

"Then we are left destitute," said Madame de Tourville.

"No," said the princess; "for, thanks to the Duc d'Épernon's blank signature, I shall have Vayres, which commands the Dordogne."

"And I," said Claire, "shall have Saint-Georges, which is the key of the Garonne."

"And I," said Lenet, "shall have the dukes and the army,—that is, if you give me time."

END OF VOL. I.

THE VICOMTESSE DE CAMBES

I.

Two days later they came in sight of Bordeaux, and it became necessary to decide at once how they should enter the city. The dukes, with their army, were no more than ten leagues away, so that they were at liberty to choose between a peaceable and a forcible entry. The important question to be decided was whether it was better to have immediate possession of Bordeaux at all hazards, or to comply with the wishes of the Parliament. Madame la Princesse summoned her council of war, which consisted of Madame de Tourville, Claire, Lenet, and her maids of honor. Madame de Tourville knew her arch antagonist so well that she had persistently opposed his admission to the council, upon the ground that the war was a war of women, in which men were to be used only to do the fighting. But Madame la Princesse declared that as Lenet was saddled upon her by her husband, she could not exclude him from the deliberative chamber, where, after all, his presence would amount to nothing, as it was agreed beforehand that he might talk all he chose, but that they would not listen to him.

Madame de Tourville's precautions were by no means uncalled-for; she had employed the two days that had just passed in bringing Madame la

Princesse around to the bellicose ideas which she was only too anxious to adopt, and she feared that Lenet would destroy the whole structure that she had erected with such infinite pains.

When the council was assembled, Madame de Tourville set forth her plan. She proposed that the dukes should come up secretly with their army, that they should procure, by force or by persuasion, a goodly number of boats, and go down the river into Bordeaux, shouting: "Vive Condé! Down with Mazarin!"

In this way Madame la Princesse's entry would assume the proportions of a veritable triumph, and Madame de Tourville, by a détour, would accomplish her famous project of taking forcible possession of Bordeaux, and thus inspiring the queen with a wholesome terror of an army whose opening move resulted so brilliantly.

Lenet nodded approval of everything, interrupting Madame de Tourville with admiring exclamations. When she had completed the exposition of her plan, he said:—

"Magnificent, madame! be good enough now to sum up your conclusions."

"That I can do very easily, in two words," said the good woman, triumphantly, warming up at the sound of her own voice. "Amid the hail-storm of bullets, the clanging of bells, and the cries, whether of rage or affection, of the people, a handful of weak women will be seen, intrepidly fulfilling their noble mission; a child in its mother's arms will appeal to the Parliament for protection. This touching spectacle cannot fail to move the most savage hearts. Thus we shall conquer, partly by force, partly by the justice of our cause; and that, I think, is Madame la Princesse's object."

The summing up aroused even more enthusiasm than the original speech. Madame la Princesse applauded; Claire, whose desire to be sent with a flag of truce to Île Saint-Georges became more and more earnest, applauded; the captain of the guards, whose business it was to thirst for battle, applauded; and Lenet did more than applaud; he took Madame de Tourville's hand, and pressed it with no less respect than emotion.

"Madame," he cried, "even if I had not known how great is your prudence, and how thoroughly you are acquainted, both by intuition and study, with the great civil and military question which engages our attention, I should assuredly be convinced of it now, and should prostrate myself before the most useful adviser that her Highness could hope to find."

"Is she not?" said the princess; "isn't it a fine scheme, Lenet? I agree with her entirely. Come, Vialas, give Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien the little sword I had made for him, and his helmet and coat of mail."

"Yes! do so, Vialas. But a single word first, by your leave, madame," said Lenet; while Madame de Tourville, who was all swollen up with pride, began to lose confidence, in view of her vivid remembrance of the subtle arguments with which Lenet was accustomed to combat her plans.

"Well," said the princess, "what is it now?"

"Nothing, madame, nothing at all; for no plan could be proposed more in harmony with the character of an august princess like yourself, and it could only emanate from your household."

These words caused Madame de Tourville to puff out anew, and brought back the smile to the lips of Madame la Princesse, who was beginning to frown.

"But, madame," pursued Lenet, watching the effect of this terrible but upon the face of his sworn foe, "while I adopt, I will not say simply without repugnance, but with enthusiasm, this plan, which seems to me the only available one, I will venture to propose a slight modification."

Madame de Tourville stiffened up, and prepared for defence. Madame la Princesse's smile disappeared.

Lenet bowed and made a motion with his hand as if asking permission to continue.

"My heart is filled with a joy I cannot express," he said, "in anticipation of the clanging of the bells, and the joyous acclamations of the people. But I haven't the confidence I would like to have in the hail-storm of bullets to which Madame has referred."

Madame de Tourville assumed a martial air. Lenet bowed even lower than before, and continued, lowering his voice a half-tone:—

"Assuredly it would be a grand spectacle to see a woman and her child walking calmly along in the midst of a tempest which would terrify most men. But I should fear that one of those same bullets, following a blind impulse, as brutal, unintelligent things are wont to do, might give Monsieur de Mazarin the advantage over us, and spoil our plan, which is so magnificent in other respects. I am of the opinion, expressed so eloquently by Madame de Tourville, that the young prince and his august mother should open up the way to the Parliament-house for us,—but by petition, not by arms. I think, in short, that it will be much better to move in that way the most savage hearts, than to conquer by other means the most valiant. I think that the former of these methods presents infinitely more chances of success, and that the object of Madame la Princesse is, before all else, to gain admission to Bordeaux. Now, I say that nothing is less sure than our success in gaining admission to

Bordeaux, if we take the chances of a battle."

"You see," said Madame de Tourville, sourly, "that monsieur proposes, as usual, to demolish my plan, bit by bit, and quietly substitute a plan of his own therefor."

"I!" cried Lenet, while the princess reassured Madame de Tourville with a smile and a glance,—"I, the most enthusiastic of your admirers! no, a thousand times no! But I say that an officer in his Majesty's service named Dalvimar has arrived in the city from Blaye, whose mission is to arouse the officials and the people against her Highness. And I say that if Monsieur de Mazarin can put an end to the war at a single blow he will do it; that is why I fear Madame de Tourville's hail-storm of bullets, the more intelligent ones even more perhaps than the brutal, unreasoning ones."

This last argument seemed to make Madame la Princesse reflect.

"You always know everything, Monsieur Lenet," retorted Madame de Tourville, in a voice trembling with wrath.

"A good hot action would be a fine thing, however," said the captain of the guards, drawing himself up and marking time with his foot as if he were on the parade ground; he was an old soldier, whose sole reliance was upon force, and who would have shone in action.

Lenet trod upon his foot, looking at him the while with a most amiable smile.

"Yes, captain," said he; "but do you not think also that Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien is necessary to our cause, and that with him dead or a prisoner we are deprived of the real generalissimo of our armies?"

The captain of the guards, who knew that to bestow this pompous title of generalissimo upon a prince of seven years made himself, in reality, the commander-in-chief of the army, realized what a fool he had made of himself, and warmly supported Lenet's opinion.

Meanwhile Madame de Tourville had gone to the princess's side and was talking with her in an undertone. Lenet saw that the battle was not yet won; indeed, the next moment her Highness turned to him and said, testily:—

"It is very strange that you should be so bent upon demolishing what was so well constructed."

"Your Highness is in error," said Lenet. "I have never been persistent in offering such advice as I have had the honor to give you, and, if I demolish, it is with the intention of rebuilding. If, notwithstanding the arguments I have had the honor to submit to you, your Highness still desires to seek death with your son, you are at liberty to do so, and we will face death at your side; that is

a very simple thing to do, and the first footman in your retinue, or the meanest scoundrel in the city will do as much. But if we wish to succeed, despite Mazarin, despite the queen, despite the Parliament, despite Mademoiselle Nanon de Lartigues, despite all the disadvantages inseparable from the feeble state to which we are reduced, this, in my opinion, is what we must do."

"Monsieur," cried Madame de Tourville, impetuously, catching Lenet's last sentence on the rebound, "there is no such thing as weakness, where we have on the one hand the name of Condé, and on the other two thousand of the men of Rocroy, Nordlingen, and Lens; and if we are weak under such circumstances, why, we are lost in any event, and no plan of yours, however magnificent it may be, will save us."

"I have read, madame," rejoined Lenet, calmly, enjoying in anticipation the effect of what he was about to say upon the princess, who was listening attentively in spite of herself,—"I have read that, in the reign of Tiberius, the widow of one of the most illustrious Romans, the noble-hearted Agrippina, who had been bereft of her husband Germanicus by persecution, a princess who could at will arouse to frenzy a whole army devoted to the memory of their dead general, preferred to enter Brundisium alone, to traverse Puglia and Campania clad in mourning, holding a child by each hand, pale-cheeked, eyes red with tears and bent upon the ground, while the children sobbed and gazed imploringly around; whereat all who saw—and from Brundisium to Rome there were above two million people—burst into tears, broke forth in threats and imprecations, and her cause was won, not at Rome alone, but before all Italy; not only in the judgment of her contemporaries, but in that of posterity; for she met with no shadow of resistance to her tears and lamentations, while lances would have been met with pikes, and swords with swords. To my mind there is a very strong resemblance between her Highness and Agrippina, between Monsieur le Prince and Germanicus, between Piso, the persecuting minister and poisoner, and Monsieur de Mazarin. With this strong resemblance between the personages concerned, the situation being almost identical, I ask that the same line of conduct be adopted; for, in my opinion, it is impossible that what succeeded so perfectly at one time could fail at another."

An approving smile played about Madame la Princesse's lips, and assured Lenet that his discourse had turned the tide of battle in his favor. Madame de Tourville took refuge in a corner of the room, veiling herself like an antique statue. Madame de Cambes, who had found a friend in Lenet, repaid him for his support in another matter, by nodding her head approvingly; the captain of the guards wept like a military tribune, and the little Duc d'Enghien cried:—

"Mamma, will you hold my hand, and dress me in mourning?"

"Yes, my son," the princess replied. "You know, Lenet, that it has always

been my intention to present myself to the people of Bordeaux dressed in black."

"Especially," said Madame de Cambes, "as black is so wondrously becoming to your Highness,"

"Hush! little one," said the princess; "Madame de Tourville will cry it loud enough, without your saying it, even in a whisper."

The programme for the entry into Bordeaux was arranged according to Lenet's suggestions. The ladies of the escort were ordered to make their preparations. The young prince was dressed in a suit of white, trimmed with black and silver lace, and wore a hat with black and white plumes.

The princess herself was arrayed with an affectation of the greatest simplicity. In order to resemble Agrippina, by whom she was determined to take pattern in every respect, she wore plain black with no jewels of any sort.

Lenet, as the architect of the fête, exerted himself to the utmost to make it magnificent. The house in which he lived, in a small town some two leagues from Bordeaux, was constantly filled with partisans of Madame la Princesse, who were anxious to know, before she entered the city, what sort of entry would be most agreeable to her. Lenet, like a modern theatrical manager, suggested flowers, acclamations, and the ringing of bells; and, wishing to afford some satisfaction to the bellicose Madame de Tourville, he proposed that the princess should receive an artillery salute.

On the following day, May 31st, at the invitation of the Parliament, the princess set out for the city. One Lavie, avocat-général of Parliament, and a zealous partisan of Monsieur de Mazarin, had ordered the gates closed the night before, to prevent the entrance of the princess if she should present herself. But, on the other hand, the partisans of the Condés were not idle, and early in the morning the people, at their instigation, assembled in crowds amid shouts of, "Vive Madame la Princesse! Vive Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien!" and cut down the gates with axes; so that there was, finally, no opposition to this famous entry, which assumed the character of a triumph. Interested observers could estimate from these two occurrences the relative power of the leaders of the two factions which divided the city, for Lavie was acting directly under the advice of the Duc d'Épernon, while the leaders of the people were advised by Lenet.

The princess had no sooner passed through the gate than the scene which had been long in preparation was enacted upon a gigantic scale. A salute was fired by the vessels in the harbor, and the guns of the city replied. Flowers fell in showers from the windows, and were stretched in festoons across the street, so that the pavements were strewn with them and the air laden with their

perfume. Loud acclamations arose from the lips of thirty thousand zealots of all ages and both sexes, whose enthusiasm increased with the interest inspired by Madame la Princesse and her son, and with their hatred for Mazarin.

However, the Duc d'Enghien was the cleverest actor in all the cast. Madame la Princesse gave up leading him by the hand, either because she feared to weary him, or so that he might not be buried under the roses; he was carried by his gentleman-in-waiting, so that his hands were free, and he sent kisses to right and left, and waved his plumed hat gracefully to the spectators.

The good people of Bordeaux are easily excited; the women soon reached a condition of frenzied adoration for the lovely child who wept so charmingly, and the old magistrates were moved to tears by the words of the little orator, who said: "Messieurs, take my father's place, for Monsieur le Cardinal has taken him away from me."

In vain did the partisans of the minister attempt to make some opposition; fists, stones, and even halberds enjoined discretion upon them, and they had no choice but to leave the triumphant rebels a clear field.

Meanwhile Madame de Cambes, with pale and serious face, drew the attention of many in the crowd as she walked along behind Madame la Princesse. As she reflected upon the glorious success of the day, she could not avoid the fear that it might bring forgetfulness of the resolution of the preceding day. She was walking along, as we have said, hustled and crowded by the adoring people, inundated with flowers and respectful caresses, shuddering with the fear of being taken up and carried in triumph, a fate with which some voices began to threaten Madame la Princesse, the Duc d'Enghien, and their suite, when Lenet noticed her embarrassment, and gave her his hand to assist her in reaching a carriage.

"Ah! Monsieur Lenet, you are very fortunate," she said to him, replying to her own thought. "You succeed always in enforcing your opinion, and your advice is always followed. To be sure," she added, "it is always good, and the best results—"

"It seems to me, madame," rejoined Lenet, "that you have no reason to complain, as the only suggestion you have made has been adopted."

"How so?"

"Wasn't it agreed that you should try to take Île Saint-Georges?"

"Yes, but when shall I be allowed to open my campaign?"

"To-morrow, if you promise to fail."

"Never fear; I am only too likely to fulfil your wishes in that regard."

"So much the better."

"I do not fully understand you."

"We need to have Île Saint-Georges make a stubborn resistance, in order to induce the Bordelais to call for our two dukes and their army, who, I am free to say, although my opinion on that point comes dangerously near coinciding with Madame de Tourville's, seem to me eminently necessary under present circumstances."

"Unquestionably," said Claire; "but although I am not as learned in the art of war as Madame de Tourville, I had the impression that a place is not usually attacked until it has been summoned to surrender."

"What you say is perfectly true."

"Then you will send a flag of truce to Île Saint-Georges?"

"Most certainly!"

"Very well! I ask leave to carry the flag of truce."

Lenet's eyes dilated in surprise.

"You!" he said; "you! Why, have all our ladies become Amazons?"

"Gratify my whim, dear Monsieur Lenet."

"To be sure. The worst that can happen to us would be your taking Saint-Georges."

"It's agreed, then?"

"Yes."

"But promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"That no one shall know the name or sex or rank of the flag of truce, unless her mission is successful."

"Agreed," said Lenet, giving Madame de Cambes his hand.

"When shall I start?"

"When you choose."

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow let it be."

"Good. See, Madame la Princesse and her son are just about going up on Monsieur le Président Lalasne's terrace. I leave my part in the triumph to Madame de Tourville. Pray excuse my absence to her Highness on the ground

of indisposition. Bid the coachman drive me to the apartments assigned me. I will make my preparations, and reflect upon how I can best accomplish my mission, which naturally causes me some uneasiness, as it is the first of the kind I have ever undertaken, and everything in this world, they say, depends on one's beginning."

"Peste!" said Lenet. "I no longer wonder that Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld was upon the point of deserting Madame de Longueville for you; you are certainly her equal in many respects, and her superior in others."

"Possibly," said Claire. "I do not put the compliment aside altogether; but if you have any influence over Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, dear Monsieur Lenet, I beg you to exert it to strengthen his devotion to his first flame, for his love terrifies me."

"We will do our best," said Lenet, with a smile. "This evening I will give you your instructions."

"You consent, then, to let me take Saint-Georges for you?"

"I must, since you wish it."

"And what about the dukes and the army?"

"I have in my pocket another means of bringing them hither."

Having given the address of Madame de Cambes to the coachman, Lenet smilingly took leave of her and returned to the princess.

II.

On the day following Madame la Princesse's entry into Bordeaux, there was a grand dinner-party at Île Saint-Georges, Canolles having invited the principal officers of the garrison and the other governors of fortresses throughout the province.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, the hour appointed for the beginning of the repast, Canolles found himself surrounded by a dozen or more gentlemen, the majority of whom he then saw for the first time. As they described the great event of the preceding day, making sport of the ladies in Madame la Princesse's retinue, they bore but little resemblance to men about to enter upon what might be an obstinate conflict, and to whom the most momentous interests of the kingdom were intrusted.

Canolles, magnificent in his gold-laced coat, and with radiant face, set the example of gayety and animation. As dinner was about to be served, he said:

"Messieurs, I beg your pardon, but there is still one guest missing."

"Who is it?" the young men asked, exchanging glances.

"The governor of Vayres, to whom I sent an invitation, although I do not know him, and who, just because I do not know him, is entitled to some indulgence. I beg, therefore, that you will pardon a delay of half an hour."

"The governor of Vayres!" exclaimed an old officer, accustomed to military regularity, and from whom the suggestion of delay brought forth a sigh,— "the governor of Vayres, if I mistake not, is the Marquis de Bernay; but he doesn't administer the government in person; he has a lieutenant."

"In that case," said Canolles, "if he doesn't come, his lieutenant will come in his place. He is himself undoubtedly at court, the fountain-head of favors."

"But, baron," said one of the guests, "it doesn't seem to me that he need be at court to secure promotion, for I know a certain commandant who has no reason to complain. Dame! captain, lieutenant-colonel, and governor, all within three months! That's a very pretty little road to travel, you must confess."

"And I do confess it," said Canolles, blushing, "and as I know not to whom to attribute such a succession of favors, I must, in good sooth, agree that there is some good genius in my household to bring me such prosperity."

"We have no question as to Monsieur le Gouverneur's good genius," said the lieutenant who received Canolles upon his arrival; "it is his merit."

"I do not deny the merit, far from it," said another officer; "I am the first to bear witness to it. But I will take the liberty of adding to it the patronage of a certain lady, the cleverest, most generous, most lovable of her sex,—after the queen, of course."

"No insinuations, count," rejoined Canolles, smiling at the last speaker; "if you have any secrets of your own, keep them for your own sake; if they concern your friends, keep them for your friends' sake."

"I confess," said an officer, "that when I heard a suggestion of delay, I supposed that our forgiveness was to be sought in favor of some gorgeous toilet. But I see that I was mistaken."

"Pray, do we dine without ladies?" asked another.

"Dame! unless I invite Madame la Princesse and her suite," said Canolles, "I hardly see whom we could have; besides, we must not forget, messieurs, that our dinner-party is a serious function; if we choose to talk business we shall bore nobody but ourselves."

"Well said, commandant, although the women do seem to be engaged in a veritable crusade against our authority at this moment; witness what Monsieur

le Cardinal said in my presence to Don Luis de Haro."

"What did he say?" Canolles asked.

"You are very fortunate! Spanish women think of nothing but money, flirting, and lovers, while the women of France refuse to take a lover now until they have sounded him on political questions; so that,' he added, despairingly, 'lovers pass their time discussing affairs of State.'"

"For that reason," said Canolles, "the present war is called the 'war of women;' a very flattering title for us."

At that moment, just as the half-hour's reprieve expired, the door opened, and a servant announced that Monsieur le Gouverneur was served.

Canolles requested his guests to follow him; but as the procession was about to start, another announcement was heard in the reception-room.

"Monsieur le Gouverneur de Vayres!"

"Ah!" said Canolles; "it's very kind of him."

He stepped forward to meet the colleague in whom he expected to find a stranger, but started back in amazement.

"Richon!" he cried; "Richon, governor of Vayres!"

"Myself, my dear baron," returned Richon, affably, but with his customary serious expression.

"Ah! so much the better! so much the better!" said Canolles, cordially pressing his hand. "Messieurs," he added, "you do not know him, but I do; and I say, emphatically, that it would be impossible to intrust an important appointment to a more honorable man."

Richon looked proudly about upon the guests, and as he detected no other expression in the looks which were bent upon him than polite surprise tempered with much good-will, he said:—

"My dear baron, now that you have answered for me so handsomely, present me, I beg you, to those of your guests whom I haven't the honor of knowing."

As he spoke he glanced significantly at three or four gentlemen to whom he was an entire stranger.

Thereupon ensued an interchange of civilities in the courtly manner characteristic of the time. Before half an hour had passed Richon was on the friendliest terms with all the young officers, and might have asked any one of them for his sword or his purse. His sponsors were his well-known gallantry, his spotless reputation, and the noble spirit written in his eyes.

"Pardieu! messieurs," said the governor of Braunes, "there's no denying that, although he's a churchman, Monsieur de Mazarin has a keen eye for fighting-men, and has been managing matters well in that direction for some time. He scents war, and selects for governors, Canolles here, and Richon at Vayres."

"Is there to be fighting?" inquired Richon, carelessly.

"Is there to be fighting!" rejoined a young man fresh from the court. "You ask if there is to be fighting, Monsieur Richon?"

"Yes."

"Well! I ask you what condition your bastions are in?"

"They are almost new, monsieur; for in the three days I have been at the fort I have done more repairing and renovating than had been done in three years."

"Good! it won't be long before they will be tested," rejoined the young man.

"So much the better," said Richon. "What do fighting-men long for? War."

"The king can sleep soundly now," said Canolles, "for he holds the Bordelais in check by means of the two rivers."

"The person who put me where I am can count upon my devotion," said Richon.

"How long do you say you have been at Vayres, monsieur?"

"Three days. How long have you been at Saint-Georges, Canolles?"

"A week. Did you have a reception like mine, Richon? Mine was magnificent, and even yet I haven't thanked these gentlemen sufficiently. There were bells ringing and drums beating, and acclamations. Cannon were the only thing missing, but I have been promised some within a few days, and that consoles me."

"My reception, my dear Canolles, was as modest as yours was splendid. I was ordered to introduce a hundred men into the place, a hundred men of the Turenne regiment, and I was in a quandary how I was to do it, when my commission, signed by Monsieur d'Épernon, arrived at Saint-Pierre, where I then was. I set out at once, handed my commission to the lieutenant, and took possession of the place without drum or trumpet. At present I am there."

Canolles, who smiled at the beginning, was conscious of an indefinable presentiment of evil from the tone in which these last words were uttered.

"And you are settled there?" he asked Richon.

"I am putting things in order," Richon replied tranquilly.

"How many men have you?"

"In the first place, the hundred men of the Turenne regiment, old soldiers of Rocroy, who can be depended upon; also a company I am forming in the town; as fast as recruits come in, I take them in hand, tradesmen, workingmen, youths, about two hundred in all; lastly, I am expecting a re-enforcement of a hundred or a hundred and fifty men, levied by an officer of the province."

"Captain Ramblay?" inquired one of the guests.

"No, Captain Cauvignac."

"I don't know him," said several voices.

"I do," said Canolles.

"Is he a stanch royalist?"

"I should not dare to say. I have every reason to think, however, that Captain Cauvignac is a creature of Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon and very devoted to him."

"That answers the question; any man who is devoted to the duke is devoted to his Majesty."

"He's a sort of scout sent on ahead to beat up the country for the king," said the old officer, who was making up for the time lost in waiting. "I have heard of him in that connection."

"Is his Majesty on his way hither?" asked Richon, with his customary tranquil manner.

"He should be at least as far as Blois," replied the young man just from the court.

"Are you sure of it?"

"Quite sure. His army will be commanded by Maréchal de la Meilleraie, who is to effect a junction in this neighborhood with Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

"At Saint-Georges, perhaps?"

"Rather at Vayres," said Richon. "Monsieur de la Meilleraie comes from Bretagne, and Vayres is on his road."

"The man who happens to be where the two armies come together will have to look well to his bastions," said the governor of Braunes. "Monsieur de la Meilleraie has thirty guns, and Monsieur d'Épernon twenty-five."

"They will make a fine show," said Canolles; "unfortunately, we shall not see it."

"True," said Richon, "unless some one of us declares for the princes."

"But Canolles is sure to come in for a volley from somebody. If he declares for the princes he'll have Monsieur de la Meilleraie and Monsieur d'Épernon about his ears; if he remains true to his Majesty he'll taste the fire of the Bordelais."

"Oh! as to the latter," said Canolles, "I don't consider them very terrible, and I confess that I am a little ashamed to have no worthier antagonist. Unfortunately, I am for his Majesty body and soul, and I must be content with a tradesmen's war."

"They'll give you that, never fear," said Richon.

"Have you any basis for conjecture on that subject?" queried Canolles.

"I have something better than that," said Richon. "I have certain knowledge. The council of citizens has decided to take Île Saint-Georges first of all."

"Good," said Canolles, "let them come; I am ready for them."

The conversation had reached this stage and the dessert had just been served, when they heard drums beating at the entrance of the fortress.

"What does that mean?" said Canolles.

"Pardieu!" exclaimed the young officer who had brought the news from court, "it would be curious if they should attack you at this moment; an assault and escalade would be a delightful after-dinner diversion!"

"Deuce take me! it looks very much like it," said the old officer; "these wretched cads never fail to disturb you at your meals. I was at the outposts at Charenton at the time of the war in Paris, and we could never breakfast or dine in peace."

Canolles rang; the orderly on duty in the antechamber entered.

"What is going on?" Canolles asked.

"I don't know yet, Monsieur le Gouverneur; some messenger from the king or from the city, no doubt."

"Inquire, and let me know."

The soldier hastened from the room.

"Let us return to the table, messieurs," said Canolles to his guests, most of whom had left their seats. "It will be time enough to leave the table when we

hear the cannon."

All the guests resumed their seats with smiling faces. Richon alone, over whose features a cloud had passed, still seemed restless, and kept his eyes fixed upon the door, awaiting the soldier's return. But an officer with drawn sword appeared in his stead.

"Monsieur le Gouverneur," said he, "a flag of truce."

"A flag of truce from whom?"

"From the princes."

"Coming from where?"

"From Bordeaux."

"From Bordeaux!" all the guests save Richon repeated in chorus.

"Oho! so war is really declared, is it," said the old officer, "that they send flags of truce?"

Canolles reflected a moment, and during that moment his features assumed as grave an expression as the circumstances demanded.

"Messieurs," said he, "duty before everything. I shall probably find myself confronted with a question not easy to solve in connection with this message from my Bordeaux friends, and I cannot say when I shall be able to join you again—"

"No! no!" cried the guests as one man. "Allow us to take our leave, commandant; this incident is notice to us to return to our respective posts, and we must separate at once."

"It was not for me to suggest it, messieurs," said Canolles, "but as the suggestion comes from you I am bound to say that it would be the more prudent course. Bring out the horses or carriages of these gentlemen."

As hurried in their movements as if they were already on the battlefield, the guests having been ferried ashore, vaulted into the saddle, or entered their carriages and rode rapidly away, followed by their escorts, in the direction of their respective residences.

Richon was the last to take his leave.

"Baron," said he, "I did not want to leave you as the others did, as we have known each other longer than you have known any of them. Adieu; give me your hand, and good luck to you!"

Canolles gave him his hand.

"Richon," said he, looking earnestly into his face, "I know you; you have

something on your mind; you do not tell it to me, for it probably is not your secret. However, you are moved,—and when a man of your temperament is moved, it's for no small matter."

"Are we not about to part?" said Richon.

"Yes, and so were we about to part when we took leave of each other at Biscarros's inn, but you were calm then."

Richon smiled sadly.

"Baron," said he, "I have a presentiment that we shall never meet again!"

Canolles shuddered at the profoundly melancholy inflection in the partisan's ordinarily firm voice.

"Ah, well!" said he, "if we do not meet again, Richon, it will be because one of us has died the death of a brave man; and in that case the one who dies will be sure, at all events, of surviving in the heart of a friend! Embrace me, Richon; you wished me good luck; I wish you good courage!"

The two men embraced warmly, and for some seconds their noble hearts beat against each other.

When they parted, Richon wiped away a tear, the first, perhaps, that ever dimmed his proud glance; then, as if he feared that Canolles might see the tear, he hurried from the room, ashamed, no doubt, to have exhibited such a sign of weakness to a man whose courage was so well known to him.

III.

The dining-hall was left untenanted, save by Canolles and the officer who announced the flag of truce, and who was still standing beside the door.

"What are Monsieur le Gouverneur's orders?" he said, after a brief pause.

Canolles, who was deep in thought, started at the voice, raised his head, and shook off his preoccupation.

"Where is the flag of truce?" he asked.

"In the armory, monsieur."

"By whom is he accompanied?"

"By two of the Bordeaux militia."

"What is he?"

"A young man, so far as I can judge; he wears a broad-brimmed hat, and is wrapped in a great cloak."

"In what terms did he announce himself?"

"As the bearer of letters from Madame la Princesse and the Parliament of Bordeaux."

"Request him to wait a moment," said Canolles, "and I will be at his service."

The officer left the room to perform his errand, and Canolles was preparing to follow him, when a door opened, and Nanon, pale and trembling, but with an affectionate smile upon her lips, made her appearance.

"A flag of truce, my dear," she said, grasping the young man's hand. "What does it mean?"

"It means, dear Nanon, that the good people of Bordeaux propose either to frighten me or seduce me."

"What have you decided?"

"To receive him."

"Is there no way to avoid it?"

"Impossible. It is one of the customs which must be followed."

"Oh! mon Dieu!"

"What's the matter, Nanon?"

"I'm afraid—"

"Of what?"

"Didn't you say that the mission of this flag of truce was to frighten you or seduce you?"

"Of course; a flag of truce is good for nothing else. Are you afraid he'll frighten me?"

"Oh, no! but he may perhaps seduce you—"

"You insult me, Nanon."

"Alas! my dear, I only say what I am afraid of—"

"You distrust me to that extent? For what do you take me, pray?"

"For what you are, Canolles; a noble heart, but easily moved."

"Well, well!" laughed Canolles; "in God's name, who is this flag of truce? Can it be Dan Cupid in person?"

"Perhaps."

"Why, have you seen him?"

"I haven't seen him, but I heard his voice. It's a very soft voice for a flag of truce."

"You are mad, Nanon! let me do my duty. It was you who made me governor."

"To defend me, my dear."

"Well, do you think me dastard enough to betray you? Really, Nanon, you insult me by placing so little confidence in me!"

"You are determined, then, to see this young man?"

"I must, and I shall take it very ill of you if you make any further objection to my fulfilling my duty in that respect."

"You are free to do as you please, my dear," said Nanon, sadly. "One other word—"

"Say it."

"Where shall you receive him?"

"In my cabinet."

"Canolles, one favor—"

"What is it?"

"Receive him in your bedroom instead of your cabinet."

"What have you in your head?"

"Don't you understand?"

"No."

"My room opens into yours."

"And you will listen?"

"Behind your bed-curtains, if you will allow me." "Nanon!"

"Let me be near you, dear. I have faith in my star; I shall bring you luck."

"But, Nanon, suppose this flag of truce—"

"Well?"

"Should have some State secret to tell me?"

"Can you not intrust a State secret to her who has intrusted her life and her fortune to you?"

"Very well! listen to us, Nanon, if you insist upon it; but don't detain me any longer; the messenger is waiting for me."

"Go, Canolles, go; but, first, accept my loving thanks for your kindness to me!"

And the young woman would have kissed her lover's hand.

"Foolish girl!" said Canolles, pressing her to his heart and kissing her on the forehead; "so you will be—"

"Behind the curtains of your bed. There I can see and hear."

"Whatever else you do, don't laugh, Nanon, for these are serious matters."

"Have no fear," said Nanon. "I won't laugh."

Canolles ordered the messenger to be introduced, and passed into his own apartment, a room of great size, furnished under Charles IX. in a style of severe simplicity. Two candelabra were burning upon the chimney-piece, but their feeble glimmer was quite inadequate to light the immense apartment; the alcove at the farther end was entirely in shadow.

"Are you there, Nanon?" Canolles asked.

A stifled "Yes" reached his ears.

At that moment he heard steps in the corridor. The sentinel presented arms; the messenger entered and followed his introducer with his eyes, until he was, or thought he was, alone with Canolles. Then he removed his hat and threw back his cloak; immediately a mass of blond locks fell down over a pair of shapely shoulders, the graceful, willowy form of a woman appeared under the gold baldric, and Canolles, by the sad, sweet expression of her face, recognized the Vicomtesse de Cambes.

"I told you that I would seek you," she said, "and I keep my word; here I am."

Canolles clasped his hands and fell upon a chair in speechless amazement, and an agony of fear.

"You! you!" he muttered. "Mon Dieu! why are you here; what seek you here?"

"I have come to ask you, monsieur, if you still remember me."

Canolles heaved a heart-breaking sigh, and put his hands before his eyes, seeking to banish the ravishing but fatal apparition.

Everything was made clear to him in an instant; Nanon's alarm, her pallor, her trembling, and, above all, her desire to be present at the interview. Nanon, with the keen eyes of jealousy, had detected a woman in the flag of truce.

"I have come to ask you," continued Claire, "if you are ready to carry out

the engagement you entered into with me in the little room at Jaulnay,—to send your resignation to the queen, and enter the service of the princes."

"Oh! silence! silence!" cried Canolles.

Claire shuddered at the accent of utter dismay in the commandant's voice, and glanced uneasily about the room.

"Are we not alone here?" she asked.

"We are, madame; but may not some one hear us through the walls?"

"I thought that the walls of Fort Saint-Georges were more solid than that," said Claire with a smile.

Canolles made no reply.

"I have come to ask you," Claire resumed, "how it happens that I have heard nothing of you during the eight or ten days you have been here,—so that I should still know nothing as to who is governor of Île Saint-Georges, had not chance, or public rumor, informed me that it is the man who swore to me, barely twelve days since, that his disgrace was the best of good fortune, since it enabled him to devote his arm, his courage, his life, to the party to which I belong."

Nanon could not repress a movement, which made Canolles jump and Madame de Cambes turn her head.

"Pray, what was that?" she demanded.

"Nothing," Canolles replied; "one of the regular noises of this old room. There is no end to the dismal creaking and groaning here."

"If it is anything else," said Claire, laying her hand upon Canolles' arm, "be frank with me, baron, for you must realize the importance of this interview between us, when I decided to come myself to seek you."

Canolles wiped the perspiration from his brow, and tried to smile.

"Say on," said he.

"I reminded you a moment since of your promise, and asked you if you were ready to keep it."

"Alas, madame," said Canolles, "it has become impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because since that time many unforeseen events have happened, many ties which I thought broken forever have been formed anew; for the punishment which I knew I had merited, the queen has substituted a recompense of which I am unworthy; to-day I am united to her Majesty's party

by—gratitude."

A sigh floated out upon the air. Poor Nanon doubtless was expecting a different word from the one that ended the sentence.

"Say by ambition, Monsieur de Canolles, and I can understand it. You are nobly born; at twenty-eight you are made lieutenant-colonel, and governor of a fortress; it's all very fine, I know; but it is no more than the fitting reward of your merit, and Monsieur de Mazarin is not the only one who appreciates it."

"Madame," said Canolles, "not another word, I beg."

"Pardon, monsieur," returned Claire, "but on this occasion it is not the Vicomtesse de Cambes who speaks to you, but the envoy of Madame la Princesse, who is intrusted with a mission to you,—a mission which she must now fulfil."

"Speak, madame," said Canolles, with a sigh which was much like a groan.

"Very well! Madame la Princesse, being aware of the sentiments which you expressed, in the first place at Chantilly, and afterwards at Jaulnay, and being anxious to know to what party you really belong, determined to send you a flag of truce to make an attempt to secure the fortress; this attempt, which another messenger might have made with much less ceremony, perhaps, I undertook to make, thinking that I should have more chance of success, knowing, as I do, your secret thoughts on the subject."

"Thanks, madame," said Canolles, tearing his hair; for, during the short pauses in the dialogue, he could hear Nanon's heavy breathing.

"This is what I have to propose to you, monsieur, in the name of Madame la Princesse, let me add; for if it had been in my own name," continued Claire, with her charming smile, "I should have reversed the order of the propositions."

"I am listening," said Canolles, in a dull voice.

"I propose that you surrender Île Saint-Georges on one of the three conditions which I submit to your choice. The first is this,—and pray remember that it does not come from me: the sum of two hundred thousand livres—"

"Oh, madame, go no further," said Canolles, trying to break off the interview at that point. "I have been intrusted by the queen with the post of commandant at Île Saint-Georges, and I will defend it to the death."

"Remember the past, monsieur," said Claire, sadly; "that is not what you said to me at our last interview, when you proposed to abandon everything to follow me, when you had the pen already in your hand to offer your

resignation to the persons for whom you propose to sacrifice your life to-day."

"I might have had that purpose, madame, when I was free to choose my own road; but to-day I am no longer free—"

"You are no longer free!" cried Claire, turning pale as death; "how am I to understand that? What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am in honor bound."

"Very well! then listen to my second proposition."

"To what end?" said Canolles; "have I not told you often enough, madame, that my resolution is immovable? So do not tempt me; you would do so to no purpose."

"Forgive me, monsieur," said Claire, "but I, too, am intrusted with a mission, and I must go through with it to the end."

"Go on," murmured Canolles; "but you are very cruel."

"Resign your command, and we will work upon your successor more effectively than upon you. In a year, in two years, you can take service under Monsieur le Prince with the rank of brigadier."

Canolles sadly shook his head.

"Alas! madame," said he, "why do you ask nothing of me but impossibilities?"

"Do you make that answer to me?" said Claire. "Upon my soul, monsieur, I do not understand you. Weren't you on the point of signing your resignation once? Did you not say to her who was beside you at that time, listening to you with such delight, that you did it freely and from the bottom of your heart? Why, I pray to know, will you not do here, when I ask you, when I beg you to do it, the very thing that you proposed to do at Jaulnay?"

Every word entered poor Nanon's heart like a dagger-thrust, and Canolles seemed to share her agony.

"That which at that time was an act of trifling importance would to-day be treachery, infamous treachery!" said Canolles, gloomily. "I will never surrender Île Saint-Georges, I will never resign my post!"

"Stay, stay," said Claire in her sweetest voice, but looking about uneasily all the while; for Canolles' resistance, and, above all, the constraint under which he was evidently laboring seemed very strange to her. "Listen now to my last proposition, with which I would have liked to begin, for I knew, and I said beforehand, that you would refuse the first two. Material advantages, and I am very happy to have divined it, are not the things which tempt a heart like

yours. You must needs have other hopes than those of ambition and of fortune; noble instincts require noble rewards. Listen—"

"In Heaven's name, madame," Canolles broke in, "have pity on me!"

And he made as if he would withdraw.

Claire thought that his resolution was shaken, and, confident that what she was about to say would complete her victory, she detained him, and continued:
—

"If, instead of a mere mercenary recompense, you were offered a pure and honorable recompense; if your resignation were to be purchased,—and you can resign without blame, for, as hostilities have not begun, it would be neither defection nor treachery, but a matter of choice, pure and simple,—if, I say, your resignation were to be purchased by an alliance; if a woman, to whom you have said that you loved her, whom you have sworn always to love, and who, notwithstanding your oaths, has never responded directly to your passion, if that woman should come to you and say: 'Monsieur de Canolles, I am free, I am wealthy, I love you; be my husband, let us go hence together,—go wherever you choose, away from all these civil commotions, away from France,'—tell me, monsieur, would you not then accept?"

Canolles, despite Claire's blushes, despite her fascinating hesitation, despite the memory of the lovely little château de Cambes, which he could have seen from his window, had not the darkness come down from heaven during the scene we have been describing,—Canolles remained firm and immovable in his determination; for he could see in the distance, a white spot in the deep shadow, the pale, tear-stained face of Nanon, trembling with agony, peering out from behind the Gothic curtains.

"Answer me, in Heaven's name!" exclaimed the viscountess, "for I am at a loss to understand your silence. Am I mistaken? Are you not Monsieur le Baron de Canolles? Are you not the same man who told me at Chantilly that you loved me, and who repeated it at Jaulnay,—who swore that you loved me alone in all the world, and that you were ready to sacrifice every other love to me? Answer! answer! in Heaven's name, answer!"

A moan came from behind the curtains, this time so distinct and unmistakable that Madame de Cambes could no longer doubt that a third person was present at the interview; her frightened eyes followed the direction taken by Canolles' eyes, and he could not look away so quickly that the viscountess did not catch a glimpse of that pale, immovable face, that form like the form of a ghost, which followed, with breathless interest, every word that was uttered.

The two women exchanged a glance of flame through the darkness, and

each of them uttered a shriek.

Nanon disappeared.

Madame de Cambes hastily seized her hat and cloak, and said, turning to Canolles:—

"Monsieur, I understand now what you mean by duty and gratitude. I understand what duty it is that you refuse to abandon or betray; I understand, in short, that there are affections utterly impervious to all seduction, and I leave you to those affections and to that duty and gratitude. Adieu, monsieur, adieu!"

She started toward the door, nor did Canolles, attempt to detain her; but a painful memory stopped her. "Once more, monsieur," said she, "in the name of the friendship that I owe you for the service you were pleased to render me, in the name of the friendship that you owe me for the service I rendered you, in the name of all those who love you and whom you love—and I except not one—do not engage in this struggle; to-morrow, day after to-morrow, perhaps, you will be attacked at Saint-Georges; do not cause me the bitter pain of knowing that you are either conquered or dead."

At the words the young man started and came to himself.

"Madame," said he, "I thank you on my knees for the assurance you give me of your friendship, which is more precious to me than I can tell you. Oh! let them come and attack me! Mon Dieu! let them come on! I look for the enemy with more ardor than will ever impel him to come to me. I feel the need of fighting, I feel the need of danger to raise me in my own esteem; let the struggle come, and the danger that attends it, aye, death itself! death will be welcome since I know that I shall die rich in your friendship, strong in your compassion, and honored by your esteem."

"Adieu, monsieur," said Claire, walking toward the door.

Canolles followed her. In the middle of the dark corridor he seized her hand, and said, in so low a tone that he himself could hardly hear the words he uttered:—

"Claire, I love you more than I have ever loved you; but it is my misfortune that I can prove my love only by dying far away from you."

A little ironical laugh was Claire's only reply; but no sooner was she out of the château than a pitiful sob burst from her throat, and she wrung her hands, crying:—

"Ah! my God, he doesn't love me! he doesn't love me! And I, poor miserable wretch that I am, do love him!"

IV.

Upon leaving Madame de Cambes, Canolles returned to his apartment. Nanon was standing like a statue in the centre of the room. Canolles walked toward her with a sad smile; as he drew nearer she bent her knee; he held out his hand, and she fell at his feet.

"Forgive me," said she; "forgive me, Canolles! It was I who brought you here, I who procured this difficult and dangerous post to be given you; if you are killed I shall be the cause of your death. I am a selfish creature, and I thought of naught but my own happiness. Leave me now; go!"

Canolles gently raised her.

"Leave you!" said he; "never, Nanon, never; you are sacred in my sight; I have sworn to protect you, defend you, save you, and I will save you, or may I die!"

"Do you say that from the bottom of your heart, Canolles, without hesitation or regret?"

"Yes," said Canolles, with a smile.

"Thanks, my noble, honorable friend, thanks. This life of mine, to which I used to attach so much value, I would sacrifice for you to-day without a murmur, for not until to-day did I know what you have done for me. They offered you money,—are not my treasures yours? They offered you love,—was there ever in the world a woman who would love you as I love you? They offered you promotion? Look you, you are to be attacked; very good! let us buy soldiers, let us heap up arms and ammunition; let us double our forces and defend ourselves; I will fight for my love, you for your honor. You will whip them, my gallant Canolles; you will force the queen to say that she has no more gallant officer than you; and then I will look to your promotion; and when you are rich, laden with glory and honor, you can desert me, if you choose; I shall have my memories to console me."

As she spoke Nanon gazed at Canolles, and she awaited such a response as women always expect to their exaggerated words,—a response, that is to say, as absurd and hyperbolical as the words themselves. But Canolles sadly hung his head.

"Nanon," said he, "so long as I remain at Île Saint-Georges, you shall never suffer injury, never submit to insult. Set your mind at ease on that score, for you have nothing to fear."

"Thanks," said she, "although that is not all I ask. Alas! I am lost," she muttered inaudibly; "he loves me no longer."

Canolles detected the glance of flame which shone in her eyes like a

lightning-flash, and the frightful momentary pallor which told of such bitter suffering.

"I must be generous to the end," he said to himself, "or be an infamous villain.—Come, Nanon, come, my dear, throw your cloak over your shoulders, take your man's hat, and let us take a breath of the night air; it will do you good. I may be attacked at any moment, and I must make my nightly round of inspection."

Nanon's heart leaped for joy; she arrayed herself as her lover bade her, and followed him.

Canolles was no make-believe officer. He entered the service when he was little more than a child, and had made a real study of his profession. So it was that he made his inspection not simply as commandant, but as engineer. The officers, when they saw that he came in the guise of a favorite, supposed that he was a mere ornamental governor. But when they were questioned by him, one after another, as to the provisions for attack and defence, they were compelled to recognize in this apparently frivolous young man an experienced captain, and even the oldest among them addressed him with respect. The only things with which they could find fault were the mildness of his voice when giving orders, and the extreme courtesy with which he questioned them; they feared that this last might be the mask of weakness. However, as every one realized the imminence of the danger, the governor's orders were executed with such celerity and accuracy that the chief conceived as favorable an opinion of his soldiers as they had formed of him. A company of pioneers had arrived during the day. Canolles ordered the construction of works, which were instantly begun. Vainly did Nanon try to take him back to the fort, in order to spare him the fatigue of a night passed in this way; Canolles continued his round, and gently dismissed her, insisting that she should return within the walls. Then, having sent out three or four scouts, whom the lieutenant recommended as the most intelligent of all those at his disposal, he stretched himself out upon a block of stone, whence he could watch the progress of the work.

But while his eyes mechanically followed the movement of mattocks and pickaxes, Canolles's mind wandered away from the material things which surrounded him, to pass in review, not only the events of the day, but all the extraordinary adventures of which he had been the hero since the day he first saw Madame de Cambes. But, strangely enough, his mind went back no farther than that day; it seemed to him as if his real life had begun at that time; that until then he had lived in another world,—a world of inferior instincts, of incomplete sensations. But from that hour there had been a light in his life which gave a different aspect to everything, and in the brightness of that new light, Nanon, poor Nanon, was pitilessly sacrificed to another passion, violent

from its very birth, like every passion which takes possession of the whole life into which it enters.

After much painful meditation, mingled with thrills of heavenly rapture at the thought that he was beloved by Madame de Cambes, Canolles confessed to himself that it was duty alone which impelled him to act the part of a man of honor, and that his friendship for Nanon counted for nothing in his determination.

Poor Nanon! Canolles called his feeling for her friendship, and in love friendship is very near indifference.

Nanon also was keeping vigil, for she could not make up her mind to retire. Standing at a window, wrapped in a black cloak to avoid being seen, she followed, not the sad, veiled moon peering out through the clouds, not the tall poplars waving gracefully in the night wind, not the majestic Garonne, which seemed like a rebellious vassal gathering its strength to war against its master, rather than a faithful servant bearing its tribute to the ocean,—but the slow, painful struggle in her lover's mind; in that dark form outlined against the stone, in that motionless shadow lying beneath a lantern, she saw the living phantom of her past happiness. She, once so active and so proud and clever, had lost all her cleverness and pride and energy; it seemed as if her faculties, sharpened by her misery, became doubly acute and far-seeing; she felt another love springing into life in her lover's heart, as God, sitting aloft in the vast firmament, feels the blade of grass growing in the earth.

