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The King's Henchman

The King's Henchman

A Chronicle of the Sixteenth Century

Brought to light and Edited by

William Henry Johnson



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INTRODUCTION.

A SULTRY summer day was closing with a threat of violent storm. Rolling up from the sea, with ominous peals of thunder and incessant lightning, a dense black cloud was fast overspreading the sky. As I rode from my plantation through interminable pine woods to the little hamlet where I was wont to spend the hot months, I had reached a spot that offered a refuge. Before me were five good miles to be covered, without the shelter of a single roof, and I was debating whether I should stop where I was or take the risks of going on.

I had paused before a gate hanging on one hinge and standing ajar, its end resting on the ground. Beyond was a broad avenue, bordered with lordly old live-oaks trailing festoons of silver-gray Spanish moss almost to the earth, but neglected and overgrown with grass and weeds, the road obliterated by time and disuse. It led through an untilled field, covered with broom-sedge and young pines, to an old mansion, which closed the view with high wooden pillars, dingy and spectral. The whole scene was a melancholy picture of unthrift and decay.

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I hesitated to enter, though I knew the place well. Indeed, its owner and occupant, Pierre Fourcade, was a remote kinsman. He was the last representative of one branch of our family. Through my mother, I was the only scion of a second line. There was yet another group of Fourcades, representatives of a third branch.

Just how nearly these three several lines were related, I never knew. The tradition was, that they descended from three brothers who came to America together in the great Huguenot immigration, received grants of land in the same neighborhood, and there perpetuated their blood. In the struggle incident to frontier life in the early colonial days, little attention was paid to matters of genealogy. At a later time, family records were easily lost in the confusion, or destroyed in the frequent house-burnings of the Revolutionary War, during which that region suffered grievously at the hands of the British. So it happened that the Fourcades of my boyhood knew little, and for the greater part cared less, about the original relationship of the three lines of that name. They contented themselves with the general tradition of a common ancestry.

To this apathy Pierre Fourcade formed a notable exception. The passion of his life, sole and consuming, was family pride. It was generally known that he had collected a vast deal of curious information as to the earlier story of the Fourcades, and it was believed that he possessed authentic documents which would throw interesting light on the whole subject.

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Unfortunately, the habit of many years had so cut him off from his fellows, that his knowledge seemed destined to die with him. Occasional efforts to draw him out on the subject which was known to interest him most in the world, had met with rebuke so quick and stern that the attempt was not likely to be renewed.

A moody, reserved man, he had chosen to live a recluse life on his plantation, with no active interests beyond its management, and rarely any companionship but that of his books. Such he was, when, as a child, I first knew him. A solitary old man, his determined attitude of self-isolation was fully accepted. But I was told that in his younger days he had been quite another man. No gayer or more rollicking blade lived in the neighborhood. There were tales still current of his wild doings in bacchanalian moods. Withal he exhibited from the first that trait which deepened and grew into the master passion of his life—an overweening and consuming pride of family. Fiery at the best, he was on all points that concerned the family name sensitive to the verge of the ludicrous. Of a sudden,—how or wherefore nobody ever knew,—his character and habits underwent a change, complete as it was swift. His jovial temper gave way to a sullen and impenetrable reserve. He denied himself to visitors, cut his old friends, withdrew from all social functions, and in a single day began that recluse existence which he led to the hour of his death. This mysterious metamorphosis of a boon companion into a hermit provoked no end of curious speculation; but it remained to the last an enigma.

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In my boyhood I alone seemed to be favored with some little place in the old man's regard. Undoubtedly our relationship, whatever it was, commended me to him, and he treated me with a friendliness which he showed to nobody else. Quite as marked as his liking for me was his deep detestation of the other family of our name. He never alluded to their existence, and once, when I chanced to speak of them in his presence, he vehemently exclaimed, "Not Fourcades, boy, not Fourcades! Call those people ragamuffins, scullions, or what you will, only not Fourcades." But when I tried to ascertain the ground of this violent antipathy, not one word could I elicit. The sudden impulse past, he guarded the same rigid reserve as before.

Now, I knew nothing against these Fourcades, either in the present or in the past. They certainly seemed unobjectionable people, well thought of by the neighbors. Therefore it became a fixed impression in my mind, that it must be some fact in their earlier history, known only to him, which made the old man so despise them. I came to fancy him the sole custodian of some dark secret, and this circumstance made him doubly interesting to me.

When the war came, I went into the army, along with the youth of the South. On my return to my home, after four years of service, I found Pierre Fourcade sadly changed for the worse. He had suffered sorely. His plantation had been harried, his slaves carried away, his cattle slaughtered, his house repeatedly pillaged, and himself despitely used. His land

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had become almost valueless. From comparative opulence he had fallen, in his old age, into indigence. As a consequence, his peculiarities had become more marked than ever. His moody temper had deepened into moroseness. The real poverty which had overtaken him was exaggerated by his imagination into a condition threatening actual want. In his proud reserve he grew parsimonious. Abandoning to decay the greater part of the old mansion, he retired to one wing and there lived, attended by a faithful old negro, Hector by name, whom no inducement could move to leave him.

When I went to see the lonely old man in his poverty, his manner showed no trace of his former friendly interest. Withal I got the impression that some deep, corroding trouble was preying on his mind, and I unavoidably connected this circumstance with the discovery which I had long ago fancied that I had made. If there was some sinister episode in the family history, so sensitive was he on that point, he would feel it more keenly than the sting of want. So strange was his manner now, that I was forced to believe that, through incessant brooding on one fixed idea, his mind had become unbalanced. Altogether I went away deeply saddened by the pitiful spectacle of the old man in his lonely misery. Subsequent attempts to renew the former friendly relations failed signally, and I abandoned the effort.

Now I found myself at his gate, hesitating whether or not to enter. My doubts were quickly resolved by a few big drops, forerunners of a heavy downpour.

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I galloped up the avenue, tied my horse under the wide piazza, and sprang up the creaking steps, just as, with a crash of thunder, the cloud burst into a torrent of rain.

In the gloom the old place seemed more than ever melancholy. Ruin was apparent everywhere. I opened the front door and entered a wide, high-pitched hall, once the very focus of the family life, but now sombre and silent, without sign of life or sound, save the echo of my footsteps and the roaring of the storm without. Thence I turned to the wing into which the solitary owner of the place had retired, and passed through a great dining-room. Here his fathers dispensed a generous hospitality, and in his younger days it had been the scene of wild revel; but now it was empty and dark. On the farther side was the door of the only room which, in all this great house, Pierre Fourcade now occupied.

I knocked. There was no reply. I knocked a second time, with no better success. Then I opened the door and looked within. In the almost total darkness I could see nothing, until a vivid flash of lightning, shining through an open window, showed me the old man sleeping peacefully in a chair, his head sunk on his chest. I groped my way across the floor and laid my hand on his shoulder, to arouse him. But I started back horrified. He was dead.

So easily and painlessly had life slipped away—no doubt while he slept—that he sat there, one hand hanging, still limp, by his side, the other resting on the arm of his chair, like one who had but sunk into a deep slumber.

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I thought at once of calling Hector. But the rain was coming down in a flood, and it seemed sheer cruelty to summon the faithful old servitor from the outbuilding which he inhabited. What mattered a little delay? There was nothing that he could do; his master was beyond the help of man. I lighted a candle and seated myself opposite the dead. In the dim yellow light how ghastly he looked! The shrunken form enveloped in threadbare garments a world too wide, the parchment-like skin drawn tight over the features, the sunken cheeks, the drooping jaw, the unkempt beard straggling over the shirt, frayed, yellow, and soiled; all about him the evidences of a parsimony little short of miserly—what a picture of the wretchedness of his last years! And this shriveled anatomy, amid surroundings almost squalid, was all that remained in his line of an ancient and proud ancestry!

With this thought another flashed into my mind—the secret of his trouble. If there was written evidence of it, surely that evidence was now within my reach! I should not need to seek far. Within the walls of that one room the old man had gathered all the earthly belongings that he cared for. I did not doubt that, if there were, as I fully believed there were, documents relating to the subject nearest his heart, I should find them in the antique secretary which was a conspicuous part of the furniture of the room.

The occasion was propitious. Until the storm should cease, I was secure from interruption. Why need I hesitate? There was no human being who

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had so good a right as I. For, if there was any person in existence to whom Pierre Fourcade, living, would have been willing to unburden himself, I surely was that one. Now that he was dead, I was morally entitled to whatever documentary evidence there might have been in his possession. Was I not a kinsman and a party interested?

In one of the old man's pockets I found his keys and hastened to try them. The first drawer which I opened contained nothing of any promise. The second was full of papers—legal documents, receipted bills, and the like. Then my eye lighted on a small box of japanned tin, an old-fashioned affair, securely fastened with a little brass padlock. I lifted it out. It was very heavy. Here, I was confident, if anywhere, I should find what I sought.

With eager haste I tried the keys, until I found the one which fitted the padlock. I lifted the lid and found the box solidly packed with documents carefully arranged and tied together in bundles. At a glance I saw the value of my discovery. The papers were yellow with age, closely covered with writing by different hands, but of the same general type, cramped and crabbed. When I attempted to decipher a line, I found that the language was old French, so unfamiliar, that at my first hasty effort I could catch only here and there a word that conveyed any meaning. It was an exciting thought, that, in all probability, these records were made by the hands of ancestors of mine, actors in a great world-drama, and had been brought by their children to America. Moreover, I

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did not doubt that I held in my hands the clue to the mystery of Pierre Fourcade's life.

I hastily replaced the papers and locked the box. It was mine now. I had no hesitation in taking it. For, while Pierre Fourcade lived, the merest suggestion of those precious papers' falling into the hands of the other Fourcades would have been sufficient to arouse his fierce wrath.

My decision was quickly made. The storm had passed over and the rain had nearly ceased. Looking out of the back window, I saw through the open door of Hector's cabin the reflection of a bright fire and the old man's shadow, as he moved about the hearth, no doubt preparing his master's evening meal. At any moment he might enter the house. I did not hesitate, but, taking from the bunch the key which I wanted, I replaced the remainder in the dead man's pocket, blew out the candle, groped my way through the dark and silent house to the open air, mounted my horse and rode away, carrying my precious treasure and leaving no trace of my visit.

When I had reached my home, I scarcely took the time for a hurried meal, before shutting myself up to examine my acquisition at my leisure. The box I found to contain a number of documents of various ages, carefully assorted and marked in the handwriting of Pierre Fourcade with numerals indicating their chronological order.

I opened first the package designated as No. 1. As I untied it, there fell out a small morocco-leather case, much worn. On pressing a spring, the lid flew

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open and revealed a miniature painted on ivory. It represented a face of marvelous beauty and sweetness and of infinite sadness. Large, dark eyes, of a liquid softness, met mine with a gaze that at once inspired confidence and enlisted sympathy. Masses of dark-brown hair, rolled back from the temples, framed the oval face in a setting of sombre beauty. The whole expression was that of a deep melancholy. To my excited fancy, Tragedy seemed to look out from the great, sad eyes.

I could not doubt that the original was, in some way, closely associated with the record contained in the manuscript with which I found the picture tied up. Further, what was more likely than that she was one of the personages, perhaps the central figure, of some story with which Pierre Fourcade had become acquainted through these writings? I was convinced that I held in my hands the key of the mystery which had so darkened his later years.

I resolved to set myself in serious earnest to the task of deciphering the manuscript. This proved to be no light work. It was a voluminous document, closely written, in many parts so faded as to be well-nigh illegible, and couched in language so archaic as to words, spelling, idioms, and general construction, that I soon became aware that I must make a thorough study of it, if I would master its contents. For many weeks all my leisure was devoted to this labor of love. As I advanced in my undertaking, I forgot its difficulties in the surpassing interest of the story.

At the end of several weeks I had read the entire

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manuscript, and my original impression had been fully confirmed. I had penetrated the secret of Pierre Fourcade's life. I knew the story of the unfortunate lady who was, beyond a doubt, the original of the miniature.

At the first, out of deference to the old man whose heir I had constituted myself, I had no other thought than that of locking up the manuscript in its receptacle and the secret in my own bosom, and so letting it die with me, as he would fain have had it perish with him. But mature reflection has determined me to act otherwise. For, after all, was not Pierre Fourcade's feeling morbid and overstrained? Was it not the supersensitiveness of an almost insane pride, rather than the facts of the story itself, that made him shrink from making known a record which can disturb no property rights, nor smirch any living person's honor?

I have decided to publish the record as it stands, in its naïve frankness. Perchance discriminating readers will find in it much to kindle their admiration, as I have found in it not a little to justify my pride. It is a plain, straightforward story, written by a hand more familiar with the sword than with the pen. It has, in my estimation, this unique value, that it incidentally portrays a famous character, not as he has been pictured by historians of the romantic school, but as he was seen in his most familiar relations by one who was his daily companion through long years. It is a bit of historical realism. If we regard it as a picture of the times, where shall we find a more downright, frank recital of things as they befell in the daily life of those who appear on the scene?

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In doing my work of editing I have suppressed nothing essential. True, I have endeavored to modernize the style by breaking up the interminably long periods, involved with numerous parentheses, into a simpler, directer construction. And in some passages I have softened the exceedingly frank terms of the original. Otherwise I have changed nothing.

The reader will doubtless be prepared to make much allowance in a narrative coming down from a ruder time for details which the taste of our day would exclude. He will remember that this story carries him back into the heart of the sixteenth century—a period in which human life was held cheap, and the Ten Commandments in light esteem; a crude, violent age, in which men of action were men of blood; an age in which the passions of men and women often ran wild riot, unchecked by conventional restraints, which impose a certain outward sobriety, even when they are powerless to bind the hidden springs of action; an age so coarse in speech, that the biographer of even the lovely and unfortunate Lady Jane Grey feels himself obliged to apologize for gross indelicacies in some of her letters.

Yet, after all, if the reader shall fail to discern amid the rude license of that older day the sure promise and potency of the better modern time, I hold that he will have read to little purpose.

THE EDITOR.

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CHAPTER THE FIRST.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE FOUND A FRIEND AND MADE
AN ENEMY.

IT was on a night late in the winter of 1577. The moon was not long risen in a clear, frosty sky. Two men were riding sharply on a road leading westward out of Limoges. Their horses' hoofs beat the frozen earth with a metallic ring. It was the only sound that broke the dead stillness of the forest, whose leafless and spectral trees seemed to flee by them like an army of ghosts, as they galloped swiftly.

After a while they drew rein, and, turning into a by-road, proceeded with evident caution. Soon the outlines of a château standing on the brow of a hill became visible. The two horsemen halted, dismounted, and tethered their animals in the deep shadows of a thick clump of trees. Then they advanced carefully and silently toward the dwelling. The coast seemed clear, and they passed through a wicket-gate into the inclosure surrounding it.

Judging from its appearance, one would say that the château had been built in the time of Francis I., probably for a country residence, by some wealthy

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courtier of that pleasure-loving monarch. But it looked neglected and ill-kept. The shrubbery, which had once been closely trimmed and cut into fantastic shapes, was now overgrown and unsightly. The walks, once neatly graveled, had become grass-covered. The great trees standing about had littered the ground profusely with their leaves, which still lay where they had fallen the previous autumn, only swept by the wintry winds into heaps at the foot of the tall trunks. On the whole, the appearance of the place was fairly indicative of a long period of civil strife, during which pleasure and ornament had been subordinated to military needs. To meet these changed conditions, the building had been strengthened for defense, and the lower windows were heavily grated, imparting a prison-like aspect strangely out of keeping with the general character of the structure.

The smaller and slighter of the two men now took the lead and went straight toward a certain portion of the building. No light was visible, nor was there any sign of life about the place; but he did not hesitate. Stooping, he gathered up a handful of gravel, and threw it against the casement of a second-story window so lightly, that none but a waiting ear would have caught the slight rattling sound. In a moment the shutter was noiselessly opened, showing a light burning within and the outlines of two feminine figures peering down. Apparently, the result of their reconnaissance was satisfactory, for the next moment a slender cord came down, swaying in the night wind. Then the larger of the two men produced from

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under his cloak a small package, which he handed to the other, who unfastened and shook it out, revealing a light silken ladder. To this he attached the end of the cord, which was quickly drawn up again.

When he had ascertained that the ladder was secure at the top, he placed his foot upon it, and, after a whispered word or two to his companion, mounted the frail support, with the confidence of an expert in such matters. So soon as he had climbed through the window, the ladder was drawn up after him, the shutter closed, and the only sign of life about the habitation was the man waiting below.

I have been able to describe thus minutely the movements of this pair, because I, Jean Fourcade, was the man who remained outside on guard, in the nipping air of that frosty night.

My companion I must not venture to thrust so bluntly upon the reader's acquaintance, but must do myself the honor of presenting him more formally, at a fitting time.

Had the situation in which I found myself been new in my experience, perhaps its romantic interest might have reconciled me to its discomforts. But it had none of the charm of novelty to counteract the keenness of the wintry air. Indeed, I question whether, under the most favorable conditions, the outdoor rôle in such a performance ever arouses enthusiasm. In my case, at all events, there was all the staleness of familiarity.

In no cheerful or sympathetic mood, then, I drew my cloak closely about me and set myself to finding

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a place where I might keep my watch with the least degree of discomfort. As I prowled around, I soon discovered a garden-seat from which I could command a full view of my post. Here I ensconced myself and soon sank into a train of sombre reflections.

I thought of my companion's career, sullied by reckless libertinism. Still I could not too severely condemn him, for I knew both his ancestry and his environment. I had witnessed the death of his father, when a mistress was obtrusively and defiantly present by the dying man's side. I had heard the stories which were in every one's mouth about remoter ancestors, male and female. I had lived with him familiarly for years amid circles in which profligacy was an admired accomplishment and chastity was counted akin to meanness.

I had myself been drawn into the whirlpool of dissipation. But now these memories were distasteful. I hated myself for my past weakness. I was in an anchorite mood. But I was young, and love wooed me irresistibly. There rose before my fancy the vision of a fair and beautiful womanhood, at once tender and chaste. If ever a soul thirsted, mine thirsted that night for enduring love, while I kept watch over a criminal assignation. Yes, I craved it as a man perishing for water in a desert has visions, not of goblets brimming with feverish wine, but of crystal springs bubbling forth from the heart of Nature, living, life-giving, satisfying.

So utterly did these emotions absorb me, that I was unaware of any one's approach, until the rustle of a

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light step on the dry leaves caused me to spring to my feet in alarm and clap my hand on my sword. Then I saw that the intruder was by no means formidable. It was a woman,—a young woman,—who was already within a few paces of me.

“Good evening, Monsieur,” she said. “I fear you find it cold here, and I have come to ask you within, where you may sit by a fire while you wait.” Her voice, which sounded not unfamiliar, was musical and inviting. By the moonlight I caught the coquettish glance of black eyes and the dazzling whiteness of her teeth. The rounded curves of her figure were set off by a cloak, which she drew tightly around her. And the general effect of easy allurements was heightened by a page's cap, which rested jauntily on her head.

I was instantly conscious of being a man of flesh and blood. My breath came a bit quicker, and a little thrill passed through me, as I thanked her for her courtesy. Still I said some half-hearted words about my duty of staying where I was.

“Oh, but, Monsieur,” she eagerly urged, “there is no need of your remaining here in the cold. There is absolutely no danger. The Baron is away from home, attending the Estates-General at Blois. The household are all asleep. There is absolutely no danger. Come inside without fear and warm yourself.”

So saying she came nearer. As she did so, both of us started in amazement. Our recognition was mutual and simultaneous. She was Marie Roseau, one of my intimates in that gay Parisian life which I had but now been recalling with more or less of self-reproach. She

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was at that time maid to a lady who, as Mademoiselle de Rouet, had been the constant companion of the late King of Navarre, and after his death had married Montesquieu, captain of the Duke of Anjou's body-guard, the same who, at Jarnac, blew out Condé's brains, as he sat on the ground, wounded and a prisoner. She was a coarse-natured Gascon girl, with the strong, bold speech and broad accent of her province, passionate in her love and fierce in her hate. Attendance on her superiors had somewhat tamed her manners by imposing something of the self-restraint of well-bred persons. But beneath this outward decorum smouldered her native fire.

"In Heaven's name, Marie, what are you doing here?" I cried.

"I have changed my mistress. The other scolded too much. That is all," she answered, shrugging her shoulders. "And you?"

"Oh, it is the same old story," I answered, jerking my thumb in the direction of the window through which my comrade had disappeared; whereupon both of us laughed, for of old his escapades had been proverbial.

"But, Marie," I resumed, "how wearisome you must find this dull old château after Paris!"

"Ah, but how do you know that I have not my distractions?" she answered with a coquettish toss of her head.

"No doubt, no doubt," I replied; "else you would not be Marie Roseau. But tell me, is your mistress Parisian?"

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“Parisian? By no means! She is country-born and country-bred. She hoped, when she married the Baron, who is much older than she, that he would take her to see the beautiful city and the court. But he keeps her shut up in this old pile. In my opinion, he is afraid of the gay gallants.”

“Indeed!” I answered; “and, notwithstanding, one of the gay gallants has found the Baron’s hidden treasure. How did they chance to meet?”

“God alone knows. My belief is, these affairs are planned in Heaven—or somewhere. You can’t hinder them. At all events, they are losing no time, while the Baron is away attending the Estates-General. Oh, let me tell you the strangest thing! She does not know who *he* really is. I nearly split my sides with laughing, when she said to me, ‘I want you to sit up with me, Marie. The Count de Chambord comes to-night.’”

“Ah! Count de Chambord is it this time?” I exclaimed. “My faith! one must have a better memory than mine to keep the run of his names. But you enlightened your mistress?”

“Enlightened her! *Par Dieu*, no! He slipped two pistoles—no doubt he could not give more—into my hand the first time he came. And, after all, it is no affair of mine. Madame takes her own risks.”

By this time we had drawn very near together. My arm had somehow got about her waist, and she was leaning on me. In the presence of this warm creature close beside me, my self-reproachful feelings of a few minutes ago had quite gone. My blood

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went through my veins like a mill-race. Pleasure had taken the helm and thrown care and trouble overboard.

"Come, Jean," said the girl, "why do we lose time gossiping, like two old women, in the cold?" And she drew me toward the house with a merry laugh.

With a faint show of resistance I said, "I dare not. I am here on guard, you know."

"Bah! what nonsense the boy talks!" she said banteringly. "Have I not told you, silly fellow, there is absolutely no danger? The Baron is away at Blois; the household are all asleep; and if there were danger, surely you could learn it more quickly within than outside."

There was no resisting this reasoning. And who could withstand such persuasive pleadings, enforced by sparkling eyes and a hand drawing me toward the house?

I yielded, with seeming reluctance, but with real delight. Fate, it seemed, had decreed me a good fortune that night, whether I sought it or not, and I bowed to her will.

As we bent our steps toward the château I said: "Ah! what a lucky dog I am to find you here, Marie! But, pray, by what providence did you know that I was waiting outside?"

This question I asked in good faith, forgetting at the moment that our meeting was seemingly as unexpected to her as it certainly was to me.

"Oh, *dame!*" she answered lightly, "I knew that where *he* was you were likely to be."

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Then I remembered that she had at first accosted me as if I were a stranger. At once something compounded of suspicion, jealousy, and disgust rose within me.

"Yet," said I, coldly, withdrawing my arm from her, "you spoke to me as if I were a stranger. You were surprised, when you recognized me."

"Oh, you believed that! That was all a pretense. I knew, before I left the house, who was outside. When I looked down from Madame's window and saw two men, I knew surely that one was you."

The falsehood seemed palpable. The girl had certainly come out, I believed, in ignorance that I was there. By this time, besides, a complete revulsion had taken place in my feelings. My former sentiments had returned in full force.

"Why don't you cease your lies?" I retorted haughtily. Then I added scornfully, "Confess the truth. You were mousing, like an owl flitting about in the night, and to the owl one mouse is as good as another."

"Jean Fourcade," she replied angrily, "are you bent on insulting me? Men have been killed for less than you have said to me." And there was a fierce ring in her voice that showed her in dead earnest.

"Little I care whether or not you are offended," I retorted loftily. "You said, a little while since, that you have your diversions. Probably mousing by night is one of them."

For a moment or two the girl was speechless with rage. With her bosom heaving, her eyes rolling and

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flashing, and her teeth set, she was a picture of a Fury. Then by a powerful effort she regained her self-control. After a little, her manner almost incredibly changed, she said coaxingly, "Come, let us forget these foolish words. We are old friends. Come inside and warm yourself."

"Never!" I answered haughtily. "I have done with you."

"Then you don't care for me any more?" and her voice actually quavered as she uttered the words.

"Care for you!" I flung out scornfully. "When did I ever care for you? It was but a pastime."

At this her anger began to rise again; but she was struggling bravely with it. With her voice low and hoarse with suppressed feeling, she said, "Ah, you love another!"

"My faith! you take much upon you, when you talk thus," was my haughty reply. "What if I love another? Do I belong to you?"

There was silence for a moment. The girl hesitated in the great struggle to control her feelings. Meanwhile something was tugging at my heart and bidding me relent and be kindly and human; but some perverse impulse urged me on the wilful course I had taken.

Marie came forward timidly now, laid her hand on my arm, and said pleadingly, as if she were studiously putting out of mind my harsh words and trying to win me over, "Won't you come with me, Jean?"

If, at that moment, I had taken her in my arms, I should have done what I was strongly moved to do;

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and how different would have been the course of this story! Alas! the demon of perverse self-will was up within me. I threw her off roughly, saying, "Be-gone, ——! You have no need of me. Lovers are never lacking to one who seeks them."

Scarcely were the cruel words spoken, when I was deeply ashamed of the unmanly insult and would gladly have recalled it. But it was too late. Marie Roseau stood for a moment, a picture of impotent rage. Then, hissing out a horrible oath and shaking her clenched hand at me, she almost shrieked, "Dog! You shall pay for this," and swept away like a whirlwind.

A moment later I was standing at the door of the château, gently tapping, hoping she would hear me and open it; but there was no response, and I dared not knock aloud, for fear of arousing some sleeping inmate.

How I longed to see Marie open that door! I should have thrown myself into her arms, nay, at her feet, and implored forgiveness; for I was overwhelmed with shame at my brutality. Certainly the girl had been good to me in her way. Undoubtedly she was fond of me. And this I had requited with a wanton insult. Besides, was it not quite likely that, though she had not known me to be outside, she had thought it very probable and had come out on the chance?

I would have given my hand to see her come forth and to have the opportunity of atoning for my cowardly offense. Then, if she had accepted my

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contrition, what? Ah, well! It was of little use to think of that now, when a locked door separated us.

Bitterly I reproached myself for what I had said and done. I had not even the Pharisee's satisfaction in the self-complacent sense of righteousness. For well enough I knew in my heart that it was not even a spasm of virtue that had moved me, but a mere wilful caprice—such an assumption of lordly superiority as men are apt to put on, when women woo.

So I remained in the sharp night air, a prey to my keen self-reproaches. Even the material side of the subject was not to be forgotten. There I was in the eager and nipping night air, my hands and feet tingling with cold, while, had I acted reasonably and as my former relations with Marie Roseau warranted her in expecting that I would, I should have been comfortably ensconced before a bright fire, with her by my side and with a flagon of good red wine before me.

So the time wore slowly away. It seemed to me interminable. At last the sash was stealthily raised, the ladder was let down, and my companion descended. The homeward ride was swift and silent. I was in no mood for conversation. Still less did I think of relating my little adventure. I should have been laughed at for a fool, and, as I felt, with too good reason. After caring for our horses, I crept into my bed, cold, comfortless, and bitter.

The next morning my companion appeared bright and smiling as usual, full of gay repartee, and, as soon as the business of the day was despatched, rode off with a hunting-party. That man of steel frame never

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knew fatigue. After marching all the day, he was ready to dance all the night, or, when he had money, to gamble till daylight, or, leaving the ball-room, to lead a surprise party to strike some outpost of the enemy.

Two days later, when my comrade notified me to be in readiness to ride that night, I was overjoyed. I longed to have an opportunity of making amends to Marie Roseau for my brutality. Now I should have the chance, and I was confident of my ability to regain her affection. Then, when she had accepted my penitent confession—ah! let the future take care of itself.

But how was the interview to be brought about? Certainly, Marie would not seek me. That was not to be dreamed of. I must open the communication. There was but one way: I must send her a note by my companion, when he entered the château. I wrote a few lines, in which I implored her to meet me and give me an opportunity of seeking her forgiveness. I signed the note, "Yours forever, J. F."

This I handed to my companion, as we rode toward Bonrepos that night, and I asked him to deliver it. "Ah, you sly dog!" he exclaimed laughingly. Then he began to catechize me, and at last he drew from me the whole story of the meeting. When he heard how it ended, he turned in his saddle, looked at me in amazement, and gave a long whistle.

"You fool!" he said deliberately. "I do many silly things, but never anything like that." Then he went on to lecture me roundly. "Do you know,"

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he concluded, "what you have done? You have wounded that girl's pride and made an enemy of her. It is ten to one she won't so much as read your note. And, let me tell you, there is no enemy so bitter as a woman scorned. You will hear from her, when you least expect it. Trust me for that. Else I know nothing of womankind."

The night was moonless, starless, and intensely cold, with a threat of snow. With difficulty, owing to the darkness, we made our way through the miles of forest which we must traverse; but at last we reached our destination.

As before, we tethered our horses at some distance and then cautiously approached the mansion. My companion made his presence known in the same manner as on the former occasion, and there was the same evidence of his being expected. As before, two persons appeared at the window. The ladder was made fast. As he was about to mount it, I implored him in a whisper, for God's sake, not to tarry long, else I should freeze. He promised that he would rejoin me in a half-hour.

It was too cold to sit still. Therefore I did not occupy the bench on which I had lately sat, but sauntered moodily about the grounds, littered with leaves fallen from the great trees, anxiously awaiting Marie's appearance. Would she come? Once I paused in my walk and was leaning against one of the trees, when, in the breathless stillness, I heard a rustling sound. I was on the alert at once. Evidently some object was moving stealthily over the dry leaves, quite

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otherwise than Marie would have come. I kept my post behind the tree and waited to see what it was. Presently two men crept by, within a few feet, toward the garden-seat, which was perhaps two rods away. It flashed across me that they were seeking me. To alarm my comrade was impossible, since they were between me and the house; but it occurred to me, that if I left the spot for a time, and they failed to find me, they would conclude that I had gone away and would abandon their attempt. I seized the opportunity, therefore, while the rustling of their movements would drown whatever sound I might make, and swiftly stole away in the opposite direction, made a little circuit, and reached the horses. Then I mounted my own and rode away, hoping that if my pursuers, failing to find me, should come upon my comrade's horse alone, they would infer that I had escaped them and would give up their attempt.

I durst not, however, go far or remain away long, lest my companion, coming from the house without warning, might fall unexpectedly into their hands. Therefore, after riding about aimlessly for a while, I cautiously returned to the spot where I had left the other horse, my pistols loosened in the holsters, in readiness for an emergency. The two animals neighed to each other, but there was no other sound and no sign of an enemy near. I fastened my own beast once more.

It was now high time for my comrade to appear, if he kept his word. "But how much is a lover's promise to be trusted?" I bitterly thought. Still I

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must get near to the house to warn him of possible danger. Not knowing what ambushade might be awaiting me, I made my approach very slowly and cautiously, reconnoitring every step, a pistol in the right hand, my drawn sword in the left. The coast seemed clear. Soon, to my great relief, I saw the window opened and my comrade descend. Just as I hastened forward to meet him, from behind a tree a man sprang forth on my left and struck at me with a dagger, while, at the same moment, a second rushed at me from the opposite side. The attack was so swift and sudden, that I could not turn quickly enough to bring my pistol to bear, but could only by a quick movement of my body escape the direct force of the blow, so that the steel, which was aimed at my heart, glanced along a rib and plowed a furrow in my side and back. In an instant I shot the villain dead. At the same time my comrade intercepted the other, who immediately turned and fled.