Not until dawn did Canolles return to his room. Nanon took her leave when she saw him coming, so that he had no idea that she had watched all night. He dressed himself with care, mustered the garrison anew, inspected by daylight the different batteries, especially those which commanded the left bank of the Garonne, ordered the little harbor to be closed by chains, stationed a number of boats provided with falconets and blunder-busses, reviewed his men, encouraged them with a few earnest, heartfelt words, and returned to his apartment once more, about ten o'clock.

Nanon was awaiting him with a smile upon her lips.

She was no longer the haughty, imperious Nanon, whose slightest caprice made Monsieur d'Épernon himself tremble; but a timid mistress, a shrinking slave, who had ceased to demand love for herself, but simply craved permission to love.

The day passed without other incident than the different developments of the drama which was being enacted in the hearts of the two young people. The scouts sent out by Canolles returned one after another. No one of them brought any definite news; but there was great excitement in Bordeaux, and it was

evident that something was in preparation there.

Madame de Cambes, upon returning to the city, although she did not divulge the details of the interview, which lay hidden in the inmost recesses of her heart, made known its result to Lenet. The Bordelais loudly demanded that Île Saint-Georges should be taken. The people volunteered in crowds for the expedition.

The leaders could hold them back only by alleging the absence of an experienced officer to take charge of the enterprise, and of regular troops to carry it through. Lenet seized the opportunity to whisper the names of the two dukes and offer the services of their army; the suggestion was received with enthusiasm, and the very men who had voted to close the gates a few days before, were loudest in demanding their presence.

Lenet hastened to make known the good news to the princess, who at once assembled her council.

Claire feigned fatigue in order to avoid taking part in any decision adverse to Canolles, and withdrew to her chamber to weep at her ease.

There she could hear the shouts and threats of the mob. Every shout, every threat was directed against Canolles.

Soon the drum began to beat, the companies assembled; the sheriffs distributed weapons to the people, who demanded pikes and arquebuses; the cannon were taken from the arsenal, powder was distributed, and two hundred boats were in readiness to ascend the Garonne with the evening tide, while three thousand men were to march up the left bank and attack by land.

The river army was to be commanded by Espagnet, councillor of Parliament, a brave and judicious man; and the land forces by Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, who had entered the city with about two thousand gentlemen. Monsieur le Duc de Bouillon, with a thousand more, was to arrive two days later, and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld hastened the attack as much as possible, so that his colleague should not be present.

V.

On the second day following that on which Madame de Cambes presented herself in the guise of a flag of truce at Île Saint-Georges, as Canolles was making his round upon the ramparts about two in the afternoon, he was informed that a messenger with a letter for him desired to speak with him.

The messenger was at once introduced, and handed his missive to Canolles.

Evidently there was nothing official about the document; it was a small letter, longer than it was wide, written in a fine, slightly tremulous hand, upon

perfumed bluish paper of fine quality.

Canolles felt his heart beat faster at the mere sight of the letter.

"Who gave it to you?" he asked.

"A man of fifty-five to sixty years of age."

"Grizzly moustache and royale?"

"Yes."

"Slightly bent?"

"Yes."

"Military bearing?"

"Yes."

"That's all."

Canolles gave the man a louis, and motioned to him to withdraw at once.

Then, with wildly beating heart, he concealed himself in the corner of a bastion, where he could read the letter at his ease.

It contained only these two lines:—

"You are to be attacked. If you are no longer worthy of me, show yourself at least worthy of yourself."

The letter was not signed, but Canolles recognized Madame de Cambes as he had recognized Pompée; he looked to see if anybody was looking at him, and blushing like a child over his first love, he put the paper to his lips, kissed it ardently, and placed it upon his heart.

Then he mounted the crown of the bastion, whence he could follow the course of the Garonne well-nigh a league, and could see the whole extent of the surrounding plain.

Nothing was to be seen upon land or water.

"The day will pass like this," he muttered; "they won't come by daylight; they have probably halted to rest on the way, and will begin the attack this evening."

He heard a light step behind him, and turned. It was his lieutenant.

"Well, Monsieur de Vibrac, what news?" said Canolles.

"They say, commandant, that the princes' flag will float over Île Saint-Georges to-morrow."

"Who says that?"

"Two of our scouts who have just come in, and have seen the preparations the citizens are making."

"What answer did you make when they said that?"

"I answered, commandant, that it was all the same to me so long as I wasn't alive to see it."

"Ah! you stole my answer, monsieur."

"Bravo, commandant! we asked nothing better; and the men will fight like lions when they know that that is your answer."

"Let them fight like men, that's all I ask. What do they say as to the manner of the attack?"

"General, they are preparing a surprise for us," said De Vibrac, with a laugh.

"Peste! what sort of a surprise? this is the second warning I have received. Who leads the assailants?"

"Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld the land forces, Espagnet, councillor of Parliament, the naval forces."

"Very good!" said Canolles; "I have a little advice to give him."

"Whom?"

"The councillor."

"What is it?"

"To re-enforce the urban militia with some good, well-disciplined regiment, who can show the tradesmen how to receive a well-sustained fire."

"He hasn't waited for your advice, commandant; I think he must have been more or less of a soldier before he became a man of the law, for he has enlisted the services of the Navailles regiment for this expedition."

"The Navailles regiment?"

"Yes."

"My old regiment?"

"The same. It has gone over, it seems, bag and baggage, to the princes."

"Who is in command?"

"Baron de Ravailly."

"Indeed?"

"Do you know him?"

"Yes—a fine fellow, and brave as his sword. In that case it will be warmer than I supposed, and we shall have some fun."

"What are your orders, commandant?"

"That the posts be doubled to-night; that the troops retire fully dressed, with loaded muskets within reach. One half will stand guard, while the other half sleeps. Those who are on guard will keep out of sight behind the embankment. One moment—Have you informed anybody of the news brought by the scouts?"

"Nobody."

"Good; keep it secret for some little time yet. Select ten or twelve of your worst soldiers; you should have some fishermen, or poachers?"

"We have only too many of them, commandant."

"Well, as I was saying, select ten of them, and give them leave of absence till to-morrow morning. Let them go and throw their lines in the Garonne, and set their snares in the fields. To-night Espagnet and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld will take them and question them."

"I don't understand—"

"Don't you understand that it is most essential that the assailants should believe that we are entirely unprepared for them? These men, who know nothing, will take their oaths with an air of sincerity, which will carry conviction because it will not be assumed, that we are sound asleep in our beds."

"Ah! excellent!"

"Let the enemy approach, let him disembark, let him plant his ladders."

"But when shall we fire on him?"

"When I give the word. If a single shot is fired from our ranks before I order it, the man who fires it shall die, my word for it!"

"The deuce!"

"Civil war is war twice over. It is important, therefore, that it be not carried on like a hunting party. Let Messieurs les Bordelais laugh, and laugh yourselves if it amuses you; but don't laugh until I give the word."

The lieutenant retired to transmit Canolles' commands to the other officers, who looked at one another in amazement. There were two men in the governor,—the courteous gentleman, and the implacable soldier.

Canolles returned to take supper with Nanon; but the supper was put ahead

two hours, as he had determined not to leave the ramparts from dusk till dawn. He found Nanon running through a pile of letters.

"You can defend the place with confidence, dear Canolles," said she, "for it won't be long before you are re-enforced. The king is coming, Monsieur de La Meilleraie is coming with his army, and Monsieur d'Épernon is coming with fifteen thousand men."

"But, meanwhile, they have a week or ten days before them. Nanon," added Canolles, with a smile, "Île Saint-Georges is not impregnable."

"Oh! while you are in command I have no fear."

"Yes; but just because I am in command I may be killed. Nanon, what would you do in that case? Have you thought about it?"

"Yes," replied Nanon, smiling back at him.

"Very good! have your boxes ready. A boatman will be waiting at a certain spot; if you have to take to the water, four of my people who are good swimmers will be at hand, with orders not to leave you, and they will take you ashore."

"All precautions are useless, Canolles; if you are killed I shall need nothing."

Supper was announced. Ten times, while they sat at table, Canolles rose and went to the window, which looked upon the river, and before the end of the repast he left the table altogether; night was beginning to fall.

Nanon would have followed him.

"Nanon," said he, "go to your room, and give me your word that you will not leave it. If I knew that you were outside, exposed to the slightest danger, I would not answer for myself. Nanon, my honor is at stake; do not trifle with my honor."

Nanon offered Canolles her carmine lips, more brilliant in hue from the pallor of her cheeks, and went to her room, saying:—

"I obey you, Canolles; I choose that enemies and friends alike should know the man I love; go!"

Canolles left the room. He could not withhold his admiration from this strong nature, so quick to comply with his wishes, so responsive to his will. He had hardly reached his post ere the night came down, threatening and awe-inspiring, as it always is when it conceals in its dark depths a bloody secret.

Canolles took up his position at the end of the esplanade, which overlooked the course of the stream and both its banks. There was no moon; a

veil of dark clouds overhung the earth. There was no danger of being seen, but it was almost impossible to see.

About midnight, however, it seemed to him that he could distinguish dark masses moving upon the left bank, and gigantic shapes gliding along the surface of the stream. But there was no other noise than the moaning of the night wind among the branches.

The masses ceased to move, the shapes became stationary at some distance. Canolles thought that he must have been mistaken, but he redoubled his watchfulness; his eager eyes pierced the darkness, his ear was awake to the slightest sound.

The clock on the fortress struck three, and the slow, mournful reverberation died away in the darkness.

Canolles was beginning to think that the warning he had received was a hoax, and he was on the point of retiring, when Lieutenant de Vibrac, who stood beside him, suddenly placed one hand upon his shoulder and pointed with the other toward the river.

"Yes, yes," said Canolles, "there they are; we have no time to lose. Go and wake the men who are off duty, and station them behind the wall. You told them, didn't you, that I would kill the first man who fired?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell them again."

By the first streaks of dawn long boats laden with men, who were laughing and talking in low tones, could be seen approaching the island, and there was a very pronounced eminence on the bank, which did not exist the night before. It was a battery of six guns which Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld had set up during the night, and the men in the boats had delayed their arrival because the battery was not ready to begin operations.

Canolles asked if the weapons were loaded, and upon being answered in the affirmative, bade the troops reserve their fire.

The boats came nearer and nearer, and there was soon light enough for Canolles to distinguish the cross-belts and peculiar hats worn by the Navailles regiment, to which, as we know, he formerly belonged. In the prow of one of the foremost boats was Baron de Ravailly, who had succeeded him in command of his company, and at the stern the lieutenant, who was his foster brother, a great favorite among his comrades because of his joyous nature, and his inexhaustible store of jokes.

"You will see," said he, "that they won't stir, and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld will have to wake them up with his cannon. Peste! how they

sleep at Saint-Georges; I'll surely come here when I'm ill."

"Dear old Canolles plays his rôle of governor like a paterfamilias," said Ravailly; "he's afraid his men will take cold if he makes them mount guard at night."

"Upon my soul," said another, "there's not a sentinel to be seen!"

"Holà!" cried the lieutenant, stepping ashore, "wake up, up there, and lend us a hand to come up."

Shouts of laughter arose along the whole line at this last pleasantry, and while three or four boats pulled toward the harbor, the rest of the force disembarked.

"I see how it is," said Ravailly; "Canolles prefers to have it appear that he was taken by surprise in order not to get into trouble at court. Let us return him courtesy for courtesy, messieurs, and kill no one. Once in the fort, mercy for all, except for the women, who may not ask it, sarpejeu! Don't forget that this is a war between friends, boys; I '11 run through the first man who unsheathes his sword."

The merriment broke out afresh at this command, which was given with true French gayety, and the soldiers joined in with the officers.

"Ah! my friends," said the lieutenant, "it does one good to laugh, but we mustn't let it interfere with what we have to do. Ladders and grappling-hooks!"

The soldiers thereupon drew forth long ladders from the boats, and advanced toward the wall.

At that, Canolles rose with his cane in his hand, and his hat on his head, like a man who was taking the fresh morning air for pleasure, and approached the parapet, which reached only to his waist.

It was light enough for him to be recognized.

"Ah! good-morning, Navailles," he said to the regiment; "good-morning, Ravailly; good-morning, Remonenq."

"Look, it's Canolles!" exclaimed the young officers; "are you awake at last, baron?"

"Why, yes! what would you have? we live like the King of Yvetot here,—early to bed, and late to rise; but what the devil are you doing at this time of night?"

"Pardieu!" said Ravailly, "I should think that you might see. We are here to besiege you, that's all."

"Well, why are you here to besiege me?"

"To take your old fort."

Canolles began to laugh.

"Come," said Ravailly, "you surrender, don't you?"

"But I must know first to whom I am surrendering. How happens it that Navailles is serving against the king?"

"Faith, my dear fellow, because we have turned rebels. On thinking it over we concluded that Mazarin was a downright rascal, unworthy to be served by gallant gentlemen; so we went over to the princes. And you?"

"My dear fellow, I am an enthusiastic Épernonist."

"Pshaw! leave your people there and come with us."

"Impossible—Ho! hands off the drawbridge chains down there! You know that those things are to be looked at from a distance, and it brings bad luck to touch them. Ravailly, bid them not touch the chains, or I'll fire on them," continued Canolles, frowning; "and I warn you, Ravailly, that I have some excellent marksmen."

"Bah! you are joking!" rejoined the captain. "Let yourself be taken; you are not in force."

"I am not joking. Down with the ladders! Ravailly, beware, I beg you, for it's the king's house you are besieging!"

"Saint-Georges the king's house!"

"Pardieu! look up and you will see the flag on the crown of the embankment. Come, push your boats off into the water, and put the ladders aboard, or I fire. If you want to talk, come alone or with Remonenq, and we will breakfast together, and talk as we eat. I have an excellent cook at Île Saint-Georges."

Ravailly began to laugh, and encouraged his men with a glance. Meanwhile another company was preparing to land.

Canolles saw that the decisive moment had arrived; and, assuming the firm attitude and serious demeanor befitting a man burdened with so heavy a responsibility as his, he cried:—

"Halt there, Ravailly! A truce to jesting, Remonenq! not another word or step, or I fire, as truly as the king's flag is above, and as your arms are raised against the lilies of France."

Suiting the action to the threat, he overturned with his strong arm the first ladder that showed its head over the stones of the rampart.

Five or six men, more eager than their fellows, were already on the ladder, and were overturned with it. They fell, and a great shout of laughter arose from besiegers and besieged alike; one would have said they were schoolboys at play.

At that moment a signal was given to indicate that the besiegers had passed the chains drawn across the mouth of the harbor.

Ravailly and Remonenq at once seized a ladder and prepared to go down into the moat, shouting:—

"This way, Navailles! Escalade! escalade! up! up!"

"My poor Ravailly," cried Canolles, "I beseech you to stop where you are."

But at the same instant the shore battery, which had kept silent hitherto, flashed and roared, and a cannon-ball ploughed up the dirt all around Canolles.

"Go to!" said Canolles, extending his cane, "if you will have it so! Fire, my lads, fire all along the line!"

Thereupon, although not a man could be seen, a row of muskets appeared, pointing down at the parapet, a girdle of flame enveloped the crown of the wall, while the detonation of two huge pieces of artillery answered Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's battery.

Half a score of men fell; but their fall, instead of discouraging their comrades, inspired them with fresh ardor. The shore battery replied to the battery on the rampart; a cannon-ball struck down the royal standard, and another killed one of Canolles' lieutenants, named D'Elboin.

Canolles looked around and saw that his men had reloaded their weapons.

"Fire!" he cried, and the order was executed as promptly as before.

Ten minutes later not a single pane of glass was left on the island. The stones trembled and burst in pieces; the cannon-balls knocked holes in the walls, and were flattened on the great flags; a dense smoke overhung the fort, and the air was filled with shrieks and threats and groans.

Canolles saw that Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's artillery was doing the greatest amount of damage. "Vibrac," said he, "do you look out for Ravailly, and see that he doesn't gain an inch of ground in my absence. I am going to our battery."

He ran to the two pieces which were returning Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's fire, and himself attended to loading and sighting them; in an instant three of the six guns on shore were dismounted, and fifty men were stretched on the ground. The others, who were not anticipating such a resistance, began to scatter and fly.

Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, trying to rally them, was struck by a fragment of stone, which knocked his sword out of his hands.

Canolles, content with this result, left the captain of the battery to do the rest, and ran back to repel the assault, which was continued by the Navailles regiment, supported by Espagnet's men.

Vibrac had maintained his ground, but had received a bullet in his shoulder.

Canolles, by his mere presence, redoubled the courage of his troops, who welcomed him with joyful shouts.

"Pray pardon me," he cried to Ravailly, "for leaving you for a moment, my dear friend; I did it, as you may see, to dismount Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's guns; but be of good cheer, here I am again."

As the captain, who was too excited to reply to the jest,—indeed, it may be that he failed to hear it amid the terrific uproar of artillery and musketry,—led his men to the assault for the third time, Canolles drew a pistol from his belt, and taking aim at his former comrade, now his enemy, fired.

The ball was guided by a firm hand and sure eye; it broke Ravailly's arm.

"Thanks, Canolles!" he cried, for he saw who fired the shot. "Thanks, I will pay you for that."

Notwithstanding his force of will, the young captain was forced to halt, and his sword fell from his hands. Remonenq ran to him and caught him in his arms.

"Will you come into the fort and have your wound dressed, Ravailly?" cried Canolles. "I have a surgeon who's as skilful in his line as my cook in his."

"No; I return to Bordeaux. But expect me again at any moment, for I will come, I promise you. The next time, however, I will select my own hour."

"Retreat! retreat!" cried Remonenq. "They are running over yonder. Au revoir, Canolles; you have the first game."

Remonenq spoke the truth; the artillery had done tremendous execution among the forces on shore, which had lost a hundred men or more. The naval contingent had fared little better. The greatest loss was sustained by the Navailles regiment, which, in order to uphold the honor of the uniform, had insisted upon marching ahead of D'Espagnet's citizen soldiers.

Canolles raised his pistol.

"Cease firing!" said he; "we will let them retreat unmolested; we have no

ammunition to waste."

Indeed, it would have been a waste of powder to continue the fire. The assailants retired in hot haste, taking their wounded with them, but leaving the dead behind.

Canolles mustered his men and found that he had four killed and sixteen wounded. Personally he had not received a scratch.

"Dame!" he exclaimed, as he was receiving Nanon's joyful caresses ten minutes later, "they were not slow, my dear, to make me earn my governor's commission. What absurd butchery! I have killed a hundred and fifty men at least, and broken the arm of one of my best friends, to prevent his being killed outright."

"Yes," said Nanon, "but you are safe and sound, aren't you?"

"Thank God! surely you brought me luck, Nanon. But look out for the second bout! The Bordelais are obstinate; and, more than that, Ravailly and Remonenq promised to come again."

"Oh, well," said Nanon, "the same man will be in command at Saint-Georges, with the same troops to sustain him. Let them come, and the second time they will have a warmer reception than before, for between now and then you will have time to strengthen your defences, won't you?"

"My dear," said Canolles, confidentially, "one doesn't get to know a place all at once. Mine is not impregnable, I have discovered that already; and if my name were La Rochefoucauld, I would have Île Saint-Georges to-morrow morning. By the way, D'Elboin will not breakfast with us."

"Why not?"

"Because he was cut in two by a cannon-ball."

VI.

The return of the attacking party to Bordeaux presented a doleful spectacle. The worthy tradesmen had left home triumphantly on the previous day, relying upon their numbers and upon the ability of their leaders; in fact, their minds were entirely at ease as to the result of the expedition, from sheer force of habit, which sometimes answers all the purposes of confidence to men who are in danger. For who was there among them who had not in his young days haunted the woods and fields of Île Saint-Georges? Where could you find a Bordelais who had not handled the oar, the fowling-piece, or the fisherman's net in the neighborhood which they were about to revisit as soldiers.

Thus the defeat was doubly depressing to the honest fellows; the locality shamed them no less than the enemy. So it was that they returned with hanging

heads, and listened resignedly to the lamentation and wailing of the women, who ascertained the losses sustained by the vanquished forces, by counting them after the manner of the savages of America.

The great city was filled with mourning and consternation. The soldiers returned to their homes to describe the disaster, each in his own way. The chiefs betook themselves to the apartments occupied by the princess at the house of the president.

Madame de Condé was at her window awaiting the return of the volunteers. Sprung as she was from a family of warriors, wife of one of the greatest conquerors in the world, and brought up to look with scorn upon the rusty armor and absurd headgear of the militia, she could not restrain a feeling of uneasiness as she thought that those same citizens, her partisans, had gone out to contend against a force of old, well-disciplined soldiers. But there were three considerations from which she derived some comfort: in the first place, Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld was in command; in the second place the Navailles regiment had the right of the line; in the third place, the name of Condé was inscribed upon the banners.

But every one of these considerations, which gave the princess ground for hope, was the source of bitter grief to Madame de Cambes; even so did everything that grieved the illustrious dame become a source of triumph to the viscountess.

The Duc de La Rochefoucauld was the first to make his appearance, covered with dust and blood; the sleeve of his black doublet was torn open, and there were spots of blood upon his shirt.

"Is this true that I hear?" cried the princess, darting to meet him.

"What do you hear, madame?" he asked, coolly.

"That you were repulsed."

"You have not heard the whole, madame; to put it frankly, we have been beaten."

"Beaten!" cried the princess, turning pale; "beaten! it isn't possible!"

"Beaten!" murmured the viscountess; "beaten by Monsieur de Canolles!"

"How did it happen, I pray to know?" demanded Madame de Condé, in a freezing tone eloquent of her bitter indignation.

"It happened, madame, as all miscalculations happen, in play, in love, in war; we attacked those who were more clever or stronger than ourselves."

"Pray is this Monsieur de Canolles such a gallant fellow?" queried the princess.

Madame de Cambes' heart throbbed with delight.

"Oh! mon Dieu!" replied La Rochefoucauld with a shrug, "not more so than another! But as he had fresh soldiers, stout walls, and was on the lookout for us, having probably received warning of our attack, he had the advantage of our good Bordelais. Ah! madame, let me remark parenthetically that they are sorry soldiers! They ran away at the second volley."

"And Navailles?" cried Claire, heedless of the imprudence of such a demonstration.

"Madame," replied La Rochefoucauld, "the only difference between Navailles and the militia is that the militia ran away, and Navailles fell back."

"The only thing we lack now is to lose Vayres!"

"I don't say that we shall not," retorted La Rochefoucauld, coolly.

"Beaten!" exclaimed the princess, tapping the floor with her foot; "beaten by upstarts, commanded by a Monsieur de Canolles! the very name is absurd."

Claire blushed to the whites of her eyes.

"You think the name absurd, madame," rejoined the duke, "but Monsieur de Mazarin thinks it sublime. And I should almost venture to say," he added with a swift, keen glance at Claire, "that he's not alone in his opinion. Names are like colors, madame," he continued with his bilious smile; "there's no accounting for tastes concerning them."

"Do you think Richon is the man to allow himself to be whipped?"

"Why not? I have allowed myself to be whipped! We must wait until the vein of bad luck is exhausted; war is a game; one day or another we shall have our revenge."

"This wouldn't have happened," said Madame de Tourville, "if my plan had been adopted."

"That's very true," said the princess; "they are never willing to do what we suggest, on the ground that we are women and know nothing about war. The men have their own way and get beaten."

"Mon Dieu, yes, madame; but that happens to the greatest generals. Paulus Æmilius was beaten at Cannae, Pompey at Pharsalia, and Attila at Chalons. There are none but Alexander and yourself, Madame de Tourville, who have never been beaten. Let us hear your plan."

"My plan, Monsieur le Duc," said Madame de Tourville in her primmest manner, "was to lay siege to the fortress in regular form. They wouldn't listen to me, but preferred a coup de main. You see the result."

"Answer madame, Monsieur Lenet," said the duke; "for my own part I do not feel sufficiently strong in strategy to maintain the conflict."

"Madame," said Lenet, whose lips thus far had opened only to smile, "there was this to be said against your idea of a regular siege, that the Bordelais are not soldiers but citizens; they must have supper under their own roof and sleep in their own bed. Now, a regular siege requires those concerned in it to dispense with a multitude of conveniences to which our worthy burghers are accustomed. So they went out to besiege Île Saint-Georges as amateurs; do not blame them for having failed to-day; they will travel the four leagues and recommence the struggle as often as need be."

"You think that they will begin again?" the princess inquired.

"Oh! as to that, madame," said Lenet, "I am quite sure of it; they are too fond of their island to leave it in the king's hands."

"And they will take it?"

"Most assuredly, some day or other."

"Very good! on the day that they take it," cried Madame la Princesse, "I propose that this insolent Monsieur de Canolles shall be shot unless he surrenders at discretion."

Claire felt a deathly shudder run through her veins.

"Shot!" echoed the duke; "peste! if that's according to your Highness's ideas of war, I congratulate myself most sincerely that I am numbered among your friends."

"Let him surrender, then."

"I would like to know what your Highness would say if Richon were to surrender."

"We're not talking of Richon, Monsieur le Duc; Richon is not in question now. Bring me a citizen, a sheriff, a councillor,—somebody to whom I can talk and assure myself that this cup is not without bitterness to those who have put it to my lips."

"Luckily enough," said Lenet, "Monsieur d'Espagnet is even now at the door, soliciting the honor of an audience of your Highness."

"Admit him," said the princess.

Throughout this scene Claire's heart had beaten at times as if it would burst, and again had felt as if it would never beat again. She said to herself that the Bordelais would make Canolles pay dear for his triumph.

But it was much worse when Espagnet, by his protestations surpassed

Lenet's confident anticipations.

"Madame," said he to the princess, "I beg that your Highness will have no fear; instead of four thousand men we will send eight thousand; instead of six pieces of cannon, we will take along twelve; instead of one hundred men, we will lose two, three, four hundred, if need be, but we will take Saint-Georges!"

"Bravo! monsieur," cried the duke; "spoken like a man! You know that I am with you, whether as your leader or as a volunteer, as often as you undertake this task. But bear in mind, I beg, that at the rate of five hundred men lost for each of four expeditions like this one, our army will be reduced one-fifth."

"Monsieur le Duc," rejoined Espagnet, "we have thirty thousand men in condition to bear arms at Bordeaux; we will drag all the cannon from the arsenal to the fortress, if necessary; we will discharge enough ammunition to reduce a mountain of granite to powder; I will myself cross the river at the head of the sappers, and we will take Saint-Georges; we have just sworn a solemn oath to do it."

"I doubt whether you will take Saint-Georges so long as Monsieur de Canolles is alive," said Claire in an almost inaudible voice.

"Then we will kill him, or have him killed, and take Saint-Georges afterward," rejoined Espagnet.

Madame de Cambes stifled the cry of dismay that came to her lips.

"Do you desire to take Saint-Georges?"

"Do we desire it!" cried the princess; "I should say as much; we desire little else."

"Very well!" said Madame de Cambes, "let me have my way, and I will put the place in your hands."

"Bah!" exclaimed the princess; "you promised much the same thing once before and failed."

"I promised your Highness to make an attempt to win over Monsieur de Canolles. That attempt failed because I found Monsieur de Canolles inflexible."

"Do you expect to find him more easy to approach after his triumph?"

"No; for that reason I did not say this time that I would turn over the governor to you, but the place itself."

"How so?"

"By admitting your soldiers into the very heart of the fortress."

"Are you a fairy, madame, that you undertake such a task?" La Rochefoucauld asked her.

"No, monsieur, I am a landowner," said the viscountess.

"Madame is pleased to jest," retorted the duke.

"Not at all, not at all," said Lenet. "I can imagine a world of meaning in the three words just uttered by Madame de Cambes."

"Then that is all I require," said the viscountess; "Monsieur Lenet's approval means everything to me. I say again that Saint-Georges is as good as taken, if I may be allowed to say four words in private to Monsieur Lenet."

"Madame," chimed in Madame de Tourville, "I too can take Saint-Georges, if I can have my way."

"Let Madame de Tourville first set forth her plan so that we can all hear," said Lenet, checking the effort Madame de Cambes was making to lead him into a corner; "then you shall whisper yours to me."

"Say on, madame," said the princess.

"I would start at night with twenty boats carrying two hundred musketeers; another party, equal in number, would creep along the right bank; four or five hundred more would ascend the left bank; meanwhile ten or twelve hundred Bordelais—"

"Bear in mind, madame," interposed La Rochefoucauld, "that you already have ten or twelve hundred men engaged."

"I will take Saint-Georges with a single company," said Claire; "give me Navailles, and I will answer for the result."

"'Tis worth considering," said the princess, while Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, with his most contemptuous smile, gazed pityingly at these women who presumed to discuss military questions which embarrassed the boldest and most enterprising men.

"I will listen to you now, madame," said Lenet. "Come this way."

He led Claire to a window recess, where she whispered her secret in his ear.

Lenet emitted a joyful exclamation.

"Indeed, madame," said he, turning to the princess, "if you will give Madame de Cambes carte blanche, Saint-Georges is ours."

"When?" the princess demanded.

"When you please."

"Madame is a great captain!" sneered La Rochefoucauld.

"You may judge for yourself, Monsieur le Duc," said Lenet, "when you enter Saint-Georges in triumph, without firing a single shot."

"When that time comes I will approve."

"If it's as certain as you say," said the princess, "let everything be prepared for to-morrow."

"On such day and at such hour as your Highness pleases," said Claire. "I will await your commands in my apartment."

With that she bowed and withdrew; the princess, who had passed in an instant from wrath to hope, did the same, followed by Madame de Tourville. Espagnet, having renewed his protestations, took his departure, and the duke was left alone with Lenet.

VII.

"My dear Monsieur Lenet," said the duke, "as the women seem to have taken charge of the war, I think it would be a good plan for the men to do a little intriguing. I have heard of a certain Captain Cauvignac, whom you commissioned to raise a company, and who is represented to me as an exceedingly clever sort of fellow. I sent for him; is there any way for me to see him?"

"He is waiting, monseigneur," said Lenet.

"Let him come in, then."

Lenet pulled a bell-cord, and a servant appeared.

"Send Captain Cauvignac hither," said Lenet.

An instant after, our old acquaintance appeared in the doorway; but, prudent as always, there he halted.

"Come hither, captain," said the duke; "I am Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld."

"I know you perfectly well, monseigneur," said Cauvignac.

"Ah! so much the better, then. You received a commission to raise a company?"

"It is raised."

"How many men have you at your disposal?"

"A hundred and fifty."

"Well armed and equipped?"

"Well armed, poorly equipped. I looked out for the weapons first of all, as the most essential thing. As to their equipment, as I am a very disinterested youth, and as I am moved principally by my affection for Messieurs les Princes, I came rather short of money, Monsieur Lenet having given me but ten thousand livres."

"You have enrolled a hundred and fifty men with ten thousand livres?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"That's a marvellous achievement."

"I have methods known to myself alone, monseigneur, to which I have resorted."

"Where are your men?"

"They are here; you will see a fine company, monseigneur, especially in respect to their morals,—all men of rank; not a single nobody among them."

Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld walked to the window, and saw in the street a hundred and fifty individuals of all ages, sizes, and conditions, drawn up in two lines, and kept in place by Ferguzon, Barrabas, Carrotel, and their two colleagues, arrayed in their most magnificent attire. The rank and file resembled a party of bandits much more nearly than a company of soldiers.

As Cauvignac had said, they were very much out at elbows, but remarkably well armed.

"Have you received any orders concerning the place where your men are to be stationed?" the duke inquired.

"I have been ordered to lead them to Vayres, and I am simply awaiting the ratification of that order by Monsieur le Duc to turn over my company to Monsieur Richon, who is expecting its arrival."

"But do not you remain at Vayres with them?"

"My principles, monseigneur, forbid my ever doing such a foolish thing as to shut myself up within four walls, when I am at liberty to go where I please. I was born to lead the life of the patriarchs."

"Very good; go where you choose; but despatch your men to Vayres as soon as possible."

"Then they are really to form part of the garrison of that place?"

"Yes."

"Under Monsieur Richon's orders?"

"Yes."

"But, monseigneur, what are my men to do in the fort, where there are already about three hundred men?"

"You are very inquisitive."

"Oh! it's not mere curiosity that makes me ask, monseigneur; it is fear."

"What are you afraid of?"

"That they will be condemned to inaction, which would be a great pity; any man makes a mistake who allows a good weapon to rust."

"Don't be alarmed, captain, they won't rust; in a week they will have a chance to fight."

"In that case they may be killed!"

"It's very likely,—unless, in addition to your secret method of recruiting soldiers, you have a secret method of making them invulnerable."

"Oh! it's not that; but before they are killed I would like to have them paid for."

"Didn't you tell me that you had received ten thousand livres?"

"Yes, on account. Ask Monsieur Lenet; he is a man of method, and I am sure he will remember our agreement."

The duke turned to Lenet.

"It is true, Monsieur le Duc," said the straightforward counsellor; "we gave Monsieur Cauvignac ten thousand livres by way of advance for the first outlay; but we promised him a hundred crowns per man."

"In that case," said the duke, "we owe the captain thirty-five thousand francs?"

"Just so, monseigneur."

"They will be given you."

"Might it not be done now, Monsieur le Duc?"

"No, impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because you are one of us, and strangers must be settled with first of all. You understand that only those people we fear have to be coaxed."

"An excellent maxim!" said Cauvignac; "in all bargains, however, it is customary to fix a time for payment."

"Very well, let us say a week," said the duke.

"A week it is," said Cauvignac.

"But suppose that when the week has elapsed we have not paid?" suggested Lenet.

"In that case I resume control of my men."

"That is no more than fair," the duke agreed.

"And I can do what I choose with them?"

"Of course, as they belong to you."

"But—" Lenet began.

"Nonsense!" said the duke in a low tone,— "when we have them safely shut up in Vayres!"

"I don't like this sort of bargain," said Lenet, shaking his head.

"They are very common in Normandy," said Cauvignac; "they are called conditional sales."

"Is it agreed?" asked the duke.

"It is," Cauvignac replied.

"When will your men start?"

"At once, if you so order."

"I do so order."

"Then they are off, monseigneur."

The captain went down into the street and said two words in Ferguzon's ear, and the Cauvignac company, followed by all the idlers whom its strange appearance had attracted, marched away toward the harbor, where the three boats were waiting which were to transport it up the Dordogne to Vayres, while its commander, faithful to the principle of freedom of action just enunciated by him to Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, stood watching his men affectionately as they moved away.

Meanwhile the viscountess in her own apartments was sobbing and praying.

"Alas!" she moaned, "I could not save his honor unimpaired, but I will at least save the appearance of honor. He must not be conquered by force; for I know him so well that I know that he would die in defence of the place; it must be made to seem to him that he is overcome by treason. Then, when he knows what I have done for him, and, above all, my object in doing it, beaten as he is, he will bless me still."

Consoled by this hope, she rose, wrote a few words which she hid in her breast, and returned to Madame la Princesse, who had sent to ask her to go with her to look to the needs of the wounded and carry consolation and material assistance to the widows and orphans.

Madame la Princesse called together all who had taken part in the expedition. In her own name and that of the Duc d'Enghien, she praised the exploits of those who had distinguished themselves; talked a long time with Ravailly, who, although he carried his arm in a sling, declared his readiness to begin again the next morning; laid her hand upon Espagnet's shoulder, and told him that she looked upon him and his gallant Bordelais as the firmest supporters of her party; in fine, she succeeded so well in inflaming their minds that the most disheartened swore that they would have their revenge, and would have started for Île Saint-Georges on the instant.

"No, not at this moment," said the princess; "take to-day and to-night for rest, and day after to-morrow you shall be in possession there forever."

This assurance was welcomed by noisy demonstrations of warlike ardor. Every shout sank deep into the heart of the viscountess, for they were like so many daggers threatening her lover's existence.

"You hear what I have agreed, Claire," said the princess; "it is for you to see that I do not break my word to these good people."

"Never fear, madame," was the reply. "I will perform what I have promised."

That same evening a messenger set out in hot haste for Saint-Georges.

VIII.

The next day, while Canolles was making his morning round, Vibrac approached him and handed him a note and a key which had been brought to the fortress during the night by a strange man, who left them with the lieutenant of the guard, saying that there was no reply.

Canolles started as he recognized the handwriting of Madame de Cambes, and his hand trembled as he broke the seal.

This is what the letter contained:—

"In my last note I gave you warning that Saint-Georges would be attacked during the night; in this, I warn you that Saint-Georges will be taken to-morrow; as a man, as an officer of the king, you run no other risk than that of being made prisoner; but Mademoiselle de Lartigues is in a very different situation, and the hatred which is entertained for her is so great that I would not answer for her life if she should fall into the hands of the Bordelais. Therefore persuade her to fly; I will furnish you with the means of flight.

"At the head of your bed, behind a curtain upon which are embroidered the arms of the lords of Cambes, to whom Île Saint-Georges formerly belonged,—Monsieur le Vicomte de Cambes, my late husband, presented it to the king,—you will find a door to which this is the key. It is one of the entrances to an extensive underground passage which passes beneath the bed of the river, and comes out at the manor of Cambes. Persuade Mademoiselle Nanon de Lartigues to fly through that passage—and, if you love her, fly with her.

"I answer for her safety upon my honor.

"Adieu. We are quits.

"VICOMTESSE DE CAMBES."

Canolles read and re-read the letter, shivering with fear at every word, growing paler with every reading; he felt that a mysterious power, which he could not fathom, enveloped him, and directed his actions. Might not this same underground passage, from his bedroom to the Château de Cambes, which was to serve to assure Nanon's safety, serve equally well, if the secret were generally known, to deliver Saint-Georges to the enemy?

Vibrac followed, upon the governor's expressive features, the emotions which were reflected there.

"Bad news, commandant?" he asked.

"Yes, it seems that we are to be attacked again to-night."

"The fanatics!" said Vibrac. "I should have supposed we had given them a sufficient dressing-down, and were not likely to hear of them again for a week at least."

"I have no need to enjoin the strictest watchfulness upon you," said Canolles.

"Have no fear, commandant. Probably they will try to surprise us, as they did before?"

"I have no idea; but let us be ready for anything, and take the same precautions that we took before. Finish my round of inspection for me; I must go to my room; I have some orders to give."

Vibrac touched his hat and strode away with the soldierly indifference to danger often exhibited by those whose profession brings them face to face with it at every step.

Canolles went to his room, taking every possible precaution not to be seen by Nanon; and having made sure that he was alone, locked himself in.

At the head of his bed were the arms of the lords of Cambes, upon a

tapestry hanging surrounded by a band of gold.

Canolles raised the band, which was not attached to the tapestry, and disclosed the crack of a door. With the aid of the key which accompanied the viscountess's letter, he opened the door, and found himself confronted by the gaping orifice of a subterranean passage.

For a moment Canolles was struck dumb, and stood motionless, with the sweat pouring from his brow. This mysterious opening into the bowels of the earth terrified him in spite of himself.

He lighted a candle and prepared to inspect it.

First, he descended twenty steep stairs, then kept on down a gentler slope farther and farther into the depths.

Soon he heard a dull, rumbling noise, which alarmed him at first, because he could not think to what cause to attribute it; but as he went forward he recognized it as the roar of the river flowing above his head.

The water had forced its way through the arch in divers places at one time or another, but the crevices had evidently been detected in time and filled with a sort of cement, which became harder in course of time than the stones it bound together.

For about ten minutes Canolles heard the water rolling over his head; then the noise gradually died away until it was hardly more than a murmur. At last even the murmuring ceased, to be succeeded by perfect silence; and after walking a hundred feet or more in the silence, Canolles reached a staircase similar to the one by which he had descended, and closed at the top by a massive door which the united strength of ten men could not have moved, and which was rendered fire-proof by a thick iron plate.

"Now I understand," said Canolles; "she will await Nanon at this door and help her to escape."

He retraced his steps beneath the river-bed, ascended the staircase, re-entered his room, replaced the gold band, and betook himself deep in thought to Nanon's apartments.

IX.

Nanon was, as usual, surrounded by maps, letters, and books. In her own way the poor woman was carrying on the war in the king's interest. As soon as she saw Canolles, she gave him her hand joyfully.

"The king is coming," said she, "and in a week we shall be out of danger."

"He is always coming," returned Canolles, with a sad smile; "unfortunately, he never arrives."

"Ah! but this time my information is reliable, my dear baron, and he will surely be here within the week."

"Let him make what haste he may, Nanon, he will arrive too late for us."

"What do you say?"

"I say that instead of wearing yourself out over these maps and papers, you would do better to be thinking of means of escape."

"Of escape? Why so?"

"Because I have bad news, Nanon. A new expedition is preparing, and this time I may be forced to yield."

"Very well, my dear; didn't we agree that I should share your fate and your fortune, whatever they may be?"

"No that cannot be; I shall be too weak, if I have to fear for you. Did they not propose at Agen to burn you at the stake? Did they not try to throw you into the river? Nanon, in pity for me, do not insist upon remaining, for your presence would surely make me do some cowardly thing."

"Mon Dieu, Canolles, you frighten me."

"Nanon, I implore you to give me your word that you will do what I bid you, if we are attacked."

"Why should I make such a promise?"

"To give me the strength to do my duty. Nanon, if you do not promise to obey me blindly, I swear that I will take the first opportunity to seek my own death."

"Whatever you wish, Canolles; I swear it by our love!"

"Thank God! Dear Nanon, my mind is much more at ease now. Get together your most valuable jewels. Where is your money?"

"In a small iron-bound chest."

"Have it all ready. You must take it with you."

"Oh! Canolles, you know that the real treasure of my heart is neither gold nor jewels. Canolles, is this all a mere pretext to send me away from you?"

"Nanon, you deem me a man of honor, do you not? Very good; upon my honor, what I now do is inspired solely by my dread of the danger that threatens you."

"You seriously believe that I am in danger?"

"I believe that Île Saint-Georges will be taken to-morrow."

"How, pray?"

"That I cannot say, but I believe it."

"And suppose I consent to fly?"

"I will do everything in my power to preserve my life, Nanon, I swear."

"Do you command, my dear, and I will obey," said Nanon, giving her hand to Canolles, regardless, in the intensity of her gaze, of two great tears which were rolling down her cheeks.

Canolles pressed her hand and left the room. Had he remained a moment longer, he would have wiped away those two pearls with his lips; but he placed his hand on the viscountess's letter, and that gave him strength to tear himself away.

It was a cruel day. The positive, definite threat, "To-morrow Île Saint-Georges will be taken," rang incessantly in Canolles' ears. How?—by what means? What ground had the viscountess for speaking with such conviction? Was he to be attacked by water or by land? From what quarter was this invisible yet indubitable disaster to burst upon him? He was well-nigh mad.

So long as the daylight lasted, Canolles burned his eyes out in the glaring sunshine, looking everywhere for the enemy. After dark he strained his eyes trying to peer into the depths of the forest, scanning the sky-line of the plain, and the windings of the river; all to no purpose, he could see nothing.

When night had fallen altogether, he spied a light in one wing of the Château de Cambes; it was the first time he had detected the slightest sign of life there while he had been at Île Saint-Georges.

"Ah!" said he, with a long-drawn sigh, "there are Nanon's saviors at their post."

What a strange, mysterious problem is that of the workings of the human heart! Canolles no longer loved Nanon, Canolles adored Madame de Cambes, and yet, at the moment of separation from her whom he no longer loved, he felt as if his heart would break; it was only when he was far away from her, or when he was about to leave her, that Canolles felt the full force of the singular sentiment with which he regarded that charming person.

Every man in the garrison was on duty upon the ramparts. Canolles grew weary of gazing, and questioning the silence of the night. Never was darkness more absolutely dumb, or apparently more solitary. Not the slightest sound disturbed the perfect calmness, which seemed like that of the desert.

Suddenly it occurred to Canolles that it might be that the enemy proposed to make their way into the fort by the underground passage he had explored. It

seemed highly improbable, for in that case they would have been unlikely to give him warning; but he resolved none the less to guard the passage. He ordered a barrel of powder to be prepared with a slow-match, selected the bravest man among his sergeants, rolled the barrel down upon the last step of the subterranean staircase, lighted a torch, and placed it in the sergeant's hand. Two other men were stationed near him.

"If more than six men appear in this passage," he said to the sergeant, "call upon them to withdraw; if they refuse, set fire to the match and give the barrel a roll; as the passage slopes down, it will burst in the midst of them."

The sergeant took the torch; the two soldiers stood motionless behind him, in its reddish glare, with the barrel of powder at their feet.

Canolles ascended the stairs with his mind at rest, in that direction at least; but as he stepped into his room he saw Nanon, who had seen him come down from the ramparts and return indoors, and had followed him in quest of news. She stared in open-mouthed dismay, at this yawning orifice of which she had no knowledge.

"Oh! mon Dieu!" said she, "what is that door?"

"The door of the passage through which you are to fly, dear Nanon."

"You promised me that you wouldn't require me to leave you except in case you were attacked."

"And I renew my promise."

"Everything about the island seems to be quiet, my dear."

"Everything seems quiet within, too, does it not? And yet there are a barrel of powder, a man, and a torch within twenty feet of us. If the man should put the torch to the powder, in one second not one stone would be left upon another in the whole fort. That is how quiet everything is, Nanon."

The color fled from the young woman's cheeks.

"Oh! you make me shudder!" she cried.

"Nanon, call your women," said Canolles, "and bid them come hither with all your packages, and your footman with your money. Perhaps I am mistaken, perhaps nothing will happen to-night; but never mind, let us be ready."

"Qui vive?" cried the sergeant's voice in the underground passage.

Another voice replied, but in a friendly tone.

"Hark," said Canolles, "they have come for you."

"There is no attack as yet, dear heart; all is quiet. Let me stay with you;

they will not come."

As Nanon ceased to speak, the cry of "Qui vive?" rang out thrice in the inner court-yard, and the third time it was followed by the report of a musket.

Canolles darted to the window, and threw it open.

"To arms!" cried the sentinel, "to arms!"

Canolles saw a black, moving mass in one corner; it was the enemy pouring forth in floods from a low, arched doorway opening into a cellar used as a wood-house, to which there was no doubt some secret issue.

"There they are!" cried Canolles; "hurry! there they are!"

As he spoke the sentinel's shot was answered by a score of muskets. Two or three bullets shattered the glass in the window, which Canolles hastily closed.

He turned back into the room and found Nanon on her knees. Her women and her man-servant came running in from her apartment.

"There's not an instant to lose, Nanon!" cried Canolles: "come! come!"

He took her in his arms as if she weighed no more than a feather, and plunged into the underground passage, calling to her people to follow him.

The sergeant was at his post, torch in hand; the two soldiers, with matches lighted, were ready to fire upon a group of men, among whom was our old acquaintance, Master Pompée, pale with fear, and uttering profuse protestations of friendliness.

"Ah! Monsieur de Canolles," he cried, "pray tell them that you were expecting us; what the devil! one doesn't indulge in pleasantries of this sort with one's friends."

"Pompée," said Canolles, "I place madame in your charge; one whom you know has agreed upon her honor to answer to me for her; you shall answer to me for her upon your head."

"Yes, I will answer for everything," said Pompée.

"Canolles! Canolles! I will not leave you!" cried Nanon, clinging to the young man's neck; "Canolles, you promised to go with me."

"I promised to defend Saint-Georges while one stone stands upon another, and I propose to keep my promise."

Despite Nanon's shrieks and tears and entreaties, Canolles gave her into Pompée's hands, and he, with the assistance of two or three servants of Madame de Cambes and the poor girl's own attendants, carried her off into the

dark passage.

For an instant Canolles looked after the fair, white phantom, as it was borne away with arms outstretched toward him. But suddenly he remembered that he was expected elsewhere, and rushed back to the stairway, shouting to the sergeant and the two soldiers to follow him.

Vibrac was in the governor's room, pale and hatless, with his drawn sword in his hand.

"Commandant," he cried as soon as he caught sight of Canolles, "the enemy!—the enemy!"

"I know it."

"What must we do?"