“We must away quickly,” cried my companion, and we hastened to the horses. But, even as we left the spot, glancing back, we saw torches moving toward the scene of the late encounter. Evidently the household had been alarmed by the report of my pistol.

We rode as fast as the darkness would allow, not knowing but that pursuit might be at our heels. Meanwhile I felt my clothes becoming saturated with blood, and I was growing faint. My comrade, who did not know of my wound, rode well in front. He was mounted on a fine Sardinian horse, which he had lately bought from Rosny, who is a keen jockey and

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is incessantly trafficking with his brother officers. Therefore it was hard for me to keep him in sight. Then, just when we were passing near a house a little retired from the road, in an upper chamber of which a light was burning, my horse stumbled and floundered for a few paces. I barely had strength to keep my seat. When the animal had recovered himself, my companion, still galloping on, was out of sight. Dizzy, and conscious that I could not keep the saddle longer, my one thought was to summon him to my aid. With a last effort I stopped my horse, pulled the remaining pistol from the holster, and fired it in the air. Then, essaying to dismount ere I should fall from the saddle, I lurched over and sank unconscious on the ground.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE CHANCED INTO A PEACEFUL HAVEN.

I AWOKE in a room warm and well lighted. I lay in a comfortable bed between sheets of clean linen. My clothing had been taken off; my wound had been dressed and the bleeding stopped. With returning consciousness, how unutterably sweet and homelike seemed my surroundings! A cheerful fire crackled on the hearth, and its flickering light was reflected on the ceiling. Sunk in a delicious languor, I lay motionless, enjoying the delightful transition from the cold and discomfort, the excitement and peril, I had so lately experienced. I dreaded to break the spell by a single word or movement, and when I became aware of a grave figure hovering about me, I closed my eyes and soon sank again into a dreamless sleep.

When I next awoke, the room was filled with the gray light of a wintry morning, and through the panes of a window from which the curtains were drawn back, I saw snowflakes falling fast. I reflected, with deep thankfulness, that, but for the friendly hands that had

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rescued me, they would doubtless have covered my corpse. Instead, how secure and comfortable I was!

Seated by the fire was an elderly woman, plainly a domestic. I was glad of her presence. It did not call upon me for any explanation of the mishap which had made me an inmate of that room. But, with returning self-recollection, I became aware that I must be prepared to give some credible account of myself. Naturally my unknown friends would inquire as to the manner in which I had received my wound. What should I say? To tell the truth was clearly impossible. The well-being and reputation of others were at stake.

On the other hand, the difficulties of the situation were very great. Any story which I might invent was liable to be discredited by some circumstance unknown to me. For instance, I did not know where my comrade was, and whether or not he was an inmate of the same house with me. Had he or had he not responded to my signal? Should my story include mention of him or not?

The likeliest tale to receive credence was one of having been set upon by robbers. And perchance, if I succeeded in eliciting first from my hosts some recital of the circumstances of my rescue, I might catch a clue which would guide me in my own narrative. Accordingly, I determined to take the initiative by asking the first questions. And the rustic-looking domestic seated by the fire would be a good subject to begin with. Perhaps I could draw from her enough information to make up a plausible tale, ere I should meet more critical persons.

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I coughed slightly. Immediately the woman rose and came to my bedside. She was a plain, motherly creature. I looked up, pleased and grateful, and said, "Ah, I am so happy and so thankful! How came I here?"

At once the full flood of her kindness and feminine volubility was turned loose. Monsieur Roberval, her master, was sitting up late reading,—for he was a great student, was Monsieur,—when he heard the galloping of horses in the road, then a pistol-shot. He had run out with a lantern to see what was amiss. Thereupon a man who was bending over me, had mounted a horse and galloped away. Then he had come upon me, poor young gentleman! lying, as it were dead, in the road. He had hastened back and summoned a man-servant, and with his help had brought me into the house. Then he had found that I was only in a swoon. He and the good Mistress had tenderly cared for me and dressed my wound, for he was as good as a surgeon himself, was the Master. Until near daylight he had sat by me, and now she had taken his place, while he rested.

Then came a volley of questions, which I quickly checked by feigning even greater weakness than I felt. But I dropped a remark about having been attacked by a robber, which satisfied the good soul and drew from her an exclamation of wrath against the villain. I hoped that I should be equally successful with her master and mistress in accounting for myself; and there was no reason why I should not, unless some report should reach them from the scene of my late

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adventure. At all events, I had learned enough from my nurse to be able to invent a fairly passable story.

Clearly, my comrade had ridden back, on hearing my pistol-shot. But why had he absconded so quickly, when a third person appeared on the scene? No doubt he dreaded recognition.

I was thankful, however, that he had acted thus. It gave ample color to the story which I purposed telling. The man who had been seen stooping over me should figure as my assailant, and his cowardly flight, so soon as a light appeared, was in keeping with his alleged attempt to murder and rob me. All seemed easy enough, if only the true story did not come to the knowledge of these good people. I dreaded being exposed to them as an impostor, but I must take my chances.

In this situation the one thing that sustained me was the consciousness that I was an innocent sufferer. What comfort there was in that thought!

After a time the mistress of the house appeared, a matronly lady of singularly kind appearance and manner. She was dressed well, but simply, as became the wife of a well-to-do burgher or tradesman, and a rosary about her neck showed her to be a Catholic. When she found me awake and doing well, she was full of the warmest interest and of delight in my well-being. All the motherliness of her heart overflowed toward me. With true delicacy, she asked not a question as to the circumstances which had brought me under her roof. But when I volunteered an explanation, she listened with breathless interest.

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I related that I was making a journey of great urgency, which necessitated traveling by night, when I was overtaken by a man riding up furiously behind me and summoning me to halt. I had endeavored to avoid an encounter by the speed of my horse, reserving my pistol for an emergency, and should have eluded my assailant, had not my animal stumbled. As I reined him up, the villain, dashing by, lunged at me with his dagger and wounded me. I had immediately fired my pistol at him, but had evidently missed my aim, and I had then fainted and fallen from my saddle.

All this agreed perfectly with what her husband had witnessed. The man whom he had seen bending over me was undoubtedly on the point of robbing me, when he was frightened away. Nothing could be more natural. So far all was well.

The good lady by her kindly interest soon put me at my ease. Had I a mother? When I told her that I had one whom I dearly loved, a strong tie was at once established between us.

By the time the master of the house appeared, two or three hours later, I was already on an assured footing. He congratulated me warmly on my narrow escape from death, and spoke of my adventure, of which he had heard the recital from his wife. I was deeply thankful that my story had been so readily believed, and I fervently prayed that nothing might come to the ears of these good people which should discredit it.

I learned that Monsieur Roberval was a Catholic

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burgher, of retiring disposition and studious habits. Originally a resident of Rochelle, he had withdrawn from that city, because the Protestant ascendancy was repugnant to him, and the disturbed state of the population harassed him. He had fixed his home in this rural neighborhood, remote, as he hoped, from the turmoil of war. It was a source, therefore, of no little chagrin to him, that the King of Navarre had recently established himself with his forces in this region. He did not doubt that my assailant belonged in the Huguenot camp, and I was very well content to leave him under this impression.

My observations filled me with admiration for this family's tolerant spirit. Calling myself Paul Sabatier, of Orléans, a name which I chose because of its well-known Protestant affiliations, I was at once designated as a Huguenot in belief. But no question was ever asked me on that point. The kindness of my host was not marred by the faintest intrusion upon my personal reserve. Each day it became more and more evident that I had fallen among people of a religious type quite new to me. I had heard of moderate Catholics. I had been told that the Chancellor L'Hôpital had died broken-hearted, when his efforts to bring about religious freedom had ended in the St. Bartholomew's massacre. But I had never met such persons. And my idea of the faith had been formed from the conduct of its votaries whom I had familiarly known. To combine unbounded profligacy with a certain sort of superstitious devotion seemed to be their conception of religion.

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On the other hand, I had not seen much better reason to be well pleased with my co-religionists. My early belief in the necessarily elevating influence of the Reformed faith had been rudely shaken by a wider experience of the world. I had observed too often the same discrepancy between profession and practice as among the Catholics whom I had met.

It was openly declared by the ministers in their sermons that the greatest hindrance to the success of our arms was, that our leaders constantly angered God by their loose morals and disorderly behavior. The great body of our people were, as they are to-day, middle-class folk, merchants and artisans in the towns and cities, who were, for the greater part, quiet, earnest, faithful Christians, neither bigoted nor licentious. But it was my misfortune to be thrown with the extreme sorts—the fanatical ministers and the pleasure-loving nobles. I had almost come to despair of religion and to distrust it altogether.

In the family of Monsieur Roberval I found all the deep earnestness of my own early home, but joined with a degree of education and refinement to which my plain parents were strangers. For my host was a student as well as a gentleman, and possessed a scholarship which one would have rarely found among the rural gentry. While he was a Catholic, he always acted and spoke as one would who felt the truth of religion to be something larger than that which was expressed by any creed. I did not wonder, therefore, that he had found Rochelle, under the domination of zealous Huguenot ministers, an intolerable abode.

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My days passed delightfully in this peaceful haven. Only one little incident occurred to ruffle the placid surface of my happy life. When I had been about a week in the house of Monsieur Roberval, he handed me, one day, without comment or question, a letter which he said had been left at the door by a man who immediately rode away. It bore the simple and somewhat remarkable superscription, "To the Wounded Young Man," in a handwriting familiar enough to me. Within were these lines, hurriedly scrawled:

"MY DEAR JEAN: My heart is torn by the thought of your wound and your suffering, and that I cannot be near you. But I have learned that you are in the hands of kind people and are doing well. Take all the time that you need for your recovery. I miss you greatly, but nothing is stirring here.

"I was compelled to leave you, much against my will. Our affair has kept itself marvelously quiet; no whisper of it. Only, some have asked me where you are. I would send you money, if I had any. But you know all that. By the way, I had no chance of delivering your note. She did not show herself. Can't you guess who sent those ruffians after you? What did I tell you?

"Yours always,

"HENRY."

How vividly this missive called up the writer before me—ardent, impulsive, and fickle, both generous and niggardly! Doubtless he had no money. But had

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his pocket been full, it would have been in his nature to requite the most devoted services with warm words, rather than with hard coin. Some such bitter reflection rose in my mind. Here was I, wounded, my life lately in peril, for this man's guilty intrigue. And here was he, leaving me in the hands of strangers as his scapegoat, and scrawling a few lines, as if we were equal partners in "our affair."

How different, too, was the tranquil, homelike existence I was now leading, from that of the camp, which this letter called up before my mind, with its tumult and disorder, its perfervid preaching on the one side, and its rude license on the other! Yet so was I bound to that career, that there was no way of escape from a return to it.

This incident of the letter was annoying, too, because it inevitably threw suspicion on my statement, that I was a stranger merely traveling through those parts. It showed that I had in the neighborhood a friend who knew my whereabouts. But since I could not explain it away, I resolved to ignore it. This proved to be wise. Whatever impression was left on their minds, no reference was ever made to the matter by my courteous hosts.

For another reason the letter disturbed me. My companion evidently believed what I already strongly suspected—that the villains who would have taken my life were instigated by Marie Roseau. Else why was I singled out? So she was my enemy now—an enemy capable of taking such a revenge!

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

SOPHIE ROBERVAL.

ONE day I sat, wrapped in a warm woolen dressing-gown of Monsieur Roberval, my feet incased in a pair of his slippers, before a low fire on the hearth. The winter was breaking up, and the mildness of the air seemed to penetrate my chamber with the promise of spring. All Nature looked radiant and rejoicing, and I, too, felt peaceful and happy.

Madame Roberval entered the room. "Monsieur Sabatier," said she, with her motherly smile, "you have not yet met my daughter, of whom you have heard me speak. Now it is time that you should know each other. May I bring her here?"

I had heard of this young lady with more than a passing interest. Now that it was proposed to me to meet her, I began to stammer out my thanks, when the good lady cut them short by stepping out of the room and immediately returning, followed by her daughter.

With the entrance of Sophie Roberval it was as if the dreamy visions of feminine goodness and loveliness that had floated through my mind, had all at once

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taken bodily form before my eyes. To see was to trust her. In her large, dark, lustrous eyes intelligence and tenderness were met in a rare union and challenged instinctive confidence. Her hair, of a deep brown, full of golden reflections, was rolled back from her temples in a way that admirably framed her oval features, something after the manner of an antique medallion, and showed to advantage her high forehead.

My first experience as I encountered her clear, steadfast eyes was one of a sort of guilty confusion. My whole past stood rebuked and self-convicted. But this wore away, and I became entirely at my ease, when I found how utterly simple and friendly she was. The uppermost feeling which she inspired at the first meeting was trust. No one could doubt those truthful eyes. Guile and suspicion seemed equally foreign to her. There was withal an air of cheerfulness about her that seemed to diffuse itself through the room, and a certain movement of the corners of her mouth showed that laughter lurked there. I felt that here was a fresh, sweet, wholesome nature—a girl who, if she loved a man, would shine into his life like a perpetual sun, and be loyal, too, as the sun is true to his orbit.

Moreover, what helped me to regain my self-possession was the memory of that scene under the walls of the château of Bonrepos. Often, during the intervening days, my mind had reverted to that occurrence which had led to so momentous consequences; and always I had found myself uncertain about it—some-

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times regretting it and reviling myself for it, sometimes glad of it. I knew that it was simply an impulsive act, not the expression of any clear principle. I did not know how to interpret myself. Now, in the presence of Sophie Roberval, all was clear. I knew that it was the unconscious effort of my nature yearning for something better than animal pleasures. Her first glance seemed to reveal me to myself. Her second gave me hope, by lighting up possibilities within me that had slumbered in the dark. From henceforth I was consecrated to the ideal, for the ideal had now become concrete. And the consciousness of that purpose imparted calmness in her society. What hindered but that I should make my future worthy of her and of such as she was, since I had already begun aright? And how thankful I was for that caprice that had both set me on the right road and had led to my knowing Sophie Roberval!

Our conversation was trivial enough, but for me at the least it was like a ripple on the surface of deep waters stirred to their very bed. When Sophie and her mother retired, promising that they would visit me again the next day, my thoughts were busy recalling every look and every inflection of her voice.

I shall not dwell on the details of the happy days that followed. To me, by contrast with the years that preceded them, they were an experience of paradise. Every day Madame Roberval brought her daughter to sit with me, and that daily visit of the lovely Sophie filled my life to the brim, first with happy anticipations, then with delightful memories.

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When I was sufficiently recovered to leave my chamber, a new happiness opened before me, for now I shared the family life. I ate at their table. By their fireside I took part in their familiar conversation. I sat for hours with Madame Roberval and her daughter, as they sewed or embroidered. In their friendly estimation, I was an agreeable reader, and they often called on me to exercise my talent of this kind for their entertainment. I had seen more of life than these simple, friendly folk. And something, it might be, in my manner and conversation showed my acquaintance with a larger world than theirs. At all events, there was an unmistakable deference in all their friendliness. Perhaps the mystery of my coming enhanced it. For, after all, they were women and shared their sex's love for the romantic.

Here was a thing, however, that troubled me deeply. The scant items of information about myself which I had imparted could hardly be supposed to satisfy reasonably prudent people. By mutual consent, nothing was asked on one side, nor said on the other, as to my history, my occupation, my family, and other such matters. Clearly, however satisfactory this arrangement might be as the basis of a friendly courtesy, it could not possibly be the ground of a final and complete understanding. Before I could take a permanent place, as I hoped that I should, in the regard of the Robervals, I must secure their confidence. While I remained an unknown stranger in their midst, I could not expect more than the hospitable friendliness which they continually

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evinced. Meanwhile, their attitude of careful abstinence from a single inquiry seemed a tacit invitation to me to declare myself.

It pressed heavily upon me, that, when I longed above all things to be taken into their entire confidence, I occupied a false and anomalous position in their eyes. Though not consciously an impostor, I felt deeply ashamed that my coming into their family circle had been accompanied and explained by a falsehood, which must certainly some day be confessed. But how could I reveal the truth, when its consequences would be so fraught with evil to others?

No doubt because of this mystery surrounding me, I was never left alone with Sophie. Cordial and gracious as she was, Madame Roberval was still the careful mother. If some domestic occasion called her momentarily from the room where I sat with her daughter and herself, she quickly returned. I knew that she was right. What mother of ordinary prudence would throw her young daughter alone in the company of a stranger, whose silence as to all that concerned him was a most provoking puzzle?

When I was permitted to go out of doors, what a delight it was to drink in the fresh air once more! The spring was by this time well begun. Ah, those happy days, when I strolled in the grounds at the rear of the house, under the trees covering themselves with young leafage, or basked on a bench in the genial sunlight! Those were halcyon days indeed, and life was rich for me. Within doors it was filled with the

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sunny presence of Sophie, out of doors with the constant thought of her.

I deeply felt that this gentle, pure, lovely girl had taken complete possession of my whole nature. I gloried in the fact. It had lifted me out of myself and given me a hope and an aspiration new in my experience.

How could I consent to drop out of her life, as I had by accident dropped into it? And yet to this fate I must resign myself, unless I was prepared to avow myself for what I was. Could I expect a girl, however trustful, to give her love to a stranger who withheld from her his confidence? All her life was open before me in its beautiful simplicity. Could I do less than reveal mine, such as it was?

What emphasized these considerations was the imminent necessity of my departure. I was now able to travel. There was no excuse for my longer stay. Go I must right soon; but go I would not without, at the least, such a partial explanation as would give me some assured footing in the estimation of the Robervals—some right, I hoped, to call them my friends. But how could it be done? There was my perplexity.

One morning I seated myself on the garden-bench in the warm sunlight. Here I sank into a train of thought so absorbing, that I was not aware of the change, when the sky became overcast and a chill wind sprang up. Presently there was a light step near me, and, looking up, I saw Sophie Roberval approaching with a cloak in her hand.

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"Monsieur Sabatier," she said, "the air has grown so chill, that I feared you might take cold, and I have brought you this covering."

"Ah, Mademoiselle," I cried, "how good you are!" Then, by an irresistible impulse, I seized her hand, as she extended it with the cloak, and for a single instant pressed it under the folds of the garment. Was it fancy or reality, that her soft hand lingered for a moment in mine? Emboldened to utter what was swelling up in my heart, I said in low tones, "How cruel is my fate, that I must so soon leave you! Shall I be remembered? Ah, Mademoiselle, my heart and soul are wholly yours! If I might know that you cared for me even a little!"

She said nothing, but her eyes met mine with a look full of tenderness and sadness. My love fed on it long afterward. In an instant she was gone.

That incident brought me to a rapid decision. I resolved that I would, at all hazards, avow myself to her parents in my true character and position, and ask their consent to my return to visit them and woo their daughter. This done, I would take my departure.

At noon I met the family at dinner. Never did Sophie seem to me so lovely—the more, perhaps, because there was about her an unmistakable air of abstraction and of sadness. Was she thinking of what I had said to her as to my intended departure and my feelings? A lover could not believe otherwise; and that thought gave color to my hopes.

That afternoon I sat again on the bench in the garden, pondering on what I should say in the inter-

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view which I purposed seeking that evening with her parents. On the next day, whatever might be the decision of Monsieur and Madame Roberval, I would take my departure. I looked forward to the momentous occasion half in hope, half in fear.

The house occupied by the Robervals stood on the edge of a great wood. On the other side were open waste lands, sloping to a fen. The whole was part of the wide estate of the Baron of Bonrepos, to whom my hosts were tenants. This circumstance, when I learned it, naturally interested me deeply.

As I sat in deep thought, I was roused by the distant cry of a hawker. Instantly I sprang to my feet and hastened to the garden wall. Clambering up half-way, and securing a foothold on a projecting stone, I looked forth. Coming up from the fens at a gallop was a party, the leader of which was calling and whistling to a falcon, which was flying toward the wood beyond the Robervals' house, in a course leading directly toward me. At the prospect of the bird's escape, the horseman in front put forth his utmost efforts to reclaim it, while he alternately whistled and called, using all the arts familiar to the craft. My interest riveted me to the spot where I stood.

At last the bird faltered, as if hesitating, then wheeled and began to circle. The sportsman redoubled his exertions to allure it. By this time the party had halted within a short distance, but so absorbed in their pursuit, that they took no note of me, standing with my body half exposed above the wall. Several times the falcon wheeled above their heads.

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Then she began slowly to descend in a spiral flight. At last she dropped straight on the extended wrist of her master, who stroked and caressed and then quickly hooded her. "Bravo! bravo!" went up from the attendants, and I incontinently joined in the cry.

Just then one of the men, catching sight of me, rode up close to the leader and said something to him, whereupon he turned quickly and gave me a piercing look. He was a powerfully built, swarthy man in middle life, with grizzled hair and with strong aquiline features and an imperious air. A scar, which seamed his right cheek from a little below the eye down to the roots of his pointed beard, gave added grimness to his harsh features.

At once it flashed into my mind, that this was doubtless the Baron of Bonrepos. Still, having shown myself, I could not now retreat without creating suspicion. I remained where I was, facing the party with all the indifference of manner I could assume. There was a hurried consultation between the leader and his attendants. Then the former turned again and faced me squarely with a black look full of suspicion. I stood my ground and met his stare with firmness.

A moment more and the whole party rode off toward the front of the house and were lost to my view, as they passed around it.

This incident disquieted me not a little. What was the meaning of that look and of the remarks of which I was plainly the subject? It must be, that I was recognized; but how and by whom?

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A few moments later, glancing toward the house in my anxiety, I saw at one of the rear windows of the second floor some one eagerly beckoning to me. I hurried forward. It was Sophie. When I had come near enough, I saw that she held a paper in her hand. In a moment it came fluttering down. On it was scrawled: "Fly this instant. Your life is in danger. Do not enter the house. Lead your horse out by the wicket and escape through the woods. Farewell!"

There was no time to be lost. Clearly, the danger was pressing. Waving my acknowledgments to Sophie, who still lingered watching me, I hastened to the stable. I had more than once visited my horse, and I knew where his equipments were. To saddle and lead him out was a moment's work. As I came out from the stable and turned toward the wicket close by, I cast a last glance toward the house, and saw a white hand waving to me a signal to begone.

A by-path through the wood led me, after going a short distance, into the road to Limoges. My horse was fresh, and, fearing that I might be pursued, I rode at a sharp gallop, which soon removed all danger of my being overtaken. As I neared my destination, I drew rein and took time for thought.

What a situation mine was! I found myself suddenly snatched away from the girl whom I loved, and without having uttered a word of the indispensable explanations! Moreover, a new complication had arisen in the appearance of the Baron of Bonrepos. In what way this was connected with the danger of which Sophie had given me warning, I could easily

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surmise. Thus my position with the Robervals was now certainly compromised. I could only determine to seek them, at the earliest occasion, and vindicate myself by telling the truth.

This is perhaps a suitable time for giving to the reader such an account of myself as it was my intention to offer, in brief, to Monsieur and Madame Roberval.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

JEAN FOURCADE TELLS THE STORY OF HIS LIFE.

I WAS born in a cottage near the castle at Pau, in Béarn, in which dwelt the old King of Navarre with his daughter, Queen Jeanne d'Albret. To the latter's infant son my mother, Jeanne Fourcade, was nurse. I was five years old, when the little prince was born. So it happened that I, being much with my mother in the nursery at the castle, was often set to rock the hope of Navarre in his cradle, which, by the way, was the quaintest in the world—a huge turtle-shell. When he began to walk, I guided his tottering steps, and as he grew older and shared the life of the country folk, mixing freely with them and living on coarse fare,—for it was his grandfather's wish that the boy should be reared rugged and vigorous,—I was his constant companion and, in a measure, his guardian.

Being older, and displaying, it would seem, some discretion for my years, I came to be held responsible for him in a way, much as an older brother would have been. Together we roamed the hillsides with goat-herds, we climbed precipitous heights, we swam in the swift Gave, and later we hunted and fenced together.

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So it came about that I, a mere peasant lad, became the inseparable companion of him who was first known as Prince of Béarn, and now as the King of Navarre.

I shared his opportunities of education, too, so far as this, that I overheard all the instruction given him, being permitted to sit by while he was with his tutor, Master La Gaucherie. Thus insensibly I was acquiring a degree of education superior to that of the generality of young nobles.

As time passed by, it was more and more evident how much my queen relied on me as a companion for her son. This was especially apparent, when, owing to the death of his uncle, the Prince of Condé, at the battle of Jarnac, the lad was summoned to take the field as the nominal head of the Huguenot forces, the real command being exercised by the great Admiral, Coligny. Ere we started on our first campaign, my mistress called me to her, and solemnly bound me to watch over and care for her son. She made me place my two hands within hers and sacredly swear to stand by him, through weal or woe, so long as we both should live. It was a weighty undertaking, and I little dreamed how much its faithful performance would cost me in the years that were to come.

The solemnity of my oath first came upon me in all its force, when my queen suddenly died. Then I felt as if my princely foster-brother had been committed to my lifelong care, and I was bound, whatever he might do, and into whatever follies he might

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plunge, not to desert him, but to continue his faithful guardian, so far as I was permitted to be. The situation was all the more serious, because I was already beginning to learn a lesson which future years would bring home to me with desperate force. I became aware that I was inextricably bound to share the experiences of another, whose exalted position exposed him to various powerful temptations, while over his conduct I could not exercise even the faintest control.

This was the frame of mind in which I found myself at the period at which this story opens. I had begun to realize that, whereas I was bound to share the fortunes of my young master, and to share them in a very peculiar and intimate way, I was impotent to mould them; I must be content to suffer dumbly; and this exasperated me.

In the meantime strange things had happened. During an interval of peace, Catherine de' Medici had made the amazing proposition of giving in marriage her daughter, Marguerite of Valois, sister of the reigning king, to my young master, and it had been accepted. It was fondly hoped that this union of a daughter of the royal house of France with the leader of the Huguenot party would heal the miserable divisions which rent the country with civil wars, and would bring about a lasting peace. Therefore the prospect of it was hailed by the oppressed party, the Huguenots, with intense delight. For them it was full of bright promise. But by zealous Catholics it was looked upon with exceeding disfavor. They ill

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brooked the proposed marriage of their king's sister with the leader of the heretics.

In furtherance of this union, it became necessary for my mistress to journey to Paris. Thither I accompanied her, as one of her attendants, and it was my sad privilege to witness her sudden and mysterious death in the great city full of those who hated her. Undeterred by this ominous occurrence, my young master pushed the preparations for his nuptials. I was in his train, when he rode to Paris for the great occasion, accompanied by a brilliant following of five hundred Protestant gentlemen. I had my deep misgivings as to the outcome of the union, when I heard whispers, widely current, of the prospective bride's supposed relations with the Duke of Guise. I witnessed the sullen discontent of the Parisian populace at the presence in their midst of so many jubilant heretics; I participated in the gorgeous ceremonies of the royal marriage; and, alas! I beheld one of the ghastliest spectacles that the world has ever looked upon, when the rage of the populace burst forth in the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, deluging Paris with blood. Scores of my friends perished, but I escaped through the protection of the King's old nurse, who was a Huguenot. My master's life was spared, because he was a prince of the blood; mine went unscathed, apparently, because I was too obscure for any one to take note whether I lived or died.

I shared, also, my master's four years' captivity at the French court, being only too often his unwilling attendant in the escapades in which he indulged. I

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fled with him in 1576, when he took the field as the leader of the Huguenot forces, and later established his quarters at Limoges, with a view to keeping his eye on the Estates-General in session at Blois. It was while we sojourned at this place, that I had the experiences related in the opening chapters of this book.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

FROM the narrative contained in the foregoing chapter it will readily be understood, that when I left the home of Monsieur Roberval, in consequence of the warning given me by Sophie, I went straight to the King of Navarre, and that he was the principal actor in the affair in which I was wounded.

He was delighted to welcome me back. My coming, too, was most timely, for I found our little force in the midst of hurried preparations for an instant march. Tidings had come that the enemy had invested Marans, and the garrison stood in need of immediate succor, else the place would surely fall.

This circumstance dashed my hopes of speedily visiting the Robervals and clearing myself of any imputation which might have been made against me by Bonrepos. I was compelled to content myself with sending Monsieur Roberval a brief letter, in which I thanked him for his hospitality and the generous confidence of his family, and deplored the necessity which I had been under of taking a false name and remaining under his roof in an assumed

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character. I assured him that, at the earliest day which my duties would allow, I should visit him and make such explanations as would put me in a proper light. In the meantime I begged him to hold me guiltless of any such wrong-doing as might seem to be justly inferred from the fact of my disguise. This letter I signed with my true name and dated from the headquarters of the King of Navarre.

When I wrote it, I had no doubt that our expedition for the relief of Marans would be quickly ended, and that we should then speedily return to our quarters at Limoges. In this expectation I was doomed to disappointment. After raising the siege of Marans, we found ourselves involved in a series of petty operations, unimportant, but rendered necessary by the activity of the royalist army under Biron. This officer, while he was one of the most skilful soldiers of the day, seemed to have no desire to terminate the war immediately. He was even suspected of having no sympathy with the objects of the all-powerful Catholic League.

At all events, whatever were the grounds of his policy, the campaign degenerated into a series of petty manœuvres, hardly worthy of being called warfare. The most that was accomplished on either side was the occasional seizure of some castle or town, either by artifice or by open assault, and these were the only occasions on which there was any serious encounter.

This species of partizan activity kept us on the alert and moving from point to point all the summer, while

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it produced no satisfactory results for either cause. The only good effect which I could observe was, that for my master it was a valuable school. In it he rapidly developed the soldierly qualities of quick perception, prompt decision, and rapid execution. Thanks to these, he was able to hold the field with our small force against the veteran Biron, at the head of a much larger army. It was his first campaign as a leader, and the manner in which he conducted it showed to the friends of our cause that we had a champion who could neither be overawed nor outwitted. Huguenot veterans who had followed Coligny in the earlier wars, when the great Admiral was the friend and counselor of the Queen of Navarre, said that the son inherited the courage and skill and readiness of resource with which the mother had held our little Béarn against a host of enemies.

At last the patience of the court was worn out by the dilatory tactics of Biron and the adroit manœuvring of his small force by the King of Navarre. If he could not be crushed, he must be cajoled. The King of France felt himself humiliated by the obstinate refusal of his brother-in-law to treat, except on his own terms, while the growing ascendancy of the League, clamorously demanding the suppression of heresy, made his own position ever more and more precarious, unless he should succeed in quickly bringing the King of Navarre to submission.

Then Catherine undertook to deal with her rebellious son-in-law, not doubting that her familiar methods, which had proved themselves effective with his father,

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would be equally potent with the son. She forgot, however, that she was dealing with the offspring not only of Antony of Bourbon, but of Jeanne d'Albret; and she had yet to learn that the atmosphere of freedom and the responsibility of command were rapidly transforming the supple and despised dependent of the Louvre into a personality more consistent with his position and with his manhood.

Accordingly, she took the field with her customary following, the select young women on whom she relied for success, when men were to be won, and came to visit the King of Navarre.

In the interview between her and my master, she experienced a discomfiture which was the more notable, because it was unexpected, not alone by her, but by many who dreaded the kind of influence which she would certainly endeavor to exert, and to which his former life at the court of France rendered him so peculiarly susceptible.

The meeting lasted a long time, and at every point she found her antagonist courteous, but inflexible, insisting on the same terms, not to be turned by either argument or cajolery, "asking more," she said, "with a handful of men at his back, than Coligny had ever dared to demand, at the head of seventy thousand." One point only of the interview I particularly recall. Catherine, worn out by the obstinate insistence of her son-in-law, asked wearily, "What, then, do you want, my son?"

"Nothing, Madame, that you have to offer," he replied, at the same time casting toward the attendant

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bevy of fair young women a droll look, that conveyed a world of meaning in its sly suggestion. Her efforts availed nothing, and Catherine went away discomfited, realizing that in her son-in-law there was a toughness of fibre which she had never dreamed of.

In another particular, too, the Protestant world was agreeably surprised by qualities now displayed for the first time by my master. The public papers which he put forth, from time to time, stating the grievances of the Reformers in the frequent violations of the pledged faith of the crown, and arguing and defending their position, were marked by consummate ability. These documents were drawn, as to their substance, by my master's wise counselor, Duplessis-Mornay; but it was himself who inspired them and who gave them that force and directness which are so marvelous in his letters.

Altogether the summer of 1577 closed satisfactorily for us. In the field my master had baffled a far superior force, led by the best general of the crown. In spite of most inadequate resources and of the difficulties caused by the jealous distrust of his stern cousin Condé, who always held himself aloof and spoke of the King of Navarre as "lost in depravity and worldly lusts," he had held his own against both the forces and the insidious overtures of the court. He had impressed upon friends and enemies alike the conviction, that he was not a contemptible weakling, as had been scornfully declared on one side and feared on the other.

Early in the following winter we went into quarters,

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not again at Limoges, but at Agen. I took the first opportunity of securing leave of my master to visit the Robervals. As I approached the scene of so exquisite happiness for me, I found my heart fluttering between hope and fear. Eight months had elapsed since I had last seen Sophie. During that time I had received no word or sign from her or from any one connected with her. It seemed presumptuous to build so much on the slight tokens of friendly interest which she had shown. How far, too, might not her feeling for me have been the outgrowth of pity? Or, again, how had she been affected by the discovery, that I had become known to her under a false name? To make matters worse, too, I had been silent through all the intervening months, except the single letter which I had sent to her father; for I had preferred waiting until I could see her. Certainly the force of appearances was strong against me.

On the other hand, there was in the nature of Sophie that which whispered hope. So absolute confidence had I in her gentle trustfulness and in her sweet loyalty, that I could not bring myself to think of her as separated from me by the mere force of outward circumstances, which at the earliest opportunity I could surely explain and clear up. I did not believe her capable of condemning me unheard.

Moreover, what gave me added confidence was the happy consciousness of loyalty to her. Since I had come to know her, she had reigned alone in my heart and supreme over my conduct. During the months of our separation, her image had been my constant

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companion and inspiration, and I rejoiced in knowing that I had lived not unworthily of my love.

Full of these thoughts and feelings, I approached the house. Whom should I first meet? How should I be received?

When I came in sight of it, a chill seized me. Every shutter was closed tightly. There was no sign of life or human habitation. I rode around the house. There was only silence and solitude. The trees, already nearly leafless, while their dead foliage lay drifted in heaps against the walls of the house, added to the mournful desolation of the scene. I dismounted, in utter heaviness of heart, and seated myself on the door-step, while the shadows of evening gathered about me, and the leaves came rustling down upon the neglected flower-beds which Sophie had been wont to tend.

At last I bethought me that perchance I might find in the neighborhood somebody who might know whither the Robervals had gone. It was a vain hope. The peasants of the vicinity could tell me no more than that they were long since gone—six months perhaps.

Nothing was left to me but to take my way back, in utter dejection, to Agen, and await such opportunity as chance might throw in my way, if ever, of learning what I so much longed to know.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

CATHERINE'S FLYING SQUADRON MEETS ITS MATCH.

IT was now a year and a half since my master had effected his escape from imprisonment. Almost from the beginning, he had repeatedly asked that his wife be allowed to join him. At the first, this demand was met with ridicule and contempt. At one time his messenger was told, that if the King of Navarre would have his consort live with him, he must be reconverted to Catholicism; at another his envoy was repulsed with actual violence.

The lady herself was by no means eager to be reunited to her husband. She had no ill-will toward him. Indeed, she was an excellent friend and invaluable correspondent, keeping him constantly informed of all that transpired at the court which might affect his interests. But she had no desire for any closer relations. The life at the Louvre afforded ample opportunities for the freest indulgence of that disposition of which she has herself given us the key in a memorable saying: "If you wish to cease to love, possess the loved object."

If her affairs of the heart, as may be inferred from

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this maxim, were not long-lived, they were varied and frequent. It was this fact, perhaps, which scandalized the King, together with the incessant quarrels between the present incumbent of her affections, Bussy d'Amboise, and the royal favorites, Quélus, Mégrim, and Maugiron, that moved her brother to think of sending her to her husband. She succeeded in postponing the evil day, by feigning an illness which required the waters of Spa for its cure. On her way to this famous resort she journeyed leisurely through the Low Countries, doing everything in her power for the interests of her brother Alençon, who had ambitious projects in that direction, and added to her list of vanquished knights Don John of Austria, Philip of Spain's natural brother. He has left on record his estimate of her seductive charms in this sentence: "Although the beauty of this queen be more divine than human, it is better calculated to ruin and damn men than to save them."

But Henry III. was by this time fully resolved to send his sister to her husband. Perhaps he had begun to suspect that she was doing more for the cause of Navarre, as an inmate of the Louvre, than she could do for it in Gascony or Guyenne. At all events, on the pretext of her daring misdemeanors, she received orders to prepare to join her husband.

The Queen-Mother thereupon announced that she would escort her daughter to the court of Navarre. In appearance it was a most delicate maternal attention; but my master was too well schooled in his mother-in-law's methods not to understand that her

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real object was to win whom she could of his followers and divide his party. Unconsciously, however, Catherine brought with her an unfailing antidote for the subtle poison which she proposed to introduce into the Navarrese court. The two queens arrived, attended each by a train of facile and obedient beauties. While these daughters of joy mingled freely with one another in gay intercourse and, to outward appearance, formed one band, they were in fact hostile forces, destined to be used for opposite purposes.

A conspicuous figure in Catherine's following was a certain large-eyed, languishing Mademoiselle d'Ayelle, a Greek, who had escaped from the taking of Cyprus. This fair Cyprian inherited, perchance, some of that charm which was possessed of old by that goddess-queen of Cyprus who condescended to become the mother of the mortal Æneas. At all events, she quickly vanquished my master, who became her obedient slave. The next in importance of our leaders, Turenne,—for the stern Condé kept himself aloof from this gay court,—fell an easy victim to Cupid's arrow directed by Mademoiselle La Vernay. So far Catherine's cohort seemed to sweep the field. But at this crisis the fine strategy of the Queen of Navarre showed itself. Catherine, besides her feminine escort of honor, had strengthened her cause, as she fondly hoped, by bringing with her a certain Monsieur de Pibrac, famous for his eloquent periods, who was expected to exercise his persuasive powers upon the Huguenot deputies of the sterner type. Upon

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this Pibrac, as the most formidable foe, the Queen of Navarre directed her own fascinations, while she assigned to her attendant damsels subordinate parts in the great work of keeping the Huguenot leaders loyal, and with so good effect, that his eloquent tongue was soon paralyzed for all purposes but that of praising the Queen of Navarre's beauty and goodness.

So the merry war went on, the young ladies on one side languishing and ogling for Catholicism, while the opposing cohort smiled and coquetted for Protestantism, all generously disregarding such personal convictions as they might have. At last, after a campaign which had continued a year and a half, and was utterly barren of the results which she had anticipated, the elder general, defeated by the younger, whom she had herself trained, drew off her forces, outraged, she declared, at the long delays, which had been purposely planned in order that the Huguenot chiefs "might enjoy the society of her maids of honor."

When her mother went away, the Queen of Navarre remained, and then began a sort of idyllic existence, which more nearly realized the imaginary delights pictured by my master's grandmother in her "Hep-tameron" than anything else that I have ever witnessed in real life. The time was spent in agreeable alternations of church-going and love-making, with an occasional interlude of hunting or a short military excursion. The Queen of Navarre has written a brief account of this Arcadian existence. According to her account, the court at Nérac was so delightful that nobody had cause to regret that of France. She says:

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"Nothing was heard of diversity of religion. The King, my husband, and madame the princess, his sister, went to the preaching, and I and my train went to the mass in a chapel in the park. The remainder of the day was passed in innocent amusements, and the afternoon and evening in dancing." The same mutual tolerance which was shown toward each other's religious observances was extended to other matters even more personal. The husband's weaknesses and those of the wife accommodated themselves to each other without friction or unfriendly criticism. The only discordant note was struck by the Huguenot ministers, who from time to time denounced licentiousness, and once publicly declared that they would not administer the Lord's Supper, until the court should mend its ways. But nobody seemed disturbed by these fulminations.

My master at this time seemed very happy. For several days, it is true, after the departure of Mademoiselle d'Ayelle with the Queen-Mother, he appeared inconsolable. Then it fell to the good fortune of Mademoiselle de Rebours, who had long had aspirations in that direction, to succeed in solacing him. This delicate duty she discharged for some time with great acceptance.

The court was at this time sojourning at Pau; but this residence did not please the Queen. She had taken a great dislike to "this little Geneva of a Pau," as she called it, and she urgently begged to be taken elsewhere to live. The court, therefore, returned to Nérac.

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This change of residence produced another change also, for Mademoiselle de Rebours remained behind, ill. In consequence of this separation, my master fell deeply in love with Mademoiselle de Montmorency, daughter of the Baron de Fosseux. Of this young lady Queen Marguerite has recorded that she conducted herself at the first with great virtue, and allowed her admirer "only such familiarities as might with all propriety be permitted." But how could a dependent girl long resist her sovereign? Soon a doggerel lampoon became current at court, celebrating a certain king who "got all his wife's maids of honor into trouble, but was matched by the good lady, who well knew how to avenge herself."

Amid these scenes of gaiety I alone was heavy-hearted. All wide France held for me but one woman, and in all wide France I knew not where to seek her. When I contrasted my Sophie with the giddy butterflies who fluttered constantly in the sunshine of pleasure, they seemed to me too frivolous to be worth a moment's thought. They indeed looked on me as a churl destitute of common feeling. To my master it was simply incomprehensible, that a man should be so devoted to the image of one woman, whom he would perhaps never see again, as to be insensible to the attractions of all others. It seemed to him a morbid and alarming symptom, verging on insanity. He expostulated with me gravely and kindly on the danger to my health in this sentimental devotion to an ideal, and insisted that what I needed was something which would keep my blood in vigor-

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ous circulation by stimulating my heart. These discourses had always one text—"Take a mistress"; and he seemed to think that he had produced an irresistible argument, when he pointed to the example of the grave Sully, who had already adopted this course, and, under the teaching of Queen Marguerite, was learning to dance, and even was in danger of forgetting his absorbing passion of amassing a fortune. I could only reply that the remedy was little to my liking, and that I was happier in my loneliness than any woman but one could make me.

As to himself, he soon began to have an experience which might make him feel that the sovereign remedy which he recommended so enthusiastically, was not free from its disadvantages. Mademoiselle de Fosseux, or Fosseuse (Dimplecheek), as my master chose to call the name, soon began to put on such airs, in consequence of her influence over her lover, as were intolerable to her mistress. The latter, however leniently she dealt with moral irregularities, never forgot that she was "the daughter of a king, the sister of a king, and the wife of a king," and the insolence of one of her maids of honor was on no account to be borne. In consequence, a growing irritation between her husband and herself threatened to terminate the court of love which was in continuous session at Nérac.

At the very time that I witnessed this unhappy result of illicit love, an incident occurred that revived my hope. A stranger knocked at my door. His appearance indicated that he had lately arrived from

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a long journey. Without comment or explanation, he handed me a letter, and, saying that he would call on the morrow for my answer, went away. The missive was addressed to me in a delicate handwriting unknown to me. "It is some prank," I thought, "of one of the giddy girls about the court." I carelessly tore it open. I copy it now as it lies before me, yellow and creased and worn by being long carried about my person.

It runs thus:

"MONSIEUR: I know not whether I am doing an unmaidenly thing in addressing you, but it seems to me I follow only the dictates of a trustful friendship. A long time has passed since we parted. No word has come from you, save the letter which you sent to my father, promising to make certain explanations. Had it been your purpose to keep that promise, as I doubt not that it was, you would have been hindered by our removal from our former residence. I dare not let you know where we now are, for my father has not only strictly forbidden any communication with you, but your name is not even to be mentioned among us. But I cannot longer endure this suspense. Friendship demands that I give you some opportunity of making to me such explanation as you would have made to my father. I will not dwell on something that you said to me shortly before we parted. Perhaps it was only the idle word of one accustomed to say pleasant things to ladies on fitting occasions. I am a simple girl, unschooled in the ways of the

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world. Yet I should be happy in knowing that you are not such as my parents have told me that you are, unworthy of being remembered among us. I know not what it all means, but dreadful suspicions surround you. You came to us under a false name. You had been wounded by some unknown hand. The lord of the manor, so soon as he discovered you here, sought your life.

“One question haunts me night and day. Only you can answer it. Were you indeed connected with those dreadful occurrences at the neighboring château, of which I have heard some rumor?”

“If you care aught for my continued trust and friendship, my messenger will bring me a letter from you. But I beg you, on your honor, not to seek, by questioning or by following him, to ascertain our present abode.

“If you can, in all honor and truth, remove the dark suspicions which hang about you, then I am still your friend,

“S. R.”

Blessed girl! What beautiful trustfulness! In spite of the damnably suspicious circumstances that seemed to unfold me, she still had faith and would not condemn me unheard. And while she wrote only of friendship, might I not hope that a tenderer feeling inspired her letter?

I wrote to her, protesting my innocence of any wrong-doing. I assured her that my assumption of a false name, and the whole train of circumstances

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involving me in apparent condemnation, were due to my desire to shield another. I promised that, if she would procure me an interview with her father, I should make such explanations to him as could not fail to fully acquit me. I implored her to write to me again and to open the way for communication between us. And I poured out the utterance of my passionate love, telling her how, during our separation, her image had been present with me always, and the thought of her had been my guardian angel.

What a load her letter lifted off my mind, in the knowledge that she still trusted and cared for me! What sweet hopes it revived!

When her messenger came on the following morning, my letter was ready for him. His eyes glistened when I put in his hand five pistoles and said, "Bring me soon another letter from the same person, and I will give you twice as much."

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

HOW A PAIR OF BRIGHT EYES LOST US A TOWN.

MY master's reputation for repartee was no less well founded than his renown as a gallant. He had an odd, brusque sort of humor that was very effective in silencing an opponent, by the unexpected turn which he was wont to give to the dialogue. Once, when we had taken Mirande, the mayor of the town came out to meet him with a formal address, which, kneeling, he began to read. My master, hungry and more concerned for his dinner than for hearing a pedantic discourse, listened impatiently to a stilted exordium. Then came the sentence, "I acknowledge, sire, that this town is yours by civil law, but—"

"*Ventre-saint-gris*, by canon (cannon) law, too," was the quick rejoinder, and he spurred his horse on and left the astonished official kneeling in the roadway.

This easy bonhomie is one of the things that have made my master beloved among the people. They are wont to say he has a heart for them.

His fun-loving humor, however, came near to hav-

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ing a disastrous consequence on one occasion about this time. One of the towns of security granted to the Huguenots by the Treaty of Poitiers, which closed the war of 1577, was La Réole. Catherine was very desirous of regaining it. But this could be done, if at all, only by treachery, for the town was strongly garrisoned, and commanded by a veteran officer, who had been assigned to this post as a reward for his long and faithful services to the cause, in the course of which he had received numerous and most disfiguring wounds. The Marquis of Ussac was old, and honored as he was brave, and his integrity was deemed incorruptible.

But one unhappy day the grizzled veteran, lame, and scarred until his face was a veritable patchwork of seams, came to court to wait upon my master. The festivities were then at their height, and this antique, war-worn figure seemed strangely out of place amid the gallants and beauties of Nérac.

“Who is this Huguenot Apollo?” asked Catherine. So soon as she learned that he was the governor of La Réole, he became an important personage in her eyes. It was not long before I saw her conversing most affably with him. I watched her manoeuvres with curious interest. Presently she took aside one of her maids of honor, Mademoiselle de Fleury, whispered something in her ear, then brought her forward and introduced her with great cordiality to her new acquaintance. The young lady took her cue with zest, and soon was engaged in animated conversation with the veteran Huguenot. She drew him

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on to tell of his varied experiences in the field and in deadly breaches, to all which she listened with a show of rapt interest, and with many an "Oh!" and "Ah!" meanwhile making effective play with her fine eyes. The poor old man doubtless thought her a most amiable and ingenuous young lady. Not many days later Ussac reappeared at court; but how transformed! His white locks were modishly trimmed and frizzled; his grizzled beard was cut down to a fashionable point, and his mustaches were waxed and curled; his weather-stained doublet, chafed by his cuirass, had given place to a cherry-colored velvet suit of the latest cut. So far as the tailor and the barber could rejuvenate him, he was a new man from the crown of his head to the points of his shoes. Poor old Ussac! It was pitiful to see him dragging his lame and halting limbs, covered with their unwonted finery, through the gay crowd, in faithful attendance on the Fleury. As for the young lady, sure of her conquest, she was now as airy and capricious as she had at the first been alluring. She was leading him a merry dance, to the great entertainment of all the frivolous crowd.

One evening, as he approached to converse with her, she said to a group of young men surrounding her, "Make room for my patriarch, my battered Adonis." If the old man did not hear the words, he did not fail to note the titter which followed the remark, and the grimaces of the courtiers directed at him. Without a word, he turned and limped away. Perhaps the old soldier would have gone back to his

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post cured of his folly by this humiliation. But, by ill fortune, as he was passing out of the ball-room, he met my master, who was in one of his most boisterous moods.

“Come, Monsieur d’Ussac,” he cried, slapping the old soldier familiarly on the shoulder, “how youthful you look! You are always adding to your laurels by new conquests. They tell me that Mademoiselle de Fleury is hopelessly enamoured of you. Let me beg you not to be too difficult. Even an old soldier may bend to love.”

The veteran frowned. “Your Majesty is pleased to be facetious,” he said, bowing stiffly, and passed on.

I followed him at a little distance, not so much from curiosity as because I felt a genuine esteem for the proud old man. He called hoarsely for his lackey and ordered his horse.

Three days later the court was entertained at a brilliant festival at Auch. During the day there was a *fête champêtre* in a grove near by, and in the evening the castle was illuminated for a grand ball. While the revels were at their height, I stood in the doorway of the great hall, looking on at the dancers, when a man plucked my sleeve. I turned and saw Horry, one of the officers of the garrison of La Réole. Evidently he had come on no errand of pleasure, for he wore his riding-boots, which were bespattered with mud, and he was covered with dust and sweat.

“Fourcade,” he said quickly, “I must speak with the King immediately.”

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I went and whispered his message to my master. He excused himself to his partner and followed me to Horry. As the latter told his story, I saw my master start and strike his forehead with his clenched hand. A moment later he came to me, gripped me almost fiercely by the arm, and hissed out, "What think you? Ussac is turned traitor! Swears that he will no longer serve under a heretic king. Abjures Protestantism. Has called in Duras, opened the gates to him by night, and delivered up La Réole. Horry got wind of what was going on just in time to escape and bring me the news."

I recalled the spectacle of poor old Ussac going away with his pride wounded by a giddy butterfly of a girl and by my master's untimely jest. And now his honorable career was ended in a base treachery! Before I could collect my thoughts sufficiently to make any remark, my master continued vehemently, "We must have reprisals, and that immediately. Do you go and get my equipments ready. Collect all the men that you can, prepared to ride within an hour. I will give a hint to Turenne, Sully, Aubigné, and the rest. By to-morrow morning I shall have an equivalent for La Réole."

Half an hour later I returned to report to my master. I found him dancing as gaily as if nothing had happened. Nobody would have suspected that he had any other thought than that of passing a merry night. I whispered to him that I could find no more than thirty-five men, the most of our force being at Nérac.

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"It is enough," he answered.

At midnight we met. I had the men-at-arms ready, and the leaders had slipped out, like my master, and put on their accoutrements. By this time I understood that Fleurance was our destination. We rode hard all the night and reached the neighborhood of the town before daybreak. There we halted in a grove, resting our horses and waiting for the opening of the gates.

The garrison did not suspect that an armed enemy was nearer than Nérac, and took no more than the usual precautions. With the opening of the gates we dashed in, cut down the sentinel, before he could give an alarm, and reached the market-place unopposed. The only fighting took place at the castle, which we carried with a rush. Its garrison had caught the alarm and rallied to the walls, and we lost five or six men in taking it. We remained at Fleurance until the second day, having meanwhile sent to Nérac for a force sufficient to hold the place.

This kind of partizan warfare went on continually, without interrupting the harmony which prevailed, and was not considered a violation of the truce.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE WENT IN SEARCH OF SOPHIE.

SEVERAL months had now passed since the receipt of the letter from Sophie, and I had waited from day to day in the vain hope of receiving another. None had come, and I was still unable to write to her, because of the care with which the secret of her residence was guarded. It was not difficult to surmise reasons for my failure to hear from her. Perhaps her father had discovered our correspondence and had taken measures to stop it. What I was less inclined to admit, perhaps my letter had not proved satisfactory on the main point, or even, possibly, I had offended her by the too ardent avowal of my love. Perhaps she had simply failed in securing the means of communicating with me.

But these surmises, however reasonable they might be, could not reconcile me to Sophie's continued silence. At last I could no longer endure the suspense. I resolved to try to end it by going in search of her. I would seek out the Robervals, if it was possible for me to find them, and plead my cause in person before her father. There was nothing in honor

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to hinder me from doing this. Sophie had, it is true, enjoined me in her letter from taking any steps to ascertain the place of her abode from her messenger, either directly or indirectly; but I was in no way debarred from any independent efforts which I might make in that direction.

It had been much in my mind that Rochelle, since it was their former abode, was of all towns the likeliest in which the Robervals would take up their residence, after leaving the place in which I had become acquainted with them. At all events, should I not find them there, what could be more probable than that among the Catholic families of that city I should gain some clue to their present abode? To Rochelle, therefore, I determined to go. My master readily gave me a leave of absence for ten days, and I started. It would be idle to relate the details of the journey. Enough to say that it was fruitless. I did indeed, without much difficulty, find friends of the Robervals who had known them well during their long residence in that city; but none of these had any knowledge of them so recent even as my own. Nothing remained for me but to return, baffled and disheartened, to Nérac.

Having reluctantly come to this conclusion, I sat disconsolate in my lodging, at the close of the third day spent in searching the city for any tidings of my Sophie. Surely mine was a hard fate, and bitterly I arraigned Providence, which involved my pure love for an innocent girl in the consequences of another's wrong-doing, while he who had caused all our trouble,

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went on his way unpunished. Was this a well-ordered world, in which virtue must suffer the penalties of crime? Or was, perchance, my expiation not yet complete for the follies of earlier days, ere Sophie had come into my life and given it a worthy purpose?

Moodily pondering these problems, I contemplated my return to the frivolous court, now more than ever hateful to me, in view of my bitter disappointment. How I loathed its inane gaiety and its soulless "loves"! Loves indeed!

My sombre reverie was broken by a low knock at my door. I strode across the room and opened it. Before me stood a man, whose hat, drawn well down over his eyes, completely hid his features in shadow, while a long cloak wrapped about him equally concealed his person.

"With your permission, Monsieur Fourcade, I shall enter," he courteously said, and without more ado stepped into the room.

A hope leaped up in my heart that my disguised visitor brought me some tidings of Sophie. I closed the door and drew a chair for him, eagerly listening for the words which would give me some ray of light in my gloom.

The stranger deliberately laid aside his cloak, throwing it over the chair on which he was about to sit, and then, seating himself, removed his hat. He was a square-built man in middle life, with features denoting singular resoluteness, and a face tanned by much exposure to the sun. He was dressed in fine, but well-worn clothing, of grave color and cut. In

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short, his whole appearance betokened the Huguenot gentleman of the more serious type, and, one would say, a soldier by profession. Such he was, in fact.

“Pardon me, Monsieur Fourcade, this unexpected visit,” he said. “When I have stated its object, you will recognize it as a compliment to your soldierly qualities.”

At these words my heart sank, for evidently his errand had nothing to do with the subject which just then filled my thoughts.

The stranger continued: “Though you do not know me, I know you, because of having once seen you in attendance on the King of Navarre, and, let me add, still better by reputation, as a brave soldier of the good cause. Perchance you have heard my name mentioned—Cæsar, Count d’Aurigny.”

I bowed, both in acknowledgment of the compliment and in recognition of a gallant gentleman, whose fame had reached me, but whom I had never chanced to meet, because he served under Condé, whose distrust and disapproval of my master kept him constantly at a distance from our court.

Aurigny then proceeded to state the object of his visit. He had that day seen and recognized me on the street, but had not made himself known, because he was endeavoring to conceal his presence in Rochelle. He had, however, learned the place of my abode, and had now come to ask me to take part in a secret expedition which he was organizing.

The circumstances were these: The town of Les Sables d’Olonne, on the sea-coast, about thirteen

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leagues to the north of Rochelle, was formerly a stronghold which we greatly prized because of its almost impregnable citadel, built on high cliffs overlooking the ocean. On its landward side, this fortress was as strong as art could make it. To seaward, Nature had rendered it stronger still, for it was guarded by a precipice which it was impossible to scale, while the sea incessantly breaking at its foot would dash to pieces any boat which might approach too near. This seeming Gibraltar had been lost to us during the summer of 1577, partly through the negligence of its commandant, and partly through treachery of some of the garrison, whereby a picked body of royalists had secured an entrance, after dusk, in the disguise of packmen. Thereupon they had immediately blown up the gates, and their comrades, rushing in, had seized the place, despite a brave resistance of its surprised defenders.

All this I had heard, and I had not forgotten the name of the Count d'Aurigny as the second in command of the garrison. I remembered, too, how deeply incensed my master was, when the evil tidings of this great loss reached him, and what bitter reproaches he wrote to the unfortunate officers, who shortly after the occurrence recovered their liberty by the payment of heavy ransoms.

These circumstances my visitor recalled to my recollection, and I could not but feel with him in the humiliation under which the gallant officer still smarted at the reproaches which, he considered, had been unjustly heaped upon him for a misfortune for which,

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not being in command, he was not answerable. He added that he had taken a solemn oath that never, so long as he lived, would he rest content, until he had vindicated himself by retaking the post.

“I have thought by day and dreamed by night, of nothing else,” he continued; “and since regaining my freedom I have wrought secretly, but incessantly, toward that end, slowly maturing my plans. Now all is ready for their execution. The enterprise is perilous in the extreme, but for brave men I believe its success assured. But one man is lacking of the number to which I must limit my force. I want one who is not only true and devoted to the good cause, but capable of being a leader. To-day as I walked the streets, not knowing where I should find such a one, I espied you. On the instant I felt that Providence was befriending me. Monsieur Fourcade,”—and he looked me steadily in the eye,—“will you, in the name of God and our religion, and for soldierly honor, aid me in this enterprise?”

Without a word I rose and, for a moment or two, paced the apartment. This, I felt, was the proposal of a desperate man. His expedition, I did not doubt, would lead to the death—certainly to the capture—of all concerned; for it was known that the fortress, since its seizure by the enemy, was strongly garrisoned, under command of a veteran officer. Any thought of its recapture was deemed scarcely less than insane. On the other hand, the proposition appealed to me strongly, by reason of its very desperateness. What was life to me without Sophie? And of her it seemed

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that I had lost all trace. To live amid the giddy frivolities of Nérac, where all seemed happy in their soulless way, would be a bitterer doom than ever, after my bootless search.

I stopped before my visitor and simply said, "Count d'Aurigny, I am with you."

He caught my extended hand in his and wrung it fervently. Then I sat down beside him, and he unfolded his plans. As he proceeded, I was filled with admiration at the sagacity and patience with which he had wrought out the minutest details of a scheme which was the more difficult because it required absolute secrecy.

His first step had been to secure confederates in the hostile post, for help from within was indispensable. With this view, he had sent two trusty followers, staunch Huguenots, whom he had thoroughly instructed, to offer themselves for enlistment in the garrison. They had appeared with a plausible story, and had been accepted without suspicion. Thus he had gained his first point.

I was startled, when he next told me that he purposed making the attack from the sea. To my expression of amazement he answered calmly, "Your very surprise shows that it is from the sea that the post must be assailed, since nobody would dream of an enemy's approach from that quarter, and not a single sentry keeps guard there."

"But those inaccessible cliffs!" I exclaimed.

"Listen!" said he. "Remember that I know every foot of ground within those walls, and that, day

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after day, and month after month, I have watched the ocean beating at the foot of those rocks. I have noted this point: the sea is shallow for some distance from the shore, so that at ordinary low tide there is but little water below the cliffs. Twice in the year, when the lowest tides occur, with an off-shore wind, a little strip of beach is exposed for a short time. One of these seasons is now at hand. On the second night from this our force will land on that bit of beach." This he said as calmly as he might have spoken of marshaling his men on some parade-ground.

"But, with cliffs steep as a wall above you, how much nearer will you be to the citadel?" I asked, fairly dazed at the seeming madness of the man.

"Listen!" he patiently continued. "Above the occasional beach which I have mentioned, a very heavy iron staple has been driven into the rock, for the purpose of securing a line by which provisions might be hauled up from a light-draught vessel, in case the post should be entirely beleaguered on the landward side, and it should be necessary to victual it from the sea. That staple we shall use to effect our entrance into the fortress."

"How?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Nothing could be simpler," said Aurigny, with a smile of amusement at my perplexity. "If rumor speaks truly, the King of Navarre sometimes makes use of a rope-ladder. If you have ever seen one employed, you will understand how we shall proceed. My men in the garrison will lower a light cord, to

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which we shall attach a strong, thick rope. They will draw it up and make it fast to the staple. And so there you have our ladder, by which we shall mount to victory." This he said with an easy air, and spreading his hands, as if he were explaining the simplest procedure in the world, instead of what seemed to me the foolhardiest scheme that a sane man could propose. "Say, rather, to sure death," I was tempted to say, but I was in no mood to urge objections. I had committed myself to this wild venture, and I was set on following it to the bitter end.

Aurigny then gave me further details of his plans. Every contingency had been foreseen. With patient secrecy he had gone about the city gathering his men, here one, there another—hardy and daring fellows all, fit for such an undertaking. Only two, however, men whom he knew to be as true as steel, had been admitted to his full confidence. The others had been enlisted without any knowledge of their destination. To have given out such information would have been to invite disaster, for about us were many sympathizers with the enemy.

The whole party was made up of seafaring men. Excepting only Aurigny and me, there was not a man of the thirty-six who had not proved his mettle in bold ventures on the ocean. Two large boats, to convey us, had been secured and were in readiness. He had even assured himself of the vigilance of his followers within the garrison, by sailing up one night in a fisherman's boat, giving the concerted signal, and holding actual communication with them, bidding

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them be in readiness for his early appearance with a force.

As I listened to Aurigny's account of what he had done, and perceived with what sagacity all his arrangements had been made, and especially when I learned how much had already been accomplished without detection, I became in some measure inspired with his hopefulness.

At all events, the undertaking did not seem so insanely desperate as, at the first, I thought it.