"Parbleu! a pretty question!—sell our lives dearly, of course!" and Canolles darted down into the court-yard. On the way he spied a miner's axe, and took possession of it.

The court-yard was full of the invading force; sixty soldiers of the garrison stood in a group, trying to defend the door leading to the governor's apartments. In the direction of the ramparts, there was much shouting and firing, and it was evident that fighting was in progress everywhere.

"Commandant! Here's the commandant!" cried the soldiers, when they saw Canolles.

"Yes," he shouted back, "the commandant has come to die with you. Courage, my lads, courage! they have surprised us by treachery, because they couldn't whip us in a fair fight."

"All's fair in war," said the mocking voice of Ravailly, who, with his arm in a sling was urging his men on to take Canolles. "Surrender, Canolles, surrender, and you shall have good terms."

"Ah! is it you, Ravailly?" was the reply. "I thought I had paid you my debt of friendship; but you are not content. Wait a moment—"

As he spoke, Canolles darted forward five or six steps, and hurled the axe he held in his hand at Ravailly with such force that it cut through the helmet and gorget of a militia officer, who stood beside the captain of Navailles, and who fell dead.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Ravailly; "how courteously you reply to proffered courtesies! I ought, though, to be well-used to your ways. He's mad, boys! fire on him! fire!"

At the word a brisk volley came from the enemy's ranks, and five or six

men about Canolles fell.

"Fire!" cried he; "fire!"

But only four or five muskets responded. Taken by surprise, just when they were least expecting it, and confused by the darkness, Canolles' troops had lost their courage.

He saw that there was no hope.

"Go in," he said to Vibrac, "go in and take your men with you; we will barricade ourselves, and we won't surrender at all events until they have carried the fort by assault."

"Fire!" shouted two new voices, those of Espagnet and La Rochefoucauld. "Remember your dead comrades, who are crying out for vengeance. Fire!"

The storm of lead came whistling again about Canolles without touching him, but decimating his little troop once more.

"Back!" cried Vibrac, "back!"

"At them! at them!" cried Ravailly; "forward, my lads, forward!"

His men obeyed and rushed forward; Canolles, with hardly more than a half a score of men, sustained the shock; he had picked up a dead soldier's gun, and used it as a club.

The soldiers entered the governor's house, Vibrac and he bringing up the rear. With their united efforts they succeeded in closing the door, despite the efforts of the assailants to prevent them, and secured it with an enormous bar of iron.

There were bars at the windows.

"Axes, crow-bars, cannon if necessary!" cried the voice of Duc de La Rochefoucauld; "we must take them all, dead or alive."

His words were followed by an appalling discharge; two or three bullets pierced the door, and one of them shattered Vibrac's thigh.

"Faith, commandant," said he, "my account is settled; do you look now to settling yours; I am done with it all."

He lay down by the wall, unable to stand erect.

Canolles glanced about him; a dozen men were still in fighting trim, among them the sergeant he had stationed in the underground passage.

"The torch!" said Canolles; "what did you do with the torch?"

"I threw it down beside the barrel, commandant."

"Is it still burning?"

"Probably."

"Good. Send out all your men through the rear doors and windows. Obtain for them and for yourself the best terms you can; the rest is my affair."

"But, commandant—"

"Obey!"

The sergeant bent his head and bade his soldiers follow him. In a twinkling they all disappeared toward the rear of the house; they understood the purpose Canolles had in mind, and were not at all solicitous to be blown up with him.

Canolles listened for an instant. They were at work on the door with axes, but the fusillade did not abate; they were firing at random, mostly at the windows, where they thought that the besieged might be lying in ambush.

Suddenly a loud shout announced that the door had yielded, and Canolles heard the assailants rushing from room to room with cries of joy.

"Ah me!" he muttered, "five minutes hence these cries of joy will change to shrieks of despair."

He rushed into the underground passage, where he found a young man sitting on the barrel, with the torch at his feet, and his face buried in his hands.

He raised his head at the sound of footsteps and Canolles recognized Madame de Cambes.

"Ah! here you are at last!" she cried, as she rose.

"Claire!" murmured Canolles, "why have you come here?"

"To die with you, if you are determined to die."

"I am dishonored, ruined, and there is nothing for me But to die."

"You are saved and your honor is secure,—saved by me."

"Ruined by you! Do you hear them? they are coming; here they are! Claire, make your escape while you may; you have five minutes, it is more than enough."

"I will not fly, I will remain."

"But do you know why I came down here? Do you know what I propose to do?"

Madame de Cambes picked up the torch, and put it near the barrel of powder.

"I have a suspicion," said she.

"Claire!" cried Canolles in dismay. "Claire!"

"Say again that you propose to die, and we will die together."

The pale face of the viscountess indicated such resolution that Canolles realized that she was quite capable of doing what she said; and he stopped.

"Tell me what you wish," he said.

"I wish you to surrender."

"Never!"

"Time is precious," continued the viscountess; "surrender. I offer you life and honor, for I give you the excuse that you were surprised by treachery."

"Let me fly, then; I will lay my sword at the king's feet, and beseech him to give me an opportunity to have my revenge."

"You shall not fly."

"Why not?"

"Because I can live in this way no longer; because I cannot live apart from you; because I love you."

"I surrender! I surrender!" cried Canolles, throwing himself at Madame de Cambes' knees, and hurling away the torch she still held in her hand.

"Ah!" she murmured, "now I have him, and no one can take him away from me again."

There was one very peculiar thing, which is capable of explanation, however; namely, that love acted so differently upon these two women.

Madame de Cambes, shy, timid, and gentle by nature, had become resolute, bold, and strong.

Nanon, capricious and wilful, had become shy, timid, and gentle.

Herein lies the explanation of the phenomenon: Madame de Cambes felt more and more confident that she was beloved by Canolles; Nanon felt that Canolles' love for her was growing less day by day.

X.

The second return of the army of the princes to Bordeaux was very different from the first. On this occasion there were laurels for everybody, even for the vanquished.

Madame de Cambes with consummate tact had assigned an honorable rôle to Canolles, who, as soon as he had entered the city, side by side with his friend Ravailly, whom he was so near killing on two occasions, was

surrounded and congratulated as a great captain and a gallant soldier.

They who had been so soundly whipped but two days before, especially those of them who had suffered any damage at that time, retained some hard feeling against their conqueror. But Canolles was so handsome and sweet-tempered; his manners were so simple; he bore himself in his new position so good-humoredly and yet with such becoming dignity; the friends who surrounded him were so demonstrative in their evidences of affection for him; both officers and men of the Navailles regiment were so loud in their praise of him as their captain, and as governor of Île Saint-Georges,—that the Bordelais soon forgot their rancor. Moreover, they had other things to think of.

Monsieur de Bouillon arrived a day or two later, and they had most precise information that the king would be at Libourne in a week at the latest.

Madame de Condé was dying with curiosity to see Canolles; she stood behind the curtains at her window, and watched him pass, and was impressed with his distinguished bearing, which fully justified the reputation he had acquired among friends and foes alike.

Madame de Tourville's opinion did not coincide with that of Madame la Princesse; she claimed that he lacked distinction. Lenet declared that he considered him a gallant fellow, and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld said simply:—

"Aha! so that's the hero, is it?"

Quarters were assigned Canolles in the principal fortress of the city, the Château Trompette. By day he was free to go where he pleased throughout the city, on business or pleasure as the case might be. At taps he returned to the fortress. His word was taken that he would not attempt to escape nor to correspond with any one outside the city.

Before accepting this last condition, he asked permission to write a few lines: and the permission being granted, he sent Nanon the following letter:—

"A prisoner, but at liberty upon my word of honor to correspond with no one outside the walls of Bordeaux, I write you these few words, dear Nanon, to assure you of my affection, which my silence might cause you to doubt. I depend upon you to defend my honor in the sight of the king and queen.

"Baron de Canolles."

In these very mild conditions the influence of Madame de Cambes was very perceptible.

It was four or five days before he came to the end of the banquets and festivities of all sorts, with which his friends entertained him; he was seen constantly with Ravailly, who walked about with his left arm in that of

Canolles and his right in a sling. When the drums beat and the Bordelais set out upon some expedition or hurried to quell an uprising, they were sure to see Canolles somewhere on the way, either with Ravailly on his arm, or alone, with his hands behind his back, interested, smiling, and inoffensive.

Since his arrival he had seen Madame de Cambes very rarely, and had hardly spoken to her; the viscountess seemed to be content so long as he was not with Nanon, and she was happy to know that he was in her neighborhood.

Canolles wrote to her to complain, mildly, whereupon she procured for him invitations to one or two houses in the city.

More than that. Canolles, through Lenet's intercession, had obtained permission to pay his respects to Madame de Condé, and the comely prisoner appeared sometimes at her receptions, dancing attendance upon the ladies of her suite.

It would be impossible, however, to imagine a man less interested than Canolles in political matters. To see Madame de Cambes and exchange a few words with her; if he could not succeed in speaking to her, to receive an affectionate smile and nod from her, to press her hand when she entered her carriage, and, Huguenot though he was, to offer her holy water at church,—such were the main points of interest in the prisoner's day.

At night he thought over what had taken place during the day.

It was not long, however, before this mild distraction ceased to satisfy the prisoner. As he fully realized the exquisite delicacy of Madame de Cambes, who was even more solicitous for his honor than her own, he sought to enlarge the circle of his distractions. In the first place he fought with an officer of the garrison and with two bourgeois, which helped to while away a few hours. But as he disarmed one of his opponents and wounded the others, that form of amusement soon failed him for lack of persons disposed to amuse him.

Then he indulged in one or two little love-affairs. This was not to be wondered at, for not only was Canolles, as we have said, an extremely well-favored youth, but since he had been a prisoner he had become immeasurably more interesting. For three whole days and the morning of the fourth his captivity was the talk of the town; more could hardly be said of that of Monsieur le Prince.

One day when Canolles hoped to see Madame de Cambes at church,—and when Madame de Cambes, perhaps for fear of meeting him there, did not appear,—as he stood at his post by the pillar he offered the holy water to a charming creature whom he had not before seen. It was not the fault of Canolles, but of Madame de Cambes; for if she had come, he would have thought of none but her, would have seen none but her, and would have

offered holy water to none but her.

That same day, as he was wondering in his own mind who the charming brunette could be, he received an invitation to pass the evening with Lavie, the avocat-général, the same man who had undertaken to interfere with the entry of Madame la Princesse, and who, in his capacity of upholder of the royal authority, was detested almost as cordially as Monsieur d'Épernon. Canolles, who felt more and more imperatively the need of being amused, accepted the invitation with thankfulness, and betook himself to the avocat-général's house at six o'clock.

The hour may seem strange to our modern entertainers; but there were two reasons why Canolles made his appearance so seasonably: in the first place, as people in those days dined at noon, evening parties began vastly earlier; in the second place, as Canolles invariably reported at Château Trompette as early as half-after nine, he must needs arrive among the first if he wished to do anything more than show himself for a moment.

As he entered the salon he uttered an exclamation of delight; Madame Lavie was no other than the bewitching brunette to whom he so gallantly presented the holy water that very morning.

Canolles was greeted in the avocat-général's salon as a royalist who had been tried and found not wanting. He had no sooner been presented than he was overwhelmed with compliments fit to turn the head of one of the seven wise men of Greece. His defence, at the time of the first attack, was compared with that of Horatius Codes, and his final defeat to the fall of Troy brought about by the artifices of Ulysses.

"My dear Monsieur de Canolles," said the avocat-général, "I know from the best authority that you have been much talked of at court, and that your gallant defence has covered you with glory; the queen has declared that she will exchange you as soon as possible, and that when you return to her service it shall be as colonel or brigadier; now, do you wish to be exchanged?"

"Faith, monsieur," replied Canolles, with a killing glance at Madame Lavie, "I assure you that I desire nothing so much as that the queen will not hurry. She would have to exchange me for a sum of money, or for some good soldier; I am not worth the expense of the one, nor do I deserve the honor of the other. I will wait until her Majesty has taken Bordeaux, where I am extremely comfortable just at present; then she will have me for nothing."

Madame Lavie smiled affably.

"The devil!" said her husband, "you speak very lukewarmly of your freedom, baron."

"Well, why should I get excited over it? Do you imagine that it would be very agreeable for me to return to active service, where I am exposed day after day to the risk of killing some of my dearest friends?"

"But what sort of a life are you leading here?" rejoined the avocat-général,—"a life altogether unworthy of a man of your calibre, taking part in no council and in no enterprise for the good of the cause, forced to see others serving the cause in which they believe, while you sit with folded arms, useless to yourself and to everybody else; the situation ought to be burdensome to you."

Canolles looked at Madame Lavie, who happened to be looking at him.

"No," said he, "you are mistaken; I am not bored in the least. You busy yourself with politics, which is a very wearisome pursuit, while I make love, which is very amusing. You people in Bordeaux are on the one hand the servants of the queen, on the other hand the servants of the princess, while I attach myself to the fortunes of no one sovereign, but am the slave of all the ladies."

The retort was much enjoyed, and the mistress of the house expressed her opinion of it by a smile.

Soon they sat down at the card-tables, and Madame Lavie went shares with Canolles against her husband, who lost five hundred pistoles.

The next day the populace, for some unknown reason, thought best to organize an émeute. A partisan of the princes, somewhat more fanatical in his devotion than his fellows, proposed that they should go and throw stones at Monsieur Lavie's windows. When the glass was all broken, another proposed to set fire to his house. They were already running to fetch firebrands when Canolles arrived with a detachment of the Navailles regiment, escorted Madame Lavie to a place of safety, and rescued her husband from the clutches of half a score of maniacs, who, as they had failed to burn him, were determined to hang him.

"Well, my man of action," said Canolles to the avocat-général, who was positively blue with terror, "what do you think now of my idleness? Is it not better for me to do nothing?"

With that he returned to Château Trompette, as taps were just sounding. He found there upon his table a letter, the shape of which made his heart beat faster, and the writing made him jump.

It was written by Madame de Cambes.

Canolles hastily opened it and read:—

"To-morrow, about six in the evening, be at the Carmelite Church, alone,

and go to the first confessional on the left as you enter. You will find the door open."

"Well, that's an original idea," said Canolles.

There was a postscript.

"Do not boast," it said, "of having been where you were yesterday and to-day. Bordeaux is not a royalist city, remember, and the fate Monsieur l'Avocat-général would have suffered but for you should make you reflect."

"Good!" said Canolles, "she is jealous. And so, whatever she may say, I did very well to go to Monsieur Lavie's yesterday and to-day."

XI.

It must be said that since his arrival at Bordeaux, Canolles had undergone all the torture of unrequited love. He had seen the viscountess courted and caressed and flattered, while he himself was forbidden to devote himself to her, and had to take what comfort he could in an occasional glance bestowed upon him by Claire when the gossips were looking the other way. After the scene in the underground passage, after the passionate words they had exchanged at that critical moment, the existing state of things seemed to him to denote something worse than lukewarmness on her part. But, as he felt sure that beneath her cold exterior she concealed a real and deep affection for him, he looked upon himself as the most to be pitied of all happy lovers that ever lived. His frame of mind is easily understood. By virtue of the promise he had been made to give, that he would carry on no correspondence with the outside world, he had relegated Nanon to that little corner of the conscience which is set aside for the accommodation of that variety of remorse. As he heard nothing of her, and consequently was spared the ennui caused by tangible reminders of the woman to whom one is unfaithful, his remorse was not altogether unbearable.

And yet, sometimes, just when the most jovial of smiles overspread the young man's features, when his voice was heard giving utterance to some bright and witty remark, a cloud would suddenly pass across his brow, and a sigh would escape from his lips at least, if not from his heart. The sigh was for Nanon; the cloud was the memory of the past casting its shadow over the present.

Madame de Cambes had remarked these moments of melancholy; she had sounded the depths of Canolles' heart, and it seemed to her that she could not leave him thus abandoned to his own resources. Between an old love which was not altogether extinct, and a new passion which might spring up in his heart, it was possible that his surplus ardor, which was formerly expended upon the proper performance of his military duties and the functions of his

responsible position, might tend to check the growth of the pure flame which she sought to inspire. Moreover she simply desired to gain time until the memory of so many romantic adventures should fade away, after keeping the curiosity of all the courtiers of the princess on the qui vive. Perhaps Madame de Cambes was injudicious; perhaps, if she had made no concealment of her love, it would have created less sensation, or the sensation would have been less long-lived.

But Lenet was the one who followed the progress of this mysterious passion with the most attention and success. For some time his observant eye had detected its existence without feeling sure of its object; nor had he been able to guess its precise situation, whether it was or was not reciprocated. But Madame de Cambes, sometimes tremulous and hesitating, sometimes firm and determined, and almost always indifferent to the pleasures which those about her enjoyed, seemed to him to be stricken to the heart in very truth. Her warlike ardor had suddenly died away; she was neither tremulous nor hesitating nor firm nor determined; she was pensive, smiled for no apparent motive, wept without cause, as if her lips and her eyes responded to the vagaries of her thought, the contrary impulses of her mind. This transformation had been noticeable for six or seven days only, and it was six or seven days since Canolles was taken prisoner. Therefore there was little doubt that Canolles was the object of her love.

Lenet, be it understood, was quite ready to further a passion which might some day result in enrolling so gallant a warrior among the partisans of Madame la Princesse.

Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld was perhaps farther advanced than Lenet in the exploration of Madame de Cambes' heart. But the language of his gestures and his eyes, as well as of his mouth, was so closely confined to what he chose to permit them to say, that no one could say whether he himself loved or hated Madame de Cambes. As to Canolles, he did not mention his name or look at him, or take any more notice of him than if he had not existed. For the rest, he assumed a more warlike attitude than ever, posing constantly as a hero,—a pretension in which he was justified to some extent by his undeniable courage, and his equally undeniable military skill; day by day he attributed increased importance to his position as lieutenant to the generalissimo. Monsieur de Bouillon, on the other hand, a cold, mysterious, calculating personage, whose political ends were admirably served by attacks of gout, which sometimes came so in the nick of time that people were tempted to question their reality, was forever negotiating, and concealed his real thoughts as much as possible, being unable to realize the tremendous distance that lay between Mazarin and Richelieu, and being always fearful for his head which he was very near losing upon the same scaffold with Cinq-Mars, and saved

only by giving up Sedan, his own city, and renouncing in fact, if not in name, his rank as a sovereign prince.

The city itself was carried away by the flood of dissipation and profligacy which poured in upon it from all sides. Between two fires, with death and ruin of one sort or another staring them in the face, the Bordelais were never sure of the morrow, and they felt the need of doing what they could to sweeten their precarious existence, which could count the future only by seconds.

They remembered La Rochelle and its demolition by Louis XIII., and the profound admiration of Anne of Austria for that exploit. Why did not Bordeaux afford the hatred and ambition of that princess an opportunity to duplicate the fate of La Rochelle?

They constantly forgot that the man who imposed his levelling instrument upon all heads and walls that seemed to him too high was dead, and that Cardinal de Mazarin was hardly equal to the shadow of Cardinal de Richelieu.

So it was that every one let himself go with the tide, Canolles with the rest. It is no less true that there were times when he was inclined to doubt everything, and in his fits of scepticism he doubted the love of Madame de Cambes, as he doubted everything else. At such times Nanon's image would once more fill a large space in his heart, in absence more affectionate and devoted than ever. At such times, if Nanon had appeared before him in the flesh, the inconstant creature would have fallen at her feet.

While his thoughts and emotions were in this incoherent state, which only those hearts can understand that have at some time hesitated between two loves, Canolles received the viscountess's letter. We need not say that every other thought instantly disappeared. After reading the letter he could not understand how he could ever have dreamed of loving any other than Madame de Cambes, and after reading it a second time he was sure that he had never loved any other than her.

He passed one of those feverish, restless nights which do not bring exhaustion in their train, because happiness furnishes a counterpoise to insomnia. Although he had hardly closed his eyes during the night, he rose with the dawn.

Every one knows how a lover passes the hours preceding a meeting with his beloved,—in looking at his watch, running aimlessly hither and thither, and jostling his dearest friends without recognizing them. Canolles performed every mad feat that his state of mind demanded.

At the precise moment (it was the twentieth time he had entered the church) he went to the confessional, the door of which stood open. Through the small window filtered the last rays of the setting sun; the whole interior of

the religious edifice was lighted up by that mysterious light, so sweet to those who pray, and those who love. Canolles would have given a year of his life rather than lose a single hope at that moment.

He looked around to make sure that the church was deserted, and when he was convinced that there was no one to see him, entered the confessional and closed the door behind him.

XII.

An instant later Claire, enveloped in a thick cloak, herself appeared at the door, leaving Pompée outside as sentinel; then having satisfied herself that she was in no danger of being seen, she knelt at one of the prie-Dieus in the confessional.

"At last, madame," said Canolles, "at last you have taken pity upon me!"

"I could do no less, since you were ruining yourself," Claire replied; it disturbed her peace of mind to tell even so harmless a falsehood as that, at the tribunal of truth.

"I am to understand then, madame," said Canolles, "that I owe the favor of your presence here to no other sentiment than compassion. Surely you will agree that I was entitled to expect something more than that from you."

"Let us speak seriously," said Claire, trying in vain to steady her trembling voice, "and as we ought to speak in a holy place. You are ruining yourself, I say again, by frequenting Monsieur Lavie's house, who is the princess's sworn enemy. Yesterday Madame de Condé heard of it from Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, who knows everything, and she said this, which alarmed me greatly:—

"If we have to guard against plotting by our prisoners, we must be as severe as we have been indulgent. Precarious situations demand decisive measures; we are not only ready to take such measures, but resolved to carry them out."

The viscountess's voice was under better control as she said this; she had faith to believe that God would pardon the action in consideration of the excuse; it was a sort of sop thrown to her conscience.

"I am not her Highness's knight, madame, but yours," said Canolles. "I surrendered to you, to you alone; you know under what circumstances, and on what conditions."

"I did not think," said Claire, "that any conditions were agreed on."

"Not by word of mouth, perhaps, but in the heart. Ah! madame, after what you said to me, after the happiness you led me to anticipate, after the hope you

authorized me to entertain!—ah! madame, confess that you have been very cruel."

"My friend," said Claire, "is it for you to reproach me because I cared as much for your honor as for my own? And do you not understand without forcing me to make the admission—surely you must divine that I have suffered as much as yourself, yes, more than you, for I had not the strength to bear my suffering. Listen to what I say, and may my words, which come from the bottom of my heart, sink as deep into yours. My friend, as I told you, I have suffered more keenly than you, because I am haunted by a fear which you cannot have, knowing as you do that I love you alone. In your enforced abode here, do you ever regret her who is not here? In your dreams of the future, have you any hope of which I am not a part?"

"Madame," said Canolles, "you appeal to my frankness, and I will speak frankly to you. Yes, when you leave me to my sorrowful reflections; when you leave me alone face to face with the past; when by your absence you condemn me to wander among gambling-hells and brothels with these beplumed idiots; when you turn your eyes away from me, or compel me to pay so dearly for a word, a gesture, a glance, of which I may be unworthy,—at such times I reproach myself bitterly because I did not die in harness; I blame myself for capitulating; I suffer from regret, and from remorse."

"Remorse?"

"Yes, madame, remorse; for as truly as God is upon that holy altar before which I tell you that I love you, there is at this hour a woman, a weeping, moaning woman, who would give her life for me, and yet she must say to herself that I am either a dastard or a traitor."

"Oh! monsieur!—"

"It is so, madame! Did she not make me all that I am? Had not she my oath to save her?"

"Well, but you did save her, or I am much mistaken."

"Yes, from the enemies who would have made her suffer physical torture, but not from the despair which rends her heart, if she knows that it was you to whom I surrendered."

Claire hung her head and sighed.

"Ah! you do not love me," said she.

Canolles answered her sigh with another.

"I have no wish to tempt you, monsieur," she continued; "I have no wish to deprive you of a friend, whom I cannot hope to rival; and yet, you know that I

love you. I came here to ask you for your love, your devoted, single-hearted love. I came to say to you: 'I am free, here is my hand. I offer it to you because you have no rival in my heart,—because I know no one who is superior to you.'"

"Ah! madame," cried Canolles, "you make me the happiest of men!"

"Nay, nay, monsieur," she rejoined, sadly, "you do not love me."

"I love you, I adore you; but I cannot describe what I have suffered from your silence and your reserve."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Claire, "is it impossible for you men to divine anything that you are not told in words? Did you not understand that I was unwilling to make you play a ridiculous rôle; that I would not give people a pretext for believing that the surrender of Saint-Georges was arranged between us beforehand? No, it was my intention that you should be exchanged by the queen, or ransomed by me, when you would belong to me without reserve. Alas! you could not wait."

"But now, madame, I will wait. One hour like this, one word from your sweet voice to tell me that you love me, and I will wait hours, days, years."

"You still love Mademoiselle de Lartigues!" said Madame de Cambes, shaking her head.

"Madame," rejoined Canolles, "were I to say to you that I had not a feeling of grateful friendship for her, I should lie to you; take me, I pray you, with that feeling. I give you all the love that I have to give, and that is much."

"Alas!" said Claire, "I know not if I ought to accept, for your words prove that you possess a very noble, but also a very loving heart."

"Hear me," said Canolles, "I would die to spare you one tear, but without a pang I cause her you name to weep incessantly. Poor woman! she has many enemies, and they who do not know her, curse her. You have only friends; they who know you not respect you, and they who know you love you; judge, then, of the difference between these two sentiments, one of which has its birth in my conscience, the other in my heart."

"Thanks, my friend. But perhaps your present impulse is due to my presence, and you may be sorry for it hereafter. I implore you, therefore, to consider my words carefully. I give you until to-morrow to reply. If you wish to send any message to Mademoiselle de Lartigues, if you wish to join her, you are free to do so, Canolles; I myself will take you by the hand and lead you outside the walls of Bordeaux."

"Madame," replied Canolles, "it is useless to wait until to-morrow; I say it with a burning heart, but a cool head. I love you, I love you alone, I shall

never love any other than you!"

"Ah! thanks, thanks, my love," cried Claire, giving him her hand. "My hand and my heart alike are yours."

Canolles seized her hand and covered it with kisses.

"Pompée signals to me that it is time to go," said Claire. "Doubtless they are about to close the church. Adieu, my love, or rather, au revoir. To-morrow you shall know what I intend to do for you, that is to say, for us. To-morrow you will be happy, for I shall be happy."

Unable to control the impulse which drew her toward him, she put his hand to her lips, kissed the ends of his fingers, and glided away, leaving Canolles as happy as the angels, whose heavenly voices seemed to find an echo in his heart.

XIII.

Meanwhile, as Nanon had said, the king, the queen, the cardinal, and Monsieur de La Meilleraie were on their way to chastise the rebellious city which had dared openly to espouse the cause of the princes; they were approaching slowly, but they were approaching.

On his arrival at Libourne the king received a deputation from the Bordelais, who came to assure him of their respect and devotion. Under the circumstances this assurance had a strange sound; and so the queen received the ambassadors from the topmost pinnacle of her Austrian high-mightiness.

"Messieurs," said she, "we propose to continue our march by way of Vayres, so that we shall soon be able to judge if your respect and devotion are as sincere as you pretend."

At the mention of Vayres, the members of the deputation, who were doubtless in possession of some fact unknown to the queen, looked at one another with some uneasiness. Anne of Austria, whom nothing escaped, did not fail to observe the exchange of glances.

"We shall go at once to Vayres," said she. "Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon assures us that it is a strong place, and we will establish the king's headquarters there."

She turned to the captain of her guards.

"Who commands at Vayres?" she asked.

"I am told, madame," Guitaut replied, "that it is a new governor."

"A trustworthy man, I hope?" said the queen, with a frown.

"An adherent of Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

The cloud vanished from the queen's brow.

"If that is so, let us go on at once," she said.

"Madame," said the Duc de La Meilleraie, "your Majesty will of course be guided by your own judgment, but I think that we ought not to go forward more rapidly than the army. A warlike entry at Vayres would work wonders; it is well that the king's subjects should realize the extent of the forces at his Majesty's command; that will encourage the faithful and discourage traitors."

"I think that Monsieur de La Meilleraie is right," said Cardinal de Mazarin.

"And I say that he is wrong," rejoined the queen. "We have nothing to fear between this and Bordeaux; the king is strong in himself, and not in his troops; his household will suffice."

Monsieur de La Meilleraie bowed his acquiescence.

"It is for your Majesty to command," said he; "your will is law."

The queen summoned Guitaut and bade him order the guards, the musketeers and the light-horse to fall in. The king mounted his horse and took his place at their head. Mazarin's niece and the maids of honor entered their carriage.

The line of march was at once taken up for Vayres. The army followed on, and as the distance was but ten leagues, was expected to arrive three or four hours after the king, and pitch its camp upon the right bank of the Dordogne.

The king was barely twelve years old, and yet he was already a finished horseman, managing his steed with ease and grace, and exhibiting in his every movement that pride of race which made him in the sequel the most punctilious of monarchs in matters of etiquette. Brought up under the queen's eye, but constantly harassed by the everlasting niggardliness of the cardinal, who forced him to go without the most necessary things, he was awaiting with furious impatience the hour when he would attain his majority,—which hour would strike on the fifth of September following; and sometimes, amid his childish caprices, he indulged by anticipation in true kingly explosions which indicated what he would be some day.

This campaign was to him a very agreeable episode; it was in some sort a farewell to his pagehood, an apprenticeship in the trade of war, an essay at kingship. He rode proudly along, sometimes at the carriage-door, saluting the queen and making eyes at Madame de Fronsac, with whom he was said to be in love, and again at the head of his household, talking with Monsieur de La Meilleraie and old Guitaut of the campaigns of Louis XIII. and of the mighty prowess of the late cardinal.

The miles flew by as they talked, and at last the towers and outer galleries

of the fort of Vayres came in sight. The weather was magnificent, and the country picturesque in the extreme; the sun's rays fell obliquely upon the river; for aught there was in the surroundings to indicate the contrary, they might have been riding out for pleasure. The king rode between Monsieur de La Meilleraie and Guitaut, looking through his glass at the fort, where no sign of life could be discovered, although it was more than probable that the sentinels, who could be seen standing like statues on the walls, had discovered and reported the approach of this brilliant advance-guard of the king's army.

The queen's carriage was driven rapidly forward to the king's side.

"I am surprised at one thing, Monsieur le Maréchal," said Mazarin.

"What is that, monseigneur?"

"It is my impression that careful governors generally know what is going on in the neighborhood of their fortresses, and that when the king takes the trouble to come their way, they should at least send him an escort."

"Nonsense!" said the queen, with a harsh, forced laugh; "mere ceremony! it's of no consequence; I care more for fidelity."

Monsieur de La Meilleraie put his handkerchief to his face to hide a grin; or if not that, his longing to indulge in one.

"But it's true that no one stirs," said the young king, annoyed at such disregard of the rules of etiquette, upon which his future grandeur was to be founded.

"Sire," replied Anne of Austria, "Monsieur de La Meilleraie here, and Guitaut too, will tell you that the first duty of a governor, especially in an enemy's country, is to remain under cover behind his walls, for fear of surprise. Do you not see yon banner, the banner of Henri IV. and François I., floating over the citadel?"

And she pointed proudly to that significant emblem, which seemed to prove that her confidence was most abundantly justified.

The procession rode forward, and in a few moments came upon an outwork which had evidently been thrown up within a few days.

"Aha!" said the marshal, "the governor seems to be at home in the profession. The position of this outwork is well selected, and the work itself well designed."

The queen put her head out through the window, and the king stood up in his stirrups.

A single sentinel was pacing to and fro upon the half-moon; but except for him the outwork seemed as silent and deserted as the fort itself.

"Although I am no soldier," said Mazarin, "and although I do not understand the military duties of a governor, it seems to me that this is very extraordinary treatment of a royal personage."

"Let us go forward all the same," said the marshal; "we shall soon see."

When the little troop was within a hundred yards of the half-moon, the sentinel came to a halt. After scrutinizing them for a moment, he cried:—

"Qui vive?"

"The king!" Monsieur de La Meilleraie replied.

At that word Anne of Austria expected to see officers and soldiers come running forth, drawbridges lowered, gates thrown open, and swords waving in the air.

But she saw nothing of all this.

The sentinel brought his right leg up beside his left, drew a bead upon the new-comers, and said in a loud, firm voice, the one word:—

"Halt!"

The king turned pale with rage; Anne of Austria bit her lips until the blood came; Mazarin muttered an Italian oath which was little used in France, but of which he had never succeeded in breaking himself; Monsieur le Maréchal de La Meilleraie did no more than glance at their Majesties, but it was a most eloquent glance.

"I love to have all possible precautionary measures taken in my service," said the queen, striving to deceive herself; for despite the confident expression she forced herself to maintain, she began to be disturbed at the bottom of her heart.

"I love respect for my person," murmured the young king, gazing with sullen wrath at the impassive sentinel.

XIV.

Meanwhile the words, "The king! the king!" repeated by the sentinel rather as a warning to his fellows than as a mark of respect, were taken up by several voices, and at last reached the fort. Thereupon a man appeared upon the crown of the ramparts, and the whole garrison gathered about him.

He raised his staff of office; immediately the drums beat the salute, the soldiers presented arms, and a heavy gun boomed solemnly.

"You see," said the queen, "they are coming to their senses at last,—better late than never. Let us go on."

"Pardon, madame," said Maréchal de La Meilleraie, "but I cannot see that they are making any movement to throw open the gates, and we cannot enter unless the gates are open."

"They have forgotten to do it in the surprise and excitement caused by this august and unexpected visit," a courtier ventured to suggest.

"Such things are not forgotten, monsieur," the marshal replied. "Will your Majesties deign to listen to a word of advice from me?" he added, turning to the king and queen.

"What is it, marshal?"

"Your Majesties should withdraw to the distance of five Hundred yards with Guitaut and the guards, while I ride forward with the musketeers and light-horse, and reconnoitre the place."

The queen replied with a single word.

"Forward!" said she. "We will see if they will dare refuse to let us pass."

The young king, in his delight, drove his spurs into his horse, and galloped ahead of the others.

The marshal and Guitaut darted forward and overtook him.

"You cannot pass!" said the sentinel, still maintaining his hostile attitude.

"It is the king!" cried the pages.

"Halt!" cried the sentinel, with a threatening gesture. At the same moment the hats and muskets of the soldiers assigned to the defence of the outermost intrenchment appeared above the parapet.

A prolonged murmur greeted the sentinel's words and hostile demonstrations. Monsieur de La Meilleraie seized the bit of the king's horse, and turned him around, at the same time bidding the queen's coachman to turn and drive back. The two insulted majesties withdrew some seven or eight hundred yards, while their attendants scattered like a flock of birds at the report of the hunter's rifle.

Maréchal de La Meilleraie, master of the situation, left some fifty men as escort for the king and queen, and with the rest of his force rode back toward the fortifications.

When he was within a hundred yards of the moat, the sentinel, who had resumed his calm and measured tread, halted once more.

"Take a trumpet, put a handkerchief on the end of your sword, Guitaut," said the marshal, "and summon this insolent governor to open his gates."

Guitaut obeyed; he hoisted the emblem of peace, which affords protection to heralds in all civilized countries, and went forward toward the intrenchment.

"Qui vive?" cried the sentry.

"Flag of truce," Guitaut replied, waving his sword, with the bit of cloth at the end.

"Let him approach," said the same man who had previously appeared upon the rampart of the main fort, and who had doubtless reached the outwork by an underground passage.

The gate opened, and a drawbridge was lowered.

"What is your errand?" demanded an officer who was awaiting Guitaut at the gate.

"To speak to the governor," he replied.

"I am he," said the man, who had been seen twice already.

Guitaut noticed that he was very pale, but tranquil and courteous.

"Are you the governor of Vayres?" Guitaut asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you decline to open the doors of your fortress to his Majesty the king, and the queen regent?"

"I regret that I must so decline."

"What do you demand?"

"The liberty of Messieurs les Princes, whose captivity is bringing ruin and desolation upon the kingdom."

"His Majesty does not chaffer with his subjects."

"Alas! monsieur, we know it; and for that reason we are prepared to die, knowing that we shall die in his Majesty's service, although we seem to be making war upon him."

"Tis well," said Guitaut; "that is all we wished to know."

With a brusque nod to the governor, who replied with a most courteous salute, he withdrew.

There was no movement discernible upon the bastion.

Guitaut rejoined the marshal, and reported the result of his mission.

"Let fifty men ride at full speed to yonder village," said the marshal,

pointing toward the hamlet of Isson, "and bring hither instantly all the ladders they can find."

Fifty men rode off at a gallop, and very soon reached the village, which was only a short distance away.

"Now, messieurs," said the marshal, "dismount. Half of you, armed with muskets, will cover the other half, as they scale the ramparts."

The command was greeted with joyful shouts. Guards, musketeers, and light-horse were on the ground in an instant, loading their weapons.

Meanwhile the fifty foragers returned with some twenty ladders.

Everything was quiet within the fortification; the sentinel paced up and down, and the ends of the musket-barrels and the peaked hats could still be seen over the parapet.

The king's household marched forward, led by the marshal in person. It was composed of about four hundred men in all, half of whom made ready to carry the outwork by assault, and the other half to cover the operation.

The king, the queen, and their suite followed the movements of the little troop from afar, with keen anxiety.

The queen seemed to have lost all her assurance. In order to have a better view of what was taking place, she caused her carriage to be partly turned, so that it stood side wise to the fortification.

The assailants had taken but a few steps when the sentinel came to the outer edge of the rampart.

"Qui vive?" he cried in a stentorian voice.

"Make no reply," said Monsieur de La Meilleraie, "but march on."

"Qui vive?" cried the sentinel a second time, putting his musket to his shoulder.

"Qui vive?" the challenge rang out a third time, and the sentinel levelled his weapon.

"Fire on the villain!" said Monsieur de La Meilleraie.

Instantly the royalist ranks poured forth a volley; the sentinel staggered, dropped his musket, which rolled down into the moat, and fell, crying:—

"To arms!"

This beginning of hostilities was answered by a single cannon-shot. The ball whistled over the heads of the first rank, ploughed through the second and third, killed four men, and eventually disembowelled one of the horses

attached to the queen's carriage.

A cry of alarm went up from the party in attendance upon their Majesties; the king was forced to fall back still farther; Anne of Austria was near fainting with rage, and Mazarin with fear. The traces of the dead horse were cut, and those of the living horses as well, for they threatened to wreck the carriage with their terrified plunging and rearing. Eight or ten of the guards took their places, and drew the queen out of range.

Meanwhile the governor unmasked a battery of six pieces.

When Monsieur de La Meilleraie saw that battery, which would be likely to make short work of his three companies, he thought that it would be injudicious to proceed further with the attack, and ordered a retreat.

The moment that the king's household took its first backward step, the hostile preparations exhibited in the fortress disappeared.

The marshal returned to the queen, and requested her to select some spot in the neighborhood for her headquarters. Thereupon the queen, looking about, espied the small house on the other side of the Dordogne, standing by itself among the trees.

"Ascertain to whom yonder house belongs," she said to Guitaut, "and request accommodations for me therein."

Guitaut crossed the river in the Isson ferry-boat, and soon returned, to say that the house was unoccupied save by a sort of intendant, who said that it belonged to Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, and was altogether at her Majesty's service.

"Let us go thither, in that case," said the queen; "but where is the king?"

The little fellow was found to have ridden apart a short distance; he returned when he heard them calling him, and although he tried to hide his tears, it was very evident that he had been weeping.

"What's the matter, sire?" the queen asked him.

"Oh! nothing, madame," the child replied, "except that some day I shall be king, and then—woe to them who have injured me!"

"What is the governor's name?" the queen inquired.

No one was able to tell her, until they asked the question of the ferryman, who replied that his name was Richon.

"'Tis well," said the queen. "I will remember that name."

"And so will I," said the young king.

XV.

About a hundred men of the king's household crossed the Dordogne with their Majesties; the others remained with Monsieur de La Meilleraie, who, having decided to besiege Vayres, was awaiting the arrival of the army.

The queen was no sooner installed in the little house—which, thanks to Nanon's luxurious tastes, she found infinitely more habitable than she anticipated—than Guitaut waited upon her to say that an officer, who claimed to have important matters to discuss with her, requested the honor of an audience.

"Who is the man?" demanded the queen.

"Captain Cauvignac, madame."

"Is he of my army?"

"I do not think it."

"Ascertain that fact, and if he is not of my army, say that I cannot receive him."

"I crave your Majesty's pardon for venturing to differ with you on that point," said Mazarin, "but it seems to me that if he is not of your army, that is the very best of reasons for receiving him."

"Why so?"

"Because, if he is of your Majesty's army, and seeks an audience, he cannot be other than a faithful subject; whereas, if he belongs to the enemy's army, he may be a traitor. At this moment, madame, traitors are not to be despised, for they may be extremely useful."

"Admit him," said the queen, "since Monsieur le Cardinal so advises."

The captain was at once introduced, and presented himself with an easy and assured demeanor which amazed the queen, accustomed as she was to produce a far different effect upon all who approached her.

She eyed Cauvignac from head to foot, but he sustained the royal scrutiny with marvellous self-possession.

"Who are you, monsieur?" said she.

"Captain Cauvignac," was the reply.

"In whose service are you?"

"I am in your Majesty's service, if such be your pleasure."

"If such be my pleasure? Surely! Indeed, is there any other service in the

kingdom? Are there two queens in France?"

"Assuredly not, madame; there is but one queen in France, and she it is at whose feet I have the honor to lay my most humble respect; but there are two contrary opinions in France,—at least, I thought as much just now."

"What mean you, sirrah?" demanded the queen, with a frown.

"I mean, madame, that I was riding about in this vicinity, and as I happened to be upon the summit of a slight eminence which overlooks the whole country-side, admiring the landscape, which, as your Majesty must have noticed, is surpassingly beautiful, I thought I saw that Monsieur Richon did not receive your Majesty with all the respect to which you are entitled; that fact confirmed a suspicion I had previously entertained, namely, that there are two ways of thinking in France, the royalist way and another, and that Monsieur Richon is of that other way of thinking."

Anne of Austria's brow grew darker and darker.

"Ah! you thought you saw that?" said she.

"Yes, madame," Cauvignac replied with the most innocent candor. "I even thought that I saw that a cannon was fired from the fort, and that the ball with which it was loaded had something to say to your Majesty's carriage."

"Enough. Did you seek audience of me, monsieur, only to indulge in such absurd remarks as these?"

"Ah! you are discourteous," was Cauvignac's mental reflection; "you shall pay the dearer for that."

"No, madame, I sought an audience to say to you that you are a very great queen, and that my admiration for you knows no bounds."

"Indeed!" said the queen, dryly.

"Because of your grandeur, and my admiration, which is its natural consequence, I resolved to devote myself heart and soul to your Majesty's cause."

"Thanks," said the queen, ironically. "Guitaut," she added, turning to the captain of the guards, "show this prating fool the door."

"Pardon, madame," said Cauvignac, "I will go without being driven out; but if I go you will not have Vayres."

Whereupon he saluted her Majesty with perfect grace, and turned upon his heel.

"Madame," said Mazarin, in an undertone, "I think that you are ill-advised to send this man away."

"Stay a moment," said the queen, "and say what you have to say; after all, you are a strange fellow, and most amusing."

"Your Majesty is very kind," said Cauvignac, bowing low.

"What were you saying about obtaining possession of Vayres?"

"I was saying that if your Majesty still entertains the purpose, which I fancied I detected this morning, of gaining admission to Vayres, I will make it my duty to show you the way in."

"How so?"

"I have a hundred and fifty men of my own at Vayres."

"Of your own?"

"Yes, of my own."

"Even so?"

"I turn over those one hundred and fifty men to your Majesty."

"What then?"

"What then?"

"Yes."

"Why, then, it seems to me that the devil's in it if with a hundred and fifty doorkeepers your Majesty cannot cause a door to be opened."

"T is a witty knave," said the queen, with a smile.

Cauvignac evidently guessed that a compliment was intended, for he bowed a second time.

"What is your price, monsieur?" she asked.

"Oh! mon Dieu, madame!—five hundred livres for each doorkeeper; those are the wages I pay my men."

"You shall have them."

"And for myself?"

"Ah! you must have something for yourself also?"

"I should be proud to hold a commission by virtue of your Majesty's munificence."

"What rank do you demand?"

"I should love to be governor of Braune. I have always longed to be a governor."

"Granted."

"In that case, save for a trifling formality, the bargain is concluded."

"What is that formality?"

"Will your Majesty deign to sign this bit of paper, which I prepared in advance, hoping that my services would be acceptable to my magnanimous sovereign?"

"What is the paper?"

"Read it, madame."

With a graceful movement of his arm, and bending his knee with the utmost deference, Cauvignac presented a paper to the queen, who read as follows:—

"On the day that I enter Vayres, without striking a blow, I will pay to Captain Cauvignac the sum of seventy-five thousand livres, and will make him governor of Braune."

"And so," the queen continued, restraining her indignation, "Captain Cauvignac has not sufficient confidence in our royal word, but demands a written promise!"

"In matters of importance, madame, a written promise seems to me most desirable," rejoined Cauvignac, with a bow. 'Verba volant,' says an old proverb; 'words fly away,' and, saving your Majesty's presence, I have been robbed."

"Insolent knave!" exclaimed the queen, "begone!"

"I go," said Cauvignac, "but you will not have Vayres."

Again the captain turned upon his heel and walked toward the door; and Anne of Austria, whose irritation was far deeper than before, did not recall him.

Cauvignac left the room.

"See to it that that man is secured," said the queen.

Guitaut started to execute the order.

"Pardon, madame," said Mazarin, "but I think that your Majesty is wrong to yield to an angry impulse."

"Why so?"

"But I fear that we may need this man later, and that, if your Majesty molests him in any way, you will then have to pay double for his services."

"Very well," said the queen, "we will pay him what we must; but meanwhile let him be kept in sight."

"Oh! that's another matter, and I am the first to approve that precaution."

"Guitaut, see what becomes of him," said the queen.

Guitaut went out, and returned half an hour later.

"Well! what has become of him?" the queen demanded.

"Your Majesty may be perfectly easy in your mind, for your man shows not the least inclination to leave the neighborhood. I made inquiries, and found that he is domiciled at the inn of one Biscarros, within three hundred yards of this house."

"And has he gone thither?"

"No, madame; he had gone to the top of a hill near by, and is watching Monsieur de La Meilleraie's preparations for forcing the intrenchments. That spectacle seems to possess great interest for him."

"What of the rest of the army?"

"It is coming up, madame, and drawing up in line of battle as fast as it arrives."

"In that case the marshal proposes to attack at once?"

"In my opinion, madame, it would be much better to give the troops a night's rest before risking an attack."

"A night's rest!" cried the queen; "the royal army to be delayed a night and day by such a paltry affair as this! Impossible! Guitaut, go and order the marshal to attack the fort at once. The king proposes to lie tonight at Vayres."

"But, madame," murmured Mazarin, "it seems to me that the marshal's precaution—"

"And it seems to me," retorted Anne of Austria, "that when the royal authority has been outraged, it cannot be avenged too swiftly. Go, Guitaut, and say to Monsieur de La Meilleraie that the queen's eye is upon him."

Dismissing Guitaut with a majestic gesture, the queen took her son by the hand and left the room; and, without looking to see if she was followed, ascended a staircase leading to a terrace. This terrace commanded a view of the surrounding country by means of vistas most artfully designed.

The queen cast a rapid glance in every direction. Two hundred yards behind her was the Libourne road, with the hostelry of our friend Biscarros gleaming white in the sunlight. At her feet flowed the Dordogne, calm, swift,

and majestic. At her right arose the fort of Vayres, silent as a ruin; the redoubts newly thrown up formed a circle around it. A few sentinels were pacing back and forth upon the gallery; five pieces of cannon showed their bronze necks and yawning mouths through the embrasures. At her left Monsieur de La Meilleraie was making his dispositions to camp for the night. The main body of the army had arrived and was drawn up in close order around the marshal's position.