The next day I spent mainly in making some simple provisions against the probability of my never returning to my friends. Chiefly, I wrote to Sophie, protesting once more my whole soul's devotion to her and my innocence of any such wrong as that in which circumstances seemed to involve me. I told her of my deep chagrin at not hearing from her again, since the receipt of the one letter which she had sent me, and of my vain attempt to learn the present abode of her family, in the hope of making to her father such explanations as I believed would not fail to satisfy him that he had misjudged me. And now, I said, in my despair, I was about to embark on an expedition from which it was little likely that I should gain aught else than a soldier's death. I would have her know that my last thought would be of God and her, and I prayed her to hold me ever in kindly remembrance, as one whose only fault, since first I had come to know her, had been in too easily bearing the burden of another's guilt.

This letter I inclosed within one addressed to my

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master, and I implored him, in the event of my death, to see that it was duly forwarded, should any opportunity ever occur, as by the coming of a messenger from a person in whom he knew me to be deeply interested.

A letter to my mother completed the package, which I then sealed and delivered to the commandant in Rochelle, with the request that he would send it to the King of Navarre, should I not reclaim it within five days.

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

WHAT JEAN FOURCADE SAW IN A CAVERN BY THE SEA.

THE evening was fine and still. Our men were under orders to assemble at ten o'clock, since at that hour there would probably not be any one moving about the water-side, and the coming together and departure of our company would be unobserved. But so early as nine o'clock Aurigny and I were making our way through the crooked streets, already well-nigh deserted, to our rendezvous, the Quai des Pêcheurs. He wished to be there in good season, that he might examine the boats, to see that their equipment was complete.

Soon we left behind us the quarter inhabited by the wealthier citizens and the shop-keepers, and entered that in which the fisherfolk and sailors abode. We must thread our way through dark and narrow passages, noisome and fetid, deep in mud, with an occasional heap of reeking filth, to which the offal of fish gave a distinctive odor, and which the dim light of lanterns suspended on chains scarcely enabled us to avoid. Here and there rose great warehouses of

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stone, sombre and iron-barred, in which merchants kept their precious goods under guard ; while, in contrast with these masses of wealth, were numberless low-browed, squalid taverns, from within which came the clamor of many voices, some deep and hoarse, others shrill and feminine, sometimes in furious quarrel, oftener in bursts of ribald song. Much of the population of this region seemed gathered in these repulsive haunts. It was a relief when we came out from this reeking quarter into view of the water, and breathed purer air, though it was laden still with the odor of rotting fish.

Aurigny speedily found the particular quay which was our rendezvous. Fastened to it were several fishing-boats, and among these two large pinnaces, destined for our party. At some distance from the shore were visible the outlines of several great vessels, and voices were heard shouting from one of these to another. But about the small fishing-craft near us there was no sign of life. Only in the stern-sheets of each of our boats sat a muffled figure. These, at a call from Aurigny, quickly rose and came ashore.

My companion then introduced me to the men, who, he said, had been his faithful and untiring helpers in organizing and fitting out our expedition. Jean Maillot and Mathieu Gourand were hardy, sober Rochellese fishermen, staunch Huguenots. They had shared the perils and privations of their fellow-citizens, when the good town, after the massacre of St. Bartholomew's, put itself in a state of defense against the red-handed king and successfully withstood a siege

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during which the beleaguering army brought all the resources of warfare and all the wealth of the kingdom against its walls. All the while the sturdy burghers, undaunted, stared gaunt famine in the face, with no relief but supplies of fish, which a kind Providence seemed to guide within the harbor in unusual abundance.

In that heroic defense these two men had borne their full share. They were fine specimens of the mass of our people, zealous, stern, and capable of unbounded sacrifices for the cause which they loved. Both of them were owners of fishing-craft and were thoroughly familiar with the neighboring coast. They had even voyaged well-nigh across the ocean and brought home full fares of fish from the great banks of the New Found Island.

They were old acquaintances of Aurigny, and when he sought them out and confided to them his plans, they threw themselves heart and soul into the enterprise. It was they who had secured the boats and brought to him the men whom he had hired. Aurigny had wisely appointed each coxswain of one of the craft, and made him answerable to himself for its crew and its whole outfit. As for me, I was to serve as his lieutenant, and was put in charge of one boat, while he would lead the way in the other.

My commander now satisfied himself, by personal examination, that everything in the pinnaces was in due order, and the rope on which so much depended, safely coiled and stowed in the bow of the larger. By this time the men began to arrive in groups of two

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or three. Some came down the quay singing snatches of rollicking sea-songs, and with a rolling gait that told plainly how they had spent the evening. But, for the greater part, they were a singularly orderly set of fellows, remarkable chiefly for a quiet air of determination. I surmised truly that Maillot and Gourand had been at pains to secure men, as far as possible, of their own stamp, that these might have the preponderance over the wilder spirits whom a secret and perilous undertaking would inevitably draw together.

As the men arrived, each was severally inspected, to ascertain that his equipment of sword, dagger, and pistol, was complete and in good order, and assigned his place. At last the number was complete, and we pushed off, the larger boat, with twelve oars, carrying twenty men, in the lead. Mine, with Maillot for coxswain, with ten oars, carried sixteen men.

As noiselessly as possible we pulled out of the harbor, keeping well away from the black hulls lying at anchor. In passing, Maillot pointed out to me the spot where, in the darkness, were the ruins of the great mole which the royalist army, during the memorable siege, built out into the water, in the vain hope of closing the harbor.

We were not at all pressed for time, since the attack was not to be made that night. The low tide occurring early in the evening, it would have been impossible for us to leave Rochelle after dark and arrive at our destination in good season. The plan was, therefore, that we should put into a certain secluded cove which our guides knew well, and which we

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could easily reach before daylight, situated, moreover, within less than a league of Les Sables, and spend the following day there in hiding. Then, on the next night, we should sally forth, with our men fresh from their rest, and strike a strong blow for the cause.

All went well. Easily we pulled along the coast, its rugged outline on our right, until near daybreak, when the leading boat turned into a narrow opening, wheeled short around a high projecting rock, and conducted us to a little, sheltered cove in which the water lay smooth.

Had pirates or smugglers designed a refuge in which they might securely lie hidden, they could not have planned one better adapted to their purpose. There were traditions, Maillot told me, that it had, in their time, served the convenience of Norse searovers and, later, of Barbary corsairs; while fragments of packing-cases and of ripped-up bales, strewn about a rude landing, gave ground for the suspicion that our honest Rochellese fishermen knew a quicker way of turning a welcome penny than by seining. From above it was inaccessible, by reason of beetling rocks shutting it in, so that surprise from the landward side was impossible. At one place there was a cavernous recess, deep and dark, its roof blackened with smoke, and its floor littered with charred remnants of many fires. Into this evident haunt of outlawry we went, and were soon warming our limbs, cramped by hours of exposure to the chill sea air, around fires of barrel-staves and broken boxes, of which there was a great store.

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I had now, for the first time, an opportunity of seeing our men in a body. A motley, rugged, hard-featured crew they were. There were two Portuguese, one Genoese, and three Basques from Santander and Bilbao, low-browed, swarthy, sullen-looking fellows, but capable and fearless seamen, I was told. These excepted, all were Frenchmen. Of these a few were Bretons, and a half-dozen, perhaps, hailed from Nantes. The rest, forming the backbone of the party, I was glad to see, were Rochellese and Bordelais, of the hardy sort which the perils of the Bay of Biscay have always moulded. I had faith in these fellows, of our coxswains' type, and of known devotion to our cause.

Here we spent the day, clustered around our fires, eating the food of which Aurigny had made ample provision, and washing it down with wine, which he caused to be served out in marked moderation. I found endless matter of interest in sauntering from group to group and listening to their talk.

In one place the Genoese was holding forth on the wonders of a voyage to Iceland, where he heard a tradition, that his great countryman, Christopher Colon, had there gained from old runes his first glimmer of the idea of a western world. He told of a frozen ocean and of boiling springs spouting up amid eternal snows. Later he had sailed and fought in a ship of his own country, when the bold bastard of Austria, Philip of Spain's half-brother, Don John, led the combined fleets of Spain, Venice, and Genoa against the infidels, and at Lepanto shattered the

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Saracen sea-power and stemmed the tide of Moslem encroachment.

In one corner an old sea-dog of Bordeaux, tanned to the color of mahogany, scarred and one-eyed, told a marvelous tale of adventures under the fierce sun of the far southern seas. Sailing in a French ship, to fetch a cargo of rare woods from Spanish America, he had fallen into the hands of buccaneers, who had spared him and a comrade, on condition of service with them. On account of his suspicious leniency at the sack of a town, he had been marooned on a desert key. Through the special mercy of God, by scooping the sand he had found a tiny spring of water, and so, with raw eggs of sea-turtles, he had kept himself alive, until one day a fleet hove in sight. Waving his shirt on a stick, he had signaled and signaled, until hope of rescue had almost died in him, as the swift keels swept on, when suddenly the hindmost went about, stood in to the shore, and sent a boat for him. The commander of the fleet was Sir Francis Drake, bent on "singeing the Spaniards' beard." Under him he had taken part in the capture of Nombre de Dios and in the looting and burning of many another Spanish town. He had been one of the force which that intrepid sea-rover led across the narrow neck of the continent, when Englishmen first set eyes on the great Still Sea. And he had come back with the slender remnant, staggering under loads of silver heavier than they could bear, throwing it away like dross, their tongues hanging out with the fierce heat and raging thirst, some

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falling by poisoned arrows, others with deadlier fever drying up their blood.

When he had finished his story, he drew from his pocket a little clay bowl, of the bigness, it might be, of a small hen's egg, and fitted a reed stem into a hole in its side near the bottom. He then filled the bowl with dried leaves of a weed, which he said he had brought from the New World, and which he carried in a skin pouch. These leaves he lighted, and drew the smoke therefrom through the reed into his mouth, and breathed it out again in a great cloud. The odor of it was marvelously pungent and aromatic. To the most of us this was a new thing, and we looked on in wonder, while the smoke rolled in clouds from the mouth of the old sailor. Some said that this was a religious rite of the infidels, and was an exorcism against witchcraft and devils. Others declared that it is a common custom among the savages of the New World, who find great joy and peace therein, and prize it most highly as a sovereign remedy for all troubles, especially for the burden of a brawling wife.

Another, a Breton, with light-blue eyes, a tawny beard, and a face sunburnt to a fiery red, had sailed with Ribault and Laudonnière in their explorations of the New World. He told of wide, smooth, inland waters, covered with wild fowl and teeming with fish; of peaceful savages; of a benignant sky and a soil fruitful of food; of trees laden with grapes; and of green savannas, extending for miles, level as a table,

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with huge, fierce lizards,¹ stout as a horse and long as a whale-boat, with cruel tusks, basking on the river-banks, waiting for their prey. He paused, took a long pull at his flagon, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and went on to tell of Port Royal, which the great admiral Coligny founded as a refuge for the oppressed, and how it came to be abandoned.² He told the story, too, of the settlement of Huguenots on the shores of the River of May,³ and how upon this peaceful colony the Spaniard, Menendez de Avila, descended with treachery, and butchered every one, and then set up on the bloody spot a writing, which afterward eyes of other Frenchmen read over the bleached bones of their countrymen: "We do this, not as unto Frenchmen, but as unto heretics."

Scarcely had he finished his tale, when up rose another of our company, a hardy Rochellese, and cried, exultantly, "*Par Dieu!* I can better that story. For it chanced that I was one of the band whom the brave seigneur, Dominique de Gourgues, led to that same spot—he who had sworn that he would never eat white bread, nor trim his hair or beard, until he had avenged his countrymen's slaughter. So he equipped and manned a ship, at his own charges, and sailed for

¹ Alligators, i.e., *el lagarto* (Spanish), the lizard.—EDITOR.

² Little could the writer have dreamed that these words of his would be read, after many generations, by one of his descendants, born and living amid these very scenes.—EDITOR.

³ The St. John's River—EDITOR.

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the River of May. We fell on the Spaniards as ruthlessly as they had fallen on our people, but not, like them, with treachery. Not one did we spare. We made a shambles of that settlement. When all was done, our leader took down the old writing, and in its place put up one which said, 'We do this, not as unto Spaniards, but as unto assassins.'¹ Then we sailed away. But when we had come back to France, brave Dominique needed to keep himself long in hiding, for there was then peace with Spain, and our king was Catholic, and these were Catholics whom we had slain."

This tale was greeted with loud applause. Only, I noticed that the two Portuguese and the three Basques, who formed a group apart, were dumb and scowled back and forth as black as night. But this circumstance did not disturb the general harmony, nor interrupt the stream of talk, which flowed on in the same strain. This interchange would have a happy effect, I thought, in cementing our men together and in bracing them for daring deeds; for I confess that these tales of perils in strange lands thrilled me. How poor and tame, in comparison, seemed the little which I had seen of adventure!

I called Aurigny's attention to the conduct of the five foreigners. "Yes," he said; "we must keep an eye on those fellows. By what evil chance we hired them, I know not. Would they were well away!"

As the day waned, he caused the wine to be served

¹ I was interested in reading this first recital of an incident which has become familiar history.—EDITOR.

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more freely, and tongues wagged faster and more furiously than ever. Then, when all seemed ripe for the announcement, he shouted, "Attention!" Immediately there was utter silence, for all knew that some momentous word was about to be spoken.

"Comrades," said Aurigny, "a great opportunity is before us. Within less than a league is the strong fortress at Les Sables d'Olonne, which, through treachery, is in the hands of the enemy. I have sworn to win it back at all costs, and have chosen you, as tried men of valor, to share in this noble enterprise. All arrangements are duly made. Before this night is far gone, we shall land there. Success is assured. If there is any man who has no heart for this undertaking for God and the true faith of His Son, let him freely speak his mind. But, if it pleases you, give me your voices in its favor."

He had well calculated the temper of his audience, for his appeal was received with vociferous cheers. No doubt many had already surmised the object of the expedition. At all events, its announcement struck the very key-note of the men's excited feeling, and they crowded around their leader with boisterous pledges of devotion. The only exception was the group of foreigners. The Genoese was a Catholic, too, but a genuine free companion, and had no scruples. He would sail and fight as cheerfully under one flag as another; and now he was shouting lustily with the rest.

Not so the Basques and Portuguese. The wine which they had drunk seemed only to have embol-

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dened them in their opposition and changed their sullen silence into open rebellion. They talked freely and excitedly among themselves; and when Aurigny, all the while watching them out of the corner of his eye, opened a great rough drawing which he had made of the interior of the fortress, and, holding it aloft, pointed out to the men crowding thickly around him, how each crew should proceed, the five glanced at it only with scorn and fury in their eyes.

The coxswains next distributed badges to the men, to distinguish them from the enemy—broad white scarfs, to be worn across the body, and white bands for the hats. Then the mutinous spirit of the foreigners broke out in earnest. They threw the badges on the ground and, appealing to Aurigny, declared that they had not taken service to fight against the Holy Church.

In an instant the cavern was filled with the clamor of angry voices. "Down with the idolaters! Down with the worshipers of the mass!" was the cry. And straightway there was a rush for the foreigners, who backed up against the walls and glared defiance, while on both sides swords leaped from their scabbards.

"Peace!" shouted our leader. "Let not a man touch them! I will have none follow me but those who are willing." And he threw himself between the would-be combatants. Still, he had much ado to hinder a deadly strife. Our men reluctantly returned their weapons, throwing curses at the Catholics, while a savage light blazed in the eyes of these,

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as if they would have sold their lives dear for their faith.

It was but a short truce. A little while later, as we were busied in other matters, there was a sudden outcry and a rush. The quarrel had broken out afresh, and in earnest. Before Aurigny and I could reach the front of the rioting mass, there was the clash of swords, and a pistol-shot was followed by a hideous groan.

"Shame on you!" shouted our leader, forcing himself through the struggling bodies of his followers. "Will you fight men who are but five to your thirty?" And, with my aid and that of Maillot and Gourand, he quelled the fray.

Short as it was, it had been deadly. One of the Bordeaux sailors, shot through the abdomen, weltered in his blood, groaning horribly, in the agonies of death. A comrade had quickly avenged him, by running his sword through the Basque, who lay grimly dying, still clutching his smoking pistol. One of his countrymen had received a deep sabre-cut over the head, from which the blood was streaming copiously.

This time Aurigny placed six men on guard between the combatants, with orders to kill the first man who moved to renew the fray.

It was now night. The men once more settled down around the fires. And a strange, wild scene it was that the cavern presented, the ruddy blaze reflected from the rocky roof lighting up the rugged features and savage countenances of the men. Their religious passions had been aroused, and they were

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full of vengeful ire. The merry jest and the thrilling tale of adventure had given place to sullen talk about the Catholics. One, who had been in Paris during the St. Bartholomew's massacre, told of the atrocities which he had witnessed. Many had taken part in the defense of Rochelle, and bitterly recalled its horrors. Some spoke of the Catholic League, which, they said, now ruled the throne and was laboring to turn France into a province of Spain and a footstool of the Pope. Then there were more fierce glances cast at the group of foreigners. These sat in grim silence, a striking picture; the wounded fellow, his head rudely bandaged by his comrade, his face livid, and his shaggy hair, matted with blood, overhanging his low brow, like a penthouse, beneath which his deep-set eyes gleamed with a yellow, wolfish light. Indeed, he and his countryman, in their unreasoning, savage stubbornness, were not unlike ferocious beasts, driven to bay. But the two Portuguese had a distinct look of fright. They were weakening.

"My faith!" remarked Aurigny to me, in a low tone, "we have lost six men from our number. I would not have given that poor Bordelais fellow for the whole five. Yet, we have gained something, too. Do you mark how fierce our men look? You will see that they will fight like demons, now their blood is up. There will be no quarter given, I warrant you. Certes! One has only to touch men on their differences of belief, to make raging devils of them. Protestant or Catholic, it is all the same. The backbone of each one's faith is hatred of the other faith."

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“What do you mean to do with these mutineers?” I asked.

“Bah! there is but one thing to be done. That is, to leave them here,” he answered, with a meaning look. Clearly, that signified death by starvation and thirst, unless some unforeseen chance should release them; for outlet there was none from that natural dungeon.

Our coxswains now told us it was time to prepare for embarking. It was a welcome notice, for it brought relief to our overstrained feelings. Amid the bustle of the men putting on their equipments, looking to the priming of their pistols, buckling their belts, and making all the preparations for departure, Aurigny espied the poor Bordelais and his foe, both dead now. “Take those bodies,” he ordered, “and throw them into the sea.” Four of his comrades lifted their countryman and almost tenderly lowered his body into the water; while two others seized the Basque by his feet, dragged him to the brink, and pushed him off with their feet. The body fell with a sullen plunge, to rest beside that of his victim in the same watery grave.

This brutal procedure increased the terror of the Portuguese. They knew well what it meant to be abandoned in that dreadful place, and they were deathly pale with fright.

“Seigneur,” cried one of them, hoarsely, “in God’s name, let us go with you. My comrade, Sanchez, and I will swear to serve you faithfully. We have repented, and implore your pardon.”

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“What say you?” asked Aurigny of me. “Shall we take them?”

“Oh, give the poor devils a chance, I say,” I answered. “They are but two and can't do any harm, if they would. But let us separate them. Do you take one, and I the other.”

It was so ordered, and the two fellows came forward sheepishly and joined our men, who eyed them with disdain. Now all hands took their places in the boats, and the crews bent to the oars. As we turned the projecting rock which screened the entrance of the cove, I cast a glance backward. Against the dark background of the cavern the firelight showed two figures grim and immovable as statues.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE TOOK PART IN A NOTABLE
ACHIEVEMENT.

IT was a lowering night. To seaward, a black and ragged mass of cloud was piled on the horizon, brightening ever and anon with fitful lightning, while the muttering of distant thunder came rumbling over the black waters.

Maillot looked anxiously to that quarter. "It will be a wild night," he said, "when the storm bursts. But by the time it comes we shall have a roof over our heads. Or," he said, sinking his voice to whisper in my ear, "we shall be forever past caring for storms."

Now a long line of white over our left bow showed where the sea was breaking on the shoals which give their name to that locality. Between these and the rocky shore we steered our way, the oars muffled, and every voice hushed in utter silence, as we neared our goal. Over the right bow I descried dimly the outline of a high cliff. To this Maillot pointed and nodded.

Soon the leading boat came to a stop, and we did

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likewise. Then a torch was held aloft and slowly waved from side to side, for a minute or two, then held still, then waved again. Meanwhile we all watched, in utter stillness, while the boats rose and fell with the motion of the sea, and there was not a sound but that of the ocean moaning and lashing itself on the long bar.

Ah! there is the answer! Up, on the brow of the cliff, a light flared for a moment, then was quickly extinguished. In reply, ours was waved again and again violently, to signify "Action." Then it, too, disappeared. At once the leading boat shot forward silently into the darkness. The hour had come.

"Now, my boys, give way," said Maillot, in low, earnest tones. "In a few moments we shall exchange oars for steel. Then we shall see who are men."

With long, steady sweep of the oars, the stout sailors sent the boat like an arrow toward the foot of the cliff towering overhead. A moment more, and our keel grated on the shingle, a few yards away from the other boat, from which the crew was already landing. There was no beach; the wind, blowing fresh from seaward all the day, had kept the tide from falling to the lowest point. But what mattered wading ashore knee-deep to men who had taken their lives in their hands in such an enterprise?

Now we stood clustered together at the foot of the rock. Already a cord had come down, and Gourand was fastening it to the end of our rope. Now up went the ladder by which we were to mount—to

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what? A very few moments would decide that point.

But few words were spoken, and those in whispers. It was a time for action only. Aurigny had ordered that I should lead in the ascent, followed first by my crew, then by his. He would come last of all, to see that none lagged behind.

As soon as the ladder was secure, I began to climb it. It was novel work for a landsman; but pride nerved me to do my best. At that point the cliff overhung the shore, so that the rope swung clear. At intervals of a few yards, knots had been made, and short sticks pushed through these, to afford resting-places; for it was a long climb. Somehow I reached the top. Two stout hands seized me and pulled me up on the level. These were our two confederates, lying flat on their bellies, to give help. "All goes well," one of them whispered to me.

Now the men began to appear in quick succession, for a dozen or more were on the rope at once. Then there was a pause. Crouching on my hands and knees, I peered over, to ascertain the cause. The topmost man had stopped some distance below and blocked the way. I could hear voices, low, but eager and angry, it seemed. Then there were quick gasps, as of men struggling together. I heard the breath sobbing between their teeth, as they agonized for life or death. It was a gruesome thing, under the black sky, over the sea whitening and thundering ever louder and louder, as it lashed itself in fury with the whistling wind, these two human beings fighting, like

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demons, in mid-air. "Ah!" cried one, quick and sharp. Then, with a half-uttered moan, a body shot down into the foaming water. A moment more and a man emerged on the level, panting from his recent struggle, his dagger between his teeth. As he wiped the weapon, he whispered to me, "Lieutenant, it was one of those damned Portuguese. His teeth were chattering in his head, and he would not budge. When I told him to move on, he said God would damn his soul forever, if he lifted his hand against the Church. I tried to pull him loose and throw him down; but he clung on like a leech. The time was short, and I gave him short shrift."

Then I saw another awesome thing. Our boats were tossing on the waves and drifting away with the current. Aurigny had pushed them afloat. There was to be no retreat possible. It was to be either victory or death.

Last of all appeared our leader, calm as ever, wiping off with a white handkerchief a gout of blood that had dropped on his face. There was not a moment to be lost. As yet the post was wrapped in profound stillness. The ramparts and the low buildings, in which the men lodged, were at a little distance away; and the blackness of the night, with the increasing roar of the sea, had favored us. But at any moment an alarm might summon the defenders to arms. Then our chances of success would be small indeed. Everything depended on surprise.

"Forward!" commanded our leader; and in a

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run we started across the parade-ground, led by our confederates, in two diverging lines, so as to strike the barracks at both ends at the same time.

It would be hard to tell what followed, so quick and confused was it all. There was a sharp challenge, "Who goes there?" from a sentry on the ramparts, followed by the discharge of his harquebus. Before the startled sleepers could gain their feet, our men were among them, shouting, cutting, thrusting, and firing their pistols at short range with deadly effect, as they rushed through the quarters.

At the first alarm the officers, sleeping in a separate building, had rushed out, but only to find themselves confronted by Aurigny, with a part of his band, which he had detailed for that purpose. Cut off from their men, almost naked as they were, they threw themselves upon their assailants with desperate, but unavailing, valor. They were cut or shot down, to a man—not unavenged, however, for brave Aurigny and two of his followers fell.

Meanwhile the soldiers, without a leader, without a plan of defense, confounded by the clamor which our men purposely made, imagining themselves attacked by an immense force, were throwing down the weapons they had seized and crying for quarter on every side. The first attempt at resistance quickly changed into a wild reign of terror, in which each sought to save himself as best he could.

Our fellows were in no merciful mood. "Remember the Bartholomew's!" "Remember the trenches of Rochelle!" they called one to another. Then

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some poor wretch, dragged out from his hiding-place, would feel their fury and their steel.

It was all quickly over, so far as any fighting on the part of the garrison was concerned. But the killing of single fugitives continued for some time. Again and again the shout of eager pursuit, the cry of anguish, or the shriek of despair was heard from some part of the ramparts or scattered buildings.

Dreading lest our men might become too much dispersed, and the survivors of the garrison, learning the smallness of our numbers, might rally and take us at a disadvantage, I despatched messengers in every direction, to summon our men together; for there was not with us a bugler to sound a recall.

Then I hastened to look after Aurigny. He lay where he had fallen, resting propped on his hand, and listening eagerly to the shouts of his victorious followers. A few great drops betokened the bursting of the storm, and, with help, I quickly lifted him into the late commandant's apartment, where a light was burning, and laid him on a couch.

A moment's examination showed that his wound was mortal. The pallor of death already overspread his countenance. But it was bright with the proud sense of a great achievement.

Feebly reaching out his hand, he took mine and said, ' Fourcade, you are a brave soldier and a true comrade. You have fulfilled all that I expected of you. Take this '—his voice faltered—" and send it to her to whom it belongs." It was a packet, sealed and addressed to his wife, in anticipation of this contingency.

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A little time passed before he quite recovered his composure. Then he said firmly and proudly, "I turn over to your command this post of the Huguenot army. May God keep it ours until the good cause triumphs! Present it, with the humble duty of Cæsar d'Aurigny, to the King of Navarre." Then, even with the shadows of death gathering about him, the memory of his great wrong came uppermost in his mind, and he added bitterly, "Perchance now he will find leisure from the weightier matters of love and women to do justice to an old soldier and clear his name of dishonor."

Not a word more did he speak, but slowly breathed out his life. Already the body of the late commandant, his gray beard dabbled and his shirt steeped in blood, had been brought in and laid upon the bed, decently covered with his military cloak. Now they lay, conquered and conqueror alike, vanquished by the last enemy of all.

The storm was now beating down in wild fury; but I must take precautions against disaster. Our men, diminished in numbers by several losses, were gathered in the barracks. I divided them into two watches, under Maillot and Gourand, one of which should keep guard under arms all the time. As for myself, I durst not sleep, knowing the peril of our situation, but spent the night sitting by a fire and planning for the morrow.

The day dawned clear and crisp after the storm. No sooner was it light, than I started a provost marshal with a guard to patrol the post and bring in

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all the prisoners they could find. Not a few of the late garrison had escaped into the town. Still, we soon found ourselves with a score or more of prisoners on our hands.

At the same time, I despatched a mounted messenger in all haste to the commandant of Rochelle, urging him to send a reinforcement immediately, since my little party was quite inadequate to holding the post against a strong assailing force, and an officer who should relieve me in the charge, until such time as my master should appoint a permanent commandant.

That was an anxious day, when I held our new acquisition with the remnant of our party, and with as many prisoners under my care as there were men at my disposal. But the second day brought relief in the arrival of the expected troops.

Right glad I was to turn over my command to my temporary successor, Huger by name, and to start for Rochelle on the late commandant's horse. I did not forget, before my departure, to send a fishing-boat to fetch away the two Basques from their prison, for the picture of them grimly awaiting death by starvation haunted me.

Arrived at Rochelle, I found the commandant, who was no other than the famous Duke de Bouillon, evidently divided between rejoicing at the great victory for our cause, and chagrin that the expedition had been organized without his aid, or even his knowledge; and his congratulations were tinged, it seemed, with envy. But that was no affair of mine.

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After receiving from him the letters which I had left in his keeping, I mounted my own horse and started for Nérac, hastening to carry to my master the first tidings of our great success.

So ended this memorable adventure. I had not, indeed, found Sophie; but it was some solace to a soldier to have had part in such a triumph.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

JEAN FOURCADE RECEIVES A SECOND LETTER
FROM SOPHIE.

ON my return to the court, the first tidings that greeted me was, that my master had gone away for an indefinite time. I reported myself to the Queen of Navarre and asked whether I might follow him, eager as I was to give him the important intelligence which I had brought.

“Oh, no,” she answered laughingly. “Men have nothing to do with this affair. To him it is vastly more interesting than any matter of forts and towns. It is a party of women, and your master has gone as a squire of dames. Fosseux made the discovery that she needed to drink the waters of Aigues-Chaudes for what she calls her indigestion. Probably, a few months will show that her trouble is of another kind. Your master came to me and most earnestly pleaded her cause, urging me to go. But I had no stomach for such a scandalous excursion. And I told him he might consult his pleasure in the matter; but as for me, I should be excused from accompanying him. He will have his hands full, however, for Rebours is of the party. She is dying to oust Fosseux and regain

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her old place, and she will scruple at nothing. To give the affair an air of respectability, they have taken along the poor governess, also. She will be expected to keep her eyes and ears shut, and to open her mouth only when she eats."

After this frank disclosure by the Queen of the domestic situation, with its interesting complications, I was about going out, when she called after me: "Stay, Jean. Here is something for you which I well-nigh forgot. Three or four days ago, a man came here, asking for you. When he learned that you were away, he inquired for your master; and after he was told that he, too, was absent, he came to me with this letter, which he wished to leave in my keeping. He said that you had promised him ten pistoles, when he should bring you a letter from a certain person. I thought it a high price for a love-letter. Nobody thinks of paying so much for one hereabouts. Even the writers, I am told, rarely come so high. But you are different, they say. So, I gave the man the money he asked."

A letter from Sophie! And coming through such a channel, the Queen of Navarre! What could she know of a love like ours, or, rather, mine? for as yet it was but a hope that Sophie returned it. I thanked my mistress and took away the letter, to devour its contents in secret.

It ran thus:

"MONSIEUR FOURCADE: A longer time than I intended has passed since the receipt of your letter,

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without my replying to it. Great difficulties beset me, and it is not easy for me to communicate with you.

“Your letter has lifted a great load off my mind. I believe what you have written, and I live in the trust, that, in due time, you will be able to make good to my father the assertion of your innocence which you have made to me, and which I fully accept. Perchance I am too confiding. I know not. I am unfamiliar with the ways of the great world. But my heart trusts you. When you were an inmate of our house, I learned to think of you as a man of truth and honor. And through all that has since happened, my trust has not wavered, even when it seemed to live in the face of evidence strong enough to kill it. Your letter has come to strengthen it, and I pledge you my full confidence, until you shall some day prove it well founded to others.

“I will not deny that your words of love have touched me deeply. On this point I may not speak now. You must be content to wait until you have shown my confidence well-grounded. When you have convinced my father of the injustice of his suspicions, the only obstacle will have been removed from your path. Until then, live in the knowledge of my unshaken trust and of my prayers ever following you. My messenger will bring me your reply; and if it contain the assurance of your readiness to meet my father, I will endeavor to arrange a plan for you to obtain an interview with him, and I will inform you in another letter. Farewell.

“Ever your friend, S. R.”

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What incredible good fortune, that I had a letter from Sophie, and such a letter! And by what stroke of malign fate was I deprived of the opportunity of answering it and, so, of securing the interview with her father? I inwardly cursed the free-handed good-nature of my mistress, in paying the messenger and letting him go. Had she but withheld the promised wage, the fellow would undoubtedly have awaited my return. As matters stood, I should be compelled to possess my soul in such patience as I could command, trusting in Providence and Sophie.

Now almost daily I heard from my mistress something of what was going on at Aigues-Chaudes. The Rebours, it seemed, was manœuvring in dead earnest for her old position, by endeavoring to win our mistress to her side. To effect this, it was essential that she should prejudice her strongly against the Fosseuse. With this in view, she continually wrote of her rival's insolent airs, and expressed her own conviction that the end for which the other was working was nothing else than to share the throne with my master. It was her belief, that the ambition of the Fosseuse was to bear a son. In this case, since kings must have heirs, and my mistress was childless, she would have a good hope of bringing about a dissolution of the existing marriage and herself becoming my master's lawful wife.

This was the tenor of the almost daily letters which came to my mistress from the Rebours, of the contents of which she spoke to me with the same freedom with which she has since written of them. The

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object of these harassing communications was plain enough. The writer was anxious to secure our mistress' aid in supplanting the Fosseuse, and was shrewdly playing on her jealousy of her royal position—the only jealousy which she was capable of feeling. So matters went on, until, after a few weeks, the party returned from Aigues-Chaudes. Apparently, the Fosseuse was no better of her “indigestion,” but worse, rather. Nor had she gained in humility during her absence; so that the old irritations, growing out of her arrogant airs and my master's infatuation, coming in conflict with our mistress' sense of her dignity as Queen, were renewed, to the great scandal of the whole court, whose lynx-eyed observation none of these things escaped.

The Queen has since written that she offered to play the mother to the Fosseuse by taking her to some quiet country house and keeping her there, until all this trouble should have blown over; but that the young lady indignantly declined the proposal, and said that she would give the lie to those who slandered her by their false representations. She adds that her husband took the same high tone and made light of the whole business.

Of all this I know nothing, and I write only what came within my knowledge.

Two or three months after my master's return to Nérac, one night I was awakened by some one rapping hastily on my door. No sooner did I open it, than the court physician, pushing by me without a word, passed through the antechamber in which I

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slept, and knocked on the inner door. My master answered the summons himself. There was a hurried colloquy between them in low tones, during which I caught the Fosseuse's name. After this the physican hastened away, leaving the communicating door ajar. Then followed a conversation between my master and my mistress. He spoke low and earnestly. Apparently he made some appeal to her, to which she responded in good part, for I caught such phrases as, "act like a mother to her," and, "remove her as quickly as possible from the room of the maids of honor."

Very soon afterward the Queen went out of her room and returned no more that night.

It was scarcely daylight, when my master called me and bade me make preparations to go hunting immediately, which we did.

In spite of all this mutual complaisance, the gossips of the court found endless food for talk in this incident.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

THE LOVERS' WAR AND THE TAKING OF CAHORS.

NEVER was there, to outward seeming, a more causeless procedure, of equal seriousness, than what is known as the "Lovers' War." In appearance, it originated in a mere court scandal. The King of France, who was nothing, unless he was malicious and mischief-making, was desirous of creating a breach between my master and his wife. He therefore wrote him a letter in which he descanted at great length on the notoriety of the relations between the Queen of Navarre and Turenne.

When my master had read this extraordinary missive, without the least apparent concern he handed it to the Queen, saying:

"Here, Margot. This is your affair, not mine."

She read it and turned crimson. Though nothing more was said just then, it soon transpired what was the purport of the letter. All the lovers at the court, that is to say, nearly all the people there, were highly incensed at the King of France, while the publicity given to their affair rendered Turenne and Marguerite furious.

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To some, however, it was a matter of no little surprise, that the King of Navarre, after, at the first, showing the greatest indifference both to the letter and its subject, now took up the matter most warmly and made it a pretext for threatening hostilities. The most serious-minded of the Huguenots severely condemned his course, and some even refused to take arms in a war inaugurated on so trivial grounds.

This was, however, only the outside of the matter. The affair of Marguerite and Turenne was simply used as a cloak of political intrigue by both of the monarchs concerned. Henry of France very well knew that his sister and her lover were trying to incite the Huguenots to an uprising. He hoped, by the step which he took, to create a breach between her husband and Turenne, and, by thus sowing dissension between the leaders, to divide the Huguenot body. Henry of Navarre played a deeper game. He saw the other's purpose and promptly defeated it, by making his wife's cause his own. A war would be the most effectual means of uniting his followers, while it might serve to improve his own position.

It is but truth to add, however, that political considerations were less potent in my master's mind than certain personal influences. His accommodating consort made habitual use of the methods for moulding men which she had learned from her mother. The Flying Squadron of the Louvre had its counterpart at our little court of Nérac, and she now used it to incite a war. The batteries of bright eyes were turned in all their force upon the King of Navarre, to

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stir him up to hostile measures. Above all, when once Mademoiselle de la Fosseuse had declared for war, it was no longer doubtful how her lover would decide.

The objective point upon which my master's eye was fixed was Cahors. This city formed part of his wife's dowry and should long since have been turned over to him. But his repeated demands for its surrender had been refused, and it was still held in adverse possession. He was now determined to have it, at all costs. It was likely to prove expensive enough, for it was well fortified, manned with two thousand men, a stronger force than we could possibly bring against it, and commanded by De Vézins, an officer renowned for his reckless intrepidity. The odds were, certainly, fearfully against us; and, had my master listened to the counsels of some of his most experienced captains, he would have desisted from the undertaking. But he would heed no dissuasions.

After a forced march, we neared Cahors by night, on the 27th of May. Happily, a thunder-storm covered our approach, and the garrison had no idea of an enemy's being near. While the elements were raging, we sheltered ourselves in a grove near the walls. Meanwhile a picked body, with the King at its head, crept forward, unobserved, to the city gates.

In the lead were two intrepid men, Huguénin and Gaillard by name, who were to discharge two machines, of a kind just then invented, and regarded as very ingenious. Everybody who has heard or read of war knows that a petard is a small cannon, as it

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were, of iron or brass, heavily charged with powder, and fastened in front to a madrier, or plank. This is secured against the wall or gate to be breached, the machine is fired by means of a fuse at its rear end, and the force of the blast is expended against the object in front. To us this engine of war was then new, and we awaited the results of its employment with mingled uncertainty and hope.

It was midnight when the garrison were aroused from their sleep by the noise of two explosions. They sprang to arms and came rushing to the defense. The breaches made by the petards, as it proved, were quite small, so that our foremost men could only creep through, one at a time, until the openings were enlarged with axes.

Thus, at the first, only a very few of us gained an entrance within the walls, whereas the defenders came rushing in great numbers to repel us. Only the fact that we were hemmed in against the wall, enabled us to stand our ground, while the very desperateness of the situation lent us valor.

Foremost among the defenders was the intrepid commandant, Vézins, who, at the first alarm, leaped out of his bed, seized his sword, and, without stopping to put on his clothes, came running in his shirt to the fray. Throwing himself with fury upon us, he was among the first killed. His death inspired us with the hope of success.

A terrible fire of harquebuses was opened upon us from the street, while the citizens, climbing out on their roofs, showered stones and tiles on our heads.

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The King of Navarre would not hear to a retreat. He vowed that he would take the city, or die in the attempt. All that we could do was to shelter ourselves, as best we might, and hold our ground, firing with our harquebuses. Happily, our force was steadily increased by more of our men coming in, until, having demolished the gates with axes, we had a clear passage for as many as could find room within. When daylight came, our whole force was inside the walls. But the chance of advancing farther seemed hopeless. We were incessantly under fire, though, happily, the houses gave us some shelter.

The fight lasted all the day. By night we had gained a little ground. We durst not, however, quit our arms, to sleep, but rested as we might, wherever we chanced to be, not knowing at what moment we might be attacked; and we ate hungrily such food as was brought to us by those in the rear.

When daylight came, we found a barricade erected in front of us. We charged and took it, only to find another facing us.

Not only must we fight the garrison, but the whole citizenship seemed arrayed against us, in a sort of martial furor. While the soldiery obstructed our advance in the streets behind barricades, which they defended with obstinate valor, the townspeople turned every building of any size into a citadel, which needed to be stormed, ere we could pass beyond it. So slow was our progress, again and again some of our officers argued and pleaded with the King of Navarre to retire, urging that it would be no disgrace to fail in

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a so desperate enterprise. But he would heed neither argument nor entreaty. I had more than once observed in him a singular sort of fatalism which, on occasions of great emergency, made him feel that he was an instrument in the hands of Providence. Now, pointing to the skies, he said, "It is written up there, what the issue is to be. And I have sworn that there is but one way that I will leave this town untaken; and that is with the breath gone out of my body." And this, although he was already wounded.

That which made the garrison and citizens so desperate in their resistance was the certain hope of reinforcement. We had, however, the advantage of holding the gate, and the enemy's succors would need to force an entrance into the town. In due time, the expected reinforcement arrived, and we were on the point of being assailed in the rear, when a great huzza went up from our men about the gate, and word was passed to us in front, that the forces of Turenne, under Chouppes, were at hand. They had come by a forced march, and just in time to save us from being placed in a still more perilous situation.

The new-comers burst in with a great cheer and mightily strengthened us.

Still, the defenders held manfully every foot of ground. First we needed to storm the town house, then the college, then the monasteries.

Four days now we had been fighting incessantly, resting at night as best we could, weapons in hand. On the fifth morning, there was still a barricade in front of us, the enemy's last.

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My master, his wounded left arm in a sling, formed a column of assault and placed himself in the middle of the front rank. I was close beside him. Then, at the word, we rushed forward. A terrible fire of harquebuses met us, and a number of our men fell. Still, we pressed on and came up to the barricade, its defenders standing up stoutly behind it.

Among them, I saw a man whom I at once recognized as the Baron of Bonrepos. He had already seen me, and that he knew me, was evident from the expression of his countenance, which was fairly livid with hate. By a common impulse, we made for each other and crossed swords over the barrier, which was here about four feet high. It was unchancy fighting, with a wall between us. But neither could attempt to mount it, without giving a cruel advantage to his adversary. So, we continued chopping and lunging at each other in this awkward fashion, without damage done on either side; for it is no difficult matter to defend yourself against a man, when he can come at you from the upper guard only, and neither party can advance a foot.

In the meanwhile, our veteran harquebusiers had come up to the barricade and were pouring a deadly fire over it into the crowded ranks of the enemy. That settled the day.

"Give me a chance to cross the barricade, and I will meet you on a fair field," cried Bonrepos to me.

"Done!" I answered; "climb over. Nobody shall molest you in crossing."

"Come away, madman!" shouted two of his com-

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rades, and they seized and dragged him back. Indeed, it was none too early, for the whole line was breaking in retreat. Still glaring toward me, Bonrepos was pulled along by his friendly captors.

By the time that we had surmounted the barrier, the enemy was at a distance, scurrying pell-mell to reach an exit from the town, and my late antagonist soon disappeared in the throng of fugitives.

At last the most desperate resistance we had ever encountered came to an end. The town yielded us an immense booty. There were few who did not find some valuable treasure. Rosny, whose scent for plunder is as keen as that of a crow for carrion, took a small iron chest, which was found to contain four thousand gold crowns. This will go far toward that great fortune which is his constant dream.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE MET AN OLD FOE
IN A NEW GUISE.

CAHORS was won, but the town was still by no means safe. A large part of the enemy had escaped, when they found their case to be desperate. Others had been captured. Still others were secreted in the houses, awaiting their opportunity of doing mischief or of slipping away. Thus, there was need of the greatest vigilance; and we posted guards at several points, to repress such disorders as might easily break out in such a situation.

As I was returning from stationing some detachments, my sleeve was twitched, and I turned, to find myself confronted by an old woman. Almost before I could recognize her as Jacqueline, the servant who nursed me at the Robervals', she made a sign to me, to be silent and follow her. The old woman led me a short distance along the street, and then turned into a dark and narrow archway, which opened into a small, dingy court, apparently deserted. The houses fronting on it were tumble-down rookeries and showed no signs of human habitation. A vile odor of rot-

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tenness pervaded the place, and the overhanging roofs so effectually shut out the daylight, that even then, while the sun was still high, twilight filled the gloomy nook.

Here Jacqueline stopped and exchanged cordial greetings with me. The old woman seemed overjoyed to see me, and my delight at meeting her was indescribable, when I learned that she had come with a message from her young mistress.

Sophie was in Cahors and wished to see me! It was soon arranged that, an hour after dark, we three should meet at the same spot.

How my heart bounded at the thought of seeing the true-hearted girl whose love had clung to me and sustained me through more than three years of separation!

Long before the appointed time, I slipped away quietly from my comrades and hastened to the rendezvous. As I passed through the archway, it was already so dark, that I needed to grope my way along, by feeling the wall on either side. The foul odor and pitchy blackness of the little court fitted it rather for a meeting-place of robbers or murderers than a trysting-place of Christian lovers. So I thought, as I cautiously advanced into it. But, looking up to the little patch of clear sky visible between the roofs, I saw a single star shining serenely. A symbol it seemed of Sophie, whose presence could make a heaven of that reeking court. I had some time to wait. It seemed interminable. Once I heard a slight sound, as of some movement in the doorway

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of one of the ruinous houses near me. I called, "Who is there?" There was no answer. Rats, I concluded, or a prowling dog. But what a place was this for Sophie to visit, and attended only by an old woman! It was a perilous undertaking, at such an hour and in such a town. It must have been, that Jacqueline had chosen this place for our meeting because of its secrecy.

In due time, I heard the shuffling of steps hesitatingly entering the archway. I called in an undertone, "Is it you, Jacqueline?" "Yes, Monsieur," she answered. Reassured by my voice, the visitors came on confidently. Then a soft hand met mine, and, before I was conscious of my own audacity, I had folded Sophie in my arms, and her head was on my shoulder, while our lips met in a long kiss—a long, long kiss of youth and love.

The moments flew swiftly by, as I held her to my heart and told how my love had upheld and inspired me during our long separation, and she, in turn, renewed the assurance of her absolute confidence in my honor and faithfulness. Alas, that we must so soon part! For she had but stolen away from her home for a few moments, and dreaded lest her absence be discovered by her parents. I had no time to learn, even, by what happy chance she found herself in Cahors, still less to inquire into the cause of the strangely unfriendly attitude of her parents toward me. But she promised that, on the next evening, she would so arrange matters at home, that she would be able to spend a longer time with me. Here she

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appealed to Jacqueline, who agreed that she and her mistress would devise a plan by which they might gain an hour the next evening.

So, with a final embrace, we parted. I led the way through the arch, and then followed them, as a protector, so long as they would allow me. For Sophie held it a point of honor, to observe the letter of her father's prohibition and not permit me to approach their domicile.

All the next day, my thoughts were busy with plans to secure an interview with her parents, that I might, as I hoped, remove whatever grounds of disapproval they might entertain against me, and seek the right to become their daughter's accepted suitor.

Once I noticed a man, a particularly ill-looking fellow, who seemed to be dogging me. I no sooner turned to accost him, than he slipped away through a group of soldiers and was quickly out of sight.

It was later than usual, when my master and his officers sat down to supper that evening. I scarcely tasted the food, then quickly slipped away from my seat near the foot of the board and hastened to the appointed place of meeting.

I had groped my way through the arch. As I emerged from it, I was seized by men who sprang upon me from both sides and gripped my arms. In vain I made a prodigious effort to shake them off. Then I shouted, "Navarre! Navarre to the rescue!"

Before I could make further outcry, a cloak was wrapped quickly around my head. At the same

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time my feet were jerked off the ground, and, still struggling vainly, I was carried along, a man to each limb. My captors did not go many steps, before I was aware that they were ascending a flight of creaking, rickety, narrow stairs, squeezing me frightfully in doing so. Evidently, I was in one of the houses fronting on the court. At once the thought of Sophie's coming there flashed into my mind and filled me with horror. I was taken into a room at the head of the stairs and tumbled rudely enough on the floor. I unwrapped the cloak from my head and rose to my feet. In a minute or two, a man came in, bringing a candle, which he set on a table, the only furniture of the room, save a rickety stool and a pallet spread on the floor.

In the man who brought in the candle, and whom the others obeyed as their leader, I recognized the fellow whom I had detected dogging my steps that day. He produced a cord from his pocket and securely tied together my hands and feet. The precaution was scarcely necessary against possible escape, for the solitary window, its panes grimy with dirt and thickly coated with dust, was heavily barred. The whole place had the look of not having been tenanted for years. As to the villainous quartet who had brought me thither, I judged from their appearance that they were hangers-on of the departed Catholic army who had taken temporary possession of this old rookery, as a safe hiding-place. What was their object in treating me in this fashion, I could not guess. Had it been either robbery or murder, or

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both, it might have been effected without so much trouble as they had taken.

I had not long to speculate on this point. Shortly after my captors had withdrawn, leaving me seated on the rickety stool, surveying my dingy cell and wondering what would come next, the door opened, and a female figure entered. The woman planted herself in front of me, her arms akimbo, and stared sardonically at me, without a word. So dull was the light of the candle, it was some time before I recognized in the coarse, slatternly creature the trim lady's-maid of the château of Bonrepos, Marie Roseau. Following the camp, I imagined, hard living, wine, and debauchery had made fearful inroads on her good looks, while they had brought out her latent devilishness.

So soon as she saw that I knew her, she began wagging her head and dropping her words slowly between her half-closed teeth.

"So, you remember me, Jean Fourcade, do you?"

I answered not a word.

"You recall what I told you? I have kept my word. I have paid you back your insult many times over already. And now I am going to make a finish of it. But all in good time. There is no need of haste. You might have been stuck like a pig, as you are, in that black archway. But you would never have known what hand sent the blow. I ordered you brought here, that I might let you know—"

Bang! bang! came a thundering knock on the door below, while a man shouted from without,

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"Open, in the King's name!"

"Your King to hell!" was the hoarse answer from within.

Instantly there came the crash of ponderous blows against the rotten old door, which immediately began to crack and split. Then followed the discharge of firearms and the clash of steel.

The woman, at the first sound, had sprung out into the hall, listening intently. Now she shouted down the stairs, her voice ringing shrilly above the din at the door, "Simon, Simon, out by the back way! I follow quickly." Then she darted back toward me, at the same time drawing something from her bosom. Intuitively I knew what she was at and, hobbled as I was, unable to take a step, I rose on my feet and threw up my tied hands, thus warding off the blow of her dagger. Before she could repeat it, I had gripped her by the throat with my right hand. With this I held her at arm's-length, choked her and shook her from side to side, so that, striking out with blind fury, she could but graze my shoulder. So I managed to keep the fiend at bay with my one hand.

All the while, fighting was going on below. But it did not last long. The ruffians were quickly overpowered by the greater force of their assailants, and a familiar voice shouted, "Jean! Jean! where are you?"

"Here!" I yelled, at the top of my voice.

Then there were heavy steps on the stairs, and my master burst into the little room, with a half-dozen men at his heels crowding the doorway. In a mo-

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ment, he had disarmed the woman, flung her, panting glaring and cursing, against the wall, and, with her dagger cut the cords that bound my hands and feet, Then, instantly changing to that jesting manner which sometimes covered his most serious moods, he said, "So, a pretty scrape with a jealous woman you have got into!" And he burst into laughing, as if the whole affair was a capital joke.

Ignoring his jocularities, I told him, in a few hurried words, of my seizure, and how the woman, when she saw me on the point of being rescued, tried to stab me. He looked from me to her and from her to me, with a puzzled air. Then, seeing blood on my sleeve, he asked, "Are you much hurt?"

"Only a scratch or two."

"It is a wonder that she did not kill you, with your hands and feet tied. Do you know who she is?"

"Yes, Sire, I have known her."

"Where?"

"In Paris and at the château of Bonrepos."

At the mention of this name he looked somewhat crestfallen, but scanned the woman closely. She, disheveled and still panting, returned his look with one of fierce defiance. Evidently he recognized her, for he asked sternly,

"Where is your mistress?"

"I have no mistress. I am a mistress." This, with a proud toss of her head.

"Oh, I understand," he laughed sardonically. "Whose?"

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“Mistress of a better man than you or that booby there,” with a scornful glance at me.

“What’s his name?”

“Oh, names are nothing. Men count.” This, with a shrug of the shoulders and an air as if she were talking with boys.

“I asked you where the Baroness is,” resumed the King, with a manner which should have warned her against further insolence.

“In Hell, no doubt. You did your best to send her there. Her husband locked her up, on bread and water—”

“Take this lying hag,” cried my master, with fury blazing from his eyes, “and guard her safe till morning. Then we shall see how she will talk.” With a menancing glance at the woman, still scowling defiance, he strode from the room.

Down-stairs the light of torches fell upon the bodies of two of the ruffians, lying with upturned faces. The others were prisoners. We paused to look at the corpses, and I pointed out one of them as that of the leader. Just then Marie Roseau was led down by the guard. When her eyes fell on the face of the ruffian, she gave an unearthly cry, something nearer the roar of an enraged lioness than any human sound I have ever heard. Then she struggled wildly with the soldiers to break loose from them and throw herself upon his body, while she wailed out, “O my God! My Simon, my beautiful Simon, dead!” He was as ill-favored a scoundrel as ever thrust a dagger in the dark, and the least likely, one

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would have said, to arouse the sentiment of a woman's nature. Yet, here was this raging creature, breaking her heart over his coarse, ugly clay, now in wild lamentations, now in blasphemous curses on those who slew him, now in hysterical outbursts, strangely like the laugh of a hyena. This she-brute loved! and her wild grief was more terrible than her murderous rage.

"Take her back to the up-stairs room and guard her securely until morning," commanded the King; and we went away.

When we stepped out into the courtyard, an anxious voice from out the darkness asked, "Is Monsieur Sabatier safe?"

"Yes, Jacqueline," I eagerly cried, "I am well; and Mademoiselle Sophie, where is she?"

"She is not far hence, waiting for tidings of you."

"I must escort you home."

"I dare not let you, Monsieur. It would sorely displease my young lady. But we are in no danger." We had drawn near to each other, and this colloquy had been held in undertones. Now the old woman, dropping her voice to a whisper, added, "She bids me tell you, she hopes to meet you to-morrow evening."

Brave Sophie! How her courage and hopefulness rose over all difficulties!

"So, Mr. Innocence," cried my master, in his bantering way, when I rejoined him, "after all, there is a woman in the case. I knew it."

"Not in the sense that you mean, Sire. This young lady is very different from the court dames."

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“H'm! so much the worse,” was all his answer.

As we walked along, he told me the story of the rescue. “I was at table,” he said, “when word was brought, that an old woman implored leave to see me immediately. Aubigné laughed and said, ‘His Majesty is not interested in old women, but perhaps—’ Then all fell to laughing immoderately. I sent word, ‘Tell her to come to-morrow.’ But she persisted that it was a matter of life and death to one of my officers. I had her brought in. She told her story quickly and straight. One of my officers—Monsieur Sabatier she called him—had been seized and carried off. She had followed to the house where he was conveyed. I knew of no Sabatier. But the thing seemed likely enough, in the existing state of affairs here. Then all looked around the table, to see who was missing, and some one cried, ‘Where is Fourcade?’ Another said, ‘I saw him go out shortly after dark.’ Fearing that it might be you, I would lose no time, but called the guard and quickly followed the old woman. When we stepped out into the courtyard, another woman, slender in figure, but completely muffled, joined the old one, and they two led us to the house where we found you. And we arrived none too early; for that hag would have made short work of you, with those scoundrels to do her bidding.

“Now, Jean,” he continued, “did I not tell you truly, that you were a fool to repulse that girl at Bonrepos? Not to mention what you lost, twice it has nearly cost you your life. Monsieur Damours

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might do that sort of thing, but a soldier—bah! Of what stuff are you made?”

“Sire,” I replied, “I would not, for all the world, have done otherwise than I did.”

“You are a strange fellow,” he muttered. Then he tried to draw me out about Sophie. But by this time we had reached our quarters. My wounds, too, needed attention, and I was too sore at the disappointment of not meeting Sophie to care to talk. So, I pleaded weariness and escaped further questioning.

The next morning, after despatching business with his officers, my master called me aside and said, “Now let us two go and see what we can find out from that she-devil.” I was willing enough, for I longed to learn something of the means which this woman had employed against me. I knew that to her I owed the unfriendliness of Monsieur Roberval, as well as the enmity of the Baron of Bonrepos. In some way she had influenced the one through the other.

We repaired to the scene of my last night's adventure. The place looked worse than ever. The shattered door stood open, and a half-dozen soldiers lounged about it. The two corpses had been dragged out into the court, where they still lay, a cur licking their blood. The men stood back, as we advanced, and the officer came out to meet us.

“How fares your prisoner?” asked the King.

“Quiet as a lamb, your Majesty. At first she shrieked and moaned and threw herself about so violently, that I feared she would do herself an injury

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and I caused her to be tied. After a time, her noise ceased. Then I let her be unloosed, and since then she has been quiet—asleep, no doubt.”

At a sign from the King, he led the way up the stairs and opened the door.

When our eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, a ghastly spectacle met us. The wretched woman hung against the wall, dead. Her garters, knotted together and caught over a hook, had been the means of her self-murder. Evidently, she had stood upon the stool and had pushed it from under her feet. She had suffered frightfully, and her fingers were crooked like talons, as if, in her last agony, she had tried to clutch the cord and release herself. Her features, fearfully swollen, were black with congested blood. Her lustreless eyes, almost burst from their sockets, stared with the stony gaze of death. The mouth stood agape, and the swollen tongue hung out, as if in a hideous leer. It was evident, too, that another life had ended with hers.

A dead silence fell upon both of us. Whatever thoughts of vengeance the King had entertained he never expressed. In the face of the frightful thing hanging there, how impotent seemed all human retribution!

Without a word, we turned away and descended the stairs.

While returning to our quarters, we were met by Aubigné on horseback, escorting a rider, splashed with mud, whose animal, panting and foam-covered, showed that he had ridden furiously. The messenger

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delivered to the King a letter, which he had no sooner read, than he bade Aubigné go and order the bugles to sound for the immediate assembling of the troops. Marshal Biron, who had been laying waste Armagnac, was now in a position in which he might be struck a deadly blow, and his new forces scattered, if no time were lost.

The King now exhibited that preternatural energy which he was wont to show at times of urgent need. A sufficient garrison was detailed to hold Cahors, and we were soon ready to march.

Thus, again, I was cruelly disappointed of the expected meeting with Sophie. To cheer me, I had only the memory of the few happy moments I had spent with her. There was but time for me to scrawl a hasty note, telling her that my duty called me away, and imploring her to intercede for me with her father, in order that, when I should return to Cahors, I might have an interview with him and seek to win his approval. This I intrusted to Porcher, a friend of mine and an officer of the garrison, begging him to wait on the spot which I described, at the hour appointed for my interview with Sophie, and, when he should see her and her attendant approach, to deliver it in my name.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

HOW THE FOUND WAS LOST AGAIN.

OUR operations in the region of Montauban led to nothing especially interesting. We failed to catch Biron and only succeeded in dispersing some new levies which he was trying to gather. It was a brief campaign of rapid marches and skirmishes, but effective in its way.

Returning to our headquarters at Montauban, I was alarmed by tidings of serious disorders at Cahors. The garrison of that city had taken advantage of the absence of the King of Navarre and, in spite of his express prohibition, had sacked and pillaged the churches and monasteries. The Catholic population had offered strenuous resistance to these outrages, and in consequence there had been riots and bloodshed. Armed bands of Catholics from without had seized the opportunity of entering the town. Severe fighting had followed, and Cahors had nearly been retaken from us. I was greatly disturbed for the safety of the Robervals, and asked leave of my master to visit the place, to look after their well-being. He readily granted permission, though not

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without a little jesting at my expense. My serious love-affair afforded him constant entertainment.

Cahors I found far more ruined than after our capture. My first inquiry was for Porcher. He had been killed, in the course of the rioting. In trying to protect a monastery against a rabble of our own men, he had fallen a victim to their fury.

What should I do? The only possible channel of information about the Robervals was closed. Then it occurred to me to make inquiry among the Catholic residents. But even this would be difficult, owing to the breaking up of the religious houses and the dispersion of their inmates.

While I was pondering where to begin, a Franciscan monk passed me. I accosted him.

"Good Father," I said, "I am in a distress of mind from which it may be that you can relieve me. I have friends here who are Catholics, and I have journeyed a long distance, for their good."

The man eyed me silently and suspiciously for a moment and then asked cautiously,

"What has led you to seek them?"

"I have been told that great disorders have prevailed here, and the Catholic population has been subjected to great indignities and wrongs."

"You are a Huguenot?"

"Yes, I follow the King of Navarre."

"We have not been accustomed to look for much consideration from that quarter."

"The acts of violence," I replied, "which I deplore, were committed in direct violation of my

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master's orders. You will bear me witness that, while he was here, the persons and property of the Catholic citizens were scrupulously protected."

"That is true. What is the name of those whom you seek?"

"Monsieur Paul Roberval and his family."

"I know of none of that name."

"That is not surprising. They have, perhaps, not been long here. They left Rochelle because of the Protestant domination."

"I fear that I cannot help you in your quest," he said, and was turning away, when I detained him.

"Hold!" I cried. "Father, this is a serious matter. It deeply concerns the welfare of these friends. Take this"—I slipped into his hand a gold crown—"as an earnest of my good faith. If you will seek them and bring me sure tidings of their whereabouts, I will add as much more."

The monk paused a moment, in deep thought, then said, "Meet me here to-morrow, an hour after sunrise. I will bring you a man who knows everything. If they are here, he either knows it or can soon find it out."

So we parted. The next morning, I was early on the spot appointed for our meeting. Soon my monk came, bringing with him another, of the same order. The new-comer's appearance, certainly, seemed to justify all that had been said of his penetration and knowledge.

Fixing upon me his deep-set eyes, which seemed to read my thoughts, he said abruptly,

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"You are seeking friends who are Catholics?"

"Yes, Father."

"I have seen them."

"That is well. Describe them."

As if ignoring the suspicion implied in my demand, he answered promptly, "A middle-aged man, quiet and scholarly in appearance; his wife, kindly and portly, a good soul, one would say; a daughter, of not much more than twenty years perhaps, very fair";—here the monk suddenly transfixed me with one of his penetrating glances, then continued, as if not observing my embarrassment, "an elderly serving-woman; one male domestic. Is that right?"

"You have described them truly. Now, where are they?"

"That I can't tell. Not in Cahors."

"Not in Cahors! What do you mean?"

"They are gone hence."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "How could they travel? All horses have been seized by one or the other army."

"They had friends."

"What friends?" I asked, while a pang of something like jealousy shot through me.

The monk looked impenetrable. I remembered that I had not yet paid the promised fee. I took out the coin and ostentatiously added another. Then I said,

"I will give you the double of what I promised, if you will tell me all you know."

The monk slipped the money into his girdle; then, with the air of a father counseling a son, he said,

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"Young man, you are engaged in a vain quest. Those whom you seek are far beyond your reach. They have mighty friends. When the tumult was at its height, and some of the Catholic troops had returned hither, a band of armed men took the family whom you seek under their protection, mounted them and escorted them out of the town."