Upon a hillock stood a man following attentively with his eyes every movement of besiegers and besieged; it was Cauvignac.

Guitaut crossed the river on the ferry-boat.

The queen stood like a statue upon the terrace, with contracted brow, holding the hand of little Louis XIV., who gazed on the scene before him with an interest beyond his years, and from time to time said to his mother:

"Madame, please let me mount my battle-horse, and go with Monsieur de La Meilleraie to punish these insolent fellows."

At the queen's side was Mazarin, whose crafty, mocking features had assumed for the moment that cast of serious thought which they wore on great occasions only; and behind the queen and the minister were the maids of honor, who took pattern by their mistress's silence, and hardly dared exchange a few hurried words in undertones.

In all this there was an appearance of peace and tranquillity; but it was the tranquillity of the mine, which a spark is soon to change into a destructive tempest.

The eyes of all were fixed with special intentness upon Guitaut, for from him was to come the explosion which was awaited with such diverse emotions.

The army likewise was in a state of painful suspense; and the messenger had no sooner stepped ashore upon the left bank of the Dordogne and been recognized than every eye was turned upon him. Monsieur de La Meilleraie, as soon as he caught sight of him, left the group of officers in the centre of which he was standing, and went to meet him.

Guitaut and the marshal talked together for a few seconds. Although the river was quite wide at that point, and although the distance was considerable between the royal party and the two officers, it was not so great that the surprised expression upon the marshal's face could not be detected. It was evident that the order conveyed to him seemed ill-advised and unseasonable, and he looked doubtfully toward the group in which the queen could be distinguished. But Anne of Austria, who understood his thought, made so

imperative a gesture with both head and hand that the marshal, who knew his imperious sovereign of old, bent his head in token of acquiescence, if not of approbation.

Instantly, at a word from him, three or four captains, who exercised the functions of aides-de-camp of the present day, leaped into the saddle and galloped away in three or four different directions. Wherever they went the work of pitching the camp, which had just been begun, was at once broken off, and at the beat of the drums and the shrill call of the bugles, the soldiers let fall the armfuls of straw they were carrying, and the hammers with which they were driving in the tent-stakes. All ran to their weapons, which were stacked in due order; the grenadiers seized their muskets, the common soldiers their pikes, the artillerymen their various instruments; for a moment there was incredible confusion, caused by all these men running in all directions; but gradually order succeeded chaos, and every man was in his proper place,—the grenadiers in the centre, the king's household on the right, the artillery on the left; the drums and trumpets were silent.

A single drum was heard behind the intrenchments; then it too ceased and deathlike silence prevailed.

Suddenly an order was given in a clear, sharp tone. The queen was too far away to hear the words, but she saw the troops form instantly in columns; she drew her handkerchief and waved it, while the young king cried excitedly, stamping upon the ground: "Forward! forward!"

The army replied with a shout of "Vive le roi!" The artillery set off at a gallop, and took up its position upon a slight elevation, and the columns moved forward as the drums beat the charge.

It was not a siege in regular form, but a simple escalade. The intrenchments thrown up in haste by Richon were earthworks; there were no trenches to be opened therefore,—it was a matter of carrying them by assault. Every precaution had been taken by the energetic commandant of Vayres, and he had availed himself of every possible advantage in the lay of the land, with unusual science.

It was clear that Richon had determined not to fire first under any circumstances, for again he waited for the provocation to come from the king's troops; but again, as on the former occasion, that terrible row of muskets, which had done such execution upon the king's household, was seen to be pointing down at them.

As the forward movement began, the six guns drawn up on the little hill were discharged, and the cannon-balls threw up showers of dirt on the crown of the ramparts.

The response was not long delayed; the artillery within the intrenchments roared forth in its turn, ploughing broad furrows in the ranks of the royal army; but at the voice of the officers, these bleeding gaps disappeared; the lips of the wound opened for an instant, then closed again; the main column, which was momentarily shaken, moved forward once more.

While the cannon were being reloaded it was the turn of the musketry.

Five minutes later, the great guns on both sides discharged their volleys again, with but a single report, like two tempests in fierce combat with each other, like two peals of thunder coming at the same instant.

As it was perfectly calm, and a dense smoke hung over the battle-field, besiegers and besieged soon disappeared in a cloud, which was rent from time to time by the vivid flash of the artillery.

From time to time men could be seen coming out from the cloud in the rear of the royal army, dragging themselves along with difficulty, and leaving a bloody track behind them, until they fell exhausted.

The number of wounded rapidly increased, and the roar of the musketry and artillery continued. The royal artillery, however, were firing irregularly and at random; for amid the dense smoke the gunners could not distinguish friends from foes. The gunners in the fort on the other hand had none but foes in front of them, and their fire was more constant and more deadly than ever.

At last the royal artillery ceased firing altogether; it was evident that the assault had begun in good earnest, and that a hand-to-hand combat was in progress.

There was a moment of keenest anxiety on the part of the spectators, during which the smoke, the firing having greatly slackened, rose slowly into the air. The royal army was then seen to be falling back in disorder, leaving heaps of dead at the foot of the ramparts. A sort of breach had been made; a few palisades were torn away, leaving an opening; but that opening bristled with men and pikes and muskets, and amid those men, covered with blood, and yet as calm and cool as if he were a disinterested spectator of the tragedy in which he was playing so terrible a part, stood Richon, holding in his hand an axe all notched by the blows he had struck with it.

Some invisible power seemed to protect him, for he was constantly in the thickest of the firing, always in the front rank, always standing erect and with uncovered head, and yet no bullet had struck him, no pike had touched him; he was as invulnerable as he was impassive.

Thrice Maréchal de La Meilleraie in person led the royal troops to the assault; thrice the royal troops were beaten back before the eyes of the king

and queen.

Great tears rolled silently down the pale cheeks of the boy king; Anne of Austria wrung her hands and muttered:—

"Oh! that man! that man! If he ever falls into my hands I will make a terrible example of him!"

Luckily flight was close at hand, and spread a veil, so to speak, over the royal blushes. Maréchal de La Meilleraie ordered the bugles to blow the recall.

Cauvignac left his post, descended the hill, and sauntered across the field toward the hostelry of Master Biscarros, with his hands in his pockets.

"Madame," said Mazarin, waving his hand in Cauvignac's direction, "there's a man who for a little gold would have spared you all this bloodshed."

"Nonsense!" said the queen. "Monsieur le Cardinal, that is strange language for an economical man like yourself."

"True, madame," rejoined the cardinal: "I know the value of gold, but I know the value of blood also; and at this moment blood is more valuable to us than gold."

"Be assured," said the queen, "that the blood that has been shed shall be avenged. Comminges," she added, addressing the lieutenant of her guards, "seek out Monsieur de La Meilleraie and bring him to me."

"Bernouin," said the Cardinal to his valet, pointing to Cauvignac, who was within a few steps of the Golden Calf, "do you see that man?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Very good! go to him from me, and bring him secretly to my room to-night."

XVI.

On the day following the interview with her lover in the Carmelite church, Madame de Cambes waited upon the princess with the intention of performing the promise she had given Canolles.

The whole city was in commotion; news had just come to hand of the king's arrival before Vayres, and of the admirable defence of Richon, who, with five hundred men, had twice repulsed the royal army of twelve thousand. Madame la Princesse was among the first to learn the news, and, in her transports of joy she cried, clapping her hands:—

"Oh! had I a hundred captains like my gallant Richon!"

Madame de Cambes swelled the chorus of admiration, doubly happy to be

able to applaud openly the glorious conduct of a man she esteemed, and to find an opportunity ready made to put forward a request, of which the news of a defeat might have rendered doubtful the success, while on the other hand its success was well-nigh made certain by the news of a victory.

But even in her joy the princess had so much upon her mind that Claire dared not risk her request. The question under consideration was the sending Richon a reinforcement of men, of which it was not hard to realize his pressing need, in view of the approaching junction of Monsieur d'Épernon's army with the king's. The method of despatching this reinforcement was being discussed in council. Claire, seeing that politics had precedence for the moment over affairs of the heart, assumed the dignified demeanor of a councillor of State, and for that day the name of Canolles was not mentioned.

A very brief but very loving note advised the prisoner of this delay. It was less cruel to him than one might suppose, for the anticipation of that which we ardently desire is almost as pleasant as the reality. Canolles had too much of the true lover's delicacy in his heart not to take pleasure in what he called the antechamber of happiness. Claire asked him to wait patiently; he waited almost joyfully.

The next day the reinforcement was organized, and at eleven in the morning it started up the river; but, as mud and current were both adverse, they did not expect to arrive until the day following, being obliged to rely entirely upon their oars. Captain Ravailly, who was in command of the expedition was instructed to reconnoitre at the same time the fort of Braune, which belonged to the queen, and was known to be without a governor.

Madame la Princesse passed the morning superintending the preliminaries and the details of the embarkation. The afternoon was to be devoted to holding a grand council of war, the purpose being to devise means, if possible, to prevent the junction between Monsieur d'Épernon and the Maréchal de La Meilleraie, or at least to delay it until the reinforcement sent to Richon should have made its way into the fort.

Claire had no choice then but to wait another twenty-four hours; about four o'clock, however, she had an opportunity to wave her hand and nod to Canolles as he passed under her window, and those gestures were so eloquent of regret and affection that Canolles was almost happy that he was compelled to wait.

During the evening, in order to make sure that the delay would be prolonged no farther, and to leave herself no other alternative than to confide to the princess a secret as to which she felt some embarrassment, Claire requested a private audience for the next day,—a request which was, of course, granted without demur.

At the hour named, Claire waited upon the princess, who received her with her most charming smile. She was alone, as Claire had requested.

"Well, little one," she said, "what is the grave matter that leads you to ask me specially for a private audience, when you know that I am at my friends' service at all hours of the day?"

"Madame," the viscountess replied, "amid the felicity which is your Highness's due, I beg you to cast your eyes upon your faithful servant, who also feels the need of a little happiness."

"With great pleasure, my dear Claire, and all the happiness God could send you would not equal that which I desire for you. Say on, pray; what favor do you desire? If it is in my power to grant, look upon it as granted before it is asked."

"Widow as I am, and free,—too free, indeed, for my liberty is more burdensome to me than slavery would be,—I desire to exchange my loneliness for a happier lot."

"That is to say that you wish to marry, eh, little one?" queried Madame de Condé, with a smile.

"I think so," replied Claire, blushing.

"Very well! That is our affair."

Claire made a deprecatory gesture.

"Have no fear; we will be tender of your pride; you must have a duke and peer, viscountess. I will look up one for you among our faithful adherents."

"Your Highness is too kind; I did not propose to give you that trouble."

"That may be, but I propose to take it, for I am bound to repay in happiness what you have given me in devotion; you will wait till the end of the war, won't you?"

"I will wait the shortest possible time, madame," replied the viscountess, with a smile.

"You speak as if your choice were already made, as if you had in hand the husband you ask me to give you."

"Indeed, the fact is as your Highness suggests."

"Upon my word! Who is the lucky mortal, pray? Speak, have no fear."

"Oh, madame," said Claire; "I know not why, but I am trembling all over."

The princess smiled, took Claire's hand, and drew her to her side.

"Child!" said she, and added, with a look which redoubled Claire's embarrassment, "Do I know him?"

"I think that your Highness has seen him several times."

"I need not ask if he is young?"

"Twenty-eight."

"And nobly born?"

"He is of good family."

"And brave?"

"His reputation is established."

"And rich?"

"I am."

"Yes, little one, yes, and we have not forgotten it. You are one of the wealthiest nobles in our dominion, and we are happy to remember, that in the present war, the louis d'or of Monsieur de Cambes, and the crowns of your peasants have relieved our embarrassment more than once."

"Your Highness honors me by recalling my devotion."

"Very good. We will make him a colonel in our army if he is only a captain, and a brigadier-general if he is only a colonel; for he is faithful to us, I presume?"

"He was at Lens, madame," Claire replied with a craft in which she had lately become proficient by virtue of her diplomatic experiences.

"Excellent! Now there is but one thing left for me to learn," said the princess.

"What is that, madame?"

"The name of the very fortunate gentleman who already possesses the heart, and will soon possess the hand, of the loveliest warrior in my whole army."

Claire, driven into her last intrenchments, was summoning all her courage to pronounce the name of Canolles, when suddenly they heard a horse gallop into the court-yard, and in another moment the confused murmur of many voices, indicating the arrival of important news.

The princess ran to the window. A courier, begrimed with dust and reeking with perspiration, had just leaped from his horse, and was surrounded by a number of persons, to whom he seemed to be giving the details of some

occurrence; and as the words fell from his lips, his listeners were overwhelmed with grief and consternation. The princess could not contain her curiosity, but opened the window and called: "Let him come up!"

The messenger looked up, recognized the princess, and darted to the stairway. In a few moments he was ushered into her apartment, covered with mud as he was, with disordered hair, and a hoarse, parched voice.

"Pray pardon me, your Highness," said he, "for appearing before you in my present condition! But I am the bearer of news at the mere utterance of which doors give way; Vayres has capitulated!"

The princess started back; Claire let her arms fall despairingly; Lenet, who entered behind the messenger, turned pale.

Five or six other persons, who had so far forgotten the respect due the princess as to invade her chamber, were stricken dumb with dismay.

"Monsieur Ravailly," said Lenet,—for the messenger was no other than our captain of Navailles,—"repeat what you said, for I find it hard to credit."

"I say again, monsieur: Vayres has capitulated!"

"Capitulated!" echoed the princess; "what of the reinforcements you led thither?"

"We arrived too late, madame! Richon was in the act of surrendering at the very moment of our arrival."

"Richon surrendered!" cried Madame la Princesse; "the coward!"

This exclamation sent a shiver down the back of everybody who heard it; but all remained mute, save Lenet.

"Madame," said he, sternly, heedless of wounding Madame de Condé's pride, "do not forget that the honor of men is at the mercy of princes, as their lives are in the hands of God. Do not brand with the name of coward the bravest of your servants, unless you would see all the most faithful abandon you to-morrow, when they see how you treat their fellows, leaving you alone, accursed and lost."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the princess.

"Madame," rejoined Lenet, "I say again to your Highness that Richon is not a coward,—that I will answer for him with my head; and if he capitulated, it was certainly because he could not do otherwise."

The princess, pale with rage, was about to hurl at Lenet one of the aristocratic invectives which she deemed a sufficient substitute for good sense; but when she saw the averted faces, and eyes that avoided her own, Lenet with

head erect, and Ravailly looking down at the floor, she realized that her cause would indeed be lost if she persevered in that fatal system; so she resorted to her usual argument.

"Unfortunate princess that I am," said she; "every one abandons me, fortune as well as men! Ah! my child, my poor child, you will undergo the same fate as your father!"

This wail of womanly weakness, this burst of maternal grief, found, as always, an echo in the hearts of those who stood by. The comedy, which the princess had so often enacted with success, once more accomplished its purpose.

Meanwhile Lenet made Ravailly repeat all that he could tell him concerning the capitulation of Vayres.

"Ah! I knew it must be so!" he suddenly ejaculated.

"What did you know?" the princess asked him.

"That Richon was no coward, madame."

"What has confirmed you in that opinion?"

"The fact that he held out two days and two nights; that he would have been buried beneath the ruins of his fort had not a company of recruits rebelled and forced him to capitulate."

"He should have died, monsieur, rather than surrender," said the princess.

"Ah! madame, can one die when one chooses?" said Lenet. "I trust," he added, turning to Ravailly, "that he obtained honorable terms."

"No terms at all, I fear," Ravailly replied. "I was told that the negotiations were conducted by a lieutenant, so that there may have been some treachery, and instead of having an opportunity to make terms Richon was betrayed."

"Yes, yes," cried Lenet, "he must have been betrayed! I know Richon, and I know that he is incapable, I will not insult him by saying of a cowardly act, but of an act of weakness. Oh, madame!" continued Lenet, "betrayed, do you understand? Let us look to his safety at once. Surrender negotiated by a lieutenant, Monsieur Ravailly? There is some great misfortune hovering over poor Richon's head. Write quickly, madame; write, I entreat you!"

"Write?" said the princess, sourly; "why should I write, pray?"

"Why, to save him, madame."

"Nonsense! when a man surrenders a fortress, he takes measures to ensure his own safety."

"But do you not understand that he didn't surrender it, madame? Do you not hear what the captain says, that he was betrayed, sold perhaps,—that it was a lieutenant who signed the capitulation, and not he?"

"What would you have me do for your Richon?"

"What would I have you do for him? Do you forget, madame, the subterfuge to which we resorted to put him in command at Vayres?—that we made use of a paper, signed in blank by Monsieur d'Épernon, and that he has resisted a royal army commanded by the queen and king in person?—that Richon is the first man to raise the standard of rebellion, and that they will surely make an example of him? Ah! madame, in Heaven's name, write to Monsieur de La Meilleraie; send a messenger, a flag of truce."

"Upon what errand should the messenger, or flag of truce, be sent?"

"To prevent at all hazards the death of a gallant officer; for if you do not make haste—Oh! I know the queen, madame, and perhaps the messenger will arrive too late as it is!"

"Too late?" said the princess; "pray, have we no hostages? Have we not some officers of the king as prisoners at Chantilly, at Montrond, and here?"

Claire rose from her chair in terror.

"Oh, madame! madame!" she cried, "do what Monsieur Lenet says: reprisals will not restore Monsieur Richon's liberty."

"It's not a question of his liberty, but of his life," said Lenet, with gloomy persistence.

"Very well," said the princess, "what they do, we will do; prison for prison, scaffold for scaffold."

Claire cried out and fell upon her knees.

"Ah! madame," said she, "Monsieur Richon is one of my friends. I have just asked you to grant me a favor, and you promised to do so. I ask you to put forth all your influence to save Monsieur Richon."

Claire was kneeling. The princess seized the opportunity to grant at her entreaty what she declined to grant in obedience to the somewhat harsh advice of Lenet. She walked to a table, seized a pen, and wrote to Monsieur de La Meilleraie a request for the exchange of Richon for such one of the officers whom she held as prisoners as the queen might select. Having written the letter she looked about for a messenger. Thereupon, suffering as he still was from his wound, and worn out by his recent expedition, Ravailly offered his services, on the single condition that he should have a fresh horse. The princess authorized him to take whatever horse he chose from her stables, and

the captain left the room, animated by the cries of the crowd, the exhortations of Lenet, and the entreaties of Claire.

An instant after, they heard the murmuring of the people outside as Ravailly explained his errand to them; in their joy, they shouted at the top of their voices:—

"Madame la Princesse! Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien!"

Worn out by these daily exhibitions of herself, which she had been making in obedience to what resembled commands much more than invitations, the princess for an instant thought of refusing to comply with the popular desire; but, as commonly happens under such circumstances, the crowd was obstinate, and the shouts soon became roars.

"So be it," said Madame la Princesse, taking her son by the hand; "slaves that we are, let us obey!" and, affecting her most gracious smile, she appeared upon the balcony and saluted the people, whose slave she was and queen at the same time.

XVII.

At the moment that the princess and her son showed themselves upon the balcony, amid the enthusiastic acclamations of the multitude, the sound of drums and fifes was heard in the distance, accompanied by loud cheering.

Instantly the noisy crowd which was besieging Président Lalasne's house to have a sight of Madame de Condé turned their heads in the direction from which the uproar seemed to proceed, and, with little heed to the laws of etiquette, began to melt away. The explanation of their action was not far to seek. They had already seen Madame la Princesse ten, twenty, perhaps a hundred times, while there was a promise of something new and unfamiliar in this noise which was coming constantly nearer.

"They are honest at least," murmured Lenet, with a smile, from behind the indignant princess. "But what is the meaning of all this music and shouting? I confess that I am almost as eager to know as yonder wretched courtiers."

"Very well," said the princess, "do you too, leave me, and go running about the streets with them."

"I would do it upon the instant, madame," said Lenet, "if I were sure of bringing you good news."

"Oh! as for good news," said the princess, with an ironical glance, apparently directed to the glorious blue sky over her head, "I hardly expect anything of the sort. We are not in a lucky vein."

"Madame," said Lenet, "you know that I am not easily deceived; I am very

much mistaken, however, if all this noise does not mean that something favorable has happened."

Indeed the joyous character of the constantly increasing uproar, and the appearance of an excited multitude at the end of the street, with arms and handkerchiefs waving in the air, convinced the princess herself that what she was about to hear must be good news. She listened therefore with an eager attention which made her forget for a moment the desertion of her admirers, and distinguished these words:—

"Braune! the governor of Braune! the governor's a prisoner!"

"Aha!" said Lenet, "the governor of Braune a prisoner! That's not half bad. In him we have a hostage whom we can hold to answer for Richon."

"Have we not the governor of Île Saint-Georges?" said the princess.

"I am very happy," said Madame de Tourville, "that my plan for taking Braune has succeeded so well."

"Madame," said Lenet, "let us not flatter ourselves yet upon so complete a victory; chance mocks at the plans of man, sometimes even at the plans of woman."

"But; monsieur," retorted Madame de Tourville, bristling up as usual, "if the governor is taken, the place must be taken."

"Your logic is not absolutely unanswerable, madame; but have no fear that I shall not be the first to congratulate you, if to you we owe a twofold result of such importance."

"The most surprising thing to me in all this," said the princess, beginning to cast about already for something, in the anticipated good news, wounding to the aristocratic pride which was her most prominent characteristic,— "the most surprising thing to me is that I was not the first person to be informed of what had taken place; it is an unpardonable neglect of propriety, like everything that Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld does."

"Why, madame," said Lenet, "we haven't soldiers enough to do the fighting, and yet you would have us take some of them from their posts to make couriers of them! Alas! let us not be too exacting, and when good news arrives, let us take it as God sends it, and not ask how it came."

Meanwhile the crowd continued to increase in size, as all the detached groups joined the main body, even as the small streams flow into a great river. In the centre of this main body, composed of perhaps a thousand persons, was a little knot of soldiers, thirty men at most, and, surrounded by these thirty men, a prisoner whom they seemed to be protecting from the fury of the mob.

"Death! death!" cried the populace; "death to the governor of Braune!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the princess, with a triumphant smile, "it seems that they really have a prisoner, and that the prisoner is the governor of Braune!"

"Yes," said Lenet; "but look, madame; it seems also that the prisoner's life is in danger. Do you hear the threats? Do you see the fierce gestures? Why, madame, they are trying to force their way through the soldiers; they mean to tear him in pieces! Oh! the tigers, they smell the flesh, and thirst for blood!"

"Well, let them drink it!" said the princess, with the ferocity peculiar to women when their bad passions are aroused; "let them drink it! it's the blood of an enemy."

"Madame," said Lenet, "yonder prisoner is under safeguard of the honor of the Condés, remember that; and furthermore, who can say that at this moment Richon, our gallant Richon, is not exposed to the same danger as this poor wretch? Ah! they will force the soldiers back; if they reach him, he is lost! Twenty volunteers this way!" cried Lenet, turning about. "Twenty volunteers to help in driving back this canaille! If a hair on the prisoner's head is injured, your heads will answer for it; go!"

At the word, twenty musketeers of the civic guard, belonging to the best families of the city, rushed like a torrent down the stairs, forced the crowd aside by dint of dealing blows right and left with clubbed muskets, and reinforced the escort. It was high time, for a few claws, longer and sharper than the rest, had already torn some pieces from the prisoner's blue coat.

"I faith, messieurs, I thank you," said the prisoner, "for you came just in time to prevent my being devoured by these cannibals; it was very well done of you. Peste! if they eat men up in this way, on the day that the royal army attempts an assault upon your city they will devour it raw."

With that he shrugged his shoulders carelessly and began to laugh.

"Ah! he's a brave man!" cried the crowd, observant of the somewhat artificial calmness of the prisoner; and they repeated the pleasantry, which flattered his self-esteem. "He's a true hero! he's not afraid. Long live the governor of Braune!"

"Gad, yes!" cried the prisoner, "long live the governor of Braune! That would suit me wonderfully well."

In a twinkling the popular rage changed to admiration, and this last sentiment was expressed in most emphatic terms. A veritable ovation took the place of the threatened martyrdom of the governor of Braune, in other words, of our old friend Cauvignac. For as our readers have undoubtedly guessed ere this, it was Cauvignac who was making this melancholy entry into the capital

of Guyenne.

Meanwhile, protected by his guards, and by his presence of mind, the prisoner of war was taken to the house of Président Lalasne, and was haled before the princess by half of the escort, while the other half stood guard at the door.

Cauvignac entered Madame de Condé's apartment with proud and tranquil bearing; but truth compels us to state that his heart was beating wildly beneath this heroic exterior.

At the first glance he was recognized, despite the deplorable condition in which the mob had left his fine blue coat, his gold lace, and his feather.

"Monsieur Cauvignac!" cried Lenet.

"Monsieur Cauvignac, governor of Braune!" added the princess. "Ah! monsieur, this much resembles downright treason."

"What said your Highness?" queried Cauvignac, realizing that now, if ever, he must summon to his aid all his impudence, and all his wit. "I thought that I heard the word 'treason'!"

"Yes, monsieur, treason; for what is this title under which you appear before me?"

"The title of governor of Braune, madame."

"Treason, as you see. By whom is your commission signed?"

"By Monsieur de Mazarin."

"Treason! two-fold treason, as I said! You are governor of Braune, and it was your company that surrendered Vayres; the title was the fitting reward of the base deed."

At these words Cauvignac's face expressed the most unbounded amazement. He looked all about, as if seeking the person to whom this extraordinary language was addressed; and convinced at last that the princess's accusation was aimed at no other than himself, he let his hands fall by his sides with a despairing gesture.

"My company surrendered Vayres!" he exclaimed. "Does your Highness make such a charge against me?"

"Yes, monsieur, I do. Pretend to know nothing of it; affect amazement; you are evidently a clever comedian; but you will not make me the dupe of your grimaces or your words, although they harmonize so perfectly with one another."

"I pretend nothing, madame. How can your Highness say that I know what

took place at Vayres, when I have never been there?"

"Subterfuge, monsieur, subterfuge!"

"I have nothing to say in reply to such words, madame, except that your Highness seems displeased with me. I pray your Highness to forgive the frankness of my character for the freedom with which I make bold to defend myself,—I was of the opinion that I had reason to complain of you."

"To complain of me, monsieur!" cried the princess, amazed at his audacity.

"Most assuredly, madame," rejoined Cauvignac, with undiminished self-possession; "relying upon your word and that of Monsieur Lenet here present, I levy a company of gallant fellows, and I enter into agreements with them, which are the more sacred in that they are in almost every instance merely verbal agreements. And lo! when I ask your Highness for the amount agreed upon,—a mere trifle, thirty or forty thousand livres,—to be used, not for myself, observe, but for the new defenders of the cause of Messieurs les Princes recruited by me, your Highness refuses to give them to me; yes, refuses me! I appeal to Monsieur Lenet."

"It is true," said Lenet; "when monsieur made his demand, we had no money."

"And could you not wait a few days, monsieur? Was your fidelity and that of your men a matter of a moment?"

"I waited the length of time that Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld himself asked me to wait, madame,—a week. At the end of the week I made my appearance again, and was then met with a formal refusal; once more I appeal to Monsieur Lenet."

The princess turned to her adviser with compressed lips, and eyes darting fire from beneath her frowning brow.

"Unfortunately," said Lenet, "I am forced to admit that what monsieur says is the exact truth."

Cauvignac drew himself up triumphantly.

"Tell me, madame," said he, "what would a schemer have done under such circumstances? He would have sold himself and his men to the queen. But I, who have a horror of intrigue, dismissed my company, and released every man from his agreement; and, being left entirely alone, I maintained absolute neutrality; I did what the sage advises the man who is in doubt to do,—I held aloof."

"But your soldiers, monsieur, your soldiers!" cried the princess, excitedly.

"Madame," Cauvignac retorted, "as I am neither king nor prince, but a

simple captain; as I have neither subjects nor vassals, I call no soldiers mine, save those whom I pay; and as those whom you call mine were, as Monsieur Lenet affirms, not paid at all, they were free. Thereupon they turned against their new leader. What was I to do? I confess that I do not know."

"But what have you to say, monsieur, as to having taken the king's part yourself?—that your neutrality was a burden to you?"

"No, madame; but my neutrality, honest as it was, aroused the suspicion of his Majesty's partisans. One fine morning I was arrested at the Golden Calf inn on the Libourne road, and taken before the queen."

"And then you came to terms with her?"

"Madame," Cauvignac replied, "a man of heart has his sensitive spots, which a keen-sighted sovereign is sure to select for attack. My heart was embittered because I had been driven out of a party which I had rushed into blindly, with all the ardor and good faith of youth. I appeared before the queen between two soldiers who were ready to kill me; I expected reproaches, insults, death; for, after all, I had served the cause of the princes in intention. But, contrary to my expectations, instead of punishing me by depriving me of liberty, by consigning me to prison, or to the gallows, that great princess said to me:—

"My gallant but deluded gentleman, I can with a word cause your head to fall; but you have met with ingratitude over yonder,—here you shall find us grateful. In the name of Saint-Anne, my patron saint, you shall be numbered henceforth among my retainers. Messieurs,' she continued, addressing my guards, 'treat this officer with respect, for I appreciate his meritorious qualities, and I make him your chief. And as for yourself,' she added, turning again to me, 'I make you governor of Braune; this is how a queen of France avenges herself.'

"What could I reply?" pursued Cauvignac, resuming his natural tone and attitude, after mimicking, in a half-comic, half-sentimental way, the voice and gestures of Anne of Austria. "Nothing. I was disappointed in my fondest hopes; I was disappointed in the result of my action in laying my devotion unrewarded at your Highness's feet, after I had had the good fortune, as it gives me great joy to remember, to render you a slight service at Chantilly. I followed the example of Coriolanus and sought the tents of the Volscii."

This discourse, delivered in a dramatic voice, and with majestic bearing, made a profound impression upon those who heard it. Cauvignac realized that he had triumphed when he saw the princess turn pale with rage.

"In Heaven's name, monsieur," said she, "to whom are you faithful?"

"To those who appreciate the delicacy of my conduct," was Cauvignac's retort.

"Be it so. You are my prisoner."

"I have that honor, madame; but I trust that you will treat me as a gentleman. I am your prisoner, it is true, but without having borne arms against your Highness. I was on my way to my post with my baggage, when I fell in with a party of your troops, who arrested me. I did not for an instant think of concealing my rank or my opinions. I say again, therefore, that I demand to be treated as a gentleman and as an officer of high rank."

"You will be so treated, monsieur," said the princess. "You will have the city for your prison; but you must swear to make no attempt to leave the city."

"I will swear whatever your Highness chooses to demand."

"T is well. Lenet, repeat the formula to monsieur; we will receive his oath."

Lenet dictated the terms of the oath which Cauvignac was required to take.

Cauvignac raised his hand and solemnly swore that he would not leave the city until relieved from his oath.

"You may now withdraw," said the princess; "we rely upon your honor as a gentleman and a soldier."

Cauvignac did not wait to be told twice; but as he went out he detected a gesture of the councillor which signified:—

"He has put us in the wrong, madame; this is what comes of a niggardly policy."

The fact is that Lenet, who was quick to appreciate merit of every variety, recognized Cauvignac's exceeding shrewdness, and, for the very reason that he was in no wise deceived by any of his specious arguments, admired the skill with which the prisoner had extricated himself from one of the most difficult dilemmas in which a turn-coat could be involved.

Cauvignac meanwhile went slowly downstairs deep in thought, with his chin in his hand, saying to himself:

"Now the question is how I can sell them my hundred and fifty men again for a hundred thousand livres, which is quite possible, as the upright and intelligent Ferguzon has obtained full liberty for himself and his men. I shall find an opportunity one day or another. After all, I see that I did not make such a very great blunder in allowing myself to be taken as I at first thought."

XVIII.

Let us now take a step backward, and direct the attention of our readers to the events that had taken place at Vayres, with which they are as yet only imperfectly acquainted.

After several assaults, which were the more terrible in that the royalist general sacrificed his men recklessly in order to save time, the outworks were carried; but their brave defenders, after contesting the ground foot by foot and heaping up the dead and wounded at the foot of the ramparts, retired by the underground passage, and intrenched themselves in the main fortification. Now Monsieur de La Meilleraie did not fail to realize that, if he had lost five or six hundred men in carrying a wretched earthwork surmounted by a palisade, he was practically certain to lose six times as many in carrying a fort surrounded by stout walls, and defended by a man whose strategic skill and soldierly gallantry he had discovered to his cost.

He had determined therefore to open trenches and lay siege to the place in due form, when he spied the advance guard of the Duc d'Épernon's army, which had effected its junction with his own, so that the royal forces were doubled. This put an entirely different face upon the affair. It was at once decided to undertake with twenty-four thousand men what they dared not undertake with twelve thousand, and to make an assault on the following day.

By the cessation of work upon the trenches, by the new dispositions which were seen to be in progress, and above all by the appearance of strong reinforcements, Richon understood that the besiegers proposed to give him no rest; and apprehending an assault upon the morrow, he called his men together, in order to make sure of the state of feeling among them, although he had no reason to doubt their zeal, in view of the manner in which they had supported him in the defence of the outworks.

His astonishment knew no bounds, therefore, when he discovered the change in the attitude of the garrison. His men gazed gloomily and uneasily at the royal army, and threatening murmurs arose in the ranks.

Richon had no patience with pleasantry in war-time, especially pleasantry of that sort.

"Who's muttering there?" he demanded, turning toward the spot where the sounds were most distinct.

"I!" replied one man, bolder than his fellows.

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Come forward, and answer my questions."

The man left the ranks and approached his chief.

"What do you lack that you dare to complain?" said Richon, folding his arms and fixing his eyes sternly upon the malcontent.

"What do I lack?"

"Yes, what do you lack? Have you your ration of bread?"

"Yes, commandant."

"Your ration of wine?"

"Yes, commandant."

"Are your quarters unsatisfactory?"

"No."

"Are any arrears due you?"

"No."

"Tell me, then, what you want? What do these murmurs mean?"

"They mean that we are fighting against our king, and that comes hard to the French soldier."

"So you sigh to be in his Majesty's service?"

"Dame! yes."

"And you wish to join your king?"

"Yes," said the soldier, who was deceived by Richon's calm manner, and supposed that the affair would end with his simple exclusion from the garrison.

"Very well," said Richon, seizing the man by his baldric; "but as the gates are closed, you must take the only road that is left open to you."

"What is that?" queried the terrified soldier.

"This," retorted Richon, lifting him with his herculean arm, and tossing him over the parapet.

The soldier, with a yell of terror, dropped into the moat, which, luckily for him, was full of water.

This energetic action was greeted with gloomy silence. Richon believed that he had crushed the sedition, and turned to his men with the air of a gambler who risks everything to gain everything.

"Now," said he, "if there are any partisans of the king here, let them say so, and they will be allowed to go and join him by the same road."

A hundred voices answered:—

"Yes! yes! we are on the king's side, and we want to leave the fort!"

"Oho!" exclaimed Richon, realizing that he had to deal, not with the whim of a single man, but with a general revolt; "oho! that's another matter; I thought that I had simply one malcontent to deal with, but I see that I have five hundred cowards!"

Richon did very wrong to include the whole garrison in his accusation: only a hundred men or thereabouts had spoken; the rest had held their peace, but they began to grumble too, when they were included in the charge of cowardice.

"Come, come," said Richon, "let us not talk all together; if there is an officer who is willing to be false to his oath let him speak for all; I give you my word that he may speak with impunity."

Ferguzon thereupon stepped out from the ranks, and said, saluting his commanding officer with irreproachable courtesy:—

"Commandant, you hear the wish expressed by the garrison. You are fighting against his Majesty our king. Now the greater number of us were not informed that we enlisted to make war upon such a foe. One of these brave fellows, finding this violence done to his opinions, might easily, in the excitement of the assault, have made a mistake in his aim and lodged a bullet in your brain; but we are loyal soldiers, not cowards, as you wrongfully called us. This, then, is our ultimatum, which we make known to you with due respect: send us to the king, or we shall go to him of our own motion."

This speech was received with a universal shout of approval, which proved that the opinion expressed by the lieutenant was shared by the greater part, if not the whole, of the garrison. Richon saw that all was lost.

"I cannot defend the place alone," he said, "and I do not propose to surrender; as my soldiers abandon me, let some one negotiate for them, as he and they think best, but that some one shall not be myself. If the few brave fellows who remain faithful to me, provided that there are any such, are promised their lives, I ask nothing more. Who will be your spokesman?"

"I will be, commandant, if you have no objection, and if my comrades honor me with their confidence."

"Yes, yes, Lieutenant Ferguzon!" cried five hundred voices, among which those of Barrabas and Carrotel could easily be distinguished.

"You are to be the man, monsieur," said Richon. "You are free to go out and in, as you choose."

"And you have no special instructions to give me, commandant?"

"Liberty for my men."

"And for yourself?"

"Nothing."

Such disinterestedness would have brought to their senses men who had been misled simply, but these men were sold.

"Yes! yes! liberty for us!" they cried.

"Have no fear, commandant; I will not forget you in the capitulation."

Richon smiled sadly, shrugged his shoulders, and withdrew to his own apartments, where he shut himself in.

Ferguzon at once visited the royalist camp. Monsieur de La Meilleraie would do nothing, however, without the queen's authorization; and the queen had left Nanon's little house, in order, as she herself said, to avoid witnessing the further humiliation of her army, and had betaken herself to the hôtel de ville at Libourne.

The marshal therefore placed Ferguzon under guard, took horse, and galloped to Libourne, where he found Monsieur de Mazarin, to whom he had, as he supposed, momentous news to announce. But at the marshal's first words, the minister stopped him, to say with his stereotyped smile:—

"We know all that, Monsieur le Maréchal: it was all arranged last evening. Treat with Lieutenant Ferguzon, but make no terms for Monsieur Richon except upon your word."

"What's that?—except upon my word?" exclaimed the marshal; "when my word is given it is as sacred, I trust, as any written engagement."

"Go to, go to, Monsieur le Maréchal; I have received special indulgences from his Holiness, which make it possible for me to relieve people from their oaths."

"That may be," said the marshal, "but those indulgences do not apply to marshals of France."

Mazarin smiled and signified to the marshal that he was at liberty to return to the camp.

The marshal took his leave grumbling, and gave Ferguzon his written guaranty for himself and his men, but simply pledged his word concerning Richon.

Ferguzon returned to the fort, which he and his companions abandoned an hour before dawn, after informing Richon of the marshal's verbal promise. Two hours later, as he was watching from his window the arrival of Ravailly

with reinforcements, Richon was arrested in the name of the queen.

At the announcement the gallant commandant's face expressed the liveliest satisfaction. If he were allowed to be at liberty, Madame de Condé might suspect him of treason; a captive, his captivity would justify him in her sight. It was this hope which led him to remain behind, instead of leaving the fort with the others.

They did not content themselves, however, with taking his sword simply, as he expected; but when he was disarmed, four men who were awaiting him at the door threw themselves upon him and bound his hands behind his back.

Richon endured this unworthy treatment with the tranquillity and resignation of a martyr. He was one of the steadfast, stern-tempered souls, who begat the popular heroes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

He was taken under guard to Libourne and carried before the queen, who eyed him arrogantly; before the king, who, honored him with a ferocious, withering gaze; and before Monsieur de Mazarin, who said to him:—

"You played a bold game, Monsieur Richon."

"And lost, did I not, monseigneur? Now it only remains for me to find out what the stake was."

"I greatly fear that the stake was your head," said Mazarin.

"Inform Monsieur d'Épernon that the king desires his presence," said Anne of Austria. "Let this fellow await his trial here."

With superb disdain in her every movement, she left the room, leading the king by the hand and followed by Monsieur de Mazarin and her courtiers.

Monsieur d'Épernon had arrived an hour before; but like the amorous old fellow he was, his first visit was to Nanon. In the heart of Guyenne he learned of the glorious defence made by Canolles at Île Saint-Georges, and, having always the utmost confidence in his mistress, he congratulated her upon the conduct of her beloved brother, whose countenance, however, he frankly observed, did not give promise of so great nobility of soul, or so great valor.

Nanon had something else to do than laugh in her sleeve at the prolongation of the blunder. At that moment she had to think, not only of her own happiness, but of her lover's liberty. Nanon loved Canolles so devotedly that she could not harbor the thought of his infidelity, although that thought came often to her mind. She had seen naught but affectionate solicitude in the pains he had taken to send her away from him; she believed him to be an unwilling prisoner; she wept and thought of nothing but the moment when, with the powerful assistance of Monsieur d'Épernon, she might obtain his freedom. So it was that she had written again and again to the dear duke, doing

everything in her power to hasten his return.

At last he had arrived, and Nanon lost no time in presenting to him her petition touching her pretended brother, whom she was insanely anxious to rescue at the earliest possible moment from the hands of his enemies, or rather from those of Madame de Cambes, for she believed that Canolles in reality was in danger of no worse fate than falling in love with the viscountess.

But that in Nanon's eye was the worst of all dangers. She therefore implored Monsieur d'Épernon, upon her knees, to set her brother at liberty.

"Why, it could not happen better," replied the duke. "I have this moment learned that the governor of Vayres has allowed himself to be taken, and we will exchange him for our brother Canolles."

"Oh!" cried Nanon, "this is a special favor from heaven, my dear duke."

"You love this brother of yours very dearly, do you not, Nanon?"

"Oh, yes! more than my life."

"How strange it is that you never mentioned him to me until that day when I was fool enough—"

"Then Monsieur le Duc, you will—?" said Nanon.

"I will send the governor of Vayres to Madame de Condé, who will send Canolles to us; that is done every day in war-time,—an exchange, pure and simple."

"But will not Madame de Condé deem Monsieur de Canolles of more value than a simple officer?"

"Oh, well, in that case we will send her two or three officers instead of one; in short, we will arrange the matter to your satisfaction, my love; and when our gallant governor of Île Saint-Georges arrives at Libourne, we will give him a triumph."

Nanon's delight was beyond words. To have Canolles once more in her possession was her one burning desire. As for what Monsieur d'Épernon might say when he learned who Canolles really was, she cared but little. Once Canolles was safe beside her, she would tell the duke that he was her lover; she would proclaim it from the housetops, that all the world might hear.

At this juncture the queen's messenger appeared.

"Well, well," said the duke, "this is most fortunate, dear Nanon; I will wait upon her Majesty, and bring back with me the request for the exchange."

"So that my brother may be here?"

"To-morrow, perhaps."

"Go, then, go!" cried Nanon, "and do not lose an instant. Oh! to-morrow, to-morrow," she added, raising her arms with a lovely imploring expression, "to-morrow,—God grant it!"

"Ah! what a loving heart!" muttered Monsieur d'Épernon as he left the room.

When the Duc d'Épernon entered the queen's apartment, Anne of Austria, flushed with wrath, was biting her thick Austrian lips, which were the special admiration of her courtiers, for the very reason that they were her only ugly feature. Monsieur d'Épernon, a famous squire of dames, and accustomed to their smiles, was received like one of the Bordelais rebels.

He looked at the queen in amazement; she did not acknowledge his salutation, but gazed at him, with a threatening frown, from the height of her royal majesty.

"Aha! is it you, Monsieur le Duc?" she said at last after a pause of some duration; "come hither that I may offer you my congratulations upon your selection of officials within your jurisdiction."

"What have I done, madame, I pray to know?" demanded the wondering nobleman; "what has happened?"

"It has happened that you appointed to be governor of Vayres a man who has fired upon the king; that is all."

"I, madame!" cried the duke. "Your Majesty is most certainly in error; I did not appoint the governor of Vayres,—at least, not that I am aware of."

D'Épernon made this reservation because his conscience reproached him with not always making his appointments without assistance.

"Ah! this is interesting," said the queen; "Monsieur Richon was not appointed by you, perhaps?" And she emphasized the last word most maliciously.

The duke, who knew Nanon's talent for selecting fit men for the places to be filled, soon recovered his confidence.

"I do not recall the appointment of Monsieur Richon," said he, "but if I did appoint him he must be a faithful servant of the king."

"God's mercy!" retorted the queen; "Monsieur Richon, in your judgment, is a faithful servant of the king!—a faithful servant, in good sooth, who kills five hundred men for us in less than three days!"

"Madame," said the duke, "if such is the case I shall be forced to admit that

I am wrong. But before I am convicted, allow me to go and procure the proof that I appointed him."

The queen's first impulse was to detain him, but she thought better of it.

"Go," said she, "and when you have brought me your proof, I will give you mine."

Monsieur d'Épernon hastened from the room, and ran all the way back to Nanon.

"Well," said she, "have you the request for the exchange of prisoners, my dear duke?"

"Oh, yes! of course! it was an excellent time to speak of that," rejoined the duke; "the queen is in a tearing rage."

"What is the cause of that?"

"Because either you or I appointed Monsieur Richon governor of Vayres, and this same governor, who seems to have defended the place like a lion, killed five hundred of our men."

"Monsieur Richon!" repeated Nanon; "I do not know that name."

"The devil take me if I do."

"Then tell the queen boldly that she is mistaken."

"But are you sure that you are not mistaken?"

"Wait a moment; I prefer to have no reason for self-reproach, so I will tell you."

Nanon went to her study, and consulted her register at the letter R. It contained no memorandum of a commission issued to Richon.

"You can go back to the queen," she said, returning, "and tell her fearlessly that she is in error."

Monsieur d'Épernon did not pause to take breath between Nanon's house and the hôtel de ville.

"Madame," said he, proudly, as he entered the queen's apartment, "I am innocent of the crime imputed to me. The appointment of Monsieur Richon was made by your Majesty's ministers."

"In that case my ministers sign themselves D'Épernon," retorted the queen, dryly.

"How so?"

"It must be so, as that signature is written at the foot of Monsieur Richon's

commission."

"Impossible, madame!" rejoined the duke, in the hesitating tone of a man who begins to doubt himself.

"Impossible?" said the queen, with a shrug. "Very good! read for yourself." And she took from the table a document upon which her hand was laid.

Monsieur d'Épernon seized the commission, and ran it through eagerly, examining every fold of the paper, every word, every letter; a terrible thought came to his mind, and kept him rooted to his place.

"May I see this Monsieur Richon?" he asked.

"Nothing easier," replied the queen; "I ordered him to be detained in the adjoining room, in order to afford you that satisfaction. Bring in the villain," she added to the guards who were awaiting her orders at the door.

In a moment Richon was led in, with his hands bound behind his back, and his hat on his head. The duke walked up to him, and fastened his eyes upon him in a piercing gaze, which he endured with his wonted dignity.

One of his guards knocked his hat to the floor with the back of his hand; but this insult did not cause the slightest evidence of excitement on the part of the governor of Vayres.

"Throw a cloak over his shoulders, put a mask on his face, and give me a lighted candle," said the duke.

The first two orders were first obeyed. The queen looked on in amazement at these strange preparations.

The duke walked around Richon, scrutinizing him with the greatest care, trying to refresh his memory upon every detail, but evidently still in doubt.

"Bring me the candle I asked for," said he; "that test will set my doubts at rest."

The candle was brought. The duke held the commission close to the flame, and the heat caused a double cross, drawn below the signature with invisible ink, to appear upon the paper.

At the sight the duke's brow cleared, and he cried:

"Madame, this commission is signed by me, it is true; but it was not signed for Monsieur Richon, or for any other person; it was extorted from me by this man in a sort of ambushade; but before I delivered it to him, signed in blank, I had made this mark on the paper which your Majesty can see, and it furnishes us with overwhelming proof against the culprit. Look."

The queen eagerly seized the paper, and looked at the cross which the duke

pointed out to her.

"I do not understand a single word of the charge you make against me," said Richon, simply.

"What's that?" cried the duke; "you were not the masked man to whom I handed this paper upon the Dordogne?"

"I have never spoken to your lordship before this day; I have never been upon the Dordogne, masked," replied Richon, coldly.

"If it was not you it was some man sent by you."

"It would serve no purpose to conceal the truth," said Richon, as calm as ever; "the commission which you hold in your hand, Monsieur le Duc, I received from Madame la Princesse de Condé, by the hands of Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld; my name had then been inserted by Monsieur Lenet, with whose writing you are perhaps familiar. How the paper came into the hands of Madame la Princesse, or of Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld; when and where my name was written upon that paper by Monsieur Lenet, I have absolutely no idea, nor do I care, for it does not concern me."

"Ah! do you think so?" retorted the duke, in a bantering tone.

Thereupon he drew near the queen and in a low tone told her a long story, to which she listened with close attention; it was the story of his meeting with Cauvignac, and the adventure of the Dordogne.

The queen, being a woman, perfectly appreciated the duke's jealousy. When he had finished, she said:—

"It's an infamous act, to add to the high treason; the man who does not hesitate to fire upon his king, may well be capable of selling a woman's secret."

"What the devil are they saying there?" muttered Richon, with a frown; for while he could not hear enough to follow the conversation, he heard enough to arouse a suspicion that his honor was being brought in question. Moreover, the flashing eyes of the duke and the queen promised nothing agreeable, and, courageous as the governor of Vayres was, he could not avoid a feeling of uneasiness, although it would have been impossible, from the calm, disdainful expression of his features, to guess what was taking place in his heart.

"He must be tried at once," said the queen. "Assemble a court-martial. You will preside, Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon; so select your associates, and lose no time."

"Madame," said Richon, "there is no occasion for assembling a court-martial, or for a trial. I am a prisoner upon the word of Monsieur le Maréchal

de La Meilleraie. I am a voluntary prisoner, for I could have gone out of Vayres with my soldiers; I could have made my escape before or after their evacuation, and I did not do it."

"I know nothing of business of this nature," said the queen, rising to go into the adjoining room; "if you have satisfactory explanations to make, you can urge them upon your judges. Will not this room serve your purpose, Monsieur le Duc?"

"Yes, madame," replied D'Épernon, who immediately selected twelve officers from among those in attendance, and constituted the court.

Richon began to understand his situation, as the judges took their places, and the judge-advocate demanded his name and rank.

Richon answered these questions.

"You are accused of high treason in having fired upon the soldiers of the king," said the judge-advocate; "do you admit your guilt?"

"To deny it would be to deny what you all saw; yes, monsieur, I fired upon the king's troops."

"By virtue of what right?"

"By virtue of the laws of war, by virtue of the same right which Monsieur de Conti, Monsieur de Beaufort, Monsieur d'Elbœuf, and so many others, have invoked under the like circumstances."

"That right does not exist, monsieur, for it is nothing more nor less than rebellion."

"But it was by virtue of that right that my lieutenant capitulated. I appeal to the terms of the capitulation."

"Capitulation!" cried Monsieur d'Épernon, ironically, for he felt that the queen was listening, and the feeling dictated the insult; "you, treat with a marshal of France!"

"Why not, when a marshal of France treated with me?"

"Produce your capitulation, then, and we will judge of its value."

"It was a verbal agreement."

"Produce your witnesses."

"I have but one witness to produce."

"Who is that?"

"The marshal himself."

"Let the marshal be called," said the duke.

"It's useless," interposed the queen, opening the door behind which she was listening; "Monsieur le Maréchal set out two hours since with the advance-guard, to march upon Bordeaux."

With that she closed the door once more.

This apparition froze the blood in every heart, for it imposed upon the judges the necessity of convicting Richon.

"Ah!" said he, "that is all the regard Monsieur de La Meilleraie has for his word. You were right, monsieur," he added, turning to the Duc d'Épernon, "I was foolish to treat with a marshal of France."

From that moment Richon maintained a disdainful silence, and refused to reply to any and all questions. This course simplified the proceedings greatly, and the trial lasted little more than an hour. They wrote little and spoke still less. The judge-advocate closed by demanding the imposition of the death penalty, and at a sign from the Duc d'Épernon the judges unanimously voted for death.

Richon listened to the sentence as if he were a simple spectator, and, as impassive and dumb as ever, was turned over on the spot to the provost of the army.

The Duc d'Épernon betook himself to the apartments of the queen, whom he found in a charming humor, and who invited him to dinner. The duke, who believed himself to be in disgrace, accepted, and returned to Nanon to inform her of his good fortune in retaining his standing in the good graces of his sovereign.

He found her stretched out upon a reclining chair by a window which looked upon the public square of Libourne.

"Well," said she, "have you discovered anything?"

"I have discovered everything, my dear."

"Nonsense!" said Nanon, not without some in-quietude.

"Mon Dieu! I mean what I say. You remember that accusation I was idiot enough to believe,—the accusation that you were carrying on an intrigue with your brother?"

"Well?"

"You remember the blank signature that I was required to give the informer?"

"Yes, what then?"

"The informer is in our hands, my dear, taken in the meshes of his blank signature, like a fox in the trap."

"Can it be?" said Nanon, in dismay; for she knew that Cauvignac was the man, and although she had no very deep affection for her real brother, she did not wish that any ill should befall him; moreover, that same brother might, to extricate himself, tell a multitude of things which Nanon preferred to have remain secret.

"Himself, my dear," continued D'Épernon; "what do you say to that? The rascal, with the assistance of my signature, appointed himself governor of Vayres on his own authority; but Vayres is taken and the culprit is in our hands."

All these details were so like Cauvignac's ingenious combinations that Nanon's alarm redoubled.

"What have you done with this man?" she asked in a voice that betrayed her emotion.

"Why," said the duke, "in a moment you can see for yourself what we have done with him. Yes, 'faith," he added, rising, "it couldn't be better; raise the curtain, or rather throw the window open; he's an enemy of the king, and you can see him hanged."

"Hanged!" cried Nanon. "What do you say, Monsieur le Duc? the man of the blank signature is to be hanged?"

"Yes, my love. Look yonder; do you not see the rope dangling from the beam, and the crowd flocking to the square? And see, there are the fusileers coming with the man himself, over at the left. Look! there is the king at his window."

Nanon's heart was in her mouth; one rapid glance, however, was enough to show her that the man in custody was not Cauvignac.

"Well, well," said the duke, "Sieur Richon is to be hanged as high as Haman; that will teach him to slander women."

"But," cried Nanon, seizing the duke's hand, and summoning all her strength for the struggle, "but the poor wretch is not guilty; perhaps he's a gallant soldier; perhaps he's an honorable man; it may be that you are murdering one who is innocent!"

"No, no, you are greatly mistaken, my dear; he is a forger and a slanderer. Besides, if there were nothing against him but his being governor of Vayres, he would still be guilty of high treason, and it seems to me that, even if that were all, it would be quite enough."

"But hadn't he Monsieur de La Meilleraie's word?"

"He said so, but I do not believe him."

"Why did not the marshal enlighten the court-martial on so important a point?"

"He left Libourne two hours before the court convened."

"O mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" cried Nanon; "something tells me that he is innocent, and that his death will bring bad luck to us all. Ah! monsieur, you have great influence, and you say there is nothing you would not do for me—in Heaven's name, then, grant me that man's pardon!"

"I cannot, my dear; the queen herself condemned him, and where she is, there is no other power."

Nanon uttered a sigh which much resembled a groan.

At that moment Richon reached the market-place, and, still tranquil and silent, was led beneath the beam to which the rope was attached; a ladder was already in place awaiting his coming. Richon mounted the ladder with unfaltering step, his noble head towering above the crowd, upon which he gazed with cold contempt. The provost passed the noose around his neck, and the crier proclaimed in a loud voice that the king was about to do justice upon the body of Étienne Richon, forger, traitor, and plebeian.

"The day has come," said Richon, "when it is more honorable to be a plebeian as I am than to be a marshal of France."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the ladder was pulled from under him, and his body hung trembling from the fatal beam.

A universal feeling of horror scattered the crowd, without a single shout of Vive le roi! although every one could see the two royal personages at their window. Nanon hid her face in her hands and fled to the farthest corner of the room.

"Whatever you may think, dear Nanon," said the duke, "I believe that this execution will have a good effect. I am curious to know what they will do at Bordeaux when they learn that we are hanging their governors."

As she thought of what they might do, Nanon opened her mouth to speak, but she could only utter a heartrending shriek, raising her hands to heaven as if in entreaty that Richon's death might not be avenged; then, as if all the springs of life were dried up within her, she fell at full length upon the floor.

"Well, well!" cried the duke, "what's the matter Nanon? What does this mean? Is it possible that it puts you in such a state as this to see a mere upstart hanged? Come, dear Nanon, come to your senses! Why, God forgive me, she

has fainted!—and the people of Agen say that she has no feeling! Ho there! help! salt! cold water!"

But no one came at his call, so the duke ran from the room to procure himself what he called for in vain from her servants, who probably did not hear him, so engrossed were they by the spectacle with which the royal generosity regaled them, free of charge.

XIX.

At the moment that the terrible drama we have described was being enacted at Libourne, Madame de Cambes, seated beside an oaken table, with Pompée at her side making a sort of inventory of her worldly goods, was writing to Canolles the following letter:—

"Still another postponement, my beloved. Just as I was about to pronounce your name to Madame la Princesse, and ask her consent to our union, the news arrived of the capture of Vayres, and froze the words upon my lips. But I know how you must suffer, and I am not strong enough to endure your grief and my own at the same time. The successes or reverses of this fatal war may carry us too far, unless we decide to take matters into our own hands. To-morrow, dear, to-morrow evening at seven o'clock, I will be your wife.

"This is the plan which I beg you to adopt; it is of the utmost importance that you conform to it in every respect.

"Immediately after dinner you will call upon Madame de Lallasne who, as well as her sister, since I presented you to them, has conceived the greatest admiration for you. There will be card-playing, and do you play like the others; but make no engagement for supper; and when night comes, send away your friends if any of them happen to be around you. When you are quite alone you will see a messenger come in,—I cannot say who it will be,—who will call you by your name, as if you were wanted for some business or other. Whoever the messenger may be, follow him without fear, for he will come from me, and his errand will be to guide you to the place where I await you.

"I should like that place to be the Carmelite church, of which I have such pleasant memories; but as yet I dare not hope that it will be the place, unless they will consent to close the doors for us.

"Meanwhile do to my letter what you do to my hand when I forget to withdraw it from yours. To-day I say to you, 'Until to-morrow;' to-morrow I will say, 'Forever!'"

Canolles was in one of his fits of misanthropy when he received this letter. During the whole of the preceding day, and all that morning he had not so much as seen Madame de Cambes, although, in the space of twenty-four hours

he had passed before her windows at least ten times. Thereupon the customary reaction took place in the heart of the lovelorn youth. He accused the viscountess of coquetry; he doubted her love; he recurred instinctively to his memories of Nanon,—of Nanon, always kind, devoted, ardent, and glorying in the love of which Claire seemed to be ashamed; and he sighed, poor heart, between the satiated passion which would not die and the hungry passion which had nothing to feed upon. The viscountess's epistle turned the scale in her favor.

Canolles read it again and again: as Claire had foreseen, he kissed it a score of times as he would have kissed her hand. Upon reflection, Canolles could not conceal from himself that his love for Claire was and had been the most serious affair of his life. With other women that sentiment had always assumed a different aspect, and developed in a different direction. Canolles had played his part as a squire of dames, had posed as a lady-killer, and had almost arrogated to himself the right to be inconstant. With Madame de Cambes, on the contrary, he felt that he was himself under the yoke of a superior power, against which he did not even try to struggle, because his present slavery was far sweeter to him than his former dominion. And in those moments of discouragement when he conceived doubts of the reality of Claire's affection, in those moments when the sorrowing heart falls back upon itself, and augments its sorrow with bitter thoughts, he confessed to himself, without a blush for a weakness which a year earlier he would have deemed unworthy a great heart, that to lose Madame de Cambes would be an insupportable calamity.

But to love her, to be beloved by her, to possess her, heart and soul and body; to possess her, without compromising his future independence,—for the viscountess did not even demand that he should sacrifice his opinions to join the faction of Madame la Princesse, and asked for nothing but his love,—to be in the future the happiest and wealthiest officer in the king's army (for, after all, why should not wealth be considered? wealth does no harm); to remain in his Majesty's service if his Majesty should fittingly reward his fidelity; to leave it if, in accordance with the custom of kings, he proved to be ungrateful, —was not all this, in very truth, greater good fortune, a more superb destiny, if we may so say, than any to which he had ever dared aspire in his wildest dreams?

But Nanon?

Ah! Nanon, Nanon! there was the dull, aching remorse, which lies always hidden in the depths of every noble heart. Only in hearts of common clay does the sorrow which they cause fail to find an echo. Nanon, poor Nanon! What would she do, what would she say, what would become of her, when she should learn the terrible tidings that her lover was the husband of another

woman? Alas! she would not, revenge herself, although she would certainly have in her hands all the means of doing so, and that was the thought which tortured Canolles most of all. Oh! if Nanon would but try to take vengeance upon him, if she would set about it in any way she might select, the faithless lover might then look upon her as an enemy, and would at least be rid of his remorse.

But Nanon had not answered the letter wherein he bade her not to write to him. How did it happen that she had followed his instructions so scrupulously? Surely, if she had wished to do so, she would have found a way to send him ten letters; so Nanon had not even tried to correspond with him. Ah! what if Nanon no longer loved him! And Canolles' brow grew dark at the thought that that was possible. It is a pitiful thing, thus to encounter selfish pride even in the noblest hearts.

Luckily Canolles had one sure way of forgetting everything else, and that was to read and reread Madame de Cambes' letter; he read it and reread it, and the remedy was effectual. Our lover thus succeeded in making himself oblivious to everything except his own happiness. And to follow out his mistress's instructions from the beginning, he made himself beautiful, which was a matter of no great difficulty for a youth with his personal advantages and good taste, and set out for Madame de Lalasne's as the clock was striking two.

He was so engrossed in his own happiness that as he passed along the quay he did not see his friend Ravailly, who made sign after sign to him from a boat which was coming down stream as fast as oars could drive it through the water. Lovers, in their happy moments, step so lightly that they seem hardly to touch the ground, and Canolles was already far away when Ravailly stepped ashore.

The latter spoke a few words in a sharp tone to the boatman, and hurried away toward Madame de Condé's abode.

The princess was at table when she heard a commotion in the antechamber; she inquired as to its cause, and was told that Baron de Ravailly, her messenger to Monsieur de La Meilleraie, had that moment arrived.

"Madame," said Lenet, "I think it would be well for your Highness to receive him without delay; whatever the tidings he brings, they are important."

The princess made a sign, and Ravailly entered the room, but his face was so pale and grief-stricken that a glance was enough to convince Madame de Condé that she had before her eyes a messenger of evil.

"What is it, captain?" said she: "what news have you?"

"Pardon me, madame, for appearing before your Highness in this plight, but I thought that the tidings I bring should not be delayed."

"Speak: did you see the marshal?"

"The marshal refused to receive me, madame."

"The marshal refused to receive my envoy?" cried the princess.

"Ah! madame, that is not all."

"What else is there? speak! speak! I am waiting."

"Poor Richon—"

"Yes, I know; he is a prisoner—did I not send you to negotiate his ransom!"

"Although I made all possible speed, I arrived too late."

"What! too late?" cried Lenet; "can any harm have come to him?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!" echoed the princess.

"He was tried for high treason, and was condemned and executed."

"Condemned! executed! Ah! you hear, madame," said the horror-stricken Lenet, "I told you how it would be!"

"Who condemned him? who was so bold?"

"A court-martial presided over by the Duc d'Épernon, or rather by the queen herself; indeed, they were not content with his death, but decided that it should be infamous."

"What! Richon—"

"Hanged, madame! hanged like a common malefactor, like a thief or an assassin! I saw his body in the market-place at Libourne."

The princess jumped to her feet, as if acted upon by an invisible spring. Lenet uttered an exclamation of grief. Madame de Cambes, who had risen, fell back upon her chair, putting her hand to her heart, as one does when one receives a grievous wound; she had fainted.

"Take the viscountess away," said the Duc de La Rochefoucauld; "we have no leisure now to attend to swooning women."

Two women bore the viscountess from the room.

"This is a brutally frank declaration of war," said the impassive duke.

"It is infamous!" said the princess.

"It is sheer savagery!" said Lenet.

"It is impolitic!" said the duke.

"Oh! but I trust that we shall find a way to be revenged!" cried the princess, "and that right cruelly!"

"I have my plan!" cried Madame de Tourville, who had said nothing thus far,—"reprisals, your Highness, reprisals!"

"One moment, madame," said Lenet; "deuce take me! how fast you go! The affair is of sufficient importance to require reflection."

"No, monsieur, not at all," retorted Madame de Tourville; "as the king has acted quickly, it is of the utmost importance that we retaliate promptly with the same stroke."

"Why, madame," cried Lenet, "you talk of shedding blood as if you were Queen of France, upon my word. Withhold your opinion at least until her Highness requests you to give it."

"Madame is right," said the captain of the guards; "reprisals are in accordance with the laws of war."

"Come," said the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, calm and unmoved as always, "let us not waste time in idle words as we are doing. The news will soon spread through the city, and an hour hence we shall have lost control of events and passions and men. Your Highness's first care should be to adopt an attitude so firm that it will be deemed to be unchangeable."

"Very well," said the princess, "I place the matter in your hands, Monsieur le Duc, and rely entirely upon you to avenge my honor and your own affection; for Richon was in your own service before entering mine; he came to me from you, and you gave him to me rather as one of your friends than as one of your retainers."

"Never fear, madame," said the duke, bowing; "I shall remember what I owe to you, to myself, and to poor dead Richon."

He led the captain of the guards aside, and talked with him a long while in a low tone, while the princess left the room with Madame de Tourville, followed by Lenet beating his breast in his grief.

The viscountess was at the door. On recovering consciousness her first impulse was to return to Madame de Condé; she met her on the way, but with a face so stern that she dared not question her personally.

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! what is to be done?" she cried timidly, clasping her hands imploringly.

"We are to have our revenge!" replied Madame de Tourville, with a majestic air.

"Revenge? and how?"

"Madame," interposed Lenet, "if you possess any influence over the princess, use it, I pray you, to prevent the commission of some horrible murder under the name of reprisals."

With that he passed on, leaving Claire in deadly terror. For, by one of those strange intuitions which make one believe in presentiments, the thought of Canolles suddenly passed through her mind. She heard a sad voice in her heart speaking of her absent lover, and rushing feverishly upstairs to her room, she began to dress to go to meet him, when she perceived that the appointed time was still three or four hours distant.

Meanwhile Canolles made his appearance at Madame de Lalasne's in accordance with the instructions contained in the viscountess's letter. It was the president's birthday, and a birthday party was in progress. As it was the pleasantest season of the year, all the guests were in the garden, where a game of tennis was in progress upon a vast lawn. Canolles, whose dexterity was remarkable, was the recipient of several challenges as soon as he appeared, and his skill at the game brought success to his side again and again.

The ladies laughed at the awkwardness of Canolles' rivals and his own address; prolonged bravoos followed every new stroke that he made; handkerchiefs waved in the air, and but little more enthusiasm was needed to cause bouquets to rain down at his feet from the loveliest of hands.

His triumph did not avail to banish from his mind the one great thought that filled it, but it helped him to be patient. However great one's haste to reach a goal, one endures delays more patiently when each delay is an ovation.

However, as the appointed hour drew near, the young man's eyes were turned more frequently toward the door through which the guests came and went, and through which the promised messenger would naturally make his appearance.

Suddenly, as Canolles was congratulating himself upon having, in all probability, but a short time to wait, a strange rumor began to circulate through the joyous assemblage. Canolles noticed that groups formed here and there, talking in undertones, and gazing at him with extraordinary interest, in which there seemed to be an admixture of compassion; at first he attributed this interest to his personal appearance and his dexterity, being very, very far from suspecting its true cause.

He began at last to notice that there was, as we have said, an admixture of

something like pity in the earnest looks that were bent upon him. He approached one of the groups, with smiling face; the persons who composed the group tried to smile back at him, but were visibly embarrassed, and they to whom he did not directly address himself moved away.

Canolles turned in one direction after another and saw that every one avoided his glance and slunk away. It was as if some fatal tidings had suddenly swept over the assemblage, and struck every one dumb with terror. Behind him Président de Lalasne was pacing gloomily back and forth with one hand under his chin and the other in his breast. His wife, with her sister on her arm, took advantage of a moment when no one seemed to be looking to walk towards Canolles, and said, without directly addressing him, in a tone which aroused his keenest apprehension:—

"If I were a prisoner of war, upon parole, for fear lest the agreement made with me might be violated, I would leap upon a good horse and ride to the river; I would give ten, twenty, a hundred louis, if need be, to a boatman, but I would leave the city."

Canolles gazed at the two women in utter amazement, and they simultaneously made a terrified gesture which he could not comprehend. He walked toward them to seek an explanation of the words he had heard, but they fled like phantoms, one with her finger on her lips to enjoin silence upon him, the other waving her hand to bid him fly.

At that moment he heard his name at the gate.

He shuddered from head to foot; the name must have been pronounced by the viscountess's messenger, and he darted in that direction.

"Is Monsieur le Baron de Canolles here?" a loud voice asked.

"Yes," cried Canolles, forgetting everything else to remember only Claire's promise; "yes, here I am."

"You are Monsieur de Canolles?" said a man in uniform passing through the gate.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Governor of Île Saint-Georges?"

"Yes."

"Formerly captain in the Navailles regiment?"

"Yes."

The sergeant, for such he seemed to be, waved his hand, and four soldiers, hidden from sight by a carriage, at once came forward; the carriage itself

drove up so that its step was close to the gate, and the sergeant ordered Canolles to enter.

The young man looked about. He was absolutely alone, except that he could see, among the trees in the distance, Madame de Lalasne and her sister, like two ghosts, gazing at him, as he fancied, with compassion.

"Pardieu!" he said to himself, utterly unable to comprehend what was going on; "Madame de Cambes has selected a strange escort for me. However," he added, smiling at his own thought, "we must not be too particular as to the means."

"We are waiting for you, commandant," said the sergeant.

"I beg your pardon, messieurs," Canolles replied, "I am ready;" and he entered the carriage.

The sergeant and two soldiers entered it with him; the other two took their places, one beside the driver, and the other behind, and the lumbering vehicle rolled away as rapidly as two sturdy horses could draw it.

All this was passing strange, and Canolles began to feel decidedly nervous.

"Monsieur," said he to the sergeant, "now that we are by ourselves, can you tell me where you are taking me?"

"Why, to prison in the first place, commandant," was the reply.

Canolles stared at the man in dumb amazement.

"What! to prison!" he exclaimed at last. "Do you not come from a lady?"

"We do, indeed."

"And is not that lady Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes?"

"No, monsieur, that lady is Madame la Princesse de Condé."

"Madame la Princesse de Condé!" cried Canolles.

"Poor young man!" murmured a woman who was passing; and she made the sign of the cross.

Canolles felt a shudder of fear run through his veins.

A little farther on, a man who was running along the street, pike in hand, stopped when he saw the carriage and the soldiers. Canolles put his head through the window, and the man evidently recognized him, for he shook his fist at him with an angry and threatening expression.

"Good God! people have gone crazy in this city of yours," said Canolles, still trying to smile. "Have I become in one hour an object of pity or of

detestation, that some pity me and others threaten me?"

"Ah! monsieur," the sergeant replied, "those who pity you make no mistake, and it may be that those who threaten you are quite right to do so."

"If I only could understand what it all means," said Canolles.

"You will very soon understand, monsieur."

They reached the door of the prison, where Canolles was ordered to alight, amid the crowd which was beginning to collect. Instead of taking him to his usual room, they led him down into a cell filled with guards.

"I must know what I am to expect," he said to himself; and taking two louis from his pocket he went up to a soldier and put them in his hand.

The soldier hesitated about receiving them.

"Take them, my friend," said Canolles, "for the question I am about to ask you cannot compromise you in any way."

"Say on, then, commandant," rejoined the soldier, first pocketing the two louis.

"Very good! I would like to know the reason of my sudden arrest."

"It would seem," said the soldier, "that you have not heard of poor Monsieur Richon's death?"

"Richon dead!" cried Canolles, in a tone of heartfelt sorrow, for the close friendship between the two men will be remembered. "Was he killed when the fortress was taken?"

"No, commandant, he has been hanged since."

"Hanged!" muttered Canolles, with pallid cheeks, looking about at the ominous surroundings and the savage faces of his keepers. "Hanged! the devil! this is likely to postpone my wedding indefinitely!"

XX.

Madame de Cambes had finished her toilet,—a toilet all the more charming for its simplicity,—and throwing a light cape over her shoulders, motioned to Pompée to go before her. It was almost dark, and thinking that she would be less likely to be observed on foot than in a carriage, she ordered her carriage to await her at one of the doors of the Carmelite church, near a chapel in which she had obtained permission for the marriage ceremony to take place. Pompée descended the stairs and the viscountess followed. This assumption of the duties of a scout reminded the old soldier of the famous patrol of the night before the battle of Corbie.

At the foot of the staircase, as the viscountess was about to pass the door of the salon, where there was a great commotion, she met Madame de Tourville dragging the Duc de La Rochefoucauld toward the princess's cabinet, and engaged in an earnest discussion with him on the way.

"One word, madame, I entreat," said she; "what decision has been reached?"

"My plan is adopted!" cried Madame de Tourville, triumphantly.

"What is your plan, madame? I do not know."

"Reprisals, my dear, reprisals!"

"Pardon me, madame, but I am so unfortunate as not to be familiar as you are with warlike terms; what do you mean by the word 'reprisals'?"

"Nothing simpler, dear child."

"Pray explain yourself."

"They hanged an officer in the army of Messieurs les Princes, did they not?"

"Yes; what then?"

"Why, we hunt up an officer of the royal army in Bordeaux, and hang him."

"Great God!" cried Claire, in dismay; "what do you say, madame?"

"Monsieur le Duc," continued the dowager, apparently not heeding the viscountess's alarm, "has not the officer who was in command at Saint-Georges already been arrested?"

"Yes, madame," the duke replied.

"Monsieur de Canolles arrested!" cried Claire.

"Yes, madame," rejoined the duke, coldly, "Monsieur de Canolles is arrested, or soon will be; the order was given in my presence, and I saw the men set out to execute it."

"But did they know where he was?" Claire asked with a last ray of hope.

"He was at the house of our host, Monsieur de Lallasne, in the suburbs, where they say he was having great success at tennis."

Claire uttered a cry. Madame de Tourville turned upon her in amazement, and the duke glanced at her with an imperceptible smile.

"Monsieur de Canolles arrested!" the viscountess repeated. "In God's name, what has he done? What connection has he with the horrible occurrence

which saddens us all?"

"What connection has he with it? The very closest, my dear. Is not he a governor, as Richon was?"

Claire tried to speak, but the words died upon her lips.

She seized the duke's arm and gazing at him in terror, succeeded at last in uttering these words in a hoarse whisper:—

"Oh! but it's a feint, is it not, Monsieur le Duc? nothing more than a mere demonstration? We can do nothing—at least so it seems to me—to one who is a prisoner on parole."

"Richon also, madame, was a prisoner on parole."

"Monsieur le Duc, I implore you—"

"Spare your supplications, madame, for they are useless. I can do nothing in the matter; it is for the council to decide."

Claire dropped the duke's arm and hurried to Madame de Condé's cabinet, where she found Lenet striding back and forth, pale and agitated, while Madame de Condé talked with the Duc de Bouillon.

Madame de Cambes glided to the princess's side, as white and light of foot as a ghost.

"Oh, madame," said she, "give me one moment, I entreat you!"

"Ah! is it you, little one? I am not at liberty at this moment; but after the council I am at your service."

"Madame, madame, I must speak to you before the council!"

The princess was about to accede, when a door, opposite that by which the viscountess had come in, opened, and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld appeared.

"Madame," said he, "the council has assembled and is impatiently awaiting your Highness."

"You see, little one," said Madame de Condé, "that it is impossible for me to listen to you at this moment; but come with us to the council, and when it is at an end we will return and talk together."

It was out of the question to insist. Dazzled and bewildered by the frightful rapidity with which events were rushing on, the poor woman began to have the vertigo; she gazed wildly into the faces, and watched the gestures of all about her, without seeing anything, unable to understand what was going on, and struggling in vain to shake off the frightful nightmare that oppressed her.

The princess walked toward the salon. Claire followed her mechanically, nor did she notice that Lenet had taken in his the ice-cold hand that hung listlessly at her side like the hand of a corpse.

They entered the council chamber; it was about eight o'clock in the evening.

It was a vast apartment, naturally dark and gloomy, but made even darker by heavy hangings. A sort of platform had been erected between the two doors, and opposite the two windows, through which the last feeble rays of the dying daylight made their way into the room. Upon the platform were two arm-chairs; one for Madame de Condé, the other for the Duc d'Enghien. On either side of these arm-chairs was a row of tabourets for the ladies who composed her Highness's privy council. The other judges were to sit upon benches prepared for them. The Duc de Bouillon stood immediately behind Madame de Condé's chair, and the Duc de La Rochefoucauld behind that of the young prince.

Lenet stood opposite the clerk; beside him was Claire, dazed and trembling.

Six officers of the army, six municipal councillors, and six sheriffs were introduced, and took their seats upon the benches.

Two candelabra, each containing three candles, furnished light for the deliberations of this improvised tribunal; they were placed upon a table in front of Madame la Princesse, so that they shed a bright light upon the principal group, while the other persons present were more or less in shadow according as they were near to or at a distance from this feeble centre of light.

The doors were guarded by soldiers of the army of Madame la Princesse, halberd in hand. The roaring of the crowd could be heard without.

The clerk called the roll of the judges, and each one rose in turn and answered to his name.

Thereupon the judge advocate opened the business upon which they were called together; he detailed the capture of Vayres, Monsieur de La Meilleraie's breach of his word, and the infamous death of Richon.

At that point an officer, who had been stationed at a window for that express purpose, and had received his orders in advance, threw the window open, and the voices of the people in the street rolled in in waves: "Vengeance for Richon! Death to the Mazarinists!" Such was the name bestowed upon the royalists.

"You hear," said Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, "what the voice of the people demands. Two hours hence, either the people will have cast our

authority to the winds and taken the law into their own hands, or it will be too late for reprisals. Adjudge this matter, therefore, messieurs, and that without further delay."

The princess rose.

"Why adjudge, I pray to know?" she cried. "What purpose is to be served by a judgment? You have already heard the judgment pronounced by the good people of Bordeaux."

"Indeed," said Madame de Tourville, "it would be impossible to conceive a simpler situation. It's the law of retaliation pure and simple. Such things as this should be done by inspiration, so to speak, between provost and provost."

Lenet could listen to no more; from the place where he stood he rushed into the midst of the circle.

"Oh! not a word more, madame, I beg you," he cried, "for such counsels, were they to prevail, would be too horrible in their consequences. You forget that the royal authorities themselves, although they chose to inflict infamous punishment, nevertheless preserved the forms of law, and that the punishment, whether just or unjust, was ratified by the decree of a court-martial. Do you think that you have the right to do a thing that the king dared not do?"

"Oh! nothing more is needed than for me to express an opinion, to have Monsieur Lenet maintain the opposite!" exclaimed Madame de Tourville. "Unfortunately, my opinion this time agrees with her Highness's."

"Unfortunately, indeed," said Lenet.

"Monsieur!" cried the princess.

"Ah! madame," continued Lenet, "preserve appearances at least. Will you not still be at liberty to condemn?"

"Monsieur Lenet is right," said La Rochefoucauld. "The death of a man is too serious a matter, especially under such circumstances, for us to allow the responsibility to rest upon a single head, even though it be a princely head."

Leaning toward the princess then, so that her immediate neighbors alone could hear, he added:—

"Madame, take the opinion of all, and then retain only those of whom you are sure, to take part in the trial. In that way we shall have no cause for fear that our vengeance will escape us."

"One moment, one moment," interposed Monsieur de Bouillon, leaning upon his cane, and raising his gouty leg. "You have spoken of taking the responsibility off the princess's shoulders. I have no desire to shirk it, but I would be glad to have others share it with me. I ask nothing better than to

continue in rebellion, but in company with Madame la Princesse on the one hand and the people on the other. Damnation! I don't choose to be isolated. I lost my sovereignty of Sedan through a pleasantry of this sort. At that time I had a city and a head. Cardinal de Richelieu took my city; to-day I have nothing left but a head, and I'm not anxious that Cardinal Mazarin should take that. I therefore demand that the notables of Bordeaux take part in the proceedings."

"Such signatures beside ours!" murmured the princess; "go to!"

"The mortise holds the timber in place, madame," rejoined Bouillon, whom the conspiracy of Cinq-Mars had rendered prudent for the rest of his life.

"Is that your opinion, messieurs?"

"Yes," said the Duc de La Rochefoucauld.

"And you, Lenet?"

"Fortunately, madame," replied Lenet, "I am neither prince nor duke, nor municipal official, nor sheriff. I am entitled to hold aloof, therefore, and I will do so."

Thereupon the princess rose, and called upon the assemblage to reply in energetic and unmistakable fashion to the royal challenge. Hardly had she finished what she had to say when the window was thrown open again, and again the voices of the people without invaded the hall, crying:—

"Vive Madame la Princesse! Vengeance for Richon! Death to the Épernonists and Mazarinists!"

Madame de Cambes seized Lenet's arm.

"Monsieur Lenet," said she, "I am dying!"

"Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes," he replied, "request her Highness's permission to retire."

"No, no," said Claire, "I want—"

"Your place is not here, madame," Lenet interrupted. "You can do nothing for him; I will keep you informed of whatever takes place, and together we will try to save him."

"The viscountess may retire," said the princess. "Those ladies who do not care to be present at this function are at liberty to follow her."

Not a woman stirred; one of the never-ending aspirations of that half of the human race whose destiny it is to fascinate is to usurp the rights of the half destined to command. These ladies saw an opportunity to play the part of men for a moment, and proposed to make the most of it.

Madame de Cambes left the room, supported by Lenet. On the stairs she met Pompée whom she had sent in quest of news.

"Well?" said she inquiringly.

"He is arrested!"

"Monsieur Lenet," said Claire, "I have no confidence or hope save in you and God!" and she rushed despairingly into her own room.

"What questions shall I put to him who is about to appear before us?" Madame la Princess asked, as Lenet resumed his place beside the clerk, "and to whose lot shall it fall to die?"

"It's a very simple matter, madame," replied the duke. "We have some three hundred prisoners, ten or twelve of whom are officers. Let us question them simply as to their names and their rank in the royal army, and the first one who turns out to be the governor of a fortress, as Richon was, we will consider to be the one to whom the lot has fallen."

"It is useless to waste our time questioning ten or twelve different officers, messieurs," said the princess, "you have the list, Monsieur le Greffier: just glance over it, and read the names of those who hold equal rank to Richon's."

"There are but two, madame," said the clerk; "the governor of Île Saint-Georges, and the governor of Braune."

"We have two of them, it is true!" cried the princess; "fate is kind to us, you see. Are they under arrest, Labussière?"

"Certainly, madame," the captain of the guards replied, "and both are in the fortress awaiting the order to appear."

"Let them be brought hither," said Madame de Condé.

"Which one shall we bring?" asked Labussière.

"Bring them both: but we will begin with the first in date, Monsieur le Gouverneur de Saint-Georges."

XXI.

A terrified silence, broken only by the receding footsteps of the captain of the guards, and by the constantly increasing murmur of the multitude without, followed this order, which gave the rebellion of Messieurs les Princes a more terrible and perilous aspect than any it had as yet assumed. Its inevitable effect was by a single act to place the princess and her advisers, the army and the city, outside the pale of the law; it was to burden an entire population with responsibility for the selfishness and passions of the few; it was to do on a small scale what the Commune of Paris did on the 2d of September. But, as we

know, the Commune of Paris acted on a grand scale.

Not a sound could be heard in the hall; all eyes were fixed upon the door through which the prisoner was expected to appear. The princess, in order to act out her part of presiding magistrate, made a pretence of looking over the lists; Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld had assumed a musing expression, and Monsieur de Bouillon was talking with Madame de Tourville about his gout, which caused him much suffering.

Lenet approached the princess to make a last effort; not that he had any hope of success, but he was one of those conscientious men, who fulfil a duty because their conscience imposes upon them the obligation to do so.

"Consider, madame," said he, "that you are risking the future of your house upon a single throw."

"There is no great merit in that," said the princess dryly, "for I am sure to win."

"Monsieur le Duc," said Lenet, turning to La Rochefoucauld, "do not you, who are so superior to commonplace motives and vulgar human passions, advise moderation?"

"Monsieur," retorted the duke, hypocritically, "I am at this moment discussing the point with my reason."

"Discuss it rather with your conscience, Monsieur le Duc," replied Lenet; "that would be much better."

At that moment they heard the sound of the outer door closing. The sound echoed in every heart, for it announced the arrival of one of the two prisoners. Soon steps resounded on the stairway, halberds rang upon the flags, the door opened, and Canolles appeared.

He had never appeared so distinguished, had never been so handsome; his calm, unmoved face had retained the cheerful expression of happy ignorance. He came forward with easy, unaffected bearing, as he might have done in the salon of Monsieur Lavie, or Président Lalasne, and respectfully saluted the princess and the dukes.

The princess was amazed at his perfect ease of manner, and gazed at the young man for a moment without speaking.

At last she broke the silence.

"Come forward, monsieur," said she.

Canolles obeyed and saluted a second time.

"Who are you?"

"I am Baron Louis de Canolles, madame."

"What rank did you hold in the royal army?"

"I was lieutenant-colonel."

"Were you not governor of Île Saint-Georges?"

"I had that honor."

"You have told the truth?"

"In every point, madame."

"Have you taken down the questions and answers, master clerk?"

The clerk bowed.

"Sign, monsieur," said the princess.

Canolles took the pen with the air of a man who does not understand the purpose of a command, but obeys out of deference to the rank of the person who makes it, and signed his name with a smile.

"'Tis well, monsieur," said the princess; "you may now retire."

Canolles saluted his judges once more, and withdrew with the same grace and freedom from constraint, and with no manifestation of surprise or curiosity.

The door was no sooner closed behind him than the princess rose.

"Well, messieurs?" said she with a questioning accent.

"Well, madame, let us vote," said the Duc de La Rochefoucauld.

"Let us vote," echoed the Duc de Bouillon. "Will these gentlemen be kind enough to express their opinion?" he added, turning to the municipal dignitaries.

"After you, monseigneur," replied one of them.

"Nay, nay, before you!" cried a sonorous voice, in which there was such an accent of determination that everybody stared in amazement.

"What does this mean?" demanded the princess, trying to identify the owner of the voice.

"It means," cried a man, rising, so that there should be no doubt as to his identity, "that I, André Lavie, king's advocate and counsellor of parliament, demand in the king's name, and in the name of humanity, for prisoners detained in Bordeaux upon parole, the privileges and guaranties to which they are entitled. Consequently, my conclusion is—"

"Oho! Monsieur l'Avocat," exclaimed the princess with a shrug, "none of your court jargon in my presence, I pray you, for I do not understand it. This is an affair of sentiment that we are engaged upon, and not a paltry pettifogging lawsuit; every one who has a seat upon this tribunal will understand the propriety of this course, I presume."

"Yes, yes," rejoined the sheriffs and the officers in chorus; "vote, messieurs, vote!"

"I said, and I say again," continued Lavie; unabashed by the princess's rebuke, "I demand their privileges and guaranties for prisoners detained on parole. This is no question of lawsuits, but of the law of nations!"

"And I say, furthermore," cried Lenet, "that Richon was heard in his own defence before he met his cruel fate, and that it is no more than fair that we should hear these accused persons."

"And I," said D'Espagnet, the militia officer, who took part in the attack upon Saint-Georges with Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, "I declare that if any clemency be shown, the city will rise in revolt."

A shout from without seemed to echo and confirm his words.

"Let us make haste," said the princess. "What penalty shall we inflict upon the accused?"

"There are two of them, madame," suggested several voices.

"Is not one enough for you, pray?" retorted Lenet, smiling scornfully at this sanguinary servility.

"Which shall it be, then; which?" demanded the same voices.

"The fattest one, cannibals!" cried Lavie. "Ah! you complain of injustice and shout sacrilege, and yet you propose to reply to an assassination by two murders! A noble combination of philosophers and soldiers melted together into murderers!"

The flashing eyes of the majority of the judges seemed quite ready to blast the courageous king's advocate. Madame de Condé had risen from her chair and was looking inquiringly into the faces of those about her as if to assure herself that the words she had heard had really been uttered, and if there really was a man on earth bold enough to say such things in her presence.

Lavie realized that his continued presence would result in adding to the bitter feeling, and that his manner of defending the accused would destroy instead of saving them. He determined to retire, therefore, but to retire rather as a judge declining to serve than as a soldier taking to his heels.

"In the name of God Almighty," said he, "I protest against what you

propose to do; in the king's name, I forbid it!"

With that, he overturned his arm-chair with a wrathful gesture, and stalked out of the room with his head in the air, like a man strong in the consciousness of duty well done, and indifferent to the possible results thereof.

"Insolent!" muttered the princess.

"No matter! no matter! let him have his way," said several; "Master Lavie's turn will come."

"Let us vote!" exclaimed the judges, almost as one man.

"But why vote without hearing the accused?" said Lenet. "Perhaps one of them will seem to you more guilty than the other. Perhaps you will conclude to concentrate upon a single head the vengeance which you now propose to divide between two."

At that moment the outer door was heard a second time.

"Very good!" said the princess, "we will vote upon both at once."

The judges, who had left their seats in disorder, sat down once more. Again the sound of footsteps was heard, accompanied by the ringing of halberds on the flags; the door opened once more and Cauvignac appeared.

The newcomer presented a striking contrast to Canolles; his garments still showed the effects of his encounter with the populace, despite the pains he had taken to efface them; his eyes glanced hastily from the sheriffs to the officers, from the dukes to the princess, embracing the whole tribunal in a sort of circular glance; then, with the air of a fox devising a stratagem, he came forward, feeling the ground at every step, so to speak, with every faculty on the alert, but pale and visibly disturbed.

"Your Highness did me the honor to summon me to your presence," he began, without waiting to be questioned.

"Yes, monsieur, for I desired to be enlightened upon certain points relative to yourself, which cause us some perplexity."

"In that case," rejoined Cauvignac, with a bow, "I am here, madame, ready to requite the honor your Highness is pleased to confer upon me."

He bowed with the most graceful air he could muster, but it was clearly lacking in ease and naturalness.

"That you may do very speedily," said the princess, "if your answers are as definite as our questions."

"Allow me to remind your Highness," said Cauvignac, "that, as the question is always prepared beforehand, and the response never, it is more

difficult to respond than to question."

"Oh! our questions will be so clear and precise," said the princess, "that you will be spared any necessity for reflecting upon them. Your name?"

"Ah! madame, there you are! there is a most embarrassing question, first of all."

"How so?"

"It often happens that one has two names, the name one has received from his family, and the name one has received from himself. Take my own case as an example: I thought that I had sufficient reason for laying aside my first name in favor of another less widely known; which of the two names do you require me to give you?"

"That under which you presented yourself at Chantilly, that under which you agreed to raise a company in my interest, that under which you did raise it, and that under which you sold yourself to Monsieur de Mazarin."

"Pardon me, madame," said Cauvignac; "but I have the impression that I had the honor to reply satisfactorily to all these questions during the audience your Highness was graciously pleased to grant me this morning."

"At this time I put but one question to you," said the princess beginning to lose patience. "I simply ask you your name."

"Very true! but that is just what embarrasses me."

"Write Baron de Cauvignac," said the princess.

The accused made no objection, and the clerk wrote as directed.

"Now, your rank?" said the princess; "I trust you will find no difficulty in replying to this question."

"On the contrary, madame, that is one of the most embarrassing questions you could put to me. If you refer to my rank as a scholar, I am a bachelor of letters, licentiate in law, doctor of theology; I reply, as your Highness sees, without hesitation."

"No, monsieur, we refer to your military rank."

"Ah, yes! upon that point it is impossible for me to reply to your Highness."

"How so?"

"Because I have never really known what I was myself."

"Try to make up your mind upon that point, monsieur, for I am anxious to know."

"Very well; in the first place I constituted myself a lieutenant on my own authority; but as I had no power to sign a commission, and as I never had more than six men under my orders while I bore that title, I fancy that I have no right to take advantage of it."

"But I myself made you a captain," said the princess, "and you are therefore a captain."

"Ah! that is just where my embarrassment redoubles, and my conscience cries more loudly than ever. For I have since become convinced that every military grade in the State must emanate from the royal authority in order to have any value. Now, your Highness did, beyond question, desire to make me a captain, but in my opinion you had not the right. That being so, I am no more a captain now than I was a lieutenant before."

"Even so, monsieur; assume that you were not a lieutenant by virtue of your own act, and that you are not a captain by mine, as neither you nor I have the right to sign a commission; at least you are governor of Braune; and as the king himself signed your commission you will not contest its validity."

"In very truth, madame, it is the most contestable of the three."

"How so?" cried the princess.

"I was appointed, I grant you, but I never entered upon my duties. What constitutes the title? Not the bare possession of the title itself, but the performance of the functions attached to the title. Now, I never performed a single one of the functions of the post to which I was promoted; I never set foot in my jurisdiction; there was on my part no entrance upon my duties; therefore I am no more governor of Braune than I was a captain before being governor, or a lieutenant before being a captain."

"But you were taken upon the road to Braune, monsieur."

"True; but a hundred yards beyond the point where I was arrested, the road divides; thence one road leads to Braune, but the other to Isson. Who can say that I was not going to Isson, rather than to Braune?"

"Enough," said the princess; "the tribunal will take under consideration the force of your defence. Clerk, write him down governor of Braune."

"I cannot prevent your Highness from ordering the clerk to write down whatever seems best to you."

"It is done, madame," said the clerk.

"Good. Now, monsieur, sign your deposition."

"It would give me the greatest pleasure, madame," said Cauvignac; "I should be enchanted to do anything that would be agreeable to your Highness;

but in the struggle I was forced to wage this morning against the populace of Bordeaux,—a struggle in which your Highness so generously came to my rescue with your musketeers,—I had the misfortune to have my right wrist injured, and it has always been impossible for me to write with my left hand."

"Record the refusal of the accused to sign, monsieur," said the princess to the clerk.

"Impossibility, monsieur; write impossibility," said Cauvignac. "God forbid that I should refuse to do anything in my power at the bidding of so great a princess as your Highness!"

With that, Cauvignac bowed with the utmost respect, and left the room, accompanied by his two guards.

"I think that you were right, Monsieur Lenet," said the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, "and that we were wrong not to make sure of that man."

Lenet was too preoccupied to reply. This time his usual perspicacity was sadly at fault; he hoped that Cauvignac would draw down the wrath of the tribunal upon his single head; but with his everlasting subterfuges he had amused his judges rather than irritated them. Moreover his examination had destroyed all the effect, if any, produced by Canolles; and the noble bearing, the outspokenness and loyalty of the first prisoner had disappeared, if we may say so, beneath the wiles of the second. Cauvignac had effaced Canolles.

And so when the vote was taken, every vote was given for death.

The princess, after the votes were counted, rose and solemnly pronounced the judgment of the court. Then each one in turn signed the record of the sitting. First the Duc d'Enghien, poor child, who knew not what he was signing, and whose first signature was to cost the life of a man; then the princess, then the dukes, then the ladies of the council, then the officers and sheriffs. Thus everybody had a share in the reprisals. Nobility and bourgeoisie, army and parliament, everybody must be punished for the act of vengeance. As everybody knows, when all the world in general must be punished, the result is that nobody at all is punished.

When the last signature had been appended, the princess, who had her vengeance in her grasp at last, and whose pride was satisfied thereby, went herself and opened the window, which had been opened twice before, and, yielding to her consuming thirst for popularity, exclaimed in a loud voice:—

"Men of Bordeaux, Richon will be avenged, and fitly; rely upon us for that."