This was startling news indeed. Who could this party be? I knew of no friends of the Robervals. They had always seemed to me singularly isolated people, cut off from their kindred by their removal from their early home. What should I think of this sudden appearance on the scene of a person interested and powerful enough to protect them from harm and take them away?

"Did you know any of this party—their leader, for instance?" I asked.

"They were disguised," answered the monk evasively.

"Ah! but you knew the leader?"

"Perhaps I did. What then?"

"You have promised to tell me all you know."

"Young man, I have kept my engagement. I promised to tell you of *your* friends, not of *mine*. I have sufficiently informed you of those whom you inquire for, to let you know that you will not find them here. Further I have nothing to say."

Before I could think how to answer him or push my inquiries further—

[At this point occurs a most exasperating break in the manuscript. Ninety-three pages are missing. The reader will be compelled to fill up the interval from his knowledge or from his imagination. So far as the course of history is concerned, we know that these years were employed by Henry of Navarre in a species of desultory warfare, unmarked by any notable occurrence, and enlivened only by his habitual gallantries.—THE EDITOR.]

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE RECEIVED STRANGE TIDINGS.

[The manuscript resumes thus:]

LEADING his jaded horse, he took me to a safe distance and then drew from his bosom a packet, which he handed to me.

I opened it and found within a letter. That handwriting! Can it indeed be Sophie's? I tore the missive open and devoured its contents. It reads thus, for it lies before me now, yellow and creased and worn, but treasured still:

“MY JEAN,—for my heart tells me that you are still mine, as I am yours, though a cruel fate has separated us through these bitter years,—I cannot write much. I dare not put on paper all I wish you to know, lest it fall into other hands than yours. But this trusted messenger can tell you what you will most need to know. Only this: come, come quickly, with force enough, if you would save me from a fate worse than death that daily threatens me.

“Yours for life and eternity,

“SOPHIE.”

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In a fever of excitement I questioned the old man and learned the following particulars. His name was Armand Lesesne. He was a tenant on the estate of Bonrepos. It had long been known among the country folk of the neighborhood, that there were strangers living at the château—some said as guests, others said as prisoners; at all events, so carefully watched, that they were never seen abroad. One day he observed an old woman making her way to him, as he was in his field, and, on her nearer approach, he was surprised to recognize Jacqueline Dupré, his wife's cousin, whom he had not seen within several years, not since Monsieur Paul Roberval and his family had gone away. They knew each other well and trusted each other.

She soon told her story. She was with her master and his family, in the château of Bonrepos. They had been there since the fall of Cahors, but so jealously watched, that they were unable to hold any communication with the outer world. During the height of the riots which followed the departure of the King of Navarre, the Baron had suddenly appeared with an armed following in Cahors. He had offered to her master a refuge in his château, and the offer had been gladly accepted.

No sooner, however, did the party reach Bonrepos, than they found that they were prisoners, rather than guests. If ever they attempted to pass beyond the grounds, the armed escort who invariably attended them out of doors, interposed his master's strict orders. In short, they found themselves most rigidly watched

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and cut off from communication with their friends, even by letter, as effectually as if they were prisoners of state in the Bastille.

The Baron's object soon became apparent, when he began to pay the most annoying attentions to her young mistress. To escape these, she kept herself always near her parents and in every manner possible avoided his presence. Her only relief was found in her tormentor's long absences from his castle, when he was with the army. There was, also, a respite of a whole year, during which he was engaged in the Duke of Anjou's campaign in Flanders. But there was never any relaxation of the vigilance with which they were guarded and all their movements watched.

At last matters had reached such a pass, that Jacqueline, dreading some act of violence, with her young mistress devised a plan by which she escaped for a brief time from the château, with the connivance of one of the guards whom she had bribed, and made her way to Armand Lesesne. He had promised his aid, and two days later she had stolen out again, bringing the letter which he had delivered to me.

Jacqueline had charged him to ride with all despatch to the King of Navarre's quarters, to seek me (by this time she knew my real name) and urge me to lose no time in effecting a rescue, by some means, for she believed the Baron capable of any desperate villainy, and she lived in daily dread.

I needed no spur. Sophie's letter was sufficiently alarming to fire my heart with a desperate resolve to accomplish her deliverance at all hazards.

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But how was it to be done? The situation was truly desperate. Bonrepos lay well within the enemy's country. To reach it, under any circumstances, would be perilous, now tenfold more, since every road was alive with the Catholic gentry flocking to the royal armies bearing down upon us and vowing death to every Huguenot.

The first thing to be done was, to lay the case before my master.

I hastily told him the outlines of the story which had just reached me. He was well aware of the mysterious disappearance of Sophie from Cahors, and how keenly I had felt it.

In a moment his love of romantic adventure was fired.

"Ventre-saint-gris!" he cried. "I will go with you, Jean. We will take a handful of picked men, storm the château, rescue your lady-love, hang that scoundrel Bonrepos over his own door, and burn his damned old robbers' nest."

But scarcely had he uttered the words, when he saw the wild impossibility of such a scheme.

In very truth, his own situation, with that of the Huguenot army, at that juncture was perilous in the extreme. Never had the cause been in greater jeopardy. Whether there would even be a vestige of our forces left, was soon to be decided. Zealous Catholics swore by every saint that there would not be an armed Huguenot alive within a month.

And their boasting seemed reasonable enough. With the King of France making common cause

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with the turbulent Catholic League; with all the forces of the kingdom in arms, to deliver one crushing blow to the heretics; with three royal armies in the field, our cause seemed desperate. There was Épernon on the eastern frontier, blocking the road of the Protestant German army coming to our relief. There was Marshal Matignon leading a heavy column southward against us. There was the Duke of Joyeuse hastening, on another line, with a third army, to win glory for himself and the troop of hot-headed gallants who followed him from the court. Rumor reported him breathing out threatenings and slaughter, meanwhile marking every mile of his march with the corpses of murdered Huguenots and swearing that he would kill any man who should spare a heretic. If we should be caught between these two columns as was their purpose, we should be ground between the upper and the nether millstone.

Never had I seen my master exhibit the cool intrepidity of the born soldier as he now did.

With all Catholic France in arms and moving to the destruction of his little army, hemmed into a corner of the kingdom, with hostile Spain at his back and the ocean on his left flank, retreat effectually cut off, he was cheerfully waiting and watching his opportunity to strike the first blow. Nothing disturbed his serenity, and only the sheer necessity of remaining at his post with the army hindered him from embarking with me in the knightly adventure of rescuing Sophie.

One thing was plain. We could not effect our

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purpose by an open show of force. All the country to our northward was swarming with armed bands. Nothing less than the whole Huguenot army could march to Limoges and Bonrepos; and that would mean an inevitable encounter with one or the other of the royal columns on ground of the enemy's choosing. The safety of the cause could not be so rashly imperiled. Sophie must be rescued, at any personal hazard, but it could be done only by some skilful stratagem. On this point my master and I were fully agreed.

At last we thought out a plan. Helpers I must have, of course. But the fewer, the better. My confederates and I must make our way northward singly. To attempt to go in a body through the debatable region, where every one was on the alert, would mean certain death to ourselves, with consequent failure of our undertaking. Once well over the border, we might come together and move forward with comparative safety, because we should then be less liable to suspicion.

"Choose your men," cried my master, with his wonted energy of execution, "not more than six or eight. You may have the pick of my army. Get them together at once and arrange your plans. See that the horses are as good as the men. Then be-gone without delay. My God! that I were but a simple gentleman, that I might ride with you on this adventure! Hold! Jean," he cried, as I was turning to go; "take this purse—you will need it."

Rarely had I seen him so stirred. It was some-

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thing to know that he requited my long service with his affection.

I quickly made choice of my comrades. First, Guy Huguénin. Small of stature, broad-shouldered, ruddy-cheeked, with fiery gray eyes and a tawny peaked beard, a dear lover of good wine and fair women, he was as fearless a soul as ever led a charge or scaled a breach. Once, as we were obliged to fall back from Niort, driven out by an overwhelming force, he was with difficulty dragged away from a small magazine where he had ensconced himself, calmly waiting, pistol in hand, until the oncoming enemy should crowd over it, when he would fire his pistol into a powder-bag and send himself, with a score or two of the victors, into eternity. Ours was a desperate enterprise and needed men to whom fear was unknown.

Huguénin I appointed my lieutenant and informed him fully of my plans, directing that, in case of misfortune befalling me, he should take command and carry out our purpose. The rest were Louis Manigault, Claude Ravenel, Henri de Saussure, Jacques Verdier, Pierre Bonneau, and Jean Gourdin—fearless soldiers all, men of coolness and discretion, every one a born gentleman, but willing to serve under a plain man, such as I, through good comradeship, and eager for this enterprise because of their devotion to honorable womanhood and their thirst for deeds of knightly adventure.

Meanwhile I had given Lesesne a hearty meal and had started him on his return, mounted on a fresh horse, with instructions to make his way as quickly as

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possible to his home and open communication at once with Jacqueline, through the domestic who had been gained. If he could not see the old woman alone, he must slip a few lines to Sophie which I had scrawled, into some package to be delivered to her. I cautioned him strenuously against giving the note into the hands of any third person, other than Jacqueline.

To Sophie I wrote that I was hastening with brave comrades to her rescue, and begged her to keep a light every night in the window of her chamber (I already knew from Lesesne in what part of the château it was situated), and to be prepared, at a given signal, the hooting of an owl three times, to lower a cord.

My plan was, to take a rope-ladder, as a part of our equipment. If all went well, this would give us an entrance into the château. With the advantage of being on the inside and of a surprise, I hoped that we should be able to overcome any resistance that we might encounter. It was not likely that the force within Bonrepos was very large, at a time when no enemy was known to be near, and when all men of arms were eagerly hastening to join the royal armies and have a part in the expected slaughter of heretics.

But, lest this plan for gaining admission to the château should in any way fail, I purposed taking along a couple of petards. With the use of these Huguénin was familiar. He was, in fact, one of the two intrepid men who had advanced under the walls of Cahors and by this means shattered its gates and opened a passage for our soldiers.

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When our party came together, we discussed our plans. It was agreed that it would be useless to start before the next morning, since we must allow Lesesne time to carry my message to my imprisoned friends, the success of our measures greatly depending on their coöperation. The storming of the castle was regarded as the last resort of desperation.

It was settled that we should meet at daybreak, ride together a few miles northward, until we should enter the debatable region, on the borders of Guyenne and Limousin, then disperse and make our way singly, as best each one could, to the rendezvous. After meeting, we should take the road to Bonrepos and make our way to Lesesne's cottage, which he had carefully described to me.

When we should have learned from him how he had fared on his mission, our future movements would be determined accordingly. If he had failed in delivering my note, we must have recourse to the petards to open a passage for us.

Having settled these points, our council broke up, to complete our preparations for the hazardous journey and to obtain such rest as we might. As for me, sleep was impossible. The thought of Sophie's peril banished slumber.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.

TO THE RESCUE.

THE dawn was faintly streaking the eastern sky when I stood by my horse, accoutred and equipped, ready for the road. Soon my comrades began to appear, each, like myself, having his arms concealed under a peaceful disguise of some kind. Huguénin laughingly pointed to a pack of seeming merchandise which he and Manigault each carried, strapped behind the saddle. These harmless-looking bales concealed the petards, his "little boys," as he called them. We rode northward, until, on the borders of my master's government of Guyenne, we passed an outpost of our army. The officer in command, De Leisseleine, laughed heartily at our various disguises. But when I showed him the permit from the King of Navarre for us to proceed beyond the lines, and told him that we had a secret mission in Limousin, he shook his head gravely and said we should never return. We were not to be daunted at the outset of our enterprise and, lightly bidding him "Au revoir," we rode on.

Before breaking up our party, to take our several roads, we agreed that the likeliest account each could

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give of himself, if he should be questioned, was, that he was journeying northward, to seek enlistment in the royal army.

Now we were about to encounter the first danger, in penetrating the hostile country. With a final agreement to die, every one, rather than fail, we parted. We had reached a point where three roads came together. One led directly to Limoges; the other two diverged, one leading northeasterly, the other northwesterly, but both would bring a traveler circuitously to the same destination. I took the middle route, Huguénin the eastern, and Gourdin the western. After a short interval, three more of the party should proceed similarly; and after another interval the last two should set out. Our rendezvous was to be a small tavern, about a half-league to the west of Limoges. We all knew the place well, having had our quarters near it for some time, in that memorable winter in which I first met Sophie.

It had been agreed among us that two hours after nightfall should be allowed for our assembling, and that, if any one failed to appear within that limit, the rest should go on without him, since it was of the last importance to avail ourselves of the darkness for putting our plans into execution.

Our ruse, of traveling singly, succeeded admirably in my case, at all events. Though I encountered several parties, I was not hindered. At a royal outpost my simple statement, that I was on my way to join the army, was sufficient. Once well within the enemy's country, my apprehensions were at an end,

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and I rode on boldly. It was twilight when I reached Limoges, and by dark I was at our rendezvous. Within an hour Gourdin and Huguénin arrived.

As the tavern was full of people, I took no notice of my comrades, as they came in, and they, taking the hint, ignored me. After a while I slipped out, with a sign to them to follow. We met outside and there awaited the coming of our companions.

Within the set time our friends came dropping in. The most had some story of experiences on the road, but none had encountered any serious hindrance. Only Verdier did not appear. We waited for him an hour beyond the limit, but in vain. Nor was he ever heard of again. Undoubtedly, the poor fellow came to grief by the way.

It was near midnight, when we reached the vicinity of Bonrepos. Following the directions given me by Lesesne, I had no difficulty in finding his cottage. He was on the alert, and the first knock on his door brought him out. He reported that he had reached his home in the morning, and had gone up to the château, with a basket of fruit, in which was hidden the note for Sophie. This he purposed giving to Jacqueline, as a present from his wife. He had met the domestic who was in Jacqueline's confidence in the kitchen; but the man, with a significant look,—for they were not alone,—had told him that the old woman was sick and could not be seen. Afraid of arousing suspicion by bringing away his basket, he intrusted it to the fellow, on the assurance that it would be delivered at once.

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This circumstance disturbed me greatly ; but there was no remedy. Another piece of disquieting news was, that the Baron was in the château. He had gone away, it was supposed, for some time ; but he had suddenly reappeared, and was engaged in preparations for joining the army. I had hoped that our attempt might be made at a time when his absence would weaken the force within the château. Now the thought of him and his devilish machinations filled me with an even more intense desire to release Sophie, as early as possible, from her hateful detention under his roof.

Lesesne guided us by the shortest way. The sky had become overcast, and the night was pitchy dark. At a safe distance, we tethered our horses and stole forward noiselessly, taking the petards with us. The stillness was intense, broken only by the fitful rustling of the trees in a passing breeze. As we crept up under the black mass of the château, how vividly came back to me that last and most memorable occasion which had found me under those same walls! But how different was this errand! Then I came as the unwilling abettor of another's intrigue, and my position shamed me. Now I had the best right there—the right which a true love alone could give. And that thought inspired me with courage.

Still guided by Lesesne, we passed around a wing of the building.

There, thank God! In Sophie's window a faint light is burning.

Our party clustered together under the trees, in-

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tently watching, I give the signal, once, twice, thrice. It was a cherished accomplishment of my boyhood. Often some deluded owl had answered what he took to be the call of his mate. Now, at the third note, the sash is stealthily raised, and two figures are dimly visible at the window. We advance under the walls, and a white cord is lowered to us. All is well!

Immediately we produced our ladder and fastened it to the end of the cord. It was then drawn up, and, having found it secure, I mounted, my companions to follow in turn.

When I reached the level of the window and looked into the room, I was surprised that no one was visible. The chamber was very obscure, for there was no light in it, except that which came from the corridor, through an open door. I cautiously climbed in and advanced toward the middle of the room. But scarcely had I made three steps, wondering what this singular reception meant, when two men rose from behind a bed and seized me on either side. By a prodigious effort I succeeded in throwing them off and planted myself with my back to the wall, sword in hand. One of them then sprang to the window and cut the fastening of the ladder. At the same moment, three or four more rushed into the room, while in the doorway appeared the Baron, holding in his hand a candle which lighted up his countenance, livid with hate.

“Remember!” he cried, “no killing. Seize the accursed canaille. He shall not die a soldier’s death,” he added between his teeth.

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But I was not easily seized. With my back against the wall, I swept with my sword a wide half-circle, within which his men seemed not eager to venture, while my left hand grasped my pistol, in readiness for closer quarters.

While this combat was going on, the report of firearms came roaring through the corridors of the château. No doubt some of the inmates were firing on my friends from the windows. But in the pitchy darkness there was little danger of their doing any execution.

I was still holding off my assailants, while the Baron glared with ever-increasing rage. "Curse you, for cowards!" he cried to his men. "Do you let one man baffle you? Run in under his guard."

Just then came a tremendous double explosion, shaking the walls and resounding through the building. Bonrepos and his men stood still, aghast. Then a cheer of "Navarre! Navarre!" ringing through the corridors, brought me the welcome assurance that my comrades had won an entrance.

"Down to the door!" shouted Bonrepos to his followers. "I will take care of this fine fellow."

With this, he set the candle down on a table and drew his sword as deliberately as for a duel. I could have shot him dead or spitted him like a hare; but no such thought entered my mind. Deadly hate inspired both, and we eyed each other as men who set everything at stake on the issue of that single combat; but one, at the least, would take no mean advantage.

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With flaming eyes, we faced each other and crossed swords. At the first, each fought cautiously, until he should gauge his adversary. I soon found that I had to deal with a wary and skilful swordsman, who took no chances, nor let his passion betray him into the least indiscretion. Then I attacked, sending my thrusts and showering my cuts so swiftly and furiously, that he was kept busy defending himself. Again and again I drove him around the room, insistently pressing my advantage and giving him no opportunity for anything but to guard and parry. Suddenly, in backing away from me, he came in contact with the table on which stood the candle. Over it went, extinguishing the light and leaving us in total darkness.

At once I drew back a step or two and lowered my point, expecting my antagonist to attempt rushing in under my guard. To my amazement, he did nothing of the kind. Instead, I heard his retreating steps, as he groped his way out of the door and down the passage. What did this mean? That he was simply afraid and was stealing away from me in the dark, I did not for a moment believe.

While our single combat had been going on, the sounds of fighting had continually come from below. Very shortly after the Baron retreated, these, too, suddenly ceased. Again, what did this mean?

Bewildered and baffled by the intense darkness, not knowing the passages of the house, I had been blindly groping about, vainly seeking some way of reaching my comrades below, having no guide but

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the uproar. Now, when this came to an end, I found myself in a quandary. Cut off from my companions, in pitchy darkness, in a house in which I had never set foot, surrounded by enemies, what had I to expect, but some artful stratagem? So far as the rescue of Sophie was concerned, I was utterly helpless. My whole thought was, how I might reach my comrades and devise some plan of action.

I shouted at the top of my voice. I called by name one after another. To my intense relief, I heard an answering shout. Then began a slow process of coming together, by feeling our way, for they, too, evidently were in darkness. Calling back and forth to one another, we groped our way, frequently taking wrong turns, then retracing our steps. I all the while moved cautiously, pistol in hand, not knowing at what moment I might stumble upon a concealed foe. There was the danger, too, of falling headlong down some flight of stairs. But at last we came together on the landing-place of the great stairway. All this while we heard distant movements in another part of the château; but it was impossible to guess what they meant.

My first inquiry, as we met, was, how they had fared in the encounter.

"All well," cried the cheery voice of Huguénin, "but poor Gourdin. He was shot dead by one of the villains, as we burst in. And Manigault has a wound in the arm. We killed two of them and drove the others like sheep. How are you?"

"I am unhurt; but Bonrepos has escaped me.

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We were fighting singly, and I was pushing him hard, when the light was upset and extinguished. I expected to continue the fight in the dark; but he fled."

"Ah, the coward! We were driving his men back, when he came on the scene, and before we could guess what he was up to, suddenly every light went out."

"Some new villainy is afoot, be sure," I answered.

The situation certainly was a strange one. We were masters of the château, apparently, but rendered utterly helpless by the simple trick which had been played upon us. Where were the Robervals? or how could we find them? To get a light was the first necessity.

Our men, in their eager haste to burst in the doors of the château, when they found that I was entrapped, had dropped the flint and steel with which they had ignited the fuses of the petards. If we could only find them, we might get a light and search the castle. Undoubtedly, our imprisoned friends were hidden somewhere within it.

Hurriedly we made our way to the open air and, on hands and knees, began searching the ground about the door, inch by inch, by the sense of touch.

My God! how slow all this seemed, when I was in a fever of anxiety to learn how our poor friends were faring! For I doubted not that the sudden disappearance of Bonrepos and his followers meant some deep scheme. Perhaps they were barricading themselves in some part of the castle.

Then one cried out, "Here is the steel!" The

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cold metal had betrayed itself to the touch. But the flint could nowhere be found.

Unable longer to endure the suspense, I cried, "Come with me, Huguénin and Bonneau. We will explore the castle as best we can. Do you others continue the search for the flint."

We reëntered the hall and felt our way to the foot of the great staircase. Then I shouted at the top of my voice, "Sophie! Sophie!"

No answer; only the echo of my own voice; then utter stillness. Again I shouted. Still no answer. I was almost frenzied with vague dread of some horror. My comrades shared my feeling. At that moment we three, in our desperation, would have faced an army and would have deemed the encounter a happy relief from the pitchy blackness and the dead stillness of that accursed mansion. What hellish secrets might be locked up in its dismal recesses?

We three joined hands and pressed forward. We climbed the staircase. We felt our way into one of the corridors. Then, once more, I shouted with the full force of my voice, "Sophie! Sophie Roberval!" Ah! what is that murmur, heard beneath the echo sounding through the long passages? An instantaneous thrill passed through us, and we clutched one another's hands more tightly, for each had caught the same indistinct response. We pressed on as fast as we could, I calling, from time to time, and the faint reply coming to us ever more distinctly. Down a flight of stairs. Then I call again, and the answering voice guides us to the left. We find ourselves

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in a narrow passage. I shout once more, and the response comes from within a room a few feet from us: "It is I, Paul Roberval. Who are you?"

"Friends, come to your rescue."

"Thank God!" was the fervent response, and I heard women's voices within the chamber. My heart bounded with joy at the thought that Sophie was there. By this time we had felt our way to the door and found it locked. I knocked and cried, "Open. It is I, Jean Fourcade, with brave comrades."

"We cannot; the door is locked, and the key taken away."

I pushed with all my strength. In vain; the door resisted my utmost efforts. Burly Bonneau, stalwart as an ox, threw himself against it with all his weight. Still in vain. Then we three clasped ourselves together and dashed our united weight against it. The fastenings of the lock gave way, and the door flew open. Light at last!

My God! where was Sophie? I glanced around the little group, Monsieur Roberval, his wife, and Jacqueline, in mute inquiry.

The old woman was first to find her speech. "Ah! Monsieur," she wailed, wringing her hands helplessly, "if you could have reached us earlier! They have carried away my poor young mistress." Then the two women burst into sobs and moans, while the father sat in speechless woe.

For a moment or two, I was paralyzed. My faculties seemed benumbed by the shock of the tidings. I sank dumbly into a chair and stared idiotically

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before me. Sophie carried away, helpless and friendless, into the black night by that fiend!

This, then, was the meaning of Bonrepos's withdrawal from our single combat. It was, that he might take a vengeance deadlier far than my death would have been. Indeed, to have killed me would have robbed his devilish revenge of half its sweetness. And this was the purpose of the retreat he had ordered. While we were helplessly groping in the dark, they were dragging my poor friends to the rear of the château, locking them up, and bearing my Sophie away. Whither? To what fate?

It was a little thing, that we were left in possession of the château. Six men could not possibly hold it, in the midst of a hostile country, when hundreds could be brought against it, at short notice. One day's occupation would seal our fate.

I sat bereft, as it seemed, of the power of thought. Those moments were hours in the intensity of their dull anguish. Then I was roused from my stupor by Huguénin, roughly shaking me and saying, "Come! there is no time to be lost."

"For what?" I stolidly asked.

"To pursue the hounds," he answered fiercely.

His fiery energy revived my manhood, and I sprang to my feet.

At once we began to take counsel, how we might proceed with the best hope of success. Clearly, the first thing to be done was to ascertain what course the scoundrels had taken.

Having now a light, we began a search of the castle.

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Not a living being could we find in any of its apartments. Even the female domestics either had fled or had been driven away. At last we went to the stables. The stalls were empty ; every horse had been removed.

Just as we were turning away, one of my comrades, holding a lantern aloft, espied a figure crouching behind some sacks of grain, and quickly dragged forth a terrified old man, his teeth chattering and his eyes staring in a frenzy of fear.

Questioned sharply as to the movements of the Baron and his party, he knew nothing, he swore by the saints—and no doubt truly, for fear utterly paralyzed him. At last, when he learned that we would not harm him, he somewhat recovered his senses. Upon our asking him whether he had witnessed the departure of the Baron and his men, he admitted that he had.

“ Did you hear him say where he was going? ”

“ No, M'sieur,” he stammered.

“ Think well,” said Huguénin, “ and I will help you to think. This is yours,” exhibiting a silver piece, “ if you can tell us what we want to know. Did any of the men drop any word about their journey—about where they were going? ”

The old creature eyed the coin furtively, hesitating between avarice and dread of his master. Greed won the day. He cautiously stammered out, “ I heard one of the men say, ‘ It is a long stretch to Clinchy.’ ”

“ Where is Clinchy? ”

“ Oh! ah! it is my master's other estate, is it not? ”
evasively.

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"Where is it? I asked you," roared Huguénin.

"I know not, M'sieur. How should a poor old man know, who has never been away from this barony?"

"See here, old man," cried his interrogator, with assumed ferocity, seizing him by the throat and rattling his sword in its scabbard, "if you don't know where Clinchy is, I will quickly send you to Hell, to find out."

"Oh, spare me, master," gasped the miserable wretch, dropping on his knees; "I have heard—the men—who have gone to Clinchy—mention Orléans—and Chartres. Is it not near to Chartres?"

"But my master—will surely—kill me," he added, as his original dread came back with renewed force.

We further learned from him that the Baron's party consisted of himself and nine men, besides the lady. Then we left him, to solace his uncertain fears with his certain gain. It was a comfort to know that Bonrepos's destination was Clinchy. He would not be likely to attempt any violence, before reaching the security of his own estate. Immediately we began our preparations for pursuit. But, in our ignorance of the country, it would be idle to start before daylight. Meanwhile we had our hungry men and horses to feed. The animals were brought in and cared for, and the men found the materials of a bountiful repast in the larder. I had no stomach for food, and I spent the brief interval in consulting with Monsieur Roberval. The present emergency was too pressing, however, to allow of any conversation on the past.

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The note which I had sent through Lesesne having, evidently, fallen into Bonrepos's hands, through the treachery of the servant who had undertaken its delivery to Jacqueline, our coming was totally unexpected by those whom it most nearly concerned. That evening Sophie had received orders to leave her chamber for one in another part of the château. The reason of this procedure they could not even guess. The noise of fighting in the château and the explosion of the petards gave to our friends the first intimation that help was at hand and raised a hope that was doomed to what cruel disappointment!

The body of poor Gourdin we had laid decently on a bed, covered with his own cloak. I begged Monsieur Roberval, now that he was at liberty, to hire some of the neighboring peasants to bury it in some secluded spot; and this he willingly promised.

It was determined that our party would not, in any case, return to Bonrepos. Undoubtedly, the Baron would take steps to send a large force to recapture it and seize us. Our return to Montauban must be effected by another route than that by which we had come.

Therefore Monsieur Roberval solemnly charged me, if I should succeed in rescuing Sophie, to place her in the nearest convent, whence he might receive notice of her safety. With this promise and with the assurance that if six mortal men could accomplish it, we should deliver his daughter from her abductors, I took leave of the almost heartbroken group.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH.

HARD ON THE ENEMY'S HEELS.

IT was early dawn, when my comrades and I went to the stables, to saddle our horses and start on our way.

Not an animal was there! Left unguarded, because we did not dream of danger in that quarter, they had been stolen. Probably, the old man from whom we had obtained our information had sought to make his peace with his conscience and with his lord by betraying us, and had roused some of the tenants of the estate, who had struck us a deadly blow by removing our horses.

Blank consternation fell upon us. What should we do?

At once we set out to search the neighborhood, but with little hope of success. For those who had been shrewd enough to do such a thing would not be so foolish as to take the risk of remaining in the vicinity.

One of the party suggested that we go around among the tenantry and seize as many horses as we needed. But though we might succeed in picking up here and there a single beast, they would be

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heavy plow-cattle and in poor condition, utterly unfit for our purpose.

"I have it!" cried Huguénin, always fertile in resources. "We will turn highwaymen and provide ourselves with horses at the expense of travelers."

The suggestion was immediately adopted. We repaired to the highway, chose a spot where the road was narrow and wound between woods and rocks, and hid ourselves on both sides. After some time a well-mounted traveler, a peaceful merchant evidently, came riding leisurely along. When he found himself suddenly surrounded by six men with swords and pistols in hand, he made no attempt to escape or resist. We took his horse and sent him on his way, wondering no doubt why we spared his purse.

It was more than an hour before another victim appeared. This was a gay gallant, riding briskly and humming a ballad. When he was halted by a jerk at the bit that threw his horse on its haunches, he was furious. But two pistols pointed at his head made a strong appeal to his reason, and, with much bravado and many oaths, he dismounted and went his way, glad enough, no doubt, that he had come off with a whole skin. He walked off vowing that he would demand reparation from the lord of the manor, the Baron of Bonrepos.

We were fortunate in our prizes. We had two good, fresh horses. But this was a slow method of mounting ourselves. We might lose the whole day thus, not to mention the danger we ran by lingering in the neighborhood. For, unquestion-

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ably, the Baron would not leave this region without taking some measures against us. At almost any hour, a much stronger force than ours might be expected to appear in search of us. Besides, my impatience would not brook delay.

“See here!” I said to my comrades, “we are losing precious time. That villain has already fully eight hours’ start of us. Huguénin and I will take the two horses and ride ahead, as scouts. We will try to overtake Bonrepos and his gang and keep them in sight. Do you stay here, mount yourselves as speedily as possible, take the road for Orléans, and follow us. When you come up, we shall be strong enough to venture an attack. If the enemy come upon you, scatter yourselves or do whatever seems best. I leave you to your own discretion.”

This course seemed so plainly the wisest under the circumstances, that it was immediately adopted without dissent. Huguénin and I at once took our departure, enjoining on our comrades to overtake us as speedily as possible, since we could do nothing without them.

My heart bounded, when, after all the vexatious delays, I found myself on the road, with a good horse under me, hastening after Sophie.

We met our first encouragement when we heard at Bellac of the party we were pursuing. The description was so complete, that it left in our minds no doubt of being on the right track. From time to time we continued to hear of them, and it was evident that we were closing upon them. At nightfall we reached a village where they had dined, six hours

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before. We had gained about two hours. By cautious inquiries we learned from the landlord that they would spend the night at Châteauroux, at the inn of the Rose Blanche.

Tired as our horses were, we must push on, for the thought of Sophie alone and friendless at the mercy of that brute was unendurable. So, after a halt long enough to give our jaded animals food and some rest, we pressed on.

All this time we had hoped that our comrades would overtake us; but there was no sign of them. Our tired and stiff horses moved so slowly, that we were a long time in accomplishing this stage. At last, after midnight, we came into Châteauroux and with difficulty found our way to the Rose Blanche.