A shout of joy, like the roar of thunder, welcomed this declaration, and the people scattered through the streets, happy in the anticipation of the spectacle

promised by the words of the princess.

But Madame de Condé had no sooner returned to her own room with Lenet, who followed her sadly, still hoping to induce her to change her resolution, than the door was thrown open, and Madame de Cambes, pale as death and weeping bitterly, threw herself at her feet.

"O madame, in Heaven's name, listen to me!" she cried: "in Heaven's name do not turn me away!"

"What's the matter, pray, my child?" inquired the princess. "Why do you weep?"

"I weep, madame, because I have learned that the judges voted for death, and that you ratified their vote; and yet, madame, you cannot put Monsieur de Canolles to death."

"Why not, my dear, I pray to know? they put Richon to death."

"Because, madame, this same Monsieur de Canolles saved your Highness at Chantilly."

"Ought I to thank him for being deceived by our stratagem?"

"Ah! madame, that's where you are in error; Monsieur de Canolles was not for one instant deceived by the substitution. He recognized me at the first glance."

"Recognized you, Claire?"

"Yes, madame. We made a part of the journey together; Monsieur de Canolles—Monsieur de Canolles was in love with me; and under those circumstances—Ah! madame, perhaps he did wrong, but it is not for you to reproach him for it,—under those circumstances he sacrificed his duty to his love."

"So the man whom you love—"

"Yes," said the viscountess.

"The man whom you asked my leave to marry—"

"Yes."

"Was—"

"Was Monsieur de Canolles himself!" cried the viscountess,—"*Monsieur de Canolles*, who surrendered to me at Saint-Georges, and who, except for me, would have blown up the citadel with himself and your soldiers,—*Monsieur de Canolles*, who might have escaped, but who surrendered his sword to me rather than be parted from me. You see, therefore, that if he dies, I must die,

too, madame; for his death will lie at my door!"

"My dear child," said the princess, deeply moved, "consider, I pray you, that what you ask is impossible. Richon is dead, and Richon must be avenged. The matter has been duly discussed, and the judgment must be executed; if my husband himself should ask what you ask, I would refuse him."

"Oh! wretched creature that I am!" cried Madame de Cambes, throwing herself upon the floor, and sobbing as if her heart would break; "I have destroyed my lover!"

Thereupon Lenet, who had not as yet spoken, approached the princess.

"Madame," said he, "is not one victim enough? Must you have two heads to pay for Monsieur Richon's?"

"Aha!" said the princess, "monsieur the upright man! that means that you ask the life of one and the death of the other. Is that absolutely just? Tell me."

"It is just, madame, when two men are to die, in the first place that one only should die, if possible, assuming that any mouth has the right to blow out the torch lighted by God's hand. In the second place, it is just, if there is anything to choose between the two, that the upright man should be preferred to the schemer. One must needs be a Jew to set Barabbas at liberty and crucify Jesus."

"Oh! Monsieur Lenet! Monsieur Lenet!" cried Claire, "plead for me, I implore you! for you are a man, and mayhap you will be listened to. And do you, madame," she continued, turning to the princess, "remember that I have passed my life in the service of your family."

"And so have I," said Lenet; "and yet I have asked no reward for thirty years of fidelity to your Highness; but at this juncture, if your Highness is without pity, I will ask a single favor in exchange for these thirty years of fidelity."

"What might it be?"

"That you will give me my dismissal, madame, so that I may throw myself at the king's feet, and consecrate to him what remains of the life I had devoted to the honor of your family."

"Ah, well!" exclaimed the princess, vanquished by this combined attack, "do not threaten, my old friend; do not weep, my sweet Claire; be comforted both, for only one shall die, since you will have it so; but do not come and seek pardon for the one who is destined to die."

Claire seized the princess's hand and devoured it with kisses.

"Oh! thanks, madame! thanks!" she sobbed; "from this moment my life

and his are at your service."

"In taking this course, madame," said Lenet, "you will be at the same time just and merciful; which, hitherto, has been the prerogative of God alone."

"And now, madame," cried Claire, impatiently, "may I see him? may I set him free?"

"Such a demonstration at this moment is out of the question," said the princess; "it would injure us irreparably. Let us leave them both in prison; we will take them out at the same time, one to be set at liberty, the other to go to his death."

"But may I not at least see him, to set his mind at rest, to comfort him?"

"To set his mind at rest?" said the princess; "my dear child, I think that you have not the right; the reversal of the judgment would be discovered and commented upon. No, it cannot be; be content to know that he is safe. I will make known my decision to the two dukes."

"I will be patient, madame. Thanks! thanks!" cried Claire; and she fled from the room, to weep at her ease, and thank God from the bottom of her heart, which was overflowing with joy and gratitude.

XXII.

The two prisoners of war occupied two adjoining rooms in the same fortress. The rooms were located on the ground-floor, which in most prisons might properly be called the third floor; for prisons do not as a general rule begin at the ground like houses, but have two stories of underground dungeons.

Each door of the prison was guarded by a detachment of men selected from among the princess's guards; but the crowd, having taken note of the preparations which satisfied its thirst for vengeance, gradually melted away from the neighborhood of the prison, whither it had hurried upon learning that Canolles and Cauvignac had been taken there. Whereupon the guards who were stationed in the inner corridor, rather to protect the prisoners from the popular fury than from any fear of their escaping, left their posts, and thenceforth the ordinary sentries were simply doubled.

The people, finding that there was nothing more to be seen where they were, naturally betook themselves to the spot where executions generally took place,—the Esplanade, to wit. The words tossed down to them from the council-hall were instantly circulated throughout the city, and every one drew his own conclusions from them. But the one thing about which there could be no doubt was that there would be a spectacle of horrible interest that same night, or on the following day at latest; it was an additional fascination for

them not to know precisely what to look forward to.

Artisans, tradesmen, women, and children hurried toward the ramparts, and as it was quite dark and the moon would not rise until about midnight, many carried torches in their hands. Almost all the windows were open, too, and many people had placed torches or lamps on the window-sills, as they were accustomed to do on fête-days. But the ominous muttering of the crowd, the terrified glances of the sightseers, and the frequent passage of patrols on foot and mounted, afforded sufficient evidence that it was no ordinary fête for which such lugubrious preparations were being made.

From time to time cries of rage arose from the groups, which formed and dissolved with a rapidity characteristic of the effect of a certain class of occurrences. These cries always resembled those which penetrated to the council-hall on several occasions:—

"Death to the prisoners! vengeance for Richon!"

The cries, the bright light, the tread of many horses interrupted Madame de Cambes' devotions. She went to her window and looked out in dismay at all the men and women with eyes flashing fiercely, who seemed like wild beasts let loose in the arena, roaring for the human victims they were to devour. She asked herself how it could be that all these human beings, whom the two prisoners had never injured in any way, could so savagely demand the death of two of their fellow-creatures; and she could find no reply to her question, poor woman, for of all the passions of mankind she knew only those which soften the heart.

From the window at which she stood, Madame de Cambes could see the summit of the high, frowning towers of the fortress above the roofs of the houses and the tree-tops. That was where Canolles was, and her eyes wandered most frequently to them. But she could not avoid turning them from time to time into the street, and then she would see those threatening faces and hear those blood-curdling cries of vengeance, and an icy shudder would run through her veins.

"Ah!" she said to herself, "in vain do they forbid my seeing him; I must find a way to get to him! These horrible noises may reach his ear; he may think that I have forgotten him; he may accuse me; he may curse me. Oh! every moment that passes without my trying to find a way to comfort him seems to me like treachery to him; it is impossible for me to continue inactive, when perhaps he is calling me to his rescue. Oh! I must see him. Yes, but, mon Dieu! how to get to see him?—who will take me to the prison? what power have I to order the doors opened? Madame la Princesse has refused to give me a pass, and she had just granted so much in answer to my prayers that she was quite right to refuse. There are guards, there are enemies of his around the

fortress; the whole population has scented blood, and doesn't propose to be cheated of its prey; they will think that I mean to help him escape, rescue him; oh! yes: and I would rescue him if he had not already the safeguard of her Highness's word. If I tell them that I simply want to see him they won't believe me, and will turn me away; and again, do I not run the risk of losing what I have already gained if I take this step against Madame la Princesse's will? Will she not be likely to retract the promise she gave me? And yet to leave him to pass the long hours of the night in anguish and torture! Oh! I feel that it is impossible, for myself even more than for him! I will pray God for help, and perhaps he will inspire me."

Thereupon Madame de Cambes for the second time knelt before her crucifix, and began to pray with a fervor which might have touched Madame la Princesse's heart could she have heard her.

"Oh! I will not go, I will not go," said she; "for I understand that it is indeed impossible for me to go thither. All night he will perhaps accuse me of abandoning him. But to-morrow, to-morrow, my God, will set me right in his sight, will it not?"

Meanwhile the uproar, the constantly increasing excitement of the crowd, the sinister glare, which shone into her room, where there was no light, and at times illuminated it as by lightning, caused her such intense terror that she placed her hands over her ears, and pressed her closed eyes against the cushion of her prie-Dieu.

At that moment the door opened, and, unheard by her, a man entered; after pausing a moment upon the threshold, with an expression of affectionate compassion, when he saw how her whole body was shaken by her sobbing, he approached with a sigh, and laid his hand upon her arm.

Claire rose to her feet in dismay.

"Monsieur Lenet!" she exclaimed: "Monsieur Lenet: ah! you have not abandoned me?"

"No," was the reply: "I feared that you were but partly reassured, and I ventured to come to you to ask if I can be of service to you in any way."

"Oh, my dear Monsieur Lenet," cried Claire, "how good you are, and how grateful I am to you!"

"It seems that I was not mistaken," said Lenet. "One rarely is mistaken, God knows, when one fancies that one's fellow-creatures are suffering," he added with a sad smile.

"Ah! monsieur," cried Claire, "you say truly; I am indeed suffering!"

"Did you not obtain all that you desired, madame, and more, I confess,

than I myself dared hope?"

"Yes, of course; but—"

"But—I understand; you are terrified, are you not, to see the fierce joy of this mob in its thirst for blood; and you are moved to pity for the fate of the other poor wretch who is to die in your lover's place?"

Claire was silent for a moment with pale cheeks and her eyes fixed upon Lenet's; then she put her hand to her sweat-bedewed brow.

"Oh! forgive me, or rather curse me!" said she; "for, selfish brute that I am, I have not even thought of him. No, Lenet, no; in all possible humility I confess that these fears, these prayers, these tears of mine are for him who is to live; for, absorbed as I am by my love, I had forgotten him who is to die!"

Lenet smiled sadly.

"Yes," said he, "that may well be, for it is human nature; it may be that the selfishness of individuals is the salvation of the masses. Every one cuts a circle about himself and his own people with a sword. Come, madame," he continued, "pursue your confession to the end. Confess frankly that you are in haste to have the poor wretch undergo his fate; for his death will ensure the safety of your fiancé!"

"Oh! I hadn't thought of that as yet, Lenet; upon my word I hadn't. But do not turn my thoughts in that direction, for I love him so dearly that I do not know what I may be capable of wishing in the intensity of my love."

"Poor child!" said Lenet, in a most compassionate tone, "why did you not say all this sooner?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! you terrify me. Is it too late? Is he not really safe?"

"He is, since Madame la Princesse has given her word; but—"

"But what?"

"Alas! can one be sure of anything in this world, and do not you yourself, who believe as I do that he is safe, weep instead of rejoicing?"

"I weep because I cannot visit him, my friend," Claire replied. "Consider, that he must hear these fearful noises, and believe that he is in imminent danger; consider, that he may accuse me of lukewarmness, of forgetfulness, of treachery! Oh Lenet, Lenet, what torture! Really, if the princess knew how I suffer, she would have pity on me."

"Very well, viscountess, you must see him."

"See him! impossible. You are well aware that I asked leave of her Highness to see him, and that her Highness refused."

"I know, and I approve her refusal with all my heart; and yet—"

"And yet you advise me to disobey!" cried Claire in surprise, gazing earnestly at Lenet, who lowered his eyes in confusion.

"I am old, dear viscountess, and suspicious just because I am old,—not in this matter, for the princess's word is sacred. She has said that only one of the prisoners shall die; but, accustomed as I have become in the course of a long life to see fortune turn against the one who seems most secure of her favor, my rule is always to seize any opportunity that presents itself. See your fiancé, viscountess; take my advice and see him."

"Oh! Lenet, you terrify me beyond words; really you do!"

"I have no such intention; moreover, would you prefer that I advise you not to see him? You would not, would you? And you would scold me even more severely, I know, if I had said the opposite of what I do say."

"Yes, yes, I admit it. But you tell me to see him; that was my one desire; I was praying when you arrived that I might be allowed to see him. But isn't it impossible?"

"Is anything impossible to the woman who took Saint-Georges?" asked Lenet, with a smile.

"Alas!" said Claire, "for two hours I have been trying to think of some way of obtaining admission to the fortress, but I cannot."

"What would you give me if I were to show you a way?"

"I would give you—I would give you my hand on the day that I go to the altar with him."

"Thanks, my child," said Lenet; "indeed, you could do nothing more acceptable to me, for I love you like a father; thanks."

"Tell me the way! Tell me the way!" said Claire.

"It is this. I asked Madame la Princesse for a pass to allow me to talk with the prisoners; for if there were any way of saving Captain Cauvignac I would be glad to enroll him in our party; but the pass is useless to me now, as you have condemned him to death with your prayers for Monsieur de Canolles."

Claire could not repress a shudder.

"So take this paper," continued Lenet; "there is no name mentioned in it, you see."

Claire took it and read:—

"The keeper of the fortress will permit the bearer of this to converse for

half an hour with either of the two prisoners of war, as he may choose.

"CLAIRE-CLÉMENCE DE CONDÉ."

"You have a suit of man's clothes," said Lenet; "put it on. You have the permit; use it."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Claire, unable to banish from her mind the thought of Cauvignac to be executed in place of Canolles.

"He undergoes the common fate," said Lenet. "Being weak, he is devoured by the strong; having no protector, he pays for him who has; he is an intelligent fellow."

Claire meanwhile was turning the paper over and over in her hands.

"Do you know," said she, "that you tempt me cruelly with this permit? Do you know that if I once hold my poor friend in my arms I am quite capable of taking him with me to the ends of the world?"

"I would advise you to do it, madame, if it were possible; but this permit does not give you carte-blanche, and you can use it for no other purpose than that for which it was intended."

"True," said Claire, reading it once more; "and yet they have given me Monsieur de Canolles; he is mine; they cannot take him from me again!"

"Nor does any one think of doing so. Come, come, madame, waste no time; don your male costume, and begone. This permit gives you half an hour; I know that half an hour is very little; but after the half-hour will come your whole life. You are young, and have many years before you; God grant that they be happy years."

Claire seized Lenet's hand, drew him to her side, and kissed his forehead as she might have done to the most affectionate of fathers.

"Go, go," said Lenet, pushing her gently toward the door, "do not lose time; the man who truly loves is never resigned."

As he watched her pass into another room, where Pompée, at her bidding, was waiting to assist in her transformation,—

"Alas!" he muttered, "who knows?"

XXIII.

The threatening shouts of the excited crowd had not, in fact, escaped Canolles' attention. Through the bars at his window he was able to feast his eyes upon the animated, changing picture which was presented to his view, and which varied little from one end of the city to the other.

"Pardieu!" said he, "this is an annoying mischance, Richon's death. Poor Richon! he was a gallant fellow! His death will redouble the severity of our captivity; they will not allow me to go about the city as before; no more meetings, and no marriage, unless Claire can resign herself to the chapel of a prison. She will be content with that, I know. One can be married as well in one chapel as another. But it's an evil omen, none the less. Why the deuce could they not have received the news to-morrow instead of to-day?"

He went to the window and looked out.

"What a strict watch they are keeping!" he continued; "two sentries! When I think that I shall be mewèd up here a week, a fortnight perhaps, until something new occurs to make them forget this! Fortunately, events follow rapidly on one another's heels just now, and the Bordelais are fickle-minded; meanwhile I shall have passed some very unpleasant hours all the same. Poor Claire! she must be in despair; luckily she knows that I have been arrested. Yes, she knows it and so knows that I am not at fault—Good lack! where are all those people going? They seem to be bound for the Esplanade!—but there can be no parade there, nor an execution, at this hour. They are all going in the same direction. Upon my word one would say that they know I am here, like a bear, behind my bars."

Canolles began to pace up and down with folded arms; finding himself within the walls of a real prison, his mind turned for a moment to philosophical ideas, with which he commonly bothered his head but little.

"What an idiotic thing war is!" he muttered. "Here is poor Richon, with whom I dined hardly a month ago, dead! He ought to have made sure of death by a cannon-ball, as I would have done—as I would have done if any other than the viscountess had besieged me. This war of women is, in good sooth, the most to be dreaded of all wars. At least, I have had no share in the death of a friend. Thank God, I haven't drawn my sword against my brother! that is a consolation to me. And it is to my little feminine good genius that I owe that, too. Take it for all in all, I owe her many things."

At that moment an officer entered, and interrupted Canolles' soliloquy.

"Do you wish for supper, monsieur?" he asked. "If so, give your orders; the jailer is instructed to furnish you with whatever you desire."

"Well, well," said Canolles, "it would seem that they propose at least to treat me honorably while I remain here. I feared something different for an instant, when I saw the stern face of the princess, and the repellent bearing of all her judges."

"I am waiting," rejoined the officer, bowing.

"Ah! to be sure; I beg your pardon. The extreme courtesy of your question led to certain reflections. Let us return to the matter in hand. Yes, monsieur, I will sup, for I am very hungry; but I am of sober habits, and a soldier's supper will content me."

"Now," said the officer, drawing nearer to him with evident interest, "have you no commissions,—in the city? Do you expect nothing? You say that you are a soldier; so am I; look upon me, therefore, as a comrade."

Canolles stared at him in amazement.

"No, monsieur," said he; "no, I have no commissions in the city; no, I expect nothing, unless it be a certain person whom I may not name. As for looking upon you as a comrade, I thank you for the suggestion. Here is my hand, monsieur, and later, if I need anything, I will remember what you say."

It was the officer's turn to stare at Canolles in amazement.

"Very well, monsieur," said he, "you will be served at once;" and he withdrew.

A moment later two soldiers entered with the supper; it was more elaborate than Canolles had asked for, and he sat down at the table and ate heartily.

The soldiers in their turn gazed wonderingly at him. Canolles mistook their amazement for envy, and as the wine was excellent Guyenne, he said to them: —

"My friends, order two glasses."

One of the soldiers smiled, and procured the articles in question. Canolles filled them; then poured a few drops of wine into his own.

"Your health, my friends!" said he.

The two soldiers took their glasses, mechanically touched them to Canolles', and drank without reciprocating his toast.

"They are not very polite," thought Canolles, "but they drink well; one cannot have everything."

He continued his supper, and brought it triumphantly to a close. When he had finished he rose, and the soldiers removed the table.

The officer returned.

"Pardieu! monsieur," said Canolles, "you should have supped with me; the supper was excellent."

"I could not enjoy that honor, monsieur, for I have just left the table myself. I return—"

"To bear me company?" said Canolles. "If so, accept my warmest thanks, monsieur, for it is very kind of you."

"No, monsieur, my errand is less agreeable. I come to inform you that there is no minister in the prison, and that the chaplain is a Catholic; I know you to be a Protestant, and this fact may annoy you somewhat—"

"Annoy me, monsieur? how so?" demanded Canolles, innocently.

"Why," said the embarrassed officer, "in the matter of your devotions."

"My devotions! Nonsense!" laughed Canolles. "I will think of that tomorrow. I pray only in the morning."

The officer stared at Canolles in open-mouthed astonishment, which gradually changed to profound compassion. He bowed and left the room.

"Damnation!" said Canolles, "why, every one is crazy! Since poor Richon's death everybody I meet has the aspect of an idiot or a madman. Sarpejeu! shall I never see a sensible face again?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the door opened once more, and before he had time to see who had opened it, some one threw herself into his arms, and winding her arms around his neck deluged his face with tears.

"God's mercy!" cried the prisoner, extricating himself from the embrace; "another lunatic! Upon my soul, I believe I am in an asylum!"

But the gesture that he made in stepping back knocked the new-comer's hat to the floor, and the lovely blond tresses of Madame de Cambes fell down about her shoulders.

"You here!" he cried, rushing to her, and taking her in his arms once more. "You! oh! forgive me for not recognizing you, or rather for not divining your presence."

"Hush!" said she, picking up her hat and hastily replacing it on her head; "hush! for if they knew it was I, perhaps they would turn me out. At last I am permitted to see you once more! Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! how happy I am!"

Her bosom heaved, and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Once more!" said Canolles; "you are permitted to see me once more, you say? In Heaven's name, are you not to see me more than this once?" he added, with a laugh.

"Oh! do not laugh!" said Claire; "my dear love, your gayety distresses me. Do not laugh, I implore you! I have had such difficulty in procuring admission,—if you knew!—and I was so near not being able to come at all! Except, for Lenet, the best of men—But let us talk of yourself, my poor dear.

Mon Dieu / it is really you, is it not? It is really you whom I can press to my heart again?"

"Why, yes, it is I, it is really I," said Canolles, smiling.

"Oh! do not affect this cheerful demeanor,—it is useless, I know all. They did not know that I loved you, so they hid nothing from me—"

"What is it that you know, pray?" queried Canolles.

"You expected me, didn't you?" the viscountess continued. "You were displeased by my silence? Were you not already blaming me?"

"Unhappy and dissatisfied I was, beyond question, but I did not blame you. I suspected that circumstances stronger than your will kept you from my side; and the main cause of my unhappiness, through it all, has been the necessary postponement of our marriage for a week,—perhaps for two weeks."

Claire stared at Canolles in like amazement to that exhibited by the officer a moment before.

"Are you speaking seriously?" said she; "are you not really any more alarmed than you seem to be?"

"Alarmed?" said Canolles, "alarmed at what? Can it be," he added with a laugh, "that I am exposed to some danger of which I know nothing?"

"Oh! the poor fellow!" cried Claire; "he knew nothing of it!"

Dreading, doubtless, to reveal the whole truth without warning to him whose life was imperilled thereby, she checked, by a violent effort, the words that had risen from her heart to her lips.

"No, I know nothing," said Canolles, gravely. "But you will tell me, won't you? I am a man! Speak, Claire, speak."

"You know that Richon is dead?" said she.

"Yes, I know it."

"But do you know how he died?"

"No, but I suspect. He was killed at his post, was he not, in the breach at Vayres?"

Claire was silent for a moment; then, in a tone as solemn as that of a bell tolling for the dead, she replied:

"He was hanged in the market place at Libourne!"

Canolles started back.

"Hanged!" he cried; "Richon,—a soldier!"

Suddenly the color fled from his cheeks, and he drew his trembling hand across his brow.

"Ah! now I understand it all," said he; "I understand my arrest, my examination, the officer's words, and the silence of the soldiers; I understand the step you have taken, your tears when you found me so cheerful; I understand the crowds, the cries, and the threats. Richon was murdered! and they will revenge Richon upon me!"

"No, no, my beloved! no, beloved of my heart!" cried Claire, beaming with joy, seizing both Canolles' hands, and gazing with all her soul into his eyes. "No, they will not sacrifice you, dear prisoner! You were not mistaken,—you were marked out for the sacrifice; you were condemned; you were doomed to die; death was very near to you, my darling fiancé. But have no fear; you may speak of happiness and of the future, for she whose whole life is consecrated to you has saved your life! Be joyous and happy, but beneath your breath; for you may awake your ill-fated companion, upon whose head the storm will break, who is to die in your place!"

"Oh! hush, hush, dear love! you freeze my blood with horror," said Canolles, hardly recovered, despite Claire's ardent caresses, from the terrible blow he had received. "I, so calm and confident, so idiotically happy, was in imminent danger of death! And when? at what moment of all others? Just Heaven! at the moment when I was to become your husband! Upon my soul, it would have been a double murder!"

"They call that 'reprisal,'" said Claire.

"Yes, yes,—it is true; they are right."

"Now you are frowning and pensive again."

"Oh!" cried Canolles, "it isn't that I fear death; but death would part us—"

"If you had died, my love, I should have died too. But, instead of giving way to sadness, rejoice with me. Look you, to-night—perhaps within an hour—you will leave the prison. Either I will come here myself for you, or I will await you at the outer door. Then, without losing a moment, a second, we will fly—oh! instantly! I cannot wait! this accursed city terrifies me. To-day I have succeeded in saving you; but to-morrow some other unforeseen mischance may take you from me again!"

"Ah! Claire, my best beloved, do you know that this is almost too great happiness at a single stroke; yes, in very truth, too great happiness! I shall die of it—"

"Well, then," said Claire, "be joyous and cheerful, as you naturally are."

"Why do not you do the same?"

"See, I am laughing."

"And that sigh?"

"The sigh, my dearest, is for the poor wretch who pays for our joy with his life."

"Yes, yes, you are right! Oh! why can you not take me away with you at this moment? Come, my good angel, open your wings and fly away with me!"

"Patience, patience! my beloved husband! To-morrow I will carry you—where? I neither know nor care—to the paradise of our love. Meanwhile I am here."

Canolles took her in his arms and strained her to his breast. She threw her arms around his neck and lay unresistingly, trembling with agitation, against that heart, which was scarcely beating, so oppressed was it by conflicting emotions.

Suddenly, for the second time, a heart-breaking sob shook her frame, and happy as she was, her tears fell thick and fast upon Canolles' face.

"Well, well!" said he, "is this your cheerfulness, my poor dear angel?"

"It is the last remnant of my sorrow."

As she spoke the door opened, and the same officer announced that the half-hour had expired.

"Adieu!" whispered Canolles; "or rather hide me in the folds of your cloak, and take me with you!"

"Hush, dear love!" she replied, in a low tone, "for you break my heart! Do you not see that I am dying with longing to do it? Be patient for your own sake, and for mine. In a few hours we shall meet again never to part."

"I am patient," said Canolles, joyfully, completely comforted by this assurance; "but we must part now. Courage, my dear, and let us say adieu. Adieu, Claire, adieu!"

"Adieu!" said she, trying to smile; "ad—"

But she could not complete the cruel word. For the third time her voice was stifled with sobs.

"Adieu! adieu!" cried Canolles, seizing her in his arms anew, and covering her brow with burning kisses, "adieu!"

"The devil!" muttered the officer, "luckily I know that the poor fellow has no great reason to fear, or this scene would break my heart!"

He escorted Claire to the door and then returned.

"Now, monsieur," said he to Canolles, who had fallen back upon a chair, exhausted by his emotion, "it's not enough for you to be happy, you must be compassionate too. Your neighbor, your unfortunate fellow-prisoner, who is to die, is entirely alone; no one is interested in him, and he has no one to comfort him. He desires to see you. I have taken it upon myself to allow him to do so, but your consent also is necessary."

"My consent!" cried Canolles, "oh! I give it willingly. Poor devil! I await him with open arms! I do not know him, but that makes no difference."

"He seems to know you, however."

"Is he aware of the fate in store for him?"

"No, I think not. You understand that he must be left in ignorance of it."

"Oh! never fear."

"Listen, then: eleven o'clock will soon strike, and I shall return to the guard-house; after eleven o'clock the jailers are supreme in the interior of the prison. Your jailer has been warned that your neighbor will be with you, and he will come here for him when it is time for him to return to his own cell. If he knows nothing, tell him nothing; if he does know, tell him from us that we soldiers all pity him from the bottom of our hearts. To die is nothing, but sacrebleu! to be hanged is to die twice over."

"Is it decided that he is to die?"

"By the same death as Richon, in order that the reprisal may be complete. But we are chattering here, while he is awaiting your reply, anxiously no doubt."

"Go to him, monsieur, and believe that I am deeply grateful to you, both for him and myself."

The officer opened the door of the adjoining cell, and Cauvignac, somewhat pale, but with a jaunty air and with head erect, entered the cell of Canolles, who walked forward several steps to meet him.

Thereupon the officer waved his hand to Canolles, cast a pitying glance at Cauvignac, and took his leave, taking with him his soldiers, whose heavy footfalls could be heard for some time in the corridors.

Soon the jailer made his round; they heard the clashing of his keys in the different doors.

Cauvignac was not depressed, because there was in the man an unalterable confidence in himself, an inextinguishable hope in the future. But, beneath his calm exterior and his mask of cheerfulness, a bitter grief was biting at his heart like a serpent. That sceptical soul, which had always doubted everything, had

come at last to doubt its very doubts.

Since Richon's death Cauvignac had not eaten or slept.

Accustomed as he was to make light of the misfortunes of others because he took his own so gayly, our philosopher had not once thought of laughing at an event which led to so terrible a result as that, and, despite himself, he saw, in all the mysterious threads which led up to his responsibility for Richon's death, the unswerving hand of Providence, and he began to believe, if not in the reward of good deeds, at least in the punishment of evil deeds.

He resigned himself to his fate, therefore, and gave himself over to thought; but, as we have said, the result of his resignation was that he no longer ate or slept.

It was a strange and mysterious fact that his own death, which he anticipated, moved him much less than the death of the comrade in misfortune, whom he knew to be within two yards of him, awaiting the fatal decree, or execution without the formality of a decree. All this turned his thoughts once more to Richon, his avenging spectre, and the twofold catastrophe resulting from what had seemed to him a charming piece of mischief.

His first idea had been to escape; for, although he was a prisoner on parole, he thought that he might without scruple disregard his engagements, as his captors had disregarded theirs by putting him in prison. But he was shrewd enough to realize that escape was impossible, despite his ingenuity. Thereupon he became more firmly convinced than ever that he was fast in the clutches of inexorable fatality; and he had but one desire,—namely, to talk for a few moments with his companion, whose name had caused him a feeling of sad surprise, and to effect a reconciliation in his person with the whole human race he had outraged so shamefully.

We do not affirm that all these reflections of his were the results of remorse,—no, Cauvignac was too much of a philosopher to suffer from remorse,—but it was something that closely resembled it, namely violent self-reproach for having done evil for nothing. With time, and a combination of circumstances suited to maintain him in this frame of mind, this sentiment might perhaps have had the same result as remorse; but time was lacking.

Upon entering Canolles' cell, Cauvignac waited first of all, with his ordinary prudence, until the officer who showed him in had withdrawn; then, when he saw that the door was securely fastened, and the wicket hermetically closed, he walked up to Canolles, who, as we have said, had taken some steps to meet him, and warmly pressed his hand.

Notwithstanding the gravity of his situation, Cauvignac could not forbear a smile as his eye fell upon the handsome, refined young man, of venturesome

and joyous disposition, whom he had twice before surprised in very different situations, once when his mission was to send him to Nantes, and again to take him to Île Saint-Georges. Furthermore, he recalled his momentary usurpation of his name, and the amusing mystification of the duke resulting therefrom; and gloomy and forbidding as the prison was, the souvenir was so mirth-provoking that, for a moment, the present was forgotten.

For his part, Canolles recognized him at the first glance as the person with whom he had come in contact on the two occasions we have mentioned; and as Cauvignac, on those two occasions had been, all things considered, a messenger of good tidings, his compassion for the poor fellow's sad fate increased tenfold, especially as he knew that it was his own safety that made Cauvignac's death inevitable; and in so sensitive a mind as his such a thought caused infinitely deeper remorse than a downright crime would have caused his companion.

He welcomed him therefore with the greatest kindness of manner.

"Well, baron," Cauvignac began; "what do you say to our present situation? It is a little too precarious to be comfortable, it seems to me."

"Yes, here we are in prison, and God knows when we shall get away from here," rejoined Canolles, trying to put a good face on the matter, in order to lighten his companion's agony with a ray of hope.

"When we shall get away from here!" repeated Cauvignac. "May God, whom you invoke, vouchsafe, in his mercy, to postpone it as long as possible! But I do not think he is disposed to respite us for long. I saw from my window, as you must have seen from yours, an excited crowd rushing in a certain direction,—toward the Esplanade, unless I am much mistaken. You know the Esplanade, my dear baron, and you know to what uses it is put?"

"Oh, nonsense! You exaggerate the danger, I am sure. The crowd were heading for the Esplanade, it is true, but it was to see some military punishment, no doubt. To make us pay for Richon's death would be frightful; for, after all, we are both entirely innocent of his death."

Cauvignac started and fastened his eyes upon Canolles' face with a gloomy expression which gradually softened to one of pity.

"Well, well," he said to himself, "here's a poor fellow who deceives himself as to the situation. But I must tell him how it really stands; for where would be the use of encouraging him in his error only to make the blow more crushing at the last? whereas, when one has time to prepare, the fall always seems a little easier."

After a pause of some duration, he took both Candles' hands in his, and

gazing into his face with an intentness which greatly embarrassed him, he said:—

"Monsieur, my dear monsieur, let us send for a bottle or two of the excellent Braune wine you know of. Alas! I might have drunk my fill of it if I had been governor a little longer, and I will even go so far as to admit that my predilection for that vintage led me to apply for that position in preference to any other. God punishes me for my gluttony."

"I shall be glad to join you," said Canolles.

"Very good, and as we drink we will talk; if what I have to tell you is not very pleasant, the wine will be good at least, and one will make up for the other."

Canolles knocked on the door, but there was no response; he knocked still louder, and a child, who was playing in the corridor, came to the door.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Wine," said Canolles; "tell your papa to bring two bottles."

The child ran off, and a moment later returned to say:

"Papa is busy talking with a gentleman just now; he will come very soon."

"Will you let me ask you a question, my dear?" said Cauvignac.

"What is it?"

"What gentleman is your papa talking with?" he asked in his most insinuating tone.

"With a tall gentleman."

"This is a charming child," said Cauvignac; "wait a moment and we shall learn something. How is the gentleman dressed?"

"All in black."

"The devil! Do you hear? all in black! What is the name of this tall gentleman dressed all in black? Do you happen to know that, my dear?"

"His name is Monsieur La Vie."

"Aha!" said Cauvignac; "the king's advocate! I fancy that we have no reason to be apprehensive of anything he is likely to do. Let us take advantage of their conversation to converse ourselves. Here, my little fellow" he added, slipping a piece of money under the door, "here's something to buy marbles with. It's a good thing to make friends everywhere," he continued, as he stood erect once more.

The child joyfully seized the coin, and thanked the donor.

"Well, monsieur," said Canolles, "you were saying—"

"Oh, yes! I was saying that you seem to me to be sadly astray as to the fate that awaits us when we leave the prison; you speak of the Esplanade, of military punishments; but I am inclined to think that we are the objects of the public attention, and that there is something more than mere flogging in the wind."

"Nonsense!" said Canolles.

"Zounds! monsieur, you look at things in rather a more cheerful light than I am able to do; perhaps because you haven't the same reasons for alarm that I have. But don't boast too much of your prospects, for they 're not over-flattering. Yours are nothing, however, compared to mine, and mine,—I must say it because I am firmly convinced that it is so,—are most infernally dark. Do you know who I am, monsieur?"

"That's a strange question surely. You are Captain Cauvignac, Governor of Braune, I suppose."

"Yes, for the moment; but I have not always borne that name or that title. I have changed my name very often, and have tried many different titles. For instance, one day I called myself Baron de Canolles, just as you call yourself."

Canolles looked him in the eye.

"Yes, I understand," pursued Cauvignac, "you are wondering whether I am insane, are you not? Have no fears on that score, for I am in full possession of all my mental faculties, and have never been more completely sane."

"Explain yourself, then," said Canolles.

"Nothing easier. Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon—You know Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, do you not?"

"By name only; I never saw him."

"Luckily for me. Monsieur d'Épernon, I say, surprised me one day at a certain house where I knew that you were a favored guest, so I took the liberty of borrowing your name."

"Monsieur, what mean you?"

"There, there, softly! Don't be selfish enough to be jealous of one woman just as you are on the point of marrying another! And even if you should be,—and it would be quite consistent with human nature, for man is a vile brute,—you will forgive me in a moment. I am too closely connected with you for you to quarrel with me."

"I do not understand a word that you are saying, monsieur."

"I say that I have a right to be treated by you as a brother, or at least as a brother-in-law."

"You speak in enigmas, and I am still all at sea."

"Very good; I will enlighten you with a single word. My true name is Roland de Lartigues, and Nanon is my sister."

Canolles' suspicions gave way before a sudden swelling of the heart.

"You, Nanon's brother!" he cried. "Oh, poor fellow!"

"Yes, poor fellow, indeed!" rejoined Cauvignac; "you have hit the point exactly; for in addition to a multitude of other disagreeable circumstances connected with my encounter with the authorities here, is that of bearing the name of Roland de Lartigues, and of being Nanon's brother. You are aware that my dear sister is not in the odor of sanctity in the nostrils of Messieurs les Bordelais. Once let it be known that I am Nanon's brother, and I am thrice lost. Now there is one La Rochefoucauld here, and one Lenet, who know everything."

"Ah!" said Canolles, in whose mind Cauvignac's Words awoke certain memories; "ah! I understand now why poor Nanon called me her brother in that letter. Dear girl!"

"Yes," said Cauvignac, "she was indeed a dear girl, and I much regret that I did not always follow her instructions to the letter; but what would you have? if one could foretell the future there would be no need of God."

"What has become of her?" Canolles asked.

"Who can say? Poor child! She is in despair, no doubt,—not on my account, for she doesn't know of my arrest, but for you, whose fate it is more than likely that she has learned."

"Have no fear," said Canolles. "Lenet will not disclose the fact that you are Nanon's brother, and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld has no reason to wish you ill; so no one will know anything about it."

"If they know nothing about that, they will know enough else, believe me; for instance, they will know that it was I who provided a certain document signed in blank, and that that blank signature—but, damnation! let us forget, if we can. What a pity that the wine doesn't come!" he continued, looking toward the door. "There's nothing like wine to make a fellow forget."

"Come, come," said Canolles, "courage!"

"Pardieu! do you think that I lack it? Wait until you see me at the critical

moment when we go for a turn on the Esplanade. But there is one thing that worries me; shall we be shot, beheaded, or hanged?"

"Hanged!" cried Canolles. "Great God! we are noblemen, and they will not inflict such an outrage on the nobility."

"Oh! you will see that they are quite capable of picking flaws in my genealogy; then, too—"

"What now?"

"Will you or I be the one to go first?"

"For God's sake! my dear friend," said Canolles, "don't get such ideas in your head! Nothing is less certain than this death that you anticipate so confidently; people are not tried, condemned, and executed in a night."

"Hark ye," rejoined Cauvignac; "I was over yonder when they tried poor Richon, God rest his soul! Trial, judgment, hanging, all together, lasted hardly more than three or four hours; let us allow for somewhat less activity in this case,—for Madame Anne d'Autriche is Queen of France, and Madame de Condé is only a princess of the blood,—and that gives us four or five hours. As it is three hours since we were arrested, and two since we appeared before our judges, we can count upon an hour or two more to live; that's but a short time."

"In any event," said Canolles, "they will wait till daybreak before executing us."

"Ah! that is not at all certain; an execution by torch-light is a very fine spectacle; it costs more, to be sure, but as Madame la Princesse is much in need of the assistance of the Bordelais, it may well be that she will decide to incur the extra expense."

"Hush!" said Canolles, "I hear footsteps."

"The devil!" exclaimed Cauvignac, turning a shade paler.

"It's the wine, no doubt," said Canolles.

"Ah, yes!" said Cauvignac, gazing more than earnestly at the door, "it may be that. If the jailer enters with the bottles, all is well; if on the other hand—"

The door opened, and the jailer entered without the bottles.

Canolles and Cauvignac exchanged a significant glance, but the jailer took no note of it,—he seemed to be in such haste, the time was so short, and it was so dark in the cell.

He entered and closed the door.

Then he walked up to the prisoners and said, drawing a paper from his pocket:—

"Which of you is Baron de Canolles?"

"The devil!" they exclaimed with one voice, exchanging a second glance.

Canolles hesitated before replying, and Cauvignac did the same; the former had borne the name too long to doubt that the question was meant for him; but the other had borne it sufficiently long to fear that his falsehood was coming home to him.

However, Canolles understood that he must reply, so at last he said:—

"I am he."

The jailer drew nearer to him.

"You were the governor of a fortress?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"But so was I governor of a fortress; I, too, have borne the name of Canolles," said Cauvignac. "Come, explain yourself, and let there be no mistake. Mischief enough has come out of my transactions with regard to poor Richon, without my being the cause of another man's death."

"So your name is Canolles now?" said the jailer to Canolles.

"Yes."

"And your name was formerly Canolles?" he said to Cauvignac.

"Yes," was the reply, "for a single day, and I begin to think that I made a great fool of myself that day."

"You were both governors of fortresses?"

"Yes," they replied, in the same breath.

"Now for one more question, which will clear up the whole matter."

The two prisoners waited in absolute silence.

"Which of you," said the jailer, "is the brother of Madame Nanon de Lartigues?"

Cauvignac made a grimace which would have been comical at a less solemn moment.

"Did I not tell you," he said to Canolles, "did I not tell you, my dear fellow, that that was where they would attack me? If I should tell you," he added, turning to the jailer, "that I am Madame Nanon de Lartigues' brother, what would you say to me, my friend?"

"I should tell you to follow me instantly."

"Damnation!" ejaculated Cauvignac.

"But she has also called me her brother," said Canolles, trying in some degree to avert the storm that was evidently gathering over the head of his unfortunate companion.

"One moment, one moment," said Cauvignac, passing in front of the jailer, and taking Canolles aside; "one moment, my young friend; it isn't fair that you should be Nanon's brother under such circumstances. I have made others pay my debts enough, and it's no more than fair that I should take my turn at paying them."

"What do you mean?" demanded Canolles.

"Oh! it would take too long to tell you, and you see our jailer is losing patience, and tapping his foot on the floor. It's all right, my friend, all right; never fear, I will go with you. Adieu, my dear fellow; my doubts are set at rest on one point at least, for I know that I am to go first. God grant that you do not follow me too quickly. Now it remains to know what sort of death it is to be. The devil! if only it isn't hanging! Oh! I am coming, pardieu! I am coming. You 're in a terrible hurry, my good man. Well then, my dear brother, my dear brother-in-law, my dear friend,—a last adieu, and good-night!"

With that Cauvignac stepped toward Canolles and held out his hand, which Canolles grasped in both of his own and pressed affectionately.

Meanwhile Cauvignac was looking at him with a strange expression.

"What do you want?" said Canolles; "have you any request to make?"

"Yes."

"Then make it boldly."

"Do you sometimes pray?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, when you pray, say a word for me." He turned to the jailer, whose impatience was visibly increasing.

"I am Madame Nanon de Lartigues' brother," said he; "come, my friend—"

The jailer did not wait for him to say it a second time, but hastily left the room, followed by Cauvignac, who waved a last farewell to Canolles from the threshold.

The door closed behind them, their steps receded rapidly, and everything relapsed into absolute silence, which seemed to him who was left behind like

the silence of death.

Canolles fell into a melancholy frame of mind, which resembled terror. This fashion of spiriting a man away by night, without commotion, without guards, was more alarming than the preparations for the infliction of the death penalty when made in broad daylight. All his fear, however, was on his companion's behalf, for his confidence in Madame de Cambes was so great that since he had seen her he was absolutely without fear for himself, notwithstanding the alarming nature of the news she brought.

So it was that the sole subject of his absorption at that moment was the fate in store for the comrade who was taken from him. Thereupon Cauvignac's last request came to his mind; he fell upon his knees and prayed.

In a few moments he rose, feeling comforted and strong, and awaiting calmly the arrival of the succor promised by Madame de Cambes, or her own presence.

Meanwhile Cauvignac followed the jailer through the dark corridor without a word, and reflecting as deeply as his nature allowed him to do.

At the end of the corridor, the jailer closed the door with the least possible noise, and after listening for a moment to certain ill-defined sounds which came up from the lower floors, turned sharply to Cauvignac, and said:

"Come! my gentleman, off we go."

"I am ready," rejoined Cauvignac, majestically.

"Don't speak so loud," said the jailer, "and walk faster;" and he started down a stairway leading to the underground dungeons.

"Oho!" said Cauvignac to himself, "do they propose to cut my throat in some dark corner, or consign me to a dungeon? I have heard it said that they sometimes content themselves with exhibiting the four limbs on a public square, as Cæsar Borgia did with Ramiro d'Orco. This jailer is all alone, and his keys are at his belt. The keys must open some door or other. He is short, I am tall; he is weak, I am strong; he is in front, I am behind; I can very soon choke the life out of him if I choose. Do I choose?"

Cauvignac, having decided that he did choose, had already extended his muscular hands to put his plan in execution, when the jailer suddenly turned about in a great fright.

"Hush!" said he, "do you hear nothing?"

"Upon my word," said Cauvignac, still speaking to himself, "there is something decidedly mysterious in all this; and so much caution ought to alarm me greatly, if it doesn't reassure me."

He stopped abruptly, and demanded:—

"Whither are you taking me?"

"Don't you see?" said the jailer; "into the vaults."

"Deuce take me!" said Cauvignac: "do they propose to bury me alive?"

The jailer shrugged his shoulders, and led the way through a labyrinth of winding corridors, until they came to a low arched door, on which the moisture stood in great drops; from the other side came a strange roaring sound.

The jailer opened the door.

"The river!" cried Cauvignac, starting back in dismay—as his eyes fell upon a swiftly flowing stream as black and forbidding as Acheron.

"Yes, the river; do you know how to swim?"

"Yes—no—that is to say—Why the devil do you ask me that?"

"Because if you can't swim, we shall have to wait for a boat that is stationed over yonder, and that means a loss of quarter of an hour, to say nothing of the danger that some one may hear the signal I shall have to give, and so discover us."

"Discover us!" cried Cauvignac. "In God's name, my dear fellow, are we escaping?"

"Pardieu! of course we are."

"Where are we going?"

"Where you please."

"I am free, then?"

"As free as the air."

"Oh, my God!" cried Cauvignac.

Without adding a word to that eloquent exclamation, without looking to right or left, without thought as to whether his companion was following him, he darted to the river, and plunged in more rapidly than a hunted otter. The jailer imitated him, and after a quarter of an hour of silent efforts to stem the current, they both were within hailing distance of the boat. The jailer whistled three times; the oarsmen, recognizing the pre-concerted signal, rowed toward them, promptly lifted them into the boat, bent to their oars without a word, and in less than five minutes set them both ashore upon the other bank.

"Ouf!" said Cauvignac, who had not uttered a single word from the

moment that he threw himself into the stream. "Ouf! I am really saved! Dear jailer of my heart, God will reward you!"

"I have already received forty thousand livres," said the jailer, "which will help me to wait patiently for the reward God has in store for me."

"Forty thousand livres!" cried Cauvignac in utter stupefaction. "Who the devil can have put out forty thousand livres for me?"

THE ABBEY OF PEYSSAC

I.

A word of explanation becomes necessary at this point, after which we will resume the thread of our narrative.

Indeed, it is high time for us to return to Nanon de Lartigues, who, at the sight of poor ill-fated Richon expiring on the market-place at Libourne, uttered a shriek and fell in a swoon.

Nanon, however, as our readers must ere this have discovered, was not a woman of a weak and shrinking temperament. Despite her slender stature she had borne long and bitter sorrows, had endured crushing fatigue, and defied danger of the most appalling kind; and her sturdy, loving heart, of more than ordinary steadfastness, could bend as circumstances required, and rebound more stanch and courageous than ever after every fillip of destiny.

The Duc d'Épernon, who knew her, or who thought that he knew her, was naturally amazed therefore to see her so completely crushed by the sight of mere physical suffering,—the same woman who, when her palace at Agen was destroyed by fire, never uttered a cry (although she was within an ace of being burned alive) lest she should give pleasure to her enemies, who were thirsty for a sight of the torture which one of them, more vindictive than the others, sought to inflict upon the mistress of the detested governor; and who had looked on without winking while two of her women were murdered by mistake for her.

Nanon's swoon lasted two hours, and was followed by a frightful attack of hysteria, during which she could not speak, but could simply utter inarticulate shrieks. It became so serious that the queen, who had sent message upon message to her, paid her a visit in person, and Monsieur de Mazarin insisted upon taking his place at her bedside to prescribe for her as her physician. Apropos, he made great pretensions to skill in the administration of medicine for the suffering body, as well as of theology for the imperilled soul.

But Nanon did not recover consciousness until well into the night. It was some time after that before she could collect her thoughts; but at last, pressing her hands against her temples, she cried in a heart-rending tone:

"I am lost! they have killed him!"

Luckily these words were so incomprehensible that those who heard charged them to the account of delirium.

They left an impression on their minds, however, and when the Duc d'Épernon returned the next morning from an expedition which had taken him away from Libourne on the preceding afternoon, he learned at the same time of her protracted swoon, and of the words she uttered when she came to her senses. The duke was well acquainted with her sensitive, excitable nature. He realized that there was something more than delirium in her words, and hastened to her side.

"My dear girl," he said to her as soon as they were left alone, "I know all that you have suffered in connection with the death of Richon, whom they were so ill-advised as to hang in front of your windows."

"Oh yes! it was fearful! it was infamous!"

"Another time," said the duke, "now that I know the effect it has upon you, I will see to it that rebels are hanged on the Place du Cours, and not on the Place du Marché. But of whom were you speaking when you said that they had killed him? It couldn't have been Richon, I fancy; for Richon was never anything to you, not even a simple acquaintance."

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur le Duc?" said Nanon, supporting herself on her elbow and seizing his arm.

"Yes, it is I; and I am very glad that you recognize me, for that proves that you are getting better. But of whom were you speaking?"

"Of him, Monsieur le Duc, of him!" cried Nanon; "you have killed him! Oh, the poor, poor boy!."

"Dear heart, you frighten me! what do you mean?"

"I mean that you have killed him. Do you not understand, Monsieur le Duc?"

"No, my dear," replied D'Épernon, trying to induce Nanon to speak by entering into the ideas her delirium suggested to her; "how can I have killed him, when I do not know him?"

"Do you not know that he is a prisoner of war, that he was a captain, that he was commandant of a fortress, that he had the same titles and the same rank as this unhappy Richon, and that the Bordelais will avenge upon him the

murder of the man whose murder you were responsible for? For it's of no use for you to pretend that it was done according to law, Monsieur le Duc; it was a downright murder!"

The duke, completely unhorsed by this apostrophe, by the fire of her flashing eyes, and by her nervous, energetic gestures, turned pale, and beat his breast.

"Oh! 't is true!" he cried, "'t is true! poor Canolles! I had forgotten him!"

"My poor brother! my poor brother!" cried Nanon, happy to be at liberty to give vent to her emotion, and bestowing upon her lover the title under which Monsieur d'Épernon knew him.

"Mordieu! you are right," said the duke, "and I have lost my wits. How in God's name could I have forgotten the poor fellow? But nothing is lost; they can hardly have heard the news at Bordeaux as yet; and it will take time to assemble the court-martial, and to try him. Besides, they will hesitate."

"Did the queen hesitate?" Nanon retorted.

"But the queen is the queen; she has the power of life and death. They are rebels."

"Alas!" said Nanon, "that's an additional reason why they should not stand on ceremony; but what do you mean to do? Tell me."

"I don't know yet, but rely on me."

"Oh!" cried Nanon, trying to rise, "if I have to go to Bordeaux myself, and surrender myself in his place, he shall not die."

"Never fear, dear heart, this is my affair. I have caused the evil and I will repair it, on the honor of a gentleman. The queen still has some friends in the city, so do not you be disturbed."

The duke made her this promise from the bottom of his heart.

Nanon read in his eyes determination, sincerity, and good-will, and her joy was so overpowering that she seized his hands, and said as she pressed them to her burning lips:—

"Oh, Monseigneur, if you succeed, how I will love you!"

The duke was moved to tears; it was the first time that Nanon had ever spoken to him so expansively or made him such a promise.

He at once rushed from the room, renewing his assurances to Nanon that she had nothing to fear. Sending for one of his retainers, whose shrewdness and trust-worthiness were well known to him, he bade him go at once to Bordeaux, make his way into the city, even if he had to scale the ramparts, and

hand to Lavie, the advocate-general, the following note, written from beginning to end by his own hand:—

"See to it that no harm comes to Monsieur de Canolles, captain and commandant in his Majesty's service.

"If he has been arrested, as is probable, use all possible means to set him free; bribe his keepers with whatever sum they demand,—a million if need be,—and pledge the word of Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon for the governorship of a royal château.

"If bribery is unavailing, use force; stop at nothing; violence, fire, murder will be overlooked.

"Description: tall, brown eye, hooked nose. If in doubt, ask him this question:—

"Are you Nanon's brother?"

"Above all things haste there is not a moment to lose."

The messenger set out and was at Bordeaux within three hours. He went to a farm-house, exchanged his coat for a peasant's smock-frock, and entered the city driving a load of meal.

Lavie received the letter quarter of an hour after the decision of the court-martial. He went at once to the fortress, talked with the jailer-in-chief, offered him twenty thousand livres,—which he refused, then thirty thousand, which he also refused, and finally forty thousand, which he accepted.

We know how Cauvignac, misled by the question which Monsieur d'Épernon relied upon as a safeguard against mistake, "Are you Nanon's brother?" yielded to what was perhaps the only generous impulse he had ever felt during his life, and answered, "Yes," and thus, to his unbounded amazement, regained his freedom.

A swift horse bore him to the village of Saint-Loubes, which was in the hands of the royalists. There they found a messenger from the duke, come to meet the fugitive on the duke's own horse, a Spanish mare of inestimable value.

"Is he saved?" he demanded of the leader of Cauvignac's escort.

"Yes," was the reply, "we have him here."

That was all that the messenger sought to learn; he turned his horse about, and darted away like a flash in the direction of Libourne. An hour and a half later, the horse fell exhausted at the city gate, and sent his rider headlong to the ground at the feet of Monsieur d'Épernon, who was fuming with impatience to hear the one word, "yes." The messenger, half-dead as he was, had sufficient

strength to pronounce that word which cost so dear, and the duke hurried away, without losing a second, to Nanon's lodgings, where she lay upon her bed, gazing wildly at the door, which was surrounded by servants.

"Yes!" cried D'Épernon; "yes, he is saved, dear love; he is at my heels, you will see him in a moment."

Nanon fairly leaped for joy; these few words removed from her breast the weight that was stifling her. She raised her hands to heaven, and, with her face wet with the tears this unhopd for happiness drew from her eyes, which despair had made dry, cried in an indescribable tone:—

"Oh! my God, my God! I thank thee!"

As she brought her eyes back to earth, she saw at her side the Duc d'Épernon, so happy in her happiness that one would have said his interest in the dear prisoner was no less deep than hers. Not until then did this disturbing thought come to her mind:—

"How will the duke be recompensed for his kindness, his solicitude, when he sees the stranger in the brother's place, an almost adulterous passion substituted for the pure sentiment of sisterly affection?"

Her reply to her own question was short and to the point.

"No matter!" she thought, "I will deceive him no longer; I will tell him the whole story; he will turn me Out and curse me; then I will throw myself at his feet to thank him for all he has done for me these three years past, and that done, I will go hence poor and humble, but rich in my love, and happy in the anticipation of the new life that awaits us."

In the midst of this dream of self-denial, of ambition sacrificed to love, the throng of servants opened to give passage to a man who rushed into the room where Nanon lay, crying:—

"My sister! my dear sister!"

Nanon sat up in bed, opened her startled eyes to their fullest extent, turned paler than the belaced pillow behind her head, and for the second time fell back in consternation, muttering:—

"Cauvignac! my God! Cauvignac!"

"Cauvignac!" the duke repeated, looking wonderingly about, evidently in search of the man to whom that exclamation was addressed. "Cauvignac! is any one here named Cauvignac?"

Cauvignac was careful not to reply; he was not as yet sufficiently sure of his safety to justify a frankness which even under ordinary circumstances would have sat strangely upon him. He realized that by answering to the name

he would ruin his sister, and would infallibly ruin himself at the same time; he held his peace therefore, and allowed Nanon to speak, reserving the right to correct her mistakes.

"What of Monsieur de Canolles?" she cried in a tone of angry reproach, darting a flaming glance at Cauvignac.

The duke frowned and began to bite his moustache. All those present, save Francinette, who was very pale, and Cauvignac, who did his utmost not to turn pale, knew not what to think of this burst of wrath, and gazed at one another in amazement.

"Poor sister!" whispered Cauvignac in the duke's ear, "she was so alarmed for me that her brain is turned and she doesn't know me."

"I am the one to whom you must reply, villain!" cried Nanon. "Where is Monsieur de Canolles? What has become of Him? Answer, answer, I tell you!"

Cauvignac formed a desperate resolution; it was necessary to risk everything to win everything, and to rely upon his impudence to carry him through; for to seek safety in confession, to inform the Duc d'Épernon of the fact that the false Canolles, whose fortune he had made his care, was identical with the Cauvignac who had levied troops against the queen, and had then sold those same troops to the queen, was equivalent to going voluntarily to join Richon on the gallows. He therefore went close to the Duc d'Épernon, and said to him with tears in his eyes:—

"Monsieur, this is no mere delirium, but downright madness; grief has turned her brain so that she does not recognize those who are nearest to her. If any one can restore her lost reason, you understand that it is myself; I beg you therefore to send away all the servants, except Francinette, who may remain at hand to look to her wants; for it would be as disagreeable to you as to myself, to see strangers laughing at the expense of my poor sister."

Perhaps the duke would not have yielded so readily to this specious reasoning,—for, credulous as he was, he began to be suspicious of Cauvignac,—had he not received a summons to wait upon the queen, Monsieur de Mazarin having convoked an extraordinary session of the council.

While the messenger was delivering his message, Cauvignac leaned over Nanon, and said in her ear:—

"In Heaven's name, sister, be calm! If we can exchange a few words in private, all will be well."

Nanon fell back upon the bed, more self-controlled at all events, if no calmer; for hope, however small the dose, is a balm which allays the heart-ache.

The duke, having decided to play the part of Orgon and G ronte to the end, returned to Nanon and kissed her hand, saying:—

"The crisis has passed, I trust, my dear; I leave you with the brother who is so dear to you, for the queen has sent for me. Believe me, nothing less than her Majesty's commands would induce me to leave your side at such a moment."

Nanon felt that her strength was failing her. She could not answer the duke, but simply looked at Cauvignac and pressed his hand as if to say:—

"Have you not deceived me, brother? May I really hope?"

Cauvignac answered her pressure, and said to Monsieur d' pernon:—

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc, the crisis seems to have passed, and my sister will soon realize that she has by her side a faithful and devoted heart, ready to undertake anything to make her happy."

Nanon could restrain herself no longer; she burst out sobbing as if her heart would break, for so many things had combined to break her spirit that she was no longer anything more than an ordinary woman,—weak, that is to say, and dependent upon tears to give vent to her emotion.

The duke left the room, shaking his head, and commending Nanon to Cauvignac's care with an eloquent look.

"Oh! how that man tortures me!" cried Nanon, as soon as his back was turned; "if he had remained a moment longer, I believe I should have died."

Cauvignac raised his hand to bid her be silent; then he put his ear to the door to make sure that the duke had really gone.

"Oh! what care I," cried Nanon, "whether he listens or does not listen? You whispered two words in my ear to give me comfort; tell me what you think, what you hope!"

"Sister," replied Cauvignac, assuming a grave demeanor, which was by no means habitual with him, "I will not tell you that I am sure of success, but I will repeat what I said before, that I will do everything in the world to succeed."

"To succeed in what?" demanded Nanon; "we understand one another this time, do we not; there is no ghastly practical joke between us?"

"To succeed in saving the unfortunate Canolles."

Nanon gazed at him with terrifying intensity.

"He is lost, is he not?"

"Alas!" was the reply; "if you ask me for my honest, outspoken opinion, I

admit that the prospect is dark."

"How indifferently he says it!" cried Nanon. "Do you know, wretch, what that man is to me?"

"I know that he is a man whom you prefer to your brother, since you would have saved him rather than me, and when you saw me you welcomed me with a curse."

Nanon made an impatient gesture.

"Pardieu! you are right," said Cauvignac; "I do not say that by way of reproach, but as a simple observation; for look you, with my hand upon my heart—I do not say upon my conscience, for fear I have none—I declare that if we were together once more in the cell in Château-Trompette, knowing what I know, I would say to Monsieur de Canolles, 'Monsieur, Nanon calls you her brother; it is you they seek, not I,'—and he would come to you in my place, and I would die in his."

"Then he is to die!" cried Nanon in a burst of grief, which proves that in the best organized minds death never presents itself as a certainty, but always as a fear simply; "then he is to die!"

"Sister," Cauvignac replied, "this is all that I can tell you, and upon it we must base all that we do. In the two hours since I left Bordeaux many things may have happened; but do not despair, for it is equally true that absolutely nothing at all may have happened. Here is an idea that has come into my head."

"Tell it me, quickly."

"I have a hundred men and my lieutenant within a league of Bordeaux."

"A sure man?"

"Ferguzon."

"Well?"

"Well, sister, whatever Monsieur de Bouillon may say, whatever Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld may do, whatever Madame la Princesse may think, who deems herself a far greater captain than her two generals, I have an idea that, with my hundred men, half of whom I will sacrifice, I can make my way to Monsieur de Canolles."

"Oh! you deceive yourself, brother; you will never get to him; you will never get to him!"

"But I will, morbleu! or I will die in the attempt!"

"Alas! your death would prove your good-will, but it would not save him."

He is lost! he is lost!"

"But I tell you no, even if I have to give myself up in his place," cried Cauvignac, in a burst of quasi-generosity that surprised himself.

"Give yourself up!"

"Yes, to be sure; for no one has any reason to hate Monsieur de Canolles; on the other hand, every one loves him, while I am universally detested."

"Why should you be detested?"

"For the simplest of reasons; because I have the honor to be bound to you by the closest ties of blood. Forgive me, my dear sister, but what I say is extremely flattering to a good royalist."

"Wait a moment," said Nanon, putting her finger on her lips.

"I am listening."

"You say that I am bitterly detested by the people of Bordeaux?"

"Why, they fairly execrate you."

"Is it so?" said Nanon, with a smile, half-pensive, half-joyous.

"I did not think I was telling you something that would be so agreeable to you to hear."

"Yes, yes," said Nanon, "it is very sensible at all events, if not exactly agreeable. Yes, you are right," she continued, speaking rather to herself than to her brother; "they do not hate Monsieur de Canolles, nor do they hate you. Wait, wait!"

She rose, threw a long silk cloak about her lithe and graceful form, and, sitting at her table, hastily wrote a few lines, which Cauvignac, as he watched the flush that mounted to her brow, and the heaving of her bosom, judged to be of great moment.

"Take this," said she, sealing the letter, "and ride alone to Bordeaux, without soldiers or escort. There is a mare in the stable that can do the distance in an hour. Bide as fast as she will carry you, deliver this letter to Madame la Princesse, and Monsieur de Canolles is saved!"

Cauvignac looked at his sister in open-mouthed amazement; but he knew how clear-sighted she was, and wasted no time criticising her instructions. He hurried to the stable, leaped upon the horse she had described, and half an hour thereafter was more than half-way to Bordeaux.

Nanon, as soon as she saw him from her window galloping away, knelt, atheist as she was, and repeated a short prayer; after which she bestowed her

money and jewels in a casket, ordered a carriage, and bade Francinette array her in her most splendid garments.

II.

Save the neighborhood of the Esplanade, whither everybody was hurrying, the city of Bordeaux seemed deserted. In the streets which lay at a distance from that favored-quarter there was no sound save the tread of the patrol, or the terrified voice of some old woman as she closed and locked her door.

But in the direction of the Esplanade there was a dull, continuous murmur as of waves beating upon a distant shore.

Madame la Princesse had finished her correspondence, and had sent word to Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld that she would receive him.

At the princess's feet, crouching upon a rug, and studying with the keenest anxiety her face and her humor, was Claire, evidently awaiting a moment when she might speak without annoying her; but her enforced patience, her studied calmness were belied by the nervous movements of the fingers with which she was folding and crumpling a handkerchief.

"Seventy-seven signatures!" cried the princess; "it's not all pleasure you see, Claire, to play at being queen."

"Indeed it is, madame; for in taking the queen's place you assumed her most gracious prerogative, that of being merciful."

"And that of punishing, Claire," rejoined the princess proudly, "for one of the seventy-seven signatures was written at the foot of a death-warrant."

"And the seventy-eighth will be at the foot of a pardon, will it not, madame?" pleaded Claire.

"What do you say, little one?"

"I say, madame, that I think it is quite time for me to go and set my prisoner free; may I not spare him the frightful spectacle of his companion led forth to his death? Ah! madame, as you consent to pardon him, pray, let it be a full and complete pardon!"

"I faith, yes! you are quite right, little one; but, in very truth I had forgotten my promise amid all this serious business, and you have done well to remind me of it."

"Then—" cried Claire, beaming with joy.

"Do what you choose."

"One more signature, then, madame," said Claire, with a smile which would have melted the hardest heart, a smile which no painter's brush could

reproduce, because it belongs only to the woman who loves, that is to say, to life in its divinest essence.

She placed a paper upon Madame la Princesse's table, and held it while she wrote:—

"The governor of Château-Trompette is ordered to allow Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes access to Monsieur le Baron de Canolles, to whom we restore his liberty without reservation or condition."

"Is that right?" the princess asked.

"Oh! yes, madame!"

"And I must sign it?"

"Most assuredly."

"Ah! little one," said Madame de Condé, with her most gracious smile, "I seem compelled to do whatever you want."

And she wrote her name.

Claire pounced upon the paper like an eagle upon its prey. She hardly took time to thank her Highness, and rushed from the room pressing the paper against her heart.

On the stairway she met Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, who was always followed wherever he went by a number of officers and admiring citizens.

Claire greeted him with a happy little smile. Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, surprised beyond measure, stopped for an instant upon the landing, and followed her with his eyes to the bottom of the stairs before entering Madame de Condé's apartment.

"All is ready, madame," he said, when he was in her Highness's presence.

"Where?"

"Over yonder."

The princess seemed to be trying to make out his meaning.

"On the Esplanade," said the duke.

"Ah yes! very good," rejoined the princess, affecting great calmness of manner, for she felt that he was looking at her, and so, notwithstanding her woman's nature which inclined her to shudder, she listened to the voice of her dignity as leader of a great party, which bade her show no sign of weakness. "If everything is ready, let the affair proceed."

The duke hesitated.

"Do you think it advisable that I should be present?" inquired the princess, with a tremor in her voice which she could not entirely repress, notwithstanding her self-control.

"Why, that is as you please, madame," replied the duke, who was at that moment engaged in one of his physiological studies.

"We will see, duke, we will see; you know that I have pardoned one of the condemned men."

"Yes, madame."

"And what do you say to that step?"

"I say that whatever your Highness does is well done."

"Yes, I thought it better so. It will be more befitting our dignity to show the Épernonists that while we do not fear to resort to reprisals, and to treat with her Majesty as one power with another, we have confidence in the strength of our cause, and return evil for evil without excitement or exaggeration."

"It is very politic."

"Is it not, duke?" rejoined the princess, seeking to gather La Rochefoucauld's real meaning from his tone and manner.

"But," he continued, "it is still your opinion, is it not, that one of the two should expiate Richon's death? For if it remains unavenged, the impression may gain ground that your Highness sets but little store by the gallant men who devote their lives to your service."

"Oh! assuredly! and one of the two shall die, on my honor as a princess! never fear."

"May I know which of the two your Highness has deigned to pardon?"

"Monsieur de Canolles."

"Ah!"

This ah! was pronounced in a most significant tone.

"Can it be that you have any particular ground for wishing that gentleman ill, Monsieur le Duc?"

"I! Madame, was I ever known to wish anybody well or ill? I divide all men into two categories: obstacles, and supporters. The former must be overthrown, and the latter supported,—so long as they support us; that is my policy, madame, and I might almost say my whole moral code."

"What infernal scheme is he concocting, and what is he driving at?" muttered Lenet; "he acted as if he detested poor Canolles."

"Well," the duke continued, "if your Highness has no other orders to give me—"

"No, Monsieur le Duc."

"I will take leave of your Highness."

"Is it to be tonight?"

"In quarter of an hour."

Lenet made ready to follow the duke.

"Are you going to see the spectacle, Lenet?" the princess asked him.

"Oh! no, madame; I am not addicted to violent emotion, as you know; I will content myself with going half way, that is to say, as far as the prison, to witness the touching picture of poor Canolles restored to freedom by the woman he loves."

The duke made a wry face. Lenet shrugged his shoulders, and the solemn procession left the palace to go to the prison.

Madame de Cambes had traversed the distance in less than five minutes; she showed the order to the sentinel at the drawbridge, then to the doorkeeper at the prison, and asked to see the governor.

The governor scrutinized the order with the inexpressive eye characteristic of prison-governors, which never lights up at sight of a death-warrant or pardon, recognized the signature and seal of Madame de Condé, saluted the messenger, and said, turning to the door:

"Call the lieutenant."

Then he motioned to Madame de Cambes to be seated; but her excitement and impatience were too intense to allow her to be at rest, and she remained on her feet.

The governor thought it incumbent upon him to speak to her.

"You know Monsieur de Canolles?" he said in the same tone in which he would have asked what the weather was.

"Oh! yes, monsieur," was the reply.

"He is your brother, mayhap, madame?"

"No, monsieur."

"A friend?"

"He is—my fiancé," said Madame de Cambes, hoping that this confession would induce the governor to hasten the discharge of the prisoner.

"Ah!" he rejoined in the same tone, "I congratulate you, madame."

Having no further questions to ask, he relapsed into immobility and silence.

The lieutenant entered.

"Monsieur d'Orgemont," said the governor, "call the chief turnkey, and see that Monsieur de Canolles is set at liberty; here is the order for his discharge."

The lieutenant bowed and took the paper.

"Do you wish to wait here?" the governor asked.

"Am I not permitted to accompany monsieur?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then I will do so; you understand,—I wish to be the first to tell him that his life is saved."

"Go then, madame, and receive the assurance of my respect."

Madame de Cambes made a hasty courtesy to the governor and followed the lieutenant. He was the same officer who had talked with Canolles and with Cauvignac, and he went about the duty assigned him with the zeal born of sympathy. In a moment he and Madame de Cambes were in the court-yard.

"The chief turnkey!" cried the lieutenant. "He will be here in an instant, madame; have no fear," he added.

The second turnkey appeared.

"Monsieur le lieutenant," said he, "the turnkey in chief cannot be found; we have sought in vain for him."

"Oh, monsieur," cried Claire; "does this mean further delay?"

"No, madame, the order is explicit; be calm."

Madame de Cambes thanked him with one of those glances which none but women and angels have to give.

"You have duplicate keys to all the cells?" asked Monsieur d'Orgemont.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Open Monsieur de Canolles' door."

"Monsieur de Canolles in number two?"

"Yes, number two; open at once."

"By the way, I believe they are both together in there," said the turnkey; "you can choose the best-looking."

Jailers in all ages have been facetious. But Madame de Cambes was too happy to take offence at the heartless pleasantry. On the contrary she smiled at it, and would have embraced the man if need be to induce him to hasten so that she might be with Canolles a second earlier.

At last the door was opened. Canolles who had heard steps in the corridor, and recognized the viscountess's voice, threw himself into her arms, and she, forgetting that he was neither her husband or her lover, strained him to her heart with all her strength. The peril that had threatened him, the eternal separation to which they had come so close, purified everything.

"Well, my dear," said she, radiant with joy and pride, "you see that I have kept my word: I have obtained your pardon as I promised; I have come to fetch you, and we are going away."

Even as she spoke she was dragging him toward the corridor.

"Monsieur," said the lieutenant, "you may well devote your whole life to madame, for you certainly owe it to her."

Canolles made no reply; but his eyes gazed fondly at the saving angel, and his hand pressed the hand of the loving woman.

"Oh! do not hasten so," said the lieutenant, with a smile; "it is all over, and you are free, so take time to open your wings."

But Madame de Cambes, paying no heed to these words of good cheer, continued to drag Canolles through the corridors. Canolles let her have her will, exchanging friendly signs with the lieutenant. They reached the staircase, and descended the stairs as if they were provided with the wings of which the lieutenant had spoken. At last they stood in the court-yard; one more door, and the atmosphere of the prison would cease to oppress their long-suffering hearts.

That last door was finally thrown open. But on the other side, the drawbridge was thronged with a troop of gentlemen, archers and guards; they were Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld and his acolytes.

Without knowing why, Madame de Cambes shuddered. Some evil thing had befallen her every time that that man had come in her path.

As to Canolles, if he experienced any emotion whatever, no trace of it appeared upon his features.

The duke saluted Madame de Cambes and Canolles, and even paused to offer his congratulations. Then he made a sign to his followers, and they made way for the lovers to pass.

Suddenly a voice was heard at the far end of the court-yard, inside the

prison:—

"Number one is empty; the other prisoner is not in his cell; I have searched everywhere and cannot find him!"

These words sent a thrill of excitement through all who heard them; the Duc de La Rochefoucauld started, and unable to restrain his first impulse, put out his hand as if to stop Canolles.

Claire saw the movement and every vestige of color fled from her cheeks.

"Come, come," said she, "let us make haste!"

"Pardon me, madame," said the duke, "but I must ask you to be patient for a moment. Give us time, if you please, to clear up this mistake; it will be a matter of a moment only, I promise you."

He made another sign to his followers and the passage was closed.

Canolles looked at Claire, at the duke, at the point whence the voice came, and he too turned pale.

"But why should I wait, monsieur?" demanded Claire. "Madame la Princesse de Condé signed the order for Monsieur de Canolles to be set free; here is the order, and his name is specifically mentioned; look, I beg you."

"Certainly, madame, it is as you say, and I do not assume to deny the validity of the order; it will be as effectual a moment hence as now; be patient therefore; I have sent a person to investigate who will very soon return."

"But how does that concern us?" Claire persisted. "What connection is there between Monsieur de Canolles and the prisoner in number one?"

"Monsieur le Duc," said the captain of the guards, whom the duke had sent to make inquiries, "we have searched for the other prisoner to no purpose; he cannot be found, and the chief turnkey has also disappeared; his child, whom we questioned, says that his father and the prisoner went out together by the secret door that opens on the river."

"Oho!" ejaculated the duke, "do you know anything of this, Monsieur de Canolles? An escape!"

At these words the whole truth flashed upon Canolles in an instant. He understood that it was Nanon who was watching over him; that it was he whom the jailer had come to seek; that it was he for whom the designation of Madame de Lartigues' brother was intended; that Cauvignac had unwittingly taken his place, and found freedom where he thought to find death. All these thoughts rushed into his mind at the same moment; he put his hands to his head and staggered, and only recovered himself when he saw that the viscountess was trembling and gasping for breath at his side.

Not one of these involuntary tokens of alarm escaped the duke.

"Close the doors!" he shouted. "Monsieur de Canolles, be kind enough to remain; this affair must be investigated, as you will understand."

"But, Monsieur le Duc," cried poor Claire, "you do not presume, I trust, to act in opposition to an order of Madame la Princesse!"

"No, madame," said the duke, "but I conceive it to be most important that she should be informed of what has taken place. I will not say to you, 'I will go to her myself;' you might believe it to be my purpose to influence our august mistress; but I will say, 'Do you go, madame;' for you know better than any one how to solicit Madame de Condé's clemency."

Lenet made an almost imperceptible sign to Claire.

"Oh! I will not leave him!" she cried, convulsively pressing the young man's arm.

"I will go to her Highness," said Lenet; "do you come with me, captain; or come yourself, Monsieur le Duc."

"So be it, I will go with you. Monsieur le capitaine will remain here and continue the search in our absence; perhaps the other prisoner may be found."

As if to enforce the latter portion of his sentence, La Rochefoucauld said a few words in the officer's ear, then took his departure with Lenet.

At the same time the viscountess and Canolles were forced back into the court-yard by the crowd of horsemen in attendance upon Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, and the door clanged behind them.

During the last ten minutes the scene had taken on a character of such gravity and solemnity that all those who witnessed it stood by, pale-faced and silent, exchanging glances of deep meaning, and gazing at Canolles and Claire as if to read in their eyes which of the two was suffering the more. Canolles realized that it was for him to find courage for both; his demeanor was grave but most affectionate to his weeping companion, who clung to him, red-eyed and hardly able to stand, drew him closer to her side, smiled upon him with an expression of heart-breaking affection, and shuddered as she looked about upon that throng of men, seeking in vain one friendly face.

The captain, who had received his instructions from the duke, spoke in a low tone to his officers. Canolles, whose glance was keen, and whose ear was quick to hear the slightest hint that tended to change his suspicion to certainty, heard him, despite the care he took to speak as low as possible, utter these words:—

"We must devise some means of sending away that poor woman."

He tried thereupon to release his arm from the caressing grasp that detained it. Claire divined his purpose and clung to him with all her strength.

"You must continue your search," she cried; "perhaps they have not searched thoroughly, and the man will yet be found. Let us all search; it is not possible that he has escaped. Why should not Monsieur de Canolles have escaped with him? Come, Monsieur le Capitaine, order them to continue the search, I entreat you."

"They have searched, madame, and are searching at this moment. The jailer is well aware that his head will pay the penalty if he doesn't produce his prisoner; so that his interest alone would lead him to make a most thorough search."

"Mon Dieu!" murmured Claire, "and Monsieur Lenet does not return!"

"Patience, dear heart, patience," said Canolles, in the soothing tone in which one speaks to children; "Monsieur Lenet has but just gone; he has barely had time to reach Madame la Princesse; give him time to explain matters to her and then to return with her reply." He gently pressed her hand as he spoke; then, noticing that the captain of the guards was gazing at him intently and with evident impatience, he said to him:—

"Do you wish to speak with me, captain?"

"Yes, monsieur," he replied, for the unremitting scrutiny of the viscountess kept him on the rack.

"Monsieur," she cried, "take us to Madame la Princesse, I implore you. What difference can it make to you? As well take us to her as leave us here in suspense; she will see him, monsieur, she will see me, I will speak to her, and she will renew her promise."

"That is an excellent idea of yours, madame," said the officer, seizing hastily upon the suggestion; "go to her yourself, go! you have every chance of success."

"What do you say to it, baron?" the viscountess asked. "Do you think it would be well? You would not deceive me; what ought I to do?"

"Go, madame," said Canolles, with a mighty effort.

The viscountess dropped his arm, walked away a few steps, then ran back to him.

"Oh! no! no!" said she, "I will not leave him."

At that moment the outer door opened.

"Ah! God be praised!" she cried; "here are Monsieur Lenet and Monsieur

le Duc!"

Behind Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld with his sphinx-like face, came Lenet with sorrowful countenance and trembling hands. At the first glance he exchanged with the counsellor, Canolles saw that there was no hope for him, that his doom was sealed.

"What have you to tell?" demanded Claire, rushing impetuously to meet Lenet, and dragging Canolles with her.

"Madame la Princesse is much embarrassed—" stammered Lenet.

"Embarrassed!" cried Claire, "what does that mean?"

"It means that she asks for you," interposed the duke, "that she wishes to speak with you."

"Is that true, Monsieur Lenet," demanded Claire, without pausing to reflect that the question was an insult to the duke.

"Yes, madame," faltered Lenet.

"But what of him?" she asked.

"Of whom?"

"Monsieur de Canolles."

"Oh! Monsieur de Canolles will return to his cell, and you will bring back the princess's reply to him."

"Will you remain with him, Monsieur Lenet?"

"Madame—"

"Will you remain with him?" she repeated.

"I will not leave him."

"You will not leave him, you swear that you will not?"

"My God!" muttered Lenet, gazing from the man who awaited his sentence to the woman whose death one word from his mouth might cause. "My God! since one of the two is doomed, give me strength to save the other."

"You will not swear, Monsieur Lenet!"

"I swear," replied the counsellor, putting his hand to his heart.

"Thanks, monsieur," said Canolles beneath his breath, "I understand you. —Go, madame," he added, turning to the viscountess; "you see that between Monsieur Lenet and Monsieur le Duc I am in no danger."

"Do not let her go without embracing her," said Lenet.

Canolles' brow was bedewed with icy sweat; a sort of mist came before his eyes; he detained Claire, as she was about to leave him, and pretending that he had something to whisper to her, drew her to his heart, and said in her ear:—

"Entreat without servility; I wish to live for you, but you should wish me to live honored."

"I will entreat in such fashion as to save you," she replied; "are you not my husband in God's sight?"

Canolles, as he released her, found a way to touch her neck with his lips, but so cautiously that she did not feel it, and the poor creature, mad with apprehension, left him without returning his last kiss. As she was about to leave the court-yard she turned, but there was a line of guards between her and the prisoner.

"Where are you, my friend? I cannot see you; one word, one word I pray, so that I may go with your voice in my ears."

"Go, Claire," said Canolles. "I await your return."

"Go, go, madame," said a kind-hearted officer; "the sooner you go, the sooner you will return."

"Monsieur Lenet, dear Monsieur Lenet," cried Claire's voice in the distance, "I rely upon you; you will answer to me for him."

And the door closed behind her.

"Good!" muttered the philosophical duke; "that was not over pleasant; but at last we are in the realm of the possible once more."

III.

As soon as the viscountess had disappeared, and her voice had died away in the distance, the gate having been closed behind her, the circle of officers drew closer around Canolles, and two men of sinister mien, suddenly appearing as if they had sprung from the ground, approached the duke and humbly awaited his commands.

The duke simply pointed to the prisoner. He himself drew near to him, and said, with his customary glacial courtesy:—

"Monsieur, you doubtless understand that the departure of your companion in misfortune renders you liable to the penalty which was to be inflicted upon him."

"Yes, monsieur," replied Canolles, "I suspected as much; but there is one thing of which I am perfectly certain, that Madame la Princesse granted a pardon to me by name. I saw, and you yourself might have seen just now, the

order for my release in the hands of Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes."

"It is true, monsieur," said the duke, "but Madame la Princesse could not have anticipated the present state of affairs."

"I am to understand, then, that Madame la Princesse recalls her signature?"

"Yes," replied the duke.

"A princess of the blood is false to her word?"

The duke maintained his impassive demeanor.

Canolles looked about him.

"Has the time arrived?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I thought that you would await the return of Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes; you promised her that nothing should be done in her absence. It seems that nobody has any regard for his word to-day."

And the prisoner gazed reproachfully, not at the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, but at Lenet.

"Alas! monsieur," cried the latter, with tears in his eyes, "forgive us. Madame la Princesse positively refused to show mercy to you. I begged very earnestly none the less; Monsieur le Duc will bear witness to that, and God as well. But she deems it imperative that Richon's death should be paid for in kind, and she was as immovable as stone. Now do you yourself pass judgment on my conduct, Monsieur le Baron; instead of allowing the burden of your horrible situation to fall partly upon the viscountess, I ventured,—pray forgive me, for I feel that I stand in great need of your forgiveness,—I ventured to cause it to fall upon you alone, for you are a soldier and of gentle birth."

"In that case," faltered Canolles, whose voice was choked with emotion, "in that case I shall not see her again! When you bade me embrace her, it was for the last time!"

A sob stronger than stoicism or pride shook Lenet's frame. He stepped back and wept bitterly. Canolles thereupon fixed his piercing gaze upon the men who stood about him, but could see on every side none but faces rendered stern and pitiless by Richon's cruel death, and among them a very few timid creatures, who were stiffening their muscles to conceal their emotion and help them to swallow their tears and sighs.

"Oh! it is terrible to think upon," murmured the youth, in a moment of superhuman clearness of vision which opens before the soul a boundless field of view over what men call life,—that is to say, a few brief instants of

happiness scattered here and there like islands in the midst of an ocean of tears and suffering,—"terrible to think upon! I had in my arms the woman I adore, who had just told me for the first time that she loved me; I had before me a long and blissful life, the realization of my fondest dream; and lo! in a moment, in a second, death takes the place of it all!"

He felt a tightness at his heart, and a pricking sensation in his eyes as if he were going to weep; but he remembered in time that he was, as Lenet said, a soldier and a gentleman.

"O pride," he said to himself, "the only form of courage that has any real existence, come to my aid! Should I bewail the loss of so vain and futile a thing as life? How they would laugh if they could say: 'On learning that he was to die, Canolles wept!' How did I bear myself on the day I was besieged at Saint-Georges, when the Bordelais showed the same eagerness for my death as to-day? I fought, I jested, I laughed. Very good! by the heaven above, which hears my words and is mayhap dealing wrongfully with me; by the devil who is struggling at this moment with my good angel, I will bear myself to-day as I bore myself on that day, and if I no longer fight, I will at least continue to jest, and will laugh on to the end."

At once his face became calm, as if all emotion had vanished from his heart; he passed his hand through his beautiful black hair, and walked up to Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld and Lenet with a smile upon his lips.

"Messieurs," said he, "as you know, one requires time to become accustomed to everything in this world, which is so filled with strange and unexpected events; I have taken, and I did wrong not to ask your leave to take, a moment to accustom myself to the thought of death; if it was too long a time, I ask your pardon for compelling you to wait."

Profound astonishment was depicted on the faces of all the bystanders, and the prisoner was aware that that feeling soon gave place to admiration; his strength was increased tenfold by his consciousness of that sentiment, so honorable to him.

"Whenever you are ready, messieurs," said he; "I am waiting for you now."

The duke, dumbfounded for an instant, at once resumed his usual phlegmatic demeanor, and gave the signal. Thereupon the gates were opened and the procession made ready to set out.

"One moment," cried Lenet, to gain time; "one moment, Monsieur le Duc! We are escorting Monsieur de Canolles to his death, are we not?"

The duke made a gesture of surprise, and Canolles looked wonderingly at Lenet.

"Why, yes," said the duke.

"Very good!" rejoined Lenet, "in that case the gallant gentleman cannot do without a confessor."

"Pardon me, pardon me, monsieur," interposed Canolles; "I can do without one perfectly well."

"How so?" Lenet asked, making signs to the prisoner which he would not understand.

"Because I am a Huguenot," replied Canolles, "and a zealous Huguenot, too, I promise you. If you wish to confer one last favor upon me, I pray you let me die as I am."

Even as he repelled the suggestion, the young man made a gesture of gratitude, which proved that he perfectly understood Lenet's purpose.

"If there is no further cause for delay, let us be off," said the duke.

"Make him confess! make him confess!" cried a few of the more vindictive bystanders.

Canolles drew himself up to his full height, looked about him on all sides with a calm and confident glance, and said sternly to the duke:—

"Are we going to act like cowards, monsieur? Me-thinks that if any person has the right to follow out his desires, I, who am the hero of the fête, have that right, I refuse to see a confessor, but I demand the scaffold, and that at the earliest possible moment; 'tis my turn to be weary of waiting."

"Silence!" cried the duke, turning to the crowd. When silence was restored in obedience to his potent voice and glance, he said to Canolles:—

"Monsieur you may do as you choose."

"Thanks, monsieur. In that case, let us go, and quickly; may we not?"

Lenet took Canolles' arm.

"On the contrary, let us go slowly," said he. "Who knows? A reprieve, an occurrence that we cannot fore-see, are among the possibilities. Go slowly, I implore you in the name of her who loves you, and who will weep so bitterly if we go too fast."

"Oh! do not speak to me of her, I entreat; all my courage vanishes at the thought that I am to be parted forever from her. But what am I saying? On the other hand, Monsieur Lenet, do speak of her, tell me again and again that she loves me, and will always love me, and above all, that she will weep for me!"

"Come, come, my dear, unfortunate child," said Lenet, "do not give way to

your feelings; remember that these men are looking at you, and that they know not of whom we are speaking."

Canolles proudly raised his head, and his hair fell in wavy black curls about his neck. By this time they were in the street; the light of many torches shone upon his calm and smiling face.

He could hear women weeping, and there were some who said:—

"Poor baron, so young and so fair!"

They marched along for some time in silence; suddenly he exclaimed:—

"Oh! Monsieur Lenet, I would that I might see her once more!"

"Do you wish me to go in search of her, and bring her to you?" asked Lenet, who had no longer any will of his own.

"Oh! yes," whispered Canolles.

"Very well! I will go; but you will kill her."

"So much the better!" whispered selfishness to the young man's heart; "if you kill her, she will never belong to another."

But he overcame this last weakness as suddenly as it assailed him.

"No, no," said he, seizing Lenet's hand; "you promised to remain with me, so remain."

"What does he say?" the duke inquired of the captain of the guards.

Canolles overheard the question.

"I was saying, Monsieur le Duc," said he, "that I thought it was not so far from the prison to the Esplanade."

"Alas!" interposed Lenet, "do not complain of the distance, my poor boy, for we have arrived."

As he spoke the torch-bearers and the head of the procession disappeared around a street-corner.

Lenet pressed the young man's hand, then went up to the duke, determined to make one last effort before they actually reached the place of execution.

"Monsieur," said he, "once more I implore you for mercy! you will ruin our cause by executing Monsieur de Canolles."

"On the contrary," retorted the duke, "we prove that we deem it a just cause, as we do not fear to make reprisals."

"But reprisals can only be made between equals, Monsieur le Duc, and whatever you may say, the queen will still be queen, and we her subjects."

"Let us not discuss such matters before Monsieur de Canolles," rejoined the duke aloud; "surely you can see the impropriety."

"Do not speak of mercy before Monsieur le Duc;" retorted Canolles; "surely you can see that his coup d'État is in process of accomplishment; do not annoy him for so small a matter."

The duke made no reply; but his compressed lips and his ironical glance showed that the blow had struck home. Meanwhile they had not ceased to go forward, and Canolles now found himself at the entrance to the Esplanade. In the distance, that is, at the other side of the square, could be seen the crowd, in a vast circle formed by the glittering musket-barrels. In the centre arose a shapeless black something, which Canolles could not clearly distinguish in the shadow, and he thought that it was an ordinary scaffold. But when the torches reached the centre of the square, their light fell full upon that black object, at first unrecognizable, and revealed the hideous silhouette of a gibbet.

"A gibbet!" cried Canolles, halting, and pointing to the structure. "Is not that a gibbet that I see yonder, Monsieur le Duc?"

"It is; you are not mistaken," he replied, coldly.

A wrathful flush reddened the young man's brow; he threw aside the two soldiers who were marching on either hand, and at one bound found himself face to face with Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld.

"Monsieur," he cried, "do you forget that I am of gentle blood? All the world knows, even the executioner himself, that a nobleman is entitled to be beheaded."

"Monsieur, there are circumstances—"

"It is not in my own name that I speak," Canolles interrupted, "but in the name of all the nobility, in which you hold so high a place, who have been prince and are now duke; it will be a lasting shame, not for me, who am innocent, but for one and all of you, that one of your caste should die upon the gallows."

"Monsieur, Richon was hanged by order of the king."

"Richon, monsieur, was a gallant soldier, and at heart as noble as any man in this wide world, but he was not of noble birth; I am."

"You forget," said the duke, "that this is a matter of reprisals; were you a prince of the blood, we would hang you."

Canolles instinctively put his hand to his side for his sword, but when he failed to find it there, the realization of his situation came over him once more in all its force; his wrath vanished, and he remembered that his real superiority

lay in his very weakness.

"Monsieur philosopher," said he, "woe to those who resort to reprisals, and woe thrice over to those who, when they resort to them, lay aside all humanity! I did not plead for mercy, but justice. There are those who love me, monsieur; I emphasize the word, because I am aware that you yourself do not appreciate how one can love. Upon the hearts of those who love me you are about to impress forever, with the memory of my death, the dishonoring image of the gibbet. A sword-thrust, I beseech you, or a musket-ball! Give me your dagger that I may kill myself, and then you may hang my dead body if it will give you any pleasure."

"Richon was hanged alive, monsieur," was the cold reply.

"Be it so! Now, listen to what I say. Some day some frightful misfortune will overtake you; when that day comes, you will remember that it is punishment from on high: for my own part, I die with the firm conviction that my death is your work."

Thereupon Canolles, shuddering and pale, but filled with exalted courage, approached the gallows and stood, proud and disdainful, facing the populace, with his foot upon the first step of the ladder.

"Now, executioner," said he, "do your duty."

"There is only one!" cried the crowd in amazement; "the other! where is the other? we were promised two!"

"Ah! that is one thing that consoles me in a measure," said Canolles, with a smile; "this amiable populace is not content with what you are doing for it; do you hear what it says, Monsieur le Duc?"

"Death! death! vengeance for Richon!" roared ten thousand voices.

"If I irritate them," thought Canolles, "they are quite capable of tearing me in pieces; in that case I shall not be hanged, and Monsieur le Duc will go insane with rage.

"You are cowards!" he cried; "I see some among you who took part in the attack on Saint-Georges, when I made you all run away! You are venting your spite on me to-day because I whipped you."

A roar of rage was the only reply.

"You are cowards!" he repeated; "rebels, villains!"

A thousand knives gleamed in the air, and stones began to fall at the gallows foot.

"Good!" muttered Canolles. "The king hanged Richon," he added aloud,

"and he did well; when he takes Bordeaux, he will hang many another—"

At these words the crowd rushed like a torrent toward the gallows, broke through the guards, overturned the palisades, and threw themselves, roaring like wild beasts, upon the prisoner.

At a gesture from the duke, one of the executioners raised Canolles by taking him under the arms, while the other adjusted a noose around his neck.

Canolles felt the cord and redoubled his taunts and insults; if he wished to be killed in time he had not a moment to lose.

At that supreme moment he looked around for the last time; he could see naught but naming eyes and threatening arms. One man, however, a mounted soldier, pointed to his musket.

"Cauvignac! 'tis Cauvignac!" cried Canolles, clinging to the ladder with both his hands, which were not bound.

Cauvignac made a motion indicating that he had been unable to save him, and levelled his weapon at him. Canolles understood him.

"Yes, yes!" he cried, emphasizing his words with his head.

Now let us see how Cauvignac happened to be at hand.

IV.

We saw Cauvignac taking his departure from Libourne, and we know the object of his journey.

When he reached the spot where his men, under Ferguzon's command, lay in camp, he paused an instant, not to take breath, but to put in execution a plan which his inventive genius had formed in half an hour and while he was riding like the wind.

In the first place he said to himself, with infinite good sense, that if he made his appearance before Madame la Princesse after what had happened, Madame la Princesse, who was about to hang Canolles, against whom she had nothing, would not fail to hang him, of whom she had good reason to complain; and so his mission, which might be successful in so far that Canolles would be saved, would assuredly fail in that he would be hanged. He lost no time therefore in changing coats with one of his soldiers, ordered Barrabas, whose face was less familiar to Madame la Princesse, to don his most elaborate costume, and started off again at a gallop for Bordeaux in that worthy's company. He was disturbed about one thing, namely, the contents of the letter of which he was the bearer, and which his sister had written with such absolute confidence that he had but to hand it to Madame la Princesse to ensure Canolles' safety. His uneasiness on this point increased to such a degree

that he resolved to read the letter and set his mind at rest, remarking to himself that a shrewd negotiator could never succeed in his negotiation unless he knew all the ins and outs of the matter in hand; and then, too, if it must be said, Cauvignac never sinned in the direction of having too great confidence in his neighbor, and Nanon, though she was his sister,—indeed, for the very reason that she was his sister,—might very well bear her brother a grudge, in the first place because of the adventure of Jaulnay, and again because of his unforeseen escape from Château-Trompette, and might be trusting to chance to restore everything to its proper place.