The inn was dark and silent. We knocked, at first without effect. At length, after repeated summons, a head in a nightcap was thrust out of a window, and we were angrily bidden begone. We answered that we were seeking a night's lodging. It was impossible, we were told; a large party had arrived that evening, and every room was filled. We begged and pleaded for accommodation for our horses only; we were willing to sleep in any corner we could find. In vain; the drowsy landlord would not listen to any such arrangement. The stable, he declared, was full. "Go to the Belle Étoile," he shouted angrily, and shut the window with a bang.

But where was the Belle Étoile? It was a weary business, on our jaded beasts, at that unseasonable hour, and in a sleeping town, to go in search of an-

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other hostelry. And what a bitter disappointment, after having come on, in the expectation of being near Sophie, not to be able to gain admittance even to the house where she was! Still, there was no remedy. We must go seek lodging elsewhere.

For some time we wandered about aimlessly, in the vain hope of encountering a patrol by whom we might be directed. At last we made bold to knock at a door. No wonder the good citizen who responded from his bedroom window was testy, when he found that we were simply seeking directions. Still, we got what we wanted. Up the street to the second crossing, then to the left, and we should know the Belle Étoile by a pump in front of it.

At the sign of the Beautiful Star we found the lodging of which both ourselves and our tired beasts were sorely in need. But, weary as I was, I was able to sleep but little. The thought of Sophie, in her distress, in the same town and near me, while I was helpless to aid her, troubled me waking and haunted my fitful sleep with terrible dreams.

In the morning, Huguénin and I agreed that it was not advisable for us to take the road too early, since we did not wish to press too close on the heels of Bonrepos's party. Starting later, we should only need to ride later, in order to come to the same stopping-place for the night. There was no doubt that Bonrepos would make Bourges the end of that day's stage, and I was firmly resolved that we should reach the same destination in time to secure lodging in the same inn.

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But, being now very near to the party which we were following, some chance encounter might expose us to recognition. To avoid such a mishap, we determined to make use of the couple of hours' longer stay at Châteauroux, to disguise ourselves as effectually as we might. We first went to a barber. Huguénin's pointed, tawny beard was shaven off clean, while I, who wore only a mustache, supplemented it with a heavy beard, trimmed square, of a style much affected by grave men of the middle class. We next provided ourselves with two long stuff cloaks, his blue, mine brown, and changed our head-gear for flat caps of velvet, such as are commonly worn by substantial middle-class citizens. So transformed, we should easily pass for two merchants on their travels.

Then we took the road again, and more than once before night we were within sight of Bonrepos's cavalcade. As evening drew on, we closed up the distance between us and followed them at a very short interval into Bourges.

Here I was happy in opening communication with Sophie through a chambermaid. Having won her aid by a liberal fee, I placed in her hands a note and a small parcel, to be delivered to the young lady. In the first I said to her that I was near in disguise, constantly following her and planning some mode of rescue. I bade her guard herself against any outcry or sign of alarm at my sudden appearance in any unexpected form. The little parcel contained a small bow-knot of red ribbon, which I had bought for the

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purpose, and which I begged her to wear on her right shoulder, as a token of having received my note and of an understanding between us. I retained its counterpart, I wrote her, and its exhibition at any moment would assure her that, under whatever disguise, I was at hand. The next morning, I stationed myself where, without being observed, I could see their party start. When all was in readiness, Sophie was led out by the Baron and assisted to a pillion behind one of the men. Thank God! she wore my bow-knot.

We were now nearing the end of our journey. That night the Baron's party would sleep at Orléans, at the Boule d'Or, as we had ascertained. One more stage would bring them to Chartres. This would, doubtless, be the last stopping-place on the road to his estate.

Whatever was to be done must, therefore, be done quickly. Once within his own stronghold, our chance of effecting anything would be slight indeed.

All this while, we had continued to hope that we might be overtaken by our comrades and have a force strong enough for an open attack. But, by this time, it was evident that we must abandon this hope. Unless our companions should come up with us before that night, which was extremely improbable, we must devise some scheme by which our purpose might be effected by cunning. It was our last hope.

All the day we rode, following our usual plan, of keeping ourselves in the rear of the enemy, having them in sight from time to time.

Now the afternoon was wearing away, and still

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there was no sign of help coming. By nightfall we should be in Orléans.

Then I took a desperate resolve. Sophie must, if possible, be secured that night. Should that hope fail, we should still have the chance of the stop at Chartres to fall back upon. A plan was forming itself in my brain, but so wild, it seemed to me, that I would not venture as yet to broach it to Huguénin.

"Come," I said to him, "I have an idea. What if we should get into Orléans ahead of these villains? We know where they will spend the night. We can, at the least, reconnoitre the ground and see what opportunity it may offer for something to be done." He took up the suggestion so quickly, that I then told him I was casting about for a plan of rescuing Sophie that night, and we must be guided in the details by what we should ascertain as to the facilities which the place might afford.

The very boldness of the scheme commended it to him, and he readily fell in with it.

We watched our opportunity of passing the Baron's party without attracting attention, and, for this purpose, we lessened the distance between us. Our chance came when they stopped at a trough, in front of a tavern, to water their horses, and some of the men entered to drink.

As we cantered by briskly, the masked face of the lady was turned toward us. Did she see the little bow-knot fastened to the head-stall of my bridle?

We rode on sharply. All the time that we could gain would favor us in making our dispositions. It

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was agreed, that, should we succeed in securing possession of Sophie, it would be folly to return by the route we had come, since pursuers would certainly seek us on that road. We must go either eastward or westward. The westward route would bring us into the line of march of the royal armies. The eastward was the only safe one. We decided, therefore, that we must direct ourselves toward Auxerre, southeast from Orléans; and it would be part of Huguénin's work to ascertain the road thither, so that we should be in no danger of missing it in the dark.

Coming into Orléans near sunset, we struck into the Rue Banner and followed it to the Place de Jeanne d'Arc. By the way I stopped at a shop and bought a long piece of light, strong rope, which I wound around my body, so that my cloak effectually hid it. Huguénin looked on without a word; he began to comprehend my plan.

Hard by the Place de Jeanne d'Arc we found the inn of the Golden Ball, easily distinguished by its sign. We dismounted and entered.

I immediately called for some wine and invited the landlord to join us in a glass. He was immensely pleased with our condescension and showed himself very affable and communicative. Then I told him that I purposed returning that way shortly with my wife, who was very fastidious about her accommodation. Had he a room suitable for a lady?

"Oh, certainly, M'sieur," with an air of being wounded by such a question.

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"Many rooms for ladies?"

"No, M'sieur," with a shrug of the shoulders. "What would you have? It is not often that a lady traveling stops at an inn. We have one beautiful chamber for a lady. It is enough; is it not?"

"And it is vacant now?"

"Yes, M'sieur. Stop! You shall see it yourself." Then, putting his head through a doorway behind him, he called, "Rosalie! Rosalie!"

The landlady bustled into the room.

"Rosalie," said her husband, "here is a gentleman who comes this way shortly with his wife, and wishes to see our lodging for a lady. Show him the blue room."

While Huguénin kept the landlord closely engaged in talk over his wine, I had ample opportunity, following the voluble hostess, discoursing on the conveniences of her house, to take note of the situation of the room in which Sophie would undoubtedly be lodged. It was up a flight of stairs and at the end of a short corridor. I noticed with pleasure that the door was not locked, but stood ajar. We entered the apartment, and I surveyed it leisurely, while the landlady pointed out its advantages, among others a deep wardrobe, where Madame might hang her garments.

While she still ran on with commercial garrulity, I stepped to the window, opened it, and looked out. Below, at a distance of fifteen or eighteen feet, was the courtyard, across which was the stable. I thanked the hostess for her trouble and descended to the common room, where Huguénin and the landlord

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were in animated conversation. I told the latter that I was well pleased with the appearance of the chamber. Then I proposed to my comrade that we should look after our horses. We strolled out toward the stable.

So soon as we were out of hearing, I whispered, "Our time is short. Mark that second-story window at the corner of the house. That is the window from which Sophie will escape this night, if I live. Do you have everything in readiness below. When all is quiet in the house, give me a signal, and she and I will come down to you. So soon as we go back into the house, I shall slip away. If my absence is observed, say that I am gone to visit a friend in the town, and that I shall not return till morning. You understand?" He nodded.

We walked back into the house. Taking the first opportunity, when the landlord's attention was drawn in another direction, I stole out, hurried up the stairs, happily meeting nobody, entered the blue room, laid my little token on the bureau, and ensconced myself in the wardrobe. I had noticed, when the landlady showed it to me, that it had a double door, and that she opened only one, the other being fastened at the bottom. I drew myself up in the corner behind the closed side and waited, trusting to good Providence and the gathering darkness to favor my concealment.

My dispositions were not made too early. I had waited not more than a quarter of an hour, when I heard the landlady say, "Here, Mademoiselle, is your room." She proceeded to expatiate on its advan-

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tages, running on volubly, as she had done with me. Then she interrupted herself to exclaim, "Ah! what is this? Some bit of Madeleine's finery, I suppose. The foolish wench! Oh, see! it is just like the one which Mademoiselle wears. I did not know that Madeleine had so good taste."

"I should like a little fire, Madame; I am chilled by riding in the evening air," said a voice which I knew as Sophie's. She was anxious, no doubt, to divert the landlady's attention from the bow-knot.

The good woman immediately assented and bustled off to order the fire.

Then I heard some one enter the chamber and, shortly afterward, the crackling of logs on the hearth. Then came the preparations for Sophie's supper, which was served to her in the chamber. So the evening wore away slowly. Meanwhile I was undiscovered, and Sophie knew that I was at hand.

At last the table had been cleared, the landlady had come in to ascertain whether Mademoiselle desired anything and to bid her good night, and now everything was quiet. Sophie was probably resting by the fire. I began to think of coming out from my hiding-place, but judged it more prudent to wait a while longer. Happily, for after a little time there came a heavy tread, a knock at the door, and the voice of the Baron of Bonrepos, saying, "I have called to ask whether you have been well served, Mademoiselle, and whether you wish anything."

"I have been well served, Monsieur le Baron, and I wish nothing," was the frigid reply.

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"Then I have the honor of wishing you a good night, Mademoiselle."

"Stop, Monsieur le Baron. I wish to ask you once more, what is the meaning of this procedure?"

"That will appear in good season, Mademoiselle," was the haughty answer.

"Is there no honor, no manhood—"

"I bid you good evening, Mademoiselle," and the door was closed and locked.

I heard Sophie throw herself down with a deep sigh. Well she might, poor girl! in the power of that cold-blooded brute. She little dreamed how near I was.

I tapped lightly on the door of the wardrobe. I could hear her start.

I tapped again and whispered her name through the door.

In an instant we were in each other's arms.

I shall not attempt to give any account of that blissful hour. How the time flew by, I know not. Strange that, in all the years of our love, this was the first hour of free intercourse we had ever enjoyed! I only know that, as we sat by the glowing fire, exchanging sweet confidences in low whispers, I dreaded the signal which would summon us to the world without. So happy we were in our reunion, we should have welcomed death, if it had taken us both at once.

After a time,—how long, I know not,—something brushed lightly against the window-panes. I knew that it was Huguénin's signal, that all was in readiness. Opening the window softly, I peered out and descried his muffled figure waiting below.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH.

A BRIDE OF CHRIST.

SOPHIE'S preparations for flight were brief. I made a loop in the rope, placed it under her arms, and lowered her gently to the ground. With the end of the rope fastened to the bedstead, I then let myself down.

Huguénin led us to the corner of the courtyard, where, in the deep shadow of the stable, he had three horses in waiting. With the readiness of resource of an old campaigner, he had so befuddled the hostler that he had been able to steal out one of Bonrepos's beasts, while the stable-man was gone to drink, and our own two he had brought out, before the stable was locked, on the ground that we purposed continuing our journey within an hour or two.

Now everything was silent about the courtyard. We led our beasts out singly, mounted, and rode away, without attracting attention. Not until we had left the sleeping town behind us, and were fairly in the open country on the road to Auxerre, did we breathe quite freely. Then what an inexpressible sense of relief we felt! To Sophie, it was a new ex-

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perience to sit a man's saddle. But, with a friend on either side, she had no fear, while love and hope inspired her, and she rode confidently. All night we pushed on, our horses being fairly fresh after their rest of some hours and a good feed.

When daylight came, we had put many a league between us and Orléans. Having in mind my promise to Sophie's father, to place her in a convent, we discussed the expediency of seeking such a refuge for her in the nearest town. But she was loath to part with us so soon and longed, moreover, to put a greater distance between herself and her hated persecutor. We settled it, therefore, that we should push on to Auxerre, which, without mishap, we could reach that night, and should there seek a haven for her. It occurred to us, however, that, now it was light, our party made a somewhat conspicuous appearance, since it was not usual to see a woman traveling on a man's saddle. We had altogether too much the appearance of runaways. And some chance traveler, journeying toward Orléans, hearing there of our escape, might give such a report of us as would put the pursuit on the right track. It was important to disguise Sophie as completely as possible.

There was but one thing to be done: she must assume a man's garb.

We halted, therefore, in a wood near the outskirts of a village, while Huguénin entered it to secure the necessary apparel. He reappeared shortly, with a page's half-worn outfit, which he had bought from a tailor. Sophie retired behind the shelter of a friendly

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rock, to make the change, and soon emerged, habited boy-fashion and blushing beautifully.

Then arose a question as to her long tresses. I protested against any desecration of them; but my inexorable lieutenant produced a pair of shears, which he had provided for the purpose, and announced his intention of playing the barber; there must be no half-way work, he said. Sophie took his side; her hair, she argued, might render futile all our efforts at disguise. So, reluctantly, I consented and saw her beautiful locks fall under Huguénin's ruthless shears. When this was done, she made a very presentable page.

I, also, discarded my false beard, and we rolled up our bourgeois-looking cloaks and resumed, as much as possible, our usual appearance. Sophie's feminine apparel, done up in a bundle, was secured at the back of her saddle, to be resumed at the earliest safe opportunity.

So we rode into the village and went to an inn, to refresh ourselves and bait our tired beasts. Though we had little fear of pursuit, we judged it best to push on with all convenient speed, until Sophie should be placed in safety. Accordingly, after a rest of two hours, we resumed our journey.

That evening we reached Auxerre. After taking a last meal together, which was saddened by the prospect of our near separation, we set out to find a religious house in which Sophie might have a temporary home, until her father should be notified of her whereabouts and take steps for her further safety.

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It was the more desirable that she should have a secure refuge, since Monsieur Roberval's future abode was altogether uncertain. That he would not remain at Bonrepos longer than necessity compelled, was sure. But in the disturbed state of the country, owing to the imminence of a battle between the opposing armies, it would be difficult to decide upon a place of residence, since any portion of the southwest might, at any time, become the centre of operations. That Sophie should be safe and removed from these uncertainties, was highly desirable and would be a great relief to her parents.

These considerations alone reconciled me to parting with her and leaving her so far away from the field of my own duties. Moreover, the struggle about to take place between the Catholic forces and ours was portentous beyond all precedent. The whole hostile strength of France was massed against us. I deeply realized the tremendous nature of the contest and its doubtful issue. Should we lose the field,—and all the odds were against us,—it was publicly proclaimed that “the Huguenotry would be exterminated.” Doubtless there would be such a slaughter of our people, women and children, as well as soldiers, as never had been seen since the Great Massacre. All the southwest would be harried and devastated. There would be no safety anywhere, even for good Catholics, when a licentious soldiery should be turned loose, to work its pleasure on a defenseless people.

Mine, too, was the uncertain lot of a soldier. Whether I should survive the forthcoming battle,

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only Providence could determine. Should I fall, it would solace my last moments to know that Sophie was in a place of safety, removed from the theatre of war.

But, while these considerations measurably reconciled me to the thought of parting with her, it was plain that they had not the same weight with her, and that she was sorely reluctant to be left behind. Plainly, nothing but her sense of propriety and of duty to her father led her to consent to the proposed arrangement. Who could wonder that, so long a prisoner, now that she had tasted, for a brief day, the sweets of freedom, she was loath to put herself again in restraint? Or could a lover resent it, that the woman he loved, united to him, after years of separation, and thrown upon his protection, persistently clung to him?

There was a famous convent of Gray Sisters at Auxerre. To this we three went, to apply for admission for our charge. I confess that, as we neared the gloomy pile, more forbidding still in the gathering shadows of evening, my heart sank at the thought of leaving my Sophie there, it might be forever, so far as I should be concerned,—at the best, for a separation of indefinite duration. How cruel was the fate that was about to sunder us, so lately united!

Even my buoyant lieutenant shared our depression, and it was with heavy hearts that we stood before the door of the cheerless structure.

With a trembling hand I struck the great knocker. The blow reëchoed, as in some wide, empty hall. In

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a moment or two, a little slide in the door was pushed aside, and through a tiny grated window a sister, herself scarcely visible, surveyed us and inquired our business. I asked to see the Mother Superior. The nun retired for a few moments. Then followed a drawing of bolts and unfastening of chains. The heavy door swung back noiselessly, and we were admitted into a broad, flagged hall, destitute of furniture, cold and cheerless as the forbidding exterior of the building.

A chill struck through me, as we crossed the gloomy portal, and I thought of the life of its inmates, the life to which Sophie was to be indefinitely consigned, —my Sophie, who loved sunshine and flowers and the song of birds, and who, that day, as we rode along, even weary, hunted fugitive as she was, had again and again drunk in with delight great draughts of the pure breath of Heaven and cried, "How sweet is the air of freedom! How restful are these woods and fields!" In this gloomy mansion of the living dead we were to part, it might be, to meet no more!

From the hall we turned into a spacious reception-room, its counterpart, except in shape: the same cold cheerlessness, the same bareness, which a few chairs, ranged against the walls, made more conspicuous, rather than relieved.

The sister who had admitted us brought in a solitary candle, which no more than made visible the dreary gloom of the apartment. She was speedily followed by the Mother Superior. We had seated ourselves, in depressed silence. On her entrance, we

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rose to meet her. She neither asked us to resume our seats, nor took one herself, but, with the quick decisiveness of one accustomed to rule, asked, "What is your business?"

She was a tall, spare woman, of a certain nobility of countenance, but with a natural hauteur, which an ascetic life and the habit of receiving implicit obedience had exaggerated. So gaunt was she, that in the pale light of the candle, striking her wan countenance and her features sharpened by years of austerity, she might easily have been mistaken for a visitor from the world of the disembodied. A deep, unfeminine voice, almost sepulchral, heightened this effect.

I began my story, purposing to tell, in as few words as possible, and without any mention of Bonrepos and his persecution, how I was intrusted by Catholic parents with the care of their daughter, whom they wished delivered into her charge. She cut me short with the brusque inquiry, "You have, you say, a young woman to place in my keeping. Where is she?"

"Here she is," I answered, pointing to Sophie.

"What! that—" She checked herself, ere the injurious word could pass her lips. Sophie winced visibly, under the cruel imputation of her tone and the insult of her look. Innocent soul! She had not dreamed that her boyish garb, assumed under the pressure of necessity, would subject her to merciless misconstruction from a bride of Christ.

The Superior resumed: "She comes, then, as a penitent?"

"Penitent for what?" I indignantly replied. "No

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sister of this house is purer than she. She comes only as a fugitive from wrong, to seek the shelter of the Church's charity."

A cold, sardonic smile flickered for an instant on the pallid features of the ecclesiastic, like moonlight on an icicle, and as quickly vanished. Then, as one might speak to a child, she said, "Young man, it may be even as you say, but much experience of the world and of its wiles breeds caution. A young woman who comes hither without her parents, in the company of two strange men, and disguised in boy's apparel, can enter these doors only as a penitent. God forbid that the Church should deny even to the vilest—"

"Madame!" I cried, blazing with anger and forgetful of all prudence, "surely you forget that you have not even heard this young lady's story. She comes hither to escape the brutal persecution of one of your great Catholic lords."

"Ah! then you are Calvinists?"

"She is of your Church, but we two men are Protestants," I answered proudly, "and follow the King of Navarre."

Never have I seen a transformation so sudden and so complete. The fire of bigotry, burning below the icy coldness of the ecclesiastic, flashed up in an instant, as she hissed out, "The King of Navarre! I might have known it. He, too, is a famous protector of friendless damsels." Then, turning quickly, she commanded, "Sister Therèse,"—the pale nun, with eyes never lifted, appeared instantly,—"light

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these persons out." And therewith she vanished in the darkness.

The sister, with the silent movement of a machine, took up the candle and preceded us. Without a word on either side, the fastenings were withdrawn, and the great door swung open for us and shut us out.

I was the first to break the silence of our sullen anger.

"Whither now?" I asked dejectedly.

"Nowhither," said Sophie in a tone that was new to me, and thrust her hand through my arm. "Never again"—and her voice quivered with anger—"will I subject myself to such humiliation. Our duty is done, and you have kept your word to my father. We have sought the Church's protection for me, and the Church has spurned me from her doors. Now, Jean, I cast my lot with you. I place my life and honor in your keeping. I will go with you to your own country, and your people shall be my people. And you, too," turning to Huguénin, "you will be a brother to me, will you not?"

Who could resist an appeal at once so tender and so brave?

"I swear it, Mademoiselle, on the honor of a soldier," blurted out my impetuous lieutenant, while I pressed the hand that rested so confidently on my arm, in an ecstasy of delight.

The die was cast. The considerations of prudence that had reconciled me reluctantly to resigning Sophie, were swept away by the breath of trustful love. Henceforth, come weal or woe, she was mine.

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We returned to the inn, as light-hearted as we had left it dejected. Two adjoining rooms were found, in one of which Huguénin and I could rest near our precious charge. How sweetly we slept that night! As for me, overpowered as I was with fatigue, I awoke more than once, in the blissful consciousness of a happiness the greater because it had come so unexpectedly.

The next day we continued our journey. With the resolve we had taken, it was like a holiday excursion, so merrily did we travel.

CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.

A MEMORABLE NIGHT IN THE MOUNTAINS.

IT was clear, brisk October weather. We were passing through an upland region, and as we climbed some eminence, there rolled out, on either hand, a panorama of hill and dale, fading, in the distance, into a thin blue veil of haze. And Sophie, the dread of a new separation removed, was blithe as a bird. She fairly reveled in the fine air, the wide landscapes, and the quiet beauty of the varied scenery. Evening brought us to Bourbon, another good day's journey behind us.

Clermont was the destination to which we aimed for our third stop. It was a short stage, and we were glad to ride leisurely, in preparation for the longest and hardest part of our journey, that from Clermont to Alby. So we traveled with light hearts, enjoying to the utmost the bright present. This day was a repetition of the one which preceded it, except that the scenery had grown more rugged. We turned the flank of a mountain-spur on our right, and all the rest of the day the serrated outline of a lofty range was in view.

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The next day we started bright and early, for a long and toilsome road was before us. We had now come into mountainous Auvergne, and our road lay through the foot-hills of the Cevennes. Again and again we passed the blackened ruins of a farmstead. The appearance of the region was desolate in the extreme. In these valleys was the birthplace of French Protestantism. For here, three hundred years before Luther and Calvin, a pious people worshiped God in the utmost simplicity of a pure faith, until their rejection of the papacy drew upon them fierce persecution. A yet crueller fate befell them, when Francis I., seeking to atone to the Church by his devotion as a king for his profligacy as a man, sent an army against them. The inoffensive inhabitants were harried and hunted into the recesses of the mountains, where numbers perished from cold and exposure, and their homes were plundered and burned. Thousands fell by the sword, and thousands more were deported. The land had never recovered from that infernal desolation. It was still a wasted and ruined region.

Our progress was slow, for in that sparsely peopled district the roads were rough and ill-kept. Making all the speed we could, we had, near sunset, but reached the hardest part of our journey. This was the crossing of the mountains at a point where, taking a sudden sweep to the southeast, they throw a barrier athwart the highway.

We had reached the foot of the pass, when, looking back, we descried a party of horsemen approaching. This was not necessarily alarming, but it put us on

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our guard. Huguénin dropped behind, to reconnoitre the strangers. Presently he came up. "I do not like this," he cried. "Those fellows, whoever they are, since catching sight of us, are pushing on at the top of their speed. They will soon overtake us, and we are too few to make a stand against them. Do you two ride on as quickly as you can. I will stop behind and meet this party. At the least, I can delay them, if they are enemies, and give you time to conceal yourselves."

It seemed the only thing to be done. Sophie and I urged our horses forward. But the poor beasts, tired with a hard day's work, failed to respond. They had reached the limit of their strength, and, now that the road began to rise steadily toward the summit of the pass, they could not go out of a walk.

Our only safety lay in leaving the highway and hiding ourselves. We took a faint track, probably once a cart-road, which led away amid the woods and rocks on our left, and plunged into the shadows. For a considerable distance we followed the windings of the trail, until we judged it safe to stop, there being no evidence of pursuit. The sombre masses of trees meeting overhead threw about us a deep twilight, and not a sound disturbed the awful stillness of the forest. Here, then, we waited, listening intently, in the vain hope of hearing something from Huguénin. I durst not shout, lest my voice should betray us to those whom we wished to avoid, should they still be near.

Then we realized that we had thrown, not only our supposed pursuers, but our comrade, off our track.

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To get back to the highway as speedily as possible, was the immediate necessity. But we found that this was no easy task. When we tried to retrace the track by which we had come, it was indistinguishable in the gathering darkness.

It was not long before we were wandering aimlessly in the dense forest. We had made so many turns in following the trail, winding among rocks and around huge boulders, that it was impossible to guess in what direction lay the highway. All our efforts ended in leaving us only in pitiable bewilderment.

With the prospect before us of spending the night in the forest, without food or shelter, I still durst not shout, through fear of betraying ourselves. So, the only possible method of deliverance was barred.

On we stumbled, leading our horses, for it was now too dark for us to ride, only hoping, at the best, to find some suitable and sheltered spot where we might await the dawn.

After a time, an opening in the tree-tops indicated a clearing. We came out into what was once a field, now long since untilled and overgrown with underbrush and young trees. Within it were the ruins of a farm-house, the goal, no doubt, to which the road once led whose almost obliterated track we had followed. The walls and chimney were still standing, but the roof was gone, save that half-burnt fragments of the joists still remained resting on the stonework. Undoubtedly, it was one of those peaceful homes which the bigotry of Francis had desolated.

It was a most happy discovery, for here was, at

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the least, some rude shelter for ourselves, and there was abundance of grass for our animals on the banks of a brook which ran hard by. Here we might pass the night in safety, but what a situation for a girl reared amid the strictest proprieties of home life!

“ My love,” I said, “ two days ago you placed your life and your honor in my keeping. Providence has taken you at your word. You see the situation in which we are. Do you accept it cheerfully? ”

“ What fortune would I not gladly share with you? ” was the brave answer; and my mind was relieved.

Happily, after our experience at Bonrepos, I had provided myself with flint and steel and tinder. The half-burnt ends of timbers furnished us with abundance of dry fuel, and I soon had a fire blazing briskly on the old hearth. Boughs, with my cloak spread over them, formed a rude couch. There, supperless, but happy beyond utterance, we settled ourselves to an hour of sweet converse, in solitude as deep as we could have wished, and amid profound stillness, broken only by the sound of our horses cropping the grass near by.

While we sat in delightful communion before the broad hearth, and the fire crackled and leaped, lighting up Sophie's dark eyes and her face, bright with love and happiness, and the trees rustled softly in the night wind, and there was no sound of life other than that of our horses grazing near, and the stars looked down upon us between the ruined walls, angels, I thought, might have beheld us and rejoiced, if their heavenly bosoms are touched with the sight of human

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happiness. Hunger, fatigue, and discomfort were all forgotten in the supreme felicity of that hour. Time had for us no existence. The universe was simply our two selves. Could we have ordered it so, we should have been well content to prolong that blissful hour into eternity. Ah, God! that it had been possible! that it had been possible!

“How strange it seems,” said Sophie, musingly, “that, in all the years of our love, this is the first evening that we have ever spent together alone! Sometimes I have chided myself for surrendering my affection so wholly to one whom I knew so little. I was a simple country girl. You came and captivated my imagination. Before I knew it, you were my hero. I found myself weaving endless romances about you. Day and night you filled my thoughts. I tried to picture your past and your usual surroundings, to see you among your friends. Sometimes the thought came to me, that in the great world in which you lived there must be some other, some fair and accomplished lady, whom you loved. For why should you care for me?”

“Ah! love,” I cried, interrupting her, “it was your very simplicity that first caught my heart. I had indeed seen something of the great world; and its hollowness had sickened me. I had seen my young master wedded, by his mother's choice, to one whom he did not love and could not respect. Among the great I had seen miserable pretenses worshiped, while what was human and genuine hid itself away, or else showed itself only furtively in forbidden places and

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ways. I was weary of the sophisticated and longed for simple reality. I met you, and my heart was glad. You satisfied its cravings. In you I found the dewy freshness and beauty of a summer morning."

"Do you indeed think and feel such lovely things about me as you utter?" asked Sophie archly.

"I do indeed, my love," I exclaimed rapturously, pressing her closer to me. "And, oh, darling, what would I not give, if you and I might live out our lives in some solitude like this or, at the least, in a quiet rural home, such as that of my boyhood! There life is simple and real; hearts are honest and true. Ah! that detested court! It was always distasteful to me. Since I have known you, I hate it, with its selfish and ambitious men, its frivolous and false women."

A cloud passed over Sophie's face, and she asked quickly, "Why, then, return to it? Why may not you and I make for ourselves such a peaceful home as you have spoken of?"

"Alas!" I answered, "it is my destiny. A solemn pledge to one who is dead binds me beyond recall to this life." Then I told her how our Queen, my master's mother, had made me swear never to forsake him, so long as we both should live.

Sophie heaved a deep sigh. It was evident that my indissoluble connection with the court was a painful revelation to her. She said simply, "Since you have sworn, we must make the best of it. But I have dreamed of quite another kind of life for us. For I will own to you that I dread that court and

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shrink from the thought of entering it. Has it not been the source of all the unhappiness that has befallen us? My father distrusted you, so soon as he learned your connection with it. To him it is an embodiment of all that is abominable; and I have had no easy task in maintaining a show of serene confidence, when—shall I confess it?—sometimes my heart has sunk at the thought of the influences that surround you there. For even we, simple folk, hear rumors such as could not but disquiet me.”

For a while there was silence. Sophie's thoughts were running in a channel in which she could not find, nor could I give her, any cheer. For we were quite agreed in our feeling about the future: she dreaded the court life from rumor; I detested it from experience.

After a while she resumed musingly, as if her mind was occupied with a more cheerful theme, “Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been, had you gone away from our house, without speaking a word to me. Then, when you said to me what you did,—do you remember that day, under the trees, when I brought you a cloak, and you pressed my hand?—in that moment, I was agonized with joy and pain. I believe that, for my life, I could not have uttered a syllable. If my heart could have spoken, it would have cried out, ‘Do not leave me. Take me with you, to be yours forever.’”

I answered her only by pressing her to me, in a rapture of love.

She continued: “Then, after those words of yours,

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whatever had happened,—had you been killed, and had I never seen you again,—one thing I know: my life would have been wholly devoted to you. I gave it to you when our hands met, and yours it would have been forever, for life or death.”

As I listened to this artless avowal of a love so genuine, so true, so self-forgetting, my uppermost feeling was one of unworthiness at being its object. But, thank God! such as I was, she was mine.

With her head pillowed softly on my shoulder, I cried, “Ah! my love, if Heaven were open to me at this moment, and angels appeared beckoning me to a seat there, I should renounce it for my place at your side and in your heart.”