He therefore unsealed the letter,—a very simple task, as it was sealed with a bit of wax only, and experienced a very strange and painful sensation as he read what follows:—

MADAME LA PRINCESSE,—It seems that you must have an expiatory victim for poor Richon's death; do not, I pray you, take an innocent man, but take the real culprit. I do not wish that Monsieur de Canolles should die, for to put him to death would be to avenge assassination by murder. As you read this letter I shall be within a league of Bordeaux, with all that I possess. You will deliver me to the populace, who detest me, for they have already tried twice to take my life, and you will keep for yourself my wealth, which amounts to two millions. Oh! madame, I ask this favor of you upon my knees; I am in part the cause of this war; with my death the province will be pacified and your Highness will be triumphant. Madame, a reprieve for quarter of an hour! You need not release Canolles until you have me in your power; but then, upon your soul, you will let him go, will you not?

And I shall be respectfully and gratefully yours,

NANON DE LARTIGUES.

Having read the letter Cauvignac was amazed beyond expression to find his heart swollen with emotion and his eyes moist.

He sat motionless and silent as if he could not believe his eyes. Suddenly he cried:—

"It is true, then, that there are in the world hearts that are generous for the mere pleasure of being generous! Morbleu! she shall see that I am as capable as another of being generous when the need arises."

As they were at the gates of the city, he handed the letter to Barrabas, with these instructions simply:—

"To whatever is said to you, reply: 'On the king's business!' nothing more, and deliver this letter into no hands but Madame la Princesse's own."

While Barrabas galloped away toward the princess's temporary domicile,

Cauvignac rode in the direction of Château-Trompette.

Barrabas met with no obstacle; the streets were empty, the city seemed deserted, for everybody had gone to the Esplanade.

At the palace gate the sentries undertook to forbid his passage, but, as Cauvignac bade him do, he waved his letter, crying:—

"On the king's business! On the king's business!"

The sentries took him for a messenger from the court, and raised their halberds, and Barrabas entered the palace without further hindrance.

If the reader will take the trouble to remember, this was not the first time that Master Cauvignac's worthy lieutenant had had the honor of appearing in Madame de Condé's presence. He alighted, and as he knew the road, darted rapidly up the staircase, passed through the crowd of startled servants, and made his way into the princess's suite. There he halted, for he found himself face to face with a woman at whose feet another woman was kneeling.

"Oh! madame, mercy, in the name of Heaven!" the latter was saying.

"Leave me, Claire," replied the princess; "be reasonable; remember that we have laid aside the emotions of womankind as well as the garments; we are Monsieur le Prince's lieutenants, and reasons of State control our actions."

"Oh! madame, there are no such things as reasons of State for me," cried Claire; "nor political parties; nor opinions. For me there is nothing and nobody in the world but the man who is to leave it, and when he has left it there will be naught for me but death!"

"Claire, my child, I have already told you that it is impossible; they put Richon to death, and if we do not return like for like we shall be dishonored."

"Ah! madame, one is never dishonored for having pardoned; one is never dishonored for having made use of the prerogative which belongs only to the King of Heaven, and the kings of earth; one word, madame, a single word; the poor boy is waiting!"

"Why, Claire, you are mad! I tell you it is impossible!"

"But I told him that he was safe; I showed him his pardon signed by your own hand; I told him that I would return with your ratification of the pardon!"

"I signed it on condition that the other was to die; why did he allow the other to escape?"

"He had absolutely no part in the escape, I give you my solemn word; besides, the other may not have escaped; he may yet be found."

"Very true! beware!" interposed Barrabas, who arrived at that moment.

"Madame, they will take him away; the time is flying, madame; they will grow weary of waiting."

"You are right, Claire," said the princess, "for I ordered that it should be all over at eleven, and the clock is just striking eleven; it must be all over."

The viscountess uttered a shriek of despair, and rose to her feet, to find herself face to face with Barrabas.

"Who are you? what do you want?" she cried. "Have you come so soon to tell me of his death?"

"No, madame," replied Barrabas, assuming his most affable expression, "on the contrary, I come to save him."

"How so?" cried Claire; "speak at once!"

"By handing this letter to Madame la Princesse."

Claire put out her hand, snatched the letter from the messenger, and handed it to the princess.

"I have no idea what there may be in this letter," said she, "but in Heaven's name read it!"

The princess opened the letter and read it aloud, while Madame de Cambes, turning paler at every line, devoured the words as they fell from her Highness's lips.

"From Nanon?" cried the princess when she had read it through. "Nanon is close by! Nanon gives herself up! Where is Lenet? Where is the duke? Call a messenger, a messenger!"

"I am here, madame," said Barrabas, "ready to go wherever your Highness would have me."

"Go to the Esplanade, to the place of execution, and bid them suspend operations,—but no, they would not believe you," she added, and seizing her pen, wrote at the bottom of the letter, "Suspend!" and handed it open to Barrabas, who rushed from the room.

"Ah!" murmured the viscountess, "she loves him more dearly than I; and he will owe his life to her, wretched creature that I am!"

Stunned by that thought, she fell helplessly upon a chair, although she had received upon her feet all the crushing blows of that terrible day.

Meanwhile Barrabas did not lose a second; he flew down the stairs as if he had wings, leaped upon his horse, and rode furiously away toward the Esplanade.

While he was on his way to the palace, Cauvignac had ridden straight to Château-Trompette. There, favored by the darkness, and rendered unrecognizable by the broad brim of his hat being pulled down over his eyes, he had questioned the bystanders and learned the whole story of his escape in all its details, and that Canolles was to pay the penalty for him. Instinctively, hardly aware of what he was doing, he thereupon hurried away to the Esplanade, driving the spurs into his horse, galloping madly through the crowd, upsetting and riding over every one who came in his way.

When he reached the Esplanade he spied the gallows, and uttered a yell, which was drowned by the howling of the populace, upon whom Canolles was heaping insults in order to excite them to tear him to pieces. It was then that Canolles saw him, divined his purpose, and motioned to him that he was welcome.

Cauvignac stood up in his stirrups and looked in every direction, hoping to see Barrabas or some messenger from the princess, and listening to hear the word: "Reprieve!" but he could see nobody and could hear nobody save Canolles, whom the executioner was just about to push from the ladder into eternity, and who pointed to his heart.

Thereupon Cauvignac raised his musket, pointed it toward the young man, took careful aim, and fired.

"Thanks!" said Canolles, opening his arms; "at least I die the death of a soldier."

The ball pierced his breast.

The executioner pushed the body from the ladder, and it swung at the end of the infamous rope; but it was nothing more than a corpse.

It was as if the report of the musket was a signal, so quickly was it followed by a thousand others.

Suddenly a voice cried:—

"Stop! stop! cut the rope!"

But the voice was drowned in the yelling of the mob; moreover, the rope was cut by a bullet. In vain did the guard resist; they were overborne by the huge waves of people; the gallows was overthrown and demolished; the executioners took flight; the crowd overflowed the square, seized upon the body, tore it limb from limb, and dragged the pieces about through the streets.

Stupid in its hatred, it believed that it was adding to the young nobleman's punishment, whereas it was really saving him from the infamy he dreaded so deeply.

During this scene Barrabas accosted the duke, and handed him the letter of which he was the bearer, although he could see for himself that he had arrived too late.

The duke, notwithstanding the brisk discharge of firearms, simply drew a little aside,—for his courage was as calm and cool as every other of his qualities,—and read the letter.

"It's a pity," he said, turning to his officers; "the plan that this Nanon suggests would have been preferable perhaps; but what's done is done.—By the way," he added after reflecting a moment, "as she is to await our reply on the other side of the river, we may even yet be able to gratify her."

Without further thought for the messenger, he put spurs to his horse, and rode back with his escort to the princess.

At that moment the storm which had been gathering for some time, burst over Bordeaux, and a heavy rain, accompanied with vivid lightning, deluged the Esplanade as if to wash it clean of innocent blood.

V.

While these things were taking place at Bordeaux, while the people were dragging the body of poor Canolles through the street, while the Duc de La Rochefoucauld was returning to flatter the pride of Madame la Princesse by pointing out to her that her power to do evil was as great as any queen's, while Cauvignac was spurring toward the city gates with Barrabas, deeming it useless to pursue their mission farther, a carriage drawn by four breathless, foam-flecked horses, came to a standstill upon the shore of the Garonne opposite Bordeaux, and between the villages of Belcroix and La Bastide.

Eleven o'clock had just struck.

A mounted courier, who followed the carriage, leaped hastily to the ground as it stopped, and opened the door.

A woman hurriedly alighted, looked up at the sky, which was all ablaze with a bright red light, and listened to the distant shouts and noises.

"You are sure," said she to the maid who alighted after her, "that we have not been followed?"

"No, madame; the two outriders who remained behind at madame's command, have just come up with the carriage, and they have not seen or heard anything."

"Do not you hear anything in the direction of the city?"

"It seems to me that I hear shouting in the distance."

"Do you see nothing?"

"I see something like the reflection of a fire."

"Those are torches."

"Yes, madame, yes, for they move about and dance up and down like wills o' the wisp; do you hear how much louder and more distinct the shouts seem to grow, madame?"

"Mon Dieu!" faltered the young woman, falling on her knees upon the damp soil; "mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

It was her only prayer. A single word presented itself to her mind; her lips could pronounce no other; it was the name of him who alone could perform a miracle in her favor.

The maid was not mistaken. Torches were waving and the cries seemed to be coming nearer; a musket-shot rang out, followed by fifty others and by a tremendous uproar; then the torches vanished and the shouts receded; a storm was rumbling overhead, the rain began to fall; but what cared Nanon for that? It was not the lightning of which she was afraid.

Her eyes were constantly fixed upon the spot where she had heard so great a tumult. She could no longer see or hear anything at that spot, and it seemed to her in the glare of the lightning that the square was empty.

"Oh! I haven't the strength to wait here any longer," she cried. "To Bordeaux! take me to Bordeaux!"

Suddenly she heard the sound of horses' footsteps rapidly approaching.

"Ah! they are coming at last," she cried. "Here they are! Adieu, Finette, I must go alone; take her up behind you, Lombard, and leave in the carriage everything that I brought."

"But what do you mean to do, madame, in God's name?" cried the terrified maid.

"Adieu, Finette; adieu!"

"But why, adieu, madame? Where are you going?"

"I am going to Bordeaux."

"Oh! don't do that, madame, in heaven's name! they will kill you."

"Very good! for what purpose do you suppose that I am going thither?"

"Oh! madame! Help, Lombard! help me prevent madame—"

"Hush! leave me, Finette. I have remembered you, never fear: go; I do not

wish that any harm should befall you. Obey me! They are coming nearer, here they are."

As she spoke a man galloped up to the carriage, followed at some little distance by another horseman; his horse was roaring rather than breathing.

"Sister! sister!" he cried. "Ah! I come in time!"

"Cauvignac!" cried Nanon. "Well, is it all arranged? Is he awaiting me? Shall we go?"

But, instead of replying, Cauvignac leaped down from his horse, and seized Nanon in his arms. She allowed him to do as he pleased, with the stiff inertness of ghosts and fools. He placed her in the carriage, bade Lombard and Francinette take their places beside her, closed the door, and leaped upon his horse. In vain did poor Nanon, once more in possession of her faculties, shriek and struggle.

"Do not release her," said Cauvignac: "whatever happens do not release her. Keep the other door, Barrabas, and do you, coachman, keep your horses on the gallop or I'll blow your brains out."

These orders followed one another so rapidly that there was a moment's delay in putting them in execution; the carriage was slow to move, the servants were trembling with apprehension, even the horses seemed to hesitate.

"Look alive there, ten thousand devils!" shouted Cauvignac; "they are coming! they are coming!"

In the distance could be heard the hoof-beats of many horses, approaching rapidly with a noise like thunder.

Fear is contagious. The coachman, at Cauvignac's threat, realized that some great danger was impending, and seized the reins.

"Where are we going?" he faltered.

"To Bordeaux! to Bordeaux!" cried Nanon from within the carriage.

"To Libourne, ten thousand furies!" cried Cauvignac.

"Monsieur, the horses will fall before they have gone two leagues."

"I don't ask them to go so far!" retorted Cauvignac, spurring them with his sword. "Let them hold out as far as Ferguzon's camp, that's all I ask."

The heavy vehicle thereupon set forth at a terrifying pace. Men and horses, sweating, gasping, bleeding, urged one another on, the first by their shouts, the others by their loud neighing.

Nanon tried to resist, to free herself, to leap down from the carriage, but

she exhausted her strength in the struggle, and soon fell back utterly worn out; she was no longer conscious of what was taking place. By dint of seeking to distinguish Cauvignac amid the hurly-burly of fleeing shadows, her head went round and round; she closed her eyes with a despairing cry, and lay cold and motionless in her maid's arms.

Cauvignac rode forward to the horses' heads. His horse left a trail of fire along the road.

"Help, Ferguzon! help!" he cried.

His call was answered by a cheer in the distance.

"Demons of hell," cried Cauvignac, "you are playing against me, but I believe, upon my soul, that you will lose again to-day. Ferguzon! Ferguzon! help!"

Two or three musket shots rang out in their rear, and were answered by a general discharge from in front.

The carriage came to a stand-still; two of the horses fell from exhaustion, and a third was struck by a bullet.

Ferguzon and his men fell upon the troops of Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld; as they outnumbered them three to one, the Bordelais soon found it hopeless to continue the struggle; they turned tail and fled, and victors and vanquished, pursuers and pursued, vanished in the darkness like a cloud driven by the wind.

Cauvignac remained with the footmen and Francinette beside the insensible Nanon. Luckily they were within a hundred yards of the village of Carbonblanc. Cauvignac carried Nanon in his arms as far as the first house; and there, having given orders to bring up the carriage, placed his sister upon a bed, and, taking from his breast an object which Francinette could not distinguish, slipped it into the poor woman's clenched hand.

The next morning, on awaking from what she thought at first was a frightful dream, Nanon put her hand to her face, and felt something soft and silky caress her pale cheeks. It was a lock of Canolles' hair which Cauvignac had heroically rescued, at the peril of his life, from the Bordelais tigers.

VI.

For eight days and nights Madame de Cambes lay tossing in delirium upon the bed to which she was carried, unconscious, upon learning the terrible news.

Her women took care of her, but Pompée kept the door; no other than the old servant, as he knelt beside his unhappy mistress's bed, could awake in her

a glimmer of reason.

Numerous visitors besieged the door; but the faithful squire, as inflexible in carrying out his orders as an old soldier should be, courageously denied admission to all comers, at first from the conviction that any visitor whatsoever would annoy his mistress, and subsequently by order of the physician, who feared the effect of too great excitement.

Every morning Lenet presented himself at the door, but it was closed to him as to all others. Madame la Princesse herself appeared there with a large retinue, one day when she had been to call upon poor Richon's mother, who lived in a suburb of the city. It was her purpose, aside from her interest in the viscountess, to show perfect impartiality. She came therefore, intending to play the gracious sovereign; but Pompée informed her with the utmost respect that he had strict orders from which he could not depart; that all men, even dukes and generals, and all women, even princesses, were included in the terms of his orders, and Madame de Condé above all others, inasmuch as a visit from her, after what had happened, would be likely to cause a terrible paroxysm.

The princess, who was fulfilling, or thought she was fulfilling, a duty, and asked nothing better than to avoid the interview, did not wait to be told twice, but took her leave with her suite.

On the ninth day Claire recovered consciousness; it was noticed that, during her delirium, which lasted eight times twenty-four hours, she wept incessantly; although fever ordinarily dries up the source of tears, hers had ploughed a furrow, so to speak, beneath her eyes, which were surrounded by a circle of red and pale blue, like those of the sublime Virgin of Rubens.

On the ninth day, as we have said, when it was least expected, and when her attendants were beginning to lose hope, her reason suddenly returned, as if by enchantment; her tears ceased to flow; her eyes gazed about upon her surroundings, and rested with a sad smile upon the maids who had cared for her so zealously, and upon Pompée who had so faithfully stood guard at her door. Then she lay for some hours, with her head resting on her hand, without speaking, dry-eyed, dwelling upon the same thought, which recurred to her mind again and again with ever-increasing force.

Suddenly, without considering whether her strength was commensurate with her determination, she exclaimed:

"Dress me."

Her women drew near, dumbfounded, and undertook to remonstrate; Pompée stepped a short distance into the room and clasped his hands imploringly.

But the viscountess repeated, gently, but firmly:—

"I bade you dress me."

The women made ready to obey. Pompée bowed and backed out of the room.

Alas! the plump, rosy cheeks were now as pale and thin as those of the dying; her hand, as beautiful as ever, and of as lovely shape, was almost transparent, and lay as white as ivory upon her breast, which put to shame the snowy linen wherein it was enveloped. Beneath her skin could be seen the violet veins which told of the exhaustion caused by great suffering. The clothes she had laid aside the day before, so to speak, and which then fitted closely to her slender, graceful form, now fell about her in loose folds.

They dressed her as she wished, but it was a long operation, for she was so weak that thrice she nearly fainted. When she was dressed she walked to the window, but turning sharply away, as if the sight of the sky and the city terrified her, she seated herself at a table, asked for pen and ink, and wrote a note to Madame la Princesse, soliciting the favor of an audience.

Ten minutes after the letter had been despatched by the hand of Pompée to its destination, a carriage stopped at the door, and almost immediately Madame de Tourville was announced.

"Was it really you," she cried, "who wrote to Madame la Princesse requesting an audience."

"Yes, madame; will she refuse me?"

"Oh! far from it, my dear child; I came hither at once to say to you from her that you know perfectly well that you have no need to request an audience, for you are welcome at any hour of the day or night."

"Thanks, madame," said Claire, "I will avail myself of the privilege."

"How so?" cried Madame de Tourville. "Do you mean to go out in your present condition?"

"Have no fear, madame," replied the viscountess; "I feel perfectly well."

"And you will come?"

"Instantly."

"I will go and tell Madame la Princesse of your purpose."

And Madame de Tourville went out as she came in, with a ceremonious reverence to the viscountess.

The prospect of this unexpected visit produced, as will readily be

understood, great excitement in the little court. The viscountess's plight had aroused an interest as keen as it was widespread, for it was by no means true that Madame La Princesse's conduct in the late affair was universally approved. Curiosity was at its height, therefore; officers, maids of honor, courtiers, thronged to Madame de Condé's cabinet, hardly able to believe in the promised visit, for it was but the day before that Claire's condition was represented to be almost hopeless.

Suddenly Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes was announced.

At the sight of those pallid features, as cold and motionless as marble, the hollow, black-ringed eyes, from which all the life and fire had fled, a murmur of compassion made itself heard in the princess's circle.

Claire did not seem to notice it.

Lenet, deeply moved, walked forward to meet her, and timidly put out his hand. But Claire, without accepting it, walked past him toward Madame de Condé, whom she saluted with noble dignity. She walked the whole length of the apartment with firm step, although she was so pale that she thought every moment that she would fall.

The princess, herself intensely excited and deathly pale, watched Claire's approach with a feeling resembling terror; nor had she the strength to conceal the feeling, which was plainly depicted on her face.

"Madame," said the viscountess in a grave voice, "I have requested this audience which your Highness is pleased to grant me, in order to ask you, in the face of all, if you have been content with my fidelity and devotion since I have had the honor to serve you."

The princess put her handkerchief to her lips, and faltered:—

"Most assuredly, my dear viscountess, I have had reason to praise your conduct on all occasions, and I have expressed my gratitude to you more than once."

"That statement is very precious to me, madame, for it permits me to solicit your Highness to relieve me from further attendance upon you."

"What!" cried the princess, "you wish to leave me, Claire?"

Claire bowed respectfully, but made no reply. Shame, remorse, or sorrow could be detected upon every face. A deathlike silence pervaded the assembly.

"But why do you leave me?" continued the princess at last.

"I have but a few days to live, madame," replied the viscountess, "and those few days I desire to pass in caring for the welfare of my soul."

"Claire, dear Claire!" cried the princess, "pray reflect—"

"Madame," the viscountess interrupted, "I have two favors to ask at your hands; may I hope that you will grant them?"

"Oh! speak, speak!" cried Madame de Condé, "for I shall be only too happy if I can do aught for you."

"You can, madame."

"What are the favors you wish to ask me?"

"The first is the gift of the abbacy of Sainte-Radegonde, vacant since the death of Madame de Montivy."

"You an abbess, my dear child! surely you cannot think of it!"

"The second, madame," continued Claire, with a slight trembling in her voice, "is that I may be permitted to inter on my estate at Cambes the body of my fiancé, Monsieur le Baron Raoul de Canolles, murdered by the the people of Bordeaux."

The princess turned away and pressed a trembling hand to her heart. The Duc de La Rochefoucauld turned pale and lost countenance. Lenet opened the door and fled incontinently.

"Your Highness does not deign to reply," said Claire; "do you refuse? Perhaps I have asked too much."

Madame de Condé had only enough strength to nod her head in token of assent, before she fell back in a swoon upon her chair.

Claire turned away as unmoved as if she were of stone, and passed majestically from the room through the lane of courtiers, standing with heads bent; not until the door had closed behind her, did they realize that no one had thought of going to Madame de Condé's assistance.

Five minutes later a carriage rolled slowly out of the court-yard; Madame de Cambes was taking leave of Bordeaux.

"What is your Highness's decision?" Madame de Tourville inquired of Madame de Condé when she came to herself.

"Comply with the wishes of Madame la Vicomtesse de Cambes in respect to both the petitions she addressed to us just now, and implore her to forgive us."

EPILOGUE

I.

THE ABBESS OF SAINTE-RADEGONDE DE PEYSSAC.

A month had passed away since the events we have described. One Sunday evening, after vespers, the Abbess of Sainte-Radegonde de Peyssac came forth last from the church at the end of the convent garden, now and then turning her tear-reddened eyes toward a dark thicket of yews and fir-trees, with such an expression of longing and regret that one would have said that her heart was in that spot and seeking to detain her there.

Before her, the nuns, veiled and silent, walking in single file along the path to the convent, seemed like a long procession of phantoms returning to the tomb, followed by another phantom who left the earth behind regretfully.

One by one the nuns disappeared beneath the sombre arches of the cloister; the superior followed them with her eyes until the last one had entered, then let them fall upon the capital of a Gothic column half buried in the grass, with an indescribable expression of hopeless despair.

"Oh, my God! my God!" said she, placing her hand on her heart, "thou art my witness that I cannot endure this life, of which I did not realize the true nature. I sought solitude and obscurity in the cloister, and not the constant scrutiny of all these curious eyes."

With that she raised her head, and took a step toward the little clump of firs.

"After all," said she, "what matters the world to me, since I have denied it? The world has done me naught but injury; society has been pitiless to me, and why should I concern myself with its opinions,—I, who have sought shelter with God, and depend upon him alone? But perhaps God frowns upon this love which lives on in my heart and consumes it. In that case, may he either tear it from my heart, or tear my heart from my body!"

But no sooner had the poor desperate creature pronounced these words than, casting her eyes upon the gown she wore, she was horrified at the thought of the blasphemy of which she had been guilty, so out of harmony was it with her saintly costume. With her thin white hand she wiped away the tears that glistened on her eyelids, and, raising her eyes to heaven, consecrated her life to everlasting suffering in a single look.

At that moment she heard a voice at her ear; it was the voice of the sister who kept the door of the convent.

"Madame," said she, "there is a woman in the parlor who wishes to be allowed to speak to you."

"Her name?"

"She refuses to tell it except to you."

"To what class in life does she seem to belong?"

"She seems a person of distinction."

"Still society, society!" murmured the abbess.

"What answer shall I give her?"

"That I await her coming."

"Where, madame?"

"Bring her hither; I will listen to her here in the garden, sitting upon this bench. I need the air; I stifle when I am indoors."

The portress withdrew, to reappear a moment later, followed by a woman whom it was easy to recognize as a woman of distinction by her garments, which were handsome, although of sombre hue.

She was rather below the average height; her rapid gait lacked something of nobility perhaps, but her presence exhaled an indescribable charm. She carried under her arm a little ivory casket, whose polished whiteness contrasted sharply with the black satin of her jet-trimmed dress.

"Madame," said the portress, "this is Madame la Supérieure."

The abbess lowered her veil, and turned toward the stranger, and as she saw that she kept her eyes turned upon the ground, and that she was deadly pale and trembling with emotion, she bestowed a kindly glance upon her, and said:—

"You expressed a wish to speak with me, and I am ready to listen to you, my sister."

"Madame," replied the stranger, "I have been so happy that in my pride I have thought that not even God himself could destroy my happiness. To-day God has breathed upon it, and I feel that I must weep and repent I have come to seek shelter here, so that my sobs may be stifled by the thick walls of your convent, and that my tears, which trace a furrow upon my cheeks, may not make me a laughing-stock to the world; so that God, who might seek me amid scenes of merry-making, would find me weeping in the sanctuary, and praying contritely at its altar."

"Your heart is deeply wounded, I can see, for I too know what it is to suffer," replied the young superior; "and in its agony the heart cannot clearly distinguish between what really is, and what it desires. If solitude, mortification of the flesh, and to do penance are what you need, my sister,

come to us, and suffer with us; but if you seek a place where you can give vent freely to your grief and your despair, where no curious gaze will be fastened upon you, oh, madame! madame! fly from this place, and take refuge in your own room, where the world will see you much less than you will be seen here, and the hangings of your oratory will absorb the sound of your sobs much more effectively than the planks of our cells. And God, unless the enormity of your crimes has compelled him to turn his eyes away from you, will see you wherever you are."

The stranger raised her head, and gazed in profound amazement at the young abbess who talked in such an extraordinary strain.

"Why, madame," said she, "should not all who suffer seek the Lord's help; and is not your establishment a consecrated station upon the way to heaven?"

"There is but one path that leads to God, my sister," replied the nun, carried away by her despair. "What do you regret? For what do you weep? What do you desire? Society has turned a cold shoulder upon you, your friends are false to you, you lack money, or some transitory sorrow has made you a believer in everlasting misery; am I not right? You are suffering at this moment, and you fancy that you will suffer always thus, even as, when one sees an open wound, one fancies that it will never close. But you are mistaken; every wound that is not mortal will heal; so suffer on, and let your sorrow take its course; you will be cured, and then, if you are bound to us, suffering of another sort will begin; and that suffering will be in very truth unending, implacable, and past endurance. You will look out, through a barrier of brass, upon the world, to which you cannot return; then you will curse the day when the door of this holy hostelry, which you take for a station on the road to heaven, closed upon you. This that I say to you is not in strict accordance with our rules perhaps,—I have not been abbess long enough to know them thoroughly,—but 't is in strict accord with the feelings of my heart, and it is what I see every hour, not, in my own case, thank God! but all about me."

"Oh! no, no!" cried the stranger, "the world is at an end for me; I have lost everything that made the world attractive to me. No, madame, have no fear; I shall never regret it, never,—I am sure I shall never regret it!"

"Then the sorrow that afflicts you has a deeper source? Instead of an illusion have you lost a reality? Have you been separated forever from a husband, or child—or from a friend? Ah! then I pity you with all my heart, madame, for your heart is pierced from side to side and your wound is incurable. In that case, come to us, madame; the Lord will comfort you; he will replace the friends or kindred you may have lost with us, who form one large family, a flock of which he is the shepherd; and," added the abbess in a lower tone, "if he does not comfort you, which is quite possible, there will

remain to you the last poor consolation of weeping with me, who came hither like yourself, in quest of comfort, but have not yet found it here."

"Alas!" cried the stranger, "was it such words as these that I hoped to hear? Is it thus that the unhappy are consoled?"

"Madame," said the superior, putting out her hand as if to ward off the rebuke, "do not speak of unhappiness before me; I know not who you may be, I know not what has happened to you, but you know nothing of unhappiness."

"Oh!" cried the stranger, in an agonized tone which made the superior shudder, "you do not know me, madame, for if you did know me, you would not speak so to me; besides, you cannot fairly judge my suffering, for to do that you must have suffered what I suffer; meanwhile, receive me, make me welcome, open the gates of God's house to me; and by my tears and cries and agony you will know if I am truly unhappy."

"Yes," said the superior, "I realize from your accent and from your words that you have lost the man you love, have you not?"

The stranger sobbed, and wrung her hands.

"Oh! yes, yes!" said she.

"Very well; since it is your desire, be one of our community; but first let me tell you what awaits you here, if your sufferings are equal to mine: two everlasting, pitiless walls, which, instead of turning our thoughts toward heaven, whither they should rise, constantly confine them to the earth, from which you will be separated; for while the blood flows, and the pulses beat, and the heart loves, none of the faculties are extinct; isolated as we are, and hidden from sight as we believe ourselves to be, the dead call to us from the depths of the tomb: 'Why do you leave the place where your dead are buried?'"

"Because all that I have loved in the world is here," replied the stranger, in a choking voice, throwing herself at the feet of the superior, who gazed at her in profound astonishment. "Now you have my secret, my sister; now you can understand my grief, my mother. I implore you on my knees—you see my tears—to accept the sacrifice I make to God, or rather to grant the favor I ask at your hands. He is buried in the church of Peyssac; let me weep upon his tomb, which is here."

"What tomb? Of whom are you speaking? What do you mean?" cried the superior, drawing back from the kneeling woman, at whom she gazed with something very like terror.

"When I was happy," continued the penitent, in a voice so low that it was drowned by the sighing of the wind among the branches, "when I was happy—and I have been very happy—I was called Nanon de Lartigues. Do you

recognize me now, and do you know what it is that I implore?"

The superior sprang to her feet as if released by a spring, and stood for a moment, motionless and pale, with uplifted eyes and clasped hands.

"Oh, madame!" she said at last in a voice which she struggled to render calm, but which trembled with emotion, "oh, madame, is it true that you, who come here to weep beside a tomb, have no knowledge who I am? You do not know that I have purchased with my freedom, with my happiness in this world, and with all the tears of my heart the melancholy pleasure of which you now claim an equal portion. You are Nanon de Lartigues; I, when I had a name, was the Vicomtesse de Cambes."

Nanon, with a sharp cry, walked up to the superior, and, raising the hood which shaded the nun's dull eyes, recognized her rival.

"'T is she!" murmured Nanon. "And she was so lovely when she came to Saint-Georges! Poor woman!"

She stepped back, with her eyes still fixed on the viscountess, and shaking her head.

"Oh!" cried the viscountess with a touch of the pride that all men feel to know that their capacity for suffering is greater than their fellows'; "it is kind of you to say that, and it has done me good. I must have suffered cruelly to have undergone so cruel a change; I must have wept bitterly; I am more unhappy than you, therefore, for you are lovely still."

And the viscountess raised her eyes, beaming with the first ray of joy that had shone in them for a month past, as if seeking Canolles in the sky above her head.

Nanon, still on her knees, hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Alas! madame," said she, "I did not know to whom my petition was addressed; for the last month I have known nothing of what was taking place, and that ignorance has preserved my beauty; beyond all question I have been mad. Now I am at your command. I have no desire to make you jealous of the dead. I ask to be admitted here as the humblest of your nuns; you can do with me as you please, and if I disobey you can subject me to the severest discipline,—you have the dungeon and the impace. But," she added in a trembling voice, "you will at least let me from time to time see the place where the man we both loved so dearly is buried?"

She fell, sobbing and almost unconscious, upon the turf.

The viscountess made no reply; leaning against the trunk of a sycamore, she seemed ready to expire at her side.

"Oh! madame," cried Nanon, "you do not answer; you refuse! Be it so; I have a single treasure in my possession, and you perhaps have nothing that was his; grant my request and that treasure is yours."

As she spoke she took from her breast a large locket which was attached to a gold chain about her neck, and, offered it to Madame de Cambes, holding it open in her hand.

Claire pounced upon the relic, and kissed the cold, life-less hair with such vehemence that it seemed as if her heart came to her lips to share the kiss.

"Do you think," said Nanon, still kneeling at her feet, "that you have ever suffered more than I suffer at this moment?"

"Ah! you carry the day, madame," said Claire, lifting her up and taking her to her arms; "come, come, my sister, for I love you better than all the world for having shared this treasure with me."

She leaned over Nanon, as she gently raised her, and lightly kissed her cheek who had been her rival.

"Yes, you shall be my sister and my dearest friend," said she; "yes, we will live and die together, talking of him and praying for him. He sleeps near by in our church; it was the only favor I could obtain from her to whom I devoted my life. May God forgive her!"

With that, Claire took Nanon's hand, and side by side, stepping so lightly that they scarcely bent the blades of grass beneath their feet, they walked to the clump of yew-trees behind which the church was hidden.

The viscountess led Nanon to a chapel, in the centre of which a simple stone stood up some four inches above the ground; a cross was carved upon the stone.

The viscountess pointed to it without speaking.

Nanon knelt and kissed the cold marble. Claire leaned against the altar, kissing the lock of hair. The one was trying to accustom herself to the thought of death, the other to dream for the last time of life.

A quarter of an hour after, the two women returned together to the house. Except to pray, they had not for an instant broken their woebegone silence.

"Madame," said the viscountess, "from this hour you have your cell in this convent; would you like the one adjoining mine?—we shall be separated less."

"I thank you very humbly, madame," said Nanon, "for the offer, and I gratefully accept it. But before I leave the world forever let me say farewell for the last time to my brother, who is waiting at the gate; he also is overcome with sorrow."

"Alas!" said Claire, to whose mind the thought came instinctively that Cauvignac's safety caused the death of his companion in captivity; "go, my sister."

Nanon left the room.

II.

THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

As Nanon said, Cauvignac was waiting, sitting upon a stone a few steps from his horse, at whom he was gazing sadly, while the horse himself browsing upon the dry grass so far as the length of his rein permitted, raised his head from time to time to gaze intelligently into his master's face.

Before the adventurer was the dusty road, which, as it passed out of sight a short distance away among the elms which covered a slight elevation, seemed to start from the convent to lose itself in space.

One might have said, and it may have occurred to the adventurer, although his mind was little given to philosophical turns of thought, that over yonder was the world, and that its tumult died at that cross-surmounted iron gate.

In fact, Cauvignac had arrived at that stage of introspection when we might fairly expect him to have thought upon such subjects.

But he had already forgotten himself in this sentimental reverie over long for a man of his character. He appealed therefore to his consciousness of what his manly dignity required of him, and, ashamed of having been so weak, said to himself:—

"What! should not I, who am so superior in mind to all these men of courage, be at least their equal in courage, or rather in lack of courage? Damnation! Richon is dead, beyond question; Canolles is dead, that is equally true; but I am still alive, and after all, that, it seems to me, is the principal thing.

"Very good; but for the very reason that I am alive, I think, and when I think, I remember, and when I remember, I am sad. Poor Richon! such a gallant officer! Poor Canolles! such a handsome fellow!—both hanged, and that by my fault, ten thousand devils! by the fault of Roland Cauvignac! Ouf! 't is a sorry affair; I am choking.

"And with all the rest, my sister, who has not always had reason to applaud my acts, as she has no farther motive for humoring me, now that Canolles is dead and she has been fool enough to break with Monsieur d'Épernon,—my sister has probably a deadly grudge against me, and as soon as she has a moment to herself will take advantage of it to disinherit me during her lifetime.

"Sure it is that that is the real source of my misfortunes, and not these infernal memories that haunt me. Canolles, Richon; Richon, Canolles! In God's name, have I not seen men die by hundreds, and were they anything more than men? But there are times all the same when, upon my honor, I believe I regret that I was not hanged with him; I should have died in good company at least, but who can say in what company I shall die now?"

At that moment the monastery clock struck seven. The sound recalled Cauvignac to himself, for he remembered that his sister bade him wait until seven o'clock, and the bell announced that Nanon would soon appear, and he would be called upon to resume his rôle of comforter.

The door opened immediately, in fact, and Nanon did appear. She walked across the little court-yard where Cauvignac might have waited had he chosen, strangers being privileged to enter there; for it had not yet become hallowed ground, although it could hardly be called a profane spot.

But the adventurer preferred not to go so far, saying that the proximity of convents, especially of convents of women, gave him always unpleasant thoughts, and so he remained, as we have said, outside the gate upon the road.

As he heard steps upon the sand Cauvignac turned and saw Nanon, still separated from him by the barred gate.

"Ah!" said he, with a tremendous sigh, "here you are at last, little sister. When I see one of these ghastly gates close upon a poor woman, I always think of the door of the tomb closing upon a dead man, and I no more expect to see the one again without her novice's frock, than the other without his winding-sheet."

Nanon smiled sadly.

"Good!" said Cauvignac, "you have ceased to weep; that's a point gained."

"True," said Nanon, "I can weep no more."

"But you can still smile, and that's much better; by your leave we'll go now, shall we not? I don't know why it is, but this place awakens all sorts of thoughts in my mind."

"Salutary?"

"Salutary indeed! is that what you call them? However, we won't discuss the matter, and I am delighted that you think them so. You have laid in a goodly store of the same kind, I trust, dear sister, and will have no occasion to come hither in search of more for a long while."

Nanon did not reply; she was thinking.

"Among these salutary thoughts," Cauvignac ventured to suggest, "I trust

that you have cultivated forgetfulness of injuries done you?"

"Forgiveness, at least, if not forgetfulness."

"I should prefer the other, but no matter; one must not be too exacting when one is in the wrong. You forgive the wrong I have done you, little sister?"

"It is all forgiven."

"Ah! you delight me beyond expression; henceforth, then, you will feel no repugnance at the sight of me?"

"Not only no repugnance, but great pleasure."

"Pleasure?"

"Yes, my friend."

"Your friend! Ah! Nanon, that is a title that pleases me, for you are under no compulsion to bestow it on me, while you are compelled to call me your brother; so you can endure to have me near you?"

"Oh! I do not say that," replied Nanon; "certain things are impossible, we must both recognize that."

"I understand," said Cauvignac, with a sigh of greater proportions than the first. "Exiled! you exile me, isn't that what it amounts to? I am to see you no more. Very well! although it's a very painful thing for me to see you no more, upon my honor, Nanon, still I know that I deserve it, and I have brought it upon myself. Moreover, what is there for me to do in France, now that peace is made, Guyenne pacified, and the queen and Madame de Condé are the best friends in the world? You see, I am no such fool as to fancy that I am in the good graces of either of the two princesses. So the best thing I can do is to go into exile, as you say. Bid farewell to the wanderer, little sister. There is war in Africa; Monsieur de Beaufort is going to fight the heathen, and I will go with him. To tell the truth, it's not that the heathen do not seem to me to be a thousand times nearer right than the faithful; but that's for kings to decide, not for us. I may be killed over yonder, and that's all I ask. I will go; you will hate me less, when you know I am dead."

Nanon, who had listened to this flow of words with lowered head, raised her great eyes to Cauvignac's face.

"Do you mean this?" she asked.

"What?"

"This that you say you are contemplating, brother."

Cauvignac had allowed himself to be drawn into this long harangue, like a

man accustomed to warm himself up with the sound of his own voice in default of real feeling. Nanon's question called him back to the actual, and he bethought himself how he could descend from that fine frenzy to something more commonplace, but more business-like.

"Well, yes, little sister," said he, "I swear—by what? I know not. Look you, I swear, *foi de Cauvignac*, that I am really sad and unhappy since Richon's death and—In fact, sitting there on that stone just now, I used numberless arguments to harden my heart, which I had never heard of until now, but which now is not content to beat, but talks and cries and weeps. Tell me, Nanon, is that what you call remorse?"

The appeal was so natural and pitiful, despite its burlesque savagery, that Nanon realized that it came from the bottom of the heart.

"Yes," said she, "it is remorse, and you are a better man than I thought."

"Very well, if it is remorse here goes for the African campaign; you will give me a trifle to cover the expense of the journey and my equipment, won't you, little sister? Would I could carry away all your grief with my own!"

"You will not go away, my friend," said Nanon, "but you will live henceforth as prosperously as those most favored by destiny. For ten years you have straggled with poverty; I say nothing of the risks you have run, for they are incident to the life of a soldier. On this last occasion your life was saved where another's life was lost; it must have been God's will that you should live, and it is my desire, quite in accord with his will, that your life from this day on shall be happy."

"What a way you have of saying that, little sister! Pray what do you mean by it?"

"I mean that you are to go to my house at Libourne before it is pillaged; there you will find in the secret cupboard behind my Venetian mirror—"

"In the secret cupboard?" queried Cauvignac.

"Yes, you know it well, do you not?" said Nanon, with a feeble smile; "you took two hundred pistoles from it last month, didn't you?"

"Nanon, do me the justice to admit that I might have taken more had I wished, for the cupboard was filled with gold; but I took no more than the sum that I actually needed."

"That is true," said Nanon, "and I am only too glad to bear witness to it, if it excuses you in your own eyes."

Cauvignac blushed and hung his head.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Nanon, "think no more about it; you know that I forgive

you."

"What proof have I?"

"This: you will go to Libourne, you will open the cupboard, and you will find there all of my fortune that I was able to turn into money,—twenty thousand crowns in gold."

"What shall I do with them?"

"Take them."

"But to whom are the twenty thousand crowns to belong?"

"To you, my brother; it is all that I have to give, for, as you know, when I left Monsieur d'Épernon I asked nothing for myself, and my houses and lands were seized."

"What do you say, sister?" cried Cauvignac, in dismay.

"What idea have you in your head now?"

"Simply, Roland, that you are to take the twenty thousand crowns."

"That's very well for me, but what about yourself?"

"I have no use for that money now."

"Ah! I understand,—you have other funds; so much the better. But it's an enormous sum, sister; think of it! It's too much for me, at least at one stroke."

"I have no other funds; I keep nothing but my jewels. I would be glad to give you them as well, but I must use them to pay for the privilege of entering this convent."

Cauvignac leaped into the air in his surprise.

"This convent!" he cried; "you, my dear sister, propose to enter a convent?"

"Yes, dear brother."

"Oh! in Heaven's name, don't do that, little sister. A convent! you have no idea what a fearful bore it will be. I can tell you something of it, having been at the seminary. A convent! Nanon, don't do it; it will kill you."

"I hope so," said Nanon.

"Sister, I will not have your money at that price, do you hear? Cordieu! it would burn me."

"Roland," rejoined Nanon, "my purpose in entering here, is not to make you rich, but to secure happiness for myself."

"But it's stark madness," said Cauvignac; "I am your brother, Nanon, and I won't allow it."

"My heart is already here, Roland; what would my body do elsewhere?"

"It's frightful to think of; oh! Nanon, dear sister, in pity's name!"

"Not a word more, Roland. You understand me? The money is yours; make good use of it, for your poor Nanon will no longer be at hand to give you more, perforce or willingly."

"But what have I ever done for you that you should be so kind to me?"

"The only thing I could expect, the only thing I could have asked you to do, in bringing me what you did from Bordeaux the night that he died and I could not die."

"Ah! yes, I remember,—the lock of hair."

The adventurer hung his head; he felt an unfamiliar sensation in his eye, and put his hand to it.

"Another would weep," said he; "I do not know how to weep, but upon my soul, I suffer as much, if not more."

"Adieu, brother," said Nanon, offering him her hand.

"No, no, no!" said Cauvignac, "I will never say adieu to you of my free will. Is it fear that drives you into the convent? If so, we will leave Guyenne, and travel the world over together. I too have an arrow in my heart, which I shall carry with me wherever I go, and the pain it causes me will help me to sympathize with your pain. You will talk to me of him, and I will talk to you of Richon; you will weep, and perhaps I shall succeed in weeping too, and it will do me good. Would you like to go to some desert island? I will serve you, faithfully and with deep respect, for you are a saint. Would you like me to be a monk? I confess that I can't do that. But do not enter the convent, do not say adieu to me."

"Adieu, dear brother."

"Would you like to remain in Guyenne, despite the Bordelais, despite the Gascons, despite the whole world? I no longer have my company, but I still have Ferguzon, Barrabas, and Carrotel. We four can do many things. We will be your body-guard, and the queen herself will not be so well guarded. And if they ever get at you, if ever a hair of your head is injured, you can safely say, 'They are all four dead; requiescant in pace!'"

"Adieu," said Nanon.

Cauvignac was about to resort to some fresh appeal, when they heard the

rumbling of a carriage upon the road. An outrider in the queen's livery was galloping ahead.

"What is all this?" said Cauvignac, turning his face toward the road, but without releasing his sister's hand, which he held through the bars.

The carriage, built according to the fashion then in vogue, with massive armorial bearings and open panels, was drawn by six horses and contained eight persons, with a whole household of lackeys and pages.

Behind came guards and mounted courtiers.

"Road! road!" cried the outrider, striking Cauvignac's horse, which, however, was standing with modest reserve well away from the centre of the road.

The terrified beast reared and plunged madly.

"Be careful what you do, my friend!" cried Cauvignac, dropping his sister's hand.

"Way for the queen!" said the courier, riding on.

"The queen! the devil!" said Cauvignac; "let's keep out of trouble in that direction."

And he stood as closely against the wall as possible, holding his horse by the bridle.

At that moment a trace broke, and the coachman, with a vigorous jerk upon the reins, brought the six horses to a stand-still.

"What has happened?" asked a voice with a noticeable Italian accent; "why do you stop?"

"A trace has broken, monsieur," replied the coachman.

"Open the door! open the door!" cried the same voice.

The footmen obeyed, but before the steps were lowered, the man with the Italian accent was already on the ground.

"Aha! Il Signor Mazarini!" said Cauvignac; "he evidently didn't wait to be asked to alight first." After him came the queen.

After the queen, Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld. Cauvignac rubbed his eyes.

After Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, Monsieur d'Épernon.

"Ah!" said the adventurer, "why wasn't that brother-in-law hanged instead of the other?"

After Monsieur d'Épernon, Monsieur de La Meilleraie.

After Monsieur de La Meilleraie, the Duc de Bouillon.

Then, two maids of honor.

"I knew that they had ceased to fight," said Cauvignac, "but I had no idea they were so thoroughly reconciled."

"Messieurs," said the queen, "instead of waiting here until the trace is mended, suppose we walk on a little way; the weather is so beautiful and the air so fresh."

"At your Majesty's service," said Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, bowing.

"Walk beside me, duke, and repeat some of your excellent maxims! you must have devised a great number of them since we met."

"Lean on my arm, duke," said Mazarin to Monsieur de Bouillon, "I know that you have the gout."

Monsieur d'Épernon and Monsieur de La Meilleraie closed the procession, talking with the maids of honor.

The whole party were laughing merrily together in the warm rays of the setting sun, like a party of friends out for a holiday.

"Is it far from here to Bourcy?" the queen asked. "You should be able to tell me, Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, you have studied the country so thoroughly."

"Three leagues, madame; we shall certainly be there before nine o'clock."

"Very good; and to-morrow you will start off early in the morning, and say to our dear cousin, Madame de Condé, that we shall be happy to see her."

"Your Majesty," said the Duc d'Épernon, "did you see the comely cavalier, who turned his face to the wall, and the lovely dame who disappeared when we alighted?"

"Yes," said the queen, "I saw them both; it seems that the nuns know how to enjoy themselves at the convent of Sainte-Radegonde de Peyssac."

At that moment the carriage drove rapidly up behind the illustrious promenaders, who were already some distance beyond the convent.

"Let us not weary ourselves, gentlemen," said the queen; "the king, you know, is to entertain us with music this evening."

The whole party re-entered the carriage and drove away with shouts of laughter, which were soon drowned by the rumbling of the wheels.

Cauvignac followed the carriage with his eyes, reflecting deeply upon the terrible contrast between their noisy gayety and the mute sorrow within the walls of the convent. When the carriage had passed out of sight, he said:—

"I am glad to know one thing, and that is that, bad as I am, there are people who are worse than I; and by Mary's death! I propose to try to make it true that there is nobody better than I; I am rich now, and it will be an easy matter."

He turned to take leave of Nanon, but she had disappeared. Thereupon, with a sigh, he mounted his horse, cast a last glance at the convent, started off at a gallop on the Libourne road, and disappeared in the opposite direction to that taken by the carriage containing the illustrious personages who have played leading parts in this narrative.

Perhaps we shall meet them again some day; for the pretended peace, but ill-cemented by the blood of Richon and Canolles, was a mere truce, and the War of Women was not yet at an end.

THE END

Freeditorial 