“O Jean,” she cried with a start, “do not speak thus, I implore you. You terrify me. It is impious. How can God bless us, if you set me before Him? Do you not believe that He favors our union? As I look up to the stars,”—and she lifted her eyes reverently to the skies,—“and see them shining so brightly upon us, they seem to me to bring us a special silent message of love from the good God.”

For a few moments she seemed lost in devout contemplation. Doubtless, gentle, pious soul, she was praying for us. How earthly and sordid I seemed to myself, in contrast with this saintly being! Yet she was mine.

We mused a long time in silence. Then Sophie spoke again. Taking my hand, she said with tender appeal, “Now, my Jean, will you not give me your full confidence? Will you not talk to me as I have

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talked to you? I have told you of my life, how you came into it and made it wholly yours. Will you not tell me of your life? For all that I knew not of I have trusted you implicitly. But now, when we are so soon to be made one, you wish to tell me, do you not, of the years before we knew each other?"

Her eyes sought mine with a strange wistfulness. There was not a shadow of suspicion in those gentle orbs, only a great yearning. She would, as it were, take all my years, past as well as future, into her heart. She longed to know and love me from my very boyhood.

But as for me, ah! how could I spread before this guileless soul the record of years of heedless folly, stained with associations which, in her presence, seemed damning in their memory?

I faltered miserably, "Ah! my dear, a man's life is not like a woman's—such a woman as you are. It runs not in one smooth and even channel. It is made up of all manner of experiences."

"Oh!" she replied sadly, "you do not answer me. Is there anything that I may not know?" The wistful look was more intense and seemed tinged with fear.

"Sophie, Sophie," I cried, guilty consciousness disguising itself as passionate vehemence, "what will you have me say? Only think! You have lived a sheltered life, unvexed by storms. Mine has been checkered by the vicissitudes of court and camp. It has been my lot to be thrown with people of all sorts, a few good, many violent and unscrupulous,

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not a few depraved. Remember what my surroundings have been."

"True," she answered sadly. "But still you evade my question. You speak only of your outward life. Does not your heart tell you what alone mine longs to know? Have you ever loved another?" Her eyes sought mine, more than ever filled with deep yearning.

Would to God that I could have looked into those clear orbs unflinchingly!

"Never, I swear, my darling," I answered, and answered truthfully, for, in her spiritual sense of the word, love had been unknown to me, till I met her. But certain accusing memories arose within me, and how could I be less than utterly truthful before this guileless soul? I added falteringly, "I never loved, until I met you—never, as I love you."

"Ah! 'as you love me,'" she replied, quickly catching my qualifying words and repeating them with emphasis, at the same time drawing away from me a little. A deep shadow fell over her face, and she was silent for some time.

After a while she said in an altered voice, out of which the joyous element of her love seemed to have gone, "Perhaps I am a foolish girl; and it may be the common lot of women, that few get in marriage what all are expected to give—an unsullied heart. But alas for my dreams!" She began to sob.

"O Sophie, my darling," I cried passionately, "why will you thus torture me, and yourself not less? Is it generous? When I tell you that, since I first knew

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you, I have loved only you, and that neither by word nor deed, nor even by a thought of mine, has any woman so much as cast a shadow on your bright image in my heart, does not that content you?"

"It must," she answered sadly. After musing a while, she said, "But would to God that it had been otherwise! How happy I should be! Oh, this is folly!" she cried, her manner suddenly changing. "Such as you are, I have accepted you for weal or for woe. I could not withdraw my love from you, if I would. And God knows, I would not. The fault has been mine, in endowing you with an ideal perfection. As you are, I thank God for you." So saying, she drew me toward her and kissed me on the forehead, as a mother might kiss an erring, but dearly loved and forgiven child.

After a while she murmured caressingly, "I have thought it all over. How foolish I am! For, surely, if there are things in your past that you would willingly obliterate, it must be that you have repented of them, and God has accepted your penitence. Else, He would not have brought us together, after our long separation, and He would not smile on our union, as I firmly believe He does. Would I be more exacting than He?"

What could be sweeter or more reasonable? I caught her to my bosom in a silent ecstasy of gratitude and love.

But, alas! the end was not yet. When a woman's instinct of proprietorship in her lover is once aroused, it is not so easily laid at rest. After a little Sophie

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said, "Let us not, my Jean, make half-way work of this. That were weak and foolish. And this subject would remain a perpetual menace to our happiness. Let us be brave and deal with it thoroughly. Then let us, so to speak, lock it up forever, never to be reopened by word or sign. Only so can our understanding be complete. Is it not so?"

I assented reluctantly. For too well I saw whither this talk tended.

"There are things, you know," she resumed, "which I dare not leave untouched—questions which, if they remained unasked, would forever haunt me and destroy my peace of mind; shadowy spectres that would dog me day and night. Is it not so?"

"Go on," I said.

"No," she answered quickly; "that is not the right tone for you to take. All our future depends on our clearing up this subject once for all. Only think! I am about to become your wife. You would not, would you, have me go blindfold into this relation? Surely, a wise wife does not begin by being a fool."

She paused for me to assent to this undeniable proposition. I merely nodded.

Sophie continued in a firm voice, "I do not ask you to lay bare all your past life. I have foregone that. It is in the keeping of God. But, indeed, I must know the present; I must comprehend the circumstances that have already so painfully affected my life, as well as yours."

"What, for example?" I asked.

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"Let me remind you," she answered, "that the mystery of your coming among us has never yet been explained. You were not, you have written, the lover of the Châtelaine of Bonrepos, but have suffered for another's wrong-doing. Who that other was, I easily surmise. But how came it that suspicion was fastened upon you? Why were you attacked? Why was the Baron so fiercely incensed against you, that he would have killed you, and, failing that, sought to wreak his cruel vengeance on me? For well I knew always that his designs against me were the blow that he aimed indirectly at you. And by what representations was he able to prejudice my father so bitterly against you—my father who is commonly so tolerant and kind?"

"It was a woman's revenge," I answered sullenly.

She started, as if she had been struck, and her eyes sought mine with a penetrating look, as she exclaimed, "A woman's revenge! Strange! How was it incurred?"

Reluctantly and in as few words as possible, I told her the story of my meeting with Marie Roseau and of our quarrel, with its consequences.

"You knew her, then, this Marie Roseau!"

I nodded grimly.

"And, surely, she had—she had some claim on you?"

I nodded again, with my teeth set, and looking stonily before me.

Sophie moaned, and, looking up, I saw her hands covering her face, while her body swayed back and

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forth. For some time I tried in vain to soothe her. I even pleaded my renunciation of Marie Roseau, before meeting her, as evidence of the altered tenor of my life.

"It is too much, too much!" she cried. "To think that I owe you to a quarrel with a former—and a servant, too!"

"O my darling!" I cried, in an agony of shame, "why have you wrung from me this wretched avowal? Must you torture me and yourself, too, by dragging to light things that should be buried forever? The wretched woman is dead; let the story die, too."

"Dead?" she exclaimed quickly, dropping her hands from her face and eying me keenly. "How do you know it?"

"Do you recall," I answered, "that incident at Cahors, when I was seized by ruffians, but, through the notice which you sent to my master, was rescued? She it was who instigated that plot to murder me." Then I told her the sequel of that episode, including the wretched woman's miserable end.

Sophie listened with a set look. When I had concluded, she was silent for a time. Then she said in a strangely hard voice, "You have been very frank. Let us go on with this subject to the bitter end. You have told me of one woman. There have, perhaps—been others—in a similar relation?"

"O my God, yes!" I cried fiercely. "Is this your generous forbearance? Will nothing content you, but to wring from me a confession of things that I loathe to recall? When I tell you, nay, swear to

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you, that never, since I have known you, has there been anything in my life that I would wish to hide from you, is not that enough? Do you forget that I have lived at a court where your ideas of virtue and mine since I have known you, are derided?"

"Ah, that wicked court!" she said, shaking her head mournfully. "How justly my father abhorred it! Yet, he could not have dreamed what sorrow it would bring to his child. It was, then, some lady—some ladies, perhaps—at the court?"

"Have it so, if you will," I flung out savagely, though, in fact, the surmise was groundless. Then I added, in better temper, "But let me tell you that I have so lived these last years as to make myself an object of derision to the court dames and gallants. I have been a recluse among them. When you become my wife, it is not likely that you will ever encounter a single woman who has any least claim on me. Now, surely, we may, as you said awhile since, lock up this subject, never to be reopened."

"Forgive me, my love," she answered, with a tenderness that was motherly, "if I have pressed you hard. If you have suffered, I have suffered more. But it is better so. There are now no illusions to be dispelled in the future. As you are, I thank God for you. After all this cruel questioning, do you still love me as much as ever?"

Her arms were extended yearningly toward me. In a moment they were about me, and the pain of the recent ordeal was forgotten in the joy of our perfect union of hearts. Nestling against me, Sophie

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wept softly, under the reaction from her recent emotions.

At last, worn out with weariness, my companion fell asleep, resting on my shoulder. I lowered her gently on the couch, her head pillowed on my knee, and my cloak drawn around her form, the stars shining down between the roofless walls our only canopy.

Then, while the fire burned, I mused. What a creature of destiny is man! These ruins once sheltered a happy household, now gone whither? Once more they look down on human felicity, to last how long? Now the face of fortune smiles propitious on our love; to-morrow it may wear a frown. It may be that the fate of war will sunder us forever. Perhaps I shall never have the proud title of husband to the woman of my love. But has not Providence, superior to the ordinances of men, placed her in my arms? And who is wise but him who, in each passing moment, discerns and thankfully follows the divine leadings? Only the ascetic makes for himself an ideal of privation and seeks to force God to his petty standards.

I looked down upon the sleeping face before me. How sweetly it lay in the flickering firelight, while the bosom, for which the page's velvet doublet was well-nigh too scant, rose and fell with regular rhythm! Adorable Sophie! dearer than ever since the understanding we had reached. My wife to be!—how soon?

The silence was broken by the distant howl of a wolf. Immediately there came into my mind the

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picture which Virgil draws, when, amid thunder and the flash of lightning, Æneas and love-sick Dido take refuge in a cave, and

“Ulularunt nymphæ,” etc.

The wood-nymphs chanted their hymeneal song.
Who should sing our nuptial hymn?

Then, even while I gazed in rapture upon her face, her lips moved, and the light of love seemed to play over her features. I bent over and listened. It was my name she breathed in her sleep. In an ecstasy, I hung over her. Again the wolf howled.

Then her face suddenly changed. Terror was depicted on it. She moaned, as if trying to cry out, and her hands twitched convulsively. Poor soul! what hideous dream was agonizing her? I threw my arm about her and drew her to me. She awoke, started up, passed her hand before her face, then sank upon my shoulder, crying, “Oh, my love, how thankful I am that it is you! What a dream of horrors I have had! First, I was with you; and we were so happy, just as we were before I fell asleep. Then methought I was separated from you and was wandering alone through the dark forest, stumbling and lost. Suddenly a great abyss yawned before me; an unearthly light flashed up and surrounded me, and I was seized about my body by strong arms. I looked down into the face of the fiend who clutched me, and it was the countenance of Bonrepos, only tenfold more hideous with hate and passion. I was helpless with terror. I struggled, but in vain. I tried

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to scream, but I could make no sound. I seemed to be toppling over into the awful chasm, when I was seized by other arms and borne up. There was a great struggle; but my rescuer conquered. I looked up into the face of the good angel, and oh, Jean, it was yours. And are you not indeed my good angel, strong to shield me from harm?"

My arms enfolded her, and our lips met in a long kiss.

Once in the night I was awakened by the snorting of the horses, in evident alarm. I remembered the wolf whose howl I had heard. Very gently I raised myself on my elbow. Sophie lay asleep across my left arm; on no account would I arouse her, without absolute necessity. The fire had burned itself low, and the cabin was in darkness. Only overhead the stars twinkled. I had taken the precaution, before falling asleep, of laying my sword, unsheathed, by my side. With it I pushed the fagots together. Presently they kindled into a little blaze. Then I espied an object in the doorway. It was, I thought, too high for a wolf and too low for a man. I kept my eyes intently fixed on it, while I held my sword firmly grasped, Sophie meanwhile sleeping on, poor soul! wearied out. After a little the fire shot up a brighter blaze, and I distinguished a man crouching, his body hidden behind the wall, while he peered in upon us.

A man, I have said, but less than human he seemed—rather, a famished and frightened wild animal. His matted hair, uncovered, overhung in a huge shock

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his gaunt, pinched face, grimy and squalid. From cavernous recesses his eyes looked out, restless and furtive, like those of a wild beast newly caged. About his shoulders hung tattered remnants of a garment. At a mere motion of my sword toward him, this apparition darted away and vanished into the darkness.

What could he be? There was nothing to be feared from him or from such as he. Still, I could sleep no more that night. The knowledge that a wretched fellow-being, bereft, perhaps, of reason, was lurking near, kept me wakeful.

CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE FELL INTO A TRAP.

THE next morning we had no difficulty in finding the old road which we had lost in the dark of the previous evening, and in following it out to the highway. With our horses fresh from their night's pasturage, we pushed on toward the summit of the pass. As we gained it, a magnificent prospect opened before us. On our right the mountains were heaped up in wild and majestic disorder. On the left they stretched in serried array to the horizon. In front the land fell away gradually, with many an alternation of hill and dale, to the far-away plain, where the morning's sun glinted on the tiled roofs of Alby. In the foreground the road rose to view here and there, as it mounted some eminence.

How blissful was that morning's ride, in the crisp October air, and in the undisturbed enjoyment of each other's society, shadowed only by our approaching separation, but lighted by love and hope!

It was high noon when we rode into Alby. As we made our way to an inn, a man accosted me and asked whether I was Monsieur Fourcade. Then he

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delivered a letter to me. It contained good news indeed, for it was from Huguénin. He had reached Alby late in the night. The party whom we had dreaded as pursuers, proved to be a group of horsemen on their way to join the Huguenot forces. Seeing us ahead of them, they surmised that we were bound on the same errand, and quickened their speed, in order to overtake our little party. After fruitless efforts to find us in the gathering darkness, Huguénin had continued his journey with them, knowing that Sophie and I would have no difficulty in reaching Alby, now that we were in a friendly country. On account of the proximity to the theatre of war, and our ignorance at what point the great encounter would take place, he urged me to leave Sophie at Alby and to hasten forward with all despatch. Our army, he had learned, was on the point of moving to meet the enemy. He himself would go on with his new companions.

It was a great relief to Sophie and me to know that our brave comrade, to whom we owed so much, was safe. We acquiesced, too, in the wisdom of his counsel, that she should await at Alby the issue of the forthcoming struggle.

Our first need was food, for we had not broken our fast since noon of the previous day. We went to the Red Stag and there ate our last meal together, in almost utter silence, each weighed down with the thought of our approaching separation and the uncertain issue of the impending battle. The only thing that sustained us was the mutual pledge that, if I

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survived it, whatever might be its result, we should be united, and henceforth our fortunes should be one.

Leaving Sophie to rest at the inn, I went out to seek a temporary home for her. I was well acquainted with the town, having visited it more than once, and there were several houses where I was a welcome guest. Above all, I prized a family named Boismaison, an elderly widow with two daughters, people so reasonable, so just in their sentiments, and so kind, that I was sure of their sympathy and friendliness.

I was not disappointed in this expectation. They listened with deep interest to my story and assured me of the heartiest welcome for the woman of my choice. But, in spite of the cordiality with which they greeted her, the poor girl keenly felt the embarrassment of her position. She had, however, availed herself of the opportunity at the inn of resuming her own attire; and the unfeigned friendliness of Madame Boismaison and her daughters soon put her at her ease. Women so reasonable and so gentle could surely put no harsh construction on the circumstances under which she had come to them.

I lingered long among these good friends. But the lover must give way to the soldier, and when the sun was already low in the west, I drew Sophie aside, to bid her farewell. My Sophie now! Ah! how could I leave her? How cruel seemed the fate that tore me from my bride! It required all the manhood in me to face my duty. In the trying ordeal

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of our parting she showed more fortitude than I, because her faith in an all-wise Providence, ordering all things for good, was stronger than mine.

“Never fear, my Jean,” she said. “Have faith. It is but for a few days, at the most. Then we shall be reunited for, ah! let us hope, long and happy years. Can you for a moment think otherwise? Can you believe but that the good God, who through the long trial of our separation kept us for each other and restored us to one another, still watches over us and wills our happiness? Without the faith that He has decreed us to be man and wife, and that He smiles on our union, think you that I could have given myself to you, as I have?” Here she hid her lovely face, covered with blushes, on my shoulder, and, in a rapture of love, I folded her in my arms. Was ever bliss greater than mine in the sweet agony of that parting?

Presently she resumed, with the gentle gaiety which no pressure of adverse circumstances could ever crush, “Ah! my faithless boy, do you begin to rally your courage? Surely, it is time for a soldier. See! here is somewhat for thee. It is a trifle, but I love it. It revived my spirit, in an hour of dark trial; and it will remind you, when you are disheartened, of your Sophie and of the hope I bid you cherish.”

Here she produced the little red badge which I had caused to be conveyed to her, before her rescue. She had cherished it, dear girl! as the first visible token she had received, in that awful time, that love and help were at hand. Now she kissed it and then fas-

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tened it over my heart. It was secured with a pin which she had added, having for its top the head of a lion, with rubies for eyes, and holding in his open jaws a fiery opal. "Let this," she said, "be to you a symbol of hope. When your courage sinks, let your eyes rest on this. Then look up to God and trust."

Adorable Sophie! How sweetly she preached her simple gospel of a faith so unswerving that it made her life as constant as the sun and as benign. Well I knew that beneath her cheerful demeanor was a heart overflowing with tenderness, and that she was even now rallying all the strength of her nature to hide her trouble, that she might send me on my way hopeful and brave. The little incident that was passing seemed to me to have all the solemnity of a sacrament.

Reverently I said, "I receive this token, my Sophie, not only as the symbol of hope, but as the badge of honor. On the battle-field it shall light me on that road or to death."

Once more I pressed her to my bosom. In spite of her hope and her courage, the tears welled up in her eyes. Was she not a woman, and a woman sending her husband to the field of battle?

So we parted.

Late in the night, I came into Montauban. The place was profoundly quiet, our army having already taken up its march in the direction of Rochelle.

I knew that I was safe in tarrying there, for I had learned that there was still a considerable distance

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between the opposing armies, and the expected encounter could not possibly take place before the second day. Thus I should have ample time to join our forces on the morrow. I might safely rest there that night, and I was sorely in need of repose. I drew up at the inn of the White Rose. It was dark and silent, except that a light shone in an upper window. I knocked. Almost immediately there was a light step within, the bolt was withdrawn, the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Mademoiselle de Rebours stood before me. At sight of me she started with surprise and evident disappointment, but quickly recovered herself and hastened to greet me with every appearance of cordiality.

“In the name of Heaven, Monsieur Fourcade, where do you come from?” she cried. “We heard you had gone on some piece of knight-errantry, beyond the lines, and we gave you up for dead. But come in and warm yourself, and tell me where you have been and what you have done.” So saying, she locked and bolted the door, set the candle down on a table, and led the way toward the hearth, where red embers lay in a heap. She bustled about with an air of the friendliest interest, stirred the coals, and threw on some fresh wood.

“Come,” she said, drawing up a chair for me, while she took another, “seat yourself and tell me how you have fared in your undertaking of rescuing a young lady — you,” she added, with a roguish laugh, “whom we have thought impervious to the arrows of Cupid!”

All this while, I stood reluctant in the middle of

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the room. I had hitherto despised the woman for a heartless wanton, capable of any intrigue, whether of gallantry, of politics, or of malice. She belonged to an ancient and proud, but impoverished, family. She had come very young to court, as an attendant of the Queen of Navarre, and had become thoroughly imbued with her principles. There was no readier instrument at her mistress' disposal than she. Her conquests were numerous, but she aimed high. At last she reached the summit of her ambition, but only to remain on that eminence a short time. After she lost her influence with my master, she spent her energies in open and reckless intrigues to regain that post of honor.

For this young lady, who was as haughty to her inferiors as she was cringing to the powerful, I had great difficulty in showing even the respect which her high station demanded. I was habitually barely civil in my demeanor toward her, while she plainly showed her ill-will toward me by her manner. She was one of those court ladies who gibed at what they called my affectation of virtue. If she had dared, she would have done more; but my nearness to my master protected me. No doubt she thought that I was a partizan of her successful rival, and that my influence was used against her. If she could not win me to her support, I believed she would seek to crush me at the first opportunity. Intrigue was her vital breath, and she was unusually well equipped for it. Besides considerable beauty, she carried herself like a queen. She possessed, moreover, great fertility of re-

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source and a ready wit, capable of seizing any chance and turning it to advantage. Of conscience she had long since lost the last vestige.

In short, she was a woman who, by reason of her bodily and mental endowments, was infinitely dangerous, and who would not scruple at any means by which she might advance her personal ends or blast an opponent.

Now, however, her manner was astonishingly friendly, and I found my habitual distrust quickly vanishing in the light of her smiles. The fire was by this time crackling merrily on the hearth. Thanking her, I went close and, standing, warmed myself, for I was chilled by my ride in the frosty air of an October night.

The landlord now entered, his clothes huddled on, and still wearing his nightcap, and bade me a sleepy "Good evening, Monsieur."

"Draw me, mine host, a flagon of your best wine," I said, "and while I am drinking it, get ready a room for me." He seemed surprised at the latter part of my order, but went his way and soon returned, bringing a large stoup of red wine.

"That," said he, holding it up proudly, "is good enough for an abbot. The King of Navarre drank of it last night and praised it. To be sure," he muttered, "he is not particular about what he drinks." Then he bustled off to prepare my room. Soon he came back and announced that it was ready. I set down my cup, half empty, and followed him to a chamber on the same floor. After seeing it, I re-

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turned, to finish my wine and to enjoy the warm fire a few moments longer. Meanwhile, the landlord bade me "Good night" and withdrew.

Mademoiselle de Rebours still sat there, with her feet stretched out and crossed before the fire. The warmth and the wine inclined me to good fellowship. For the time, I forgot my habitual distrust and settled down in the chair which she had drawn for me.

In the easiest manner my companion drew me on to talk by her questions, full, it seemed, of sincere interest. I began to feel that I had misjudged her. After all, was not there good in the girl? Insensibly I was led to tell of my recent adventure, and this excited me still more. I became confidential; I spoke of my love.

"And who is the young lady?" asked Mademoiselle de Rebours, with a charming simplicity of manner, as if she were chatting with an old friend.

"Sophie Roberval is her name," I answered proudly.

"Roberval! I do not recall having heard it," she said reflectively. She continued, "It is not a noble name; but you are not noble and would not expect a noble bride." Then she added with winning condescension, "But the good and beautiful are not always noble. It is the heart's love that makes happiness. Is it not so, Monsieur Fourcade?" she asked, looking me ingenuously in the eyes.

How wisely and feelingly she talked, this woman whom I had thought a heartless coquette! And how handsome she looked by the firelight! How her

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reddish-brown hair lighted up in the glow of the fire! What fine eyes! What a figure!

"Yes," I answered enthusiastically, "and my Sophie is all that a lover could ask." Then I went into raptures about her beauty, her amiability, and her loyalty to me through years of sore trial.

Mademoiselle de Rebours sighed sympathetically, hung on my words, looked up in my face, drew her chair closer, and let her hand fall softly on my knee.

"And where is she now?" she asked, her voice low and full of feeling.

"At Alby," I answered. Then I told her of my reasons for leaving her there, and I spoke of my good friends, Madame Boismaison and her daughters, to whose care I had committed her.

"You have done wisely," said she. "And you will be married soon?"

"If God spares my life through this battle, we shall be married immediately afterward," I answered fervently. At my side there was a deep sigh, and the hand on my knee seemed to tighten and grasp it with a little convulsive tremor.

Surely there was a devil in that heady wine. I took the hand, and it quivered in mine with an electric thrill that sent the blood bounding, until I seemed to feel and hear it throbbing against my brain.

She leaned toward me, and her head sank on my shoulder. I dropped my eyes. Great God! there, over my heart, where Sophie had pinned it, nestled the little red "badge of honor." Of honor! Her words came ringing through my brain, and, with them,

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my response,—alas! so nearly forgotten,—“It shall lead me on the road to honor or to death.” The opal eyed me with sullen, vengeful fire.

I dropped the hand I held, started up, pushed my chair back, and cried in an altered voice, “Mademoiselle, I must bid you good night. It is late, and I must be astir early to-morrow. I thank you for your good company and your friendly interest.”

“But wherefore so suddenly?” she asked, rising, her cheeks flushed, her hair disheveled, and an ugly light in her eyes. “Oh, see,” she exclaimed abruptly, “what a beautiful decoration you have—your lady-love’s gift, no doubt!” And she came close to examine it. Filled with the thought of Sophie and of my perilous approach to a lapse from loyalty, I barely suffered her, as she came near, leaned over, and fingered the badge.

Before I suspected what she was about, she had unpinned and slipped it out of sight.

“Good night, Monsieur Fourcade,” she said with a sweeping mock courtesy, at the same time taking up the candle. “Commend me to your charming lady-love.”

In that moment I saw that my bow-knot was gone. “Hold, Mademoiselle!” I cried, as she passed through the door. “You have taken my decoration.”

The woman turned on me fiercely. “What do you mean, insolent roturier? What interest have I in your peasant loves? or what should I want of your cheap trumpery?” she haughtily demanded. “You will escape what you deserve, if I do not cause some

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gentleman to slit your ears." In another moment she was ascending the stairs.

Dumbfounded, I did not know how to meet this cool effrontery. Before I could gather my wits, I heard a door on the second floor shut and the key turned in the lock. I bounded up the stairs. But which was her room? I knocked at one door and was roundly cursed from within in deep, gruff tones. At another a shrill feminine voice cried, "What do you want? Go away. I will tell my husband." At a third my repeated knocking brought no reply, though I heard a person moving about within the room.

I went away, resolved to secure the return of my badge the next morning, at whatever cost.

When I went to my room, it was a long time before I could sleep, so deeply was I troubled with the sense of my folly in being made the easy dupe of an adventuress. At last I fell into an uneasy slumber, in which I continually dreamed of being menaced with some dire misfortune or deep disgrace.

I awoke and drew the curtain aside, to see the sun shining brightly. I hastily put on my clothes and hurried down-stairs. My first thought was of Mademoiselle de Rebours. I asked the landlord to take her a message from me.

"She is gone, two hours since," he replied.

"Gone!" I exclaimed, aghast. "What do you mean?"

He came nearer and said, in a confidential undertone, opening his eyes, and with an air of deep worldly

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wisdom, "A gentleman—Monsieur understands, no doubt—came here, when it was yet scarcely light, with a horse for her, and took her away."

"What road did they take?" I demanded impetuously.

"I do not know, Monsieur," he answered. "Ah, stop! Surely, they mentioned Alby, as they talked together."

Great heavens! They had gone in the opposite direction to that which my duty compelled me to take. And to Alby! If, by any mischance, that intriguing creature should meet Sophie!

Bitterly I cursed my heedless folly in talking to her so freely. But there was no help now. The impending battle left me no choice but to press on with all despatch.

So soon as I had eaten a hurried breakfast, I mounted and followed the track of the army. Before long, my depression and my self-reproaches vanished in the excitement of the signs of an imminent conflict. For a ride of a few miles brought me to the rear-guard of our army. It was moving forward with all haste. Orders had come to press on with all possible despatch. Evidently, some vantage-ground was to be occupied. As rapidly as the crowded state of the road would allow, I hurried forward, to report myself to my master. All along the way there were joyful recognitions, as I was greeted by old comrades who had heard that I had gone beyond our outposts, on a secret mission, and who were glad to welcome me back, especially on the eve of a battle.

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In spite of the great inferiority of our numbers to the reported strength of the enemy, our men were full of eager hopefulness, and hurried forward with the alacrity of old soldiers about to meet the foe.

As I rode by Turenne's Gascon cavalry, I was hailed from the ranks by the familiar voice of Gailard. We were overjoyed to greet each other, and I listened with intense interest to his hurried recital of the experiences of my comrades whom I left behind, when Huguénin and I pushed on, in pursuit of Bonrepos and his men.

Our four friends had not been so successful as we in obtaining mounts. And when, at last, they secured animals, they encountered a considerable party of horsemen, who had, undoubtedly, been sent by the Baron to look after us. This compelled them to disperse and abandon the hope of overtaking us. They had succeeded, however, in making their way back, singly, within our lines.

When I came up with my master, he was characteristically employed. A tumbrel carrying one of our few pieces of artillery was stuck in a deep rut. He was on his feet, in person directing the men what to do, and was not content until he saw the heavy machine lumbering on its way.

He hailed me with delight. "You are just in the nick of time, Jean," he said. "If we had fought, and you had not been there, you would have wished to go and hang yourself."

He inquired how I had fared on my errand, and congratulated me warmly on my success. But there

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was brief time for talk, for he was busily engaged in his preparations for the expected encounter. From end to end of the column his presence was felt, and everywhere it inspired eagerness and hope.

It was a race, I found, between ourselves and Joyeuse for the possession of the castle and town of Coutras, which was by far the strongest position in that vicinity. If we could succeed in gaining it, we should have the advantage of the choice of ground; and if Joyeuse, in his eager haste to seize it, should come into collision with us, before effecting a junction with Matignon's army, we should be fighting one hostile force, instead of two.

When night came on, our main body was still some miles from Coutras. But the King of Navarre sent forward La Trimouille, with a considerable force, to seize the position. They forded the Drogne and drove out the royalist advance-guard, which had already taken possession of Coutras, but were not strong enough to hold it. Thus we gained the first advantage.

All night long, our forces were crossing the river and taking position, under the direction of my master, who was everywhere, superintending with tireless activity every detail and himself pointing out the ground to be occupied by each corps, as it completed the passage and came upon the field. During the night he learned from some prisoners who were brought in, that the royalist commander had begun his movement at ten o'clock, in the hope, no doubt, that, by marching all night, he would anticipate us and seize the high ground which we already held.

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With the knowledge, therefore, that the enemy were within a few miles, and would probably attack in the early morning, it behooved us to hasten our dispositions; but the passage of the river by the infantry was slow work, and when morning came, there were still three regiments that had not crossed. These did not actually come upon the field, until the engagement had begun.

With the eye of genius, our leader seemed to see at a glance what was the best disposition to make of our forces, and, as it turned out, the place which he chose for our cannon gave them the most effective range.

Our army was drawn up in the form of a crescent, the left resting on the river Drogne, and the right on a copse of wood. At this point La Trimouille was posted, with two hundred light horse, and well supported by harquebusiers. Turenne, with his Gascon cavalry, held the centre. At this point the King of Navarre had taken his position. Next was Condé; and the left was occupied by the Count de Soissons. One novel feature was, that each body of cavalry was accompanied by a small force of harquebusiers. These were arranged five deep, and they were under the strictest orders to reserve their fire until the enemy should be within twenty paces. As each rank should deliver its volley, it would drop on its knees and give an opportunity for the next rank to fire. This disposition proved immensely effective, when, during the battle, the enemy's cavalry broke our line and came within close range of these firearms, which mowed them down with deadly volleys.

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Before our arrangements were completed, the head of Joyeuse's army came in sight. From our position on higher ground, we were able to observe every movement and to distinguish the various corps and their several equipments. A goodly sight it was. On came the glittering squadrons, with flying pennons and glint of the morning sun on silver and polished steel. First came a troop of light horse, with lances poised, from each a banderole fluttering. Next tramped a body of harquebusiers, with a long, swinging gait, fusee on shoulder and match in hand. After them, more horse. Next marched a regiment of infantry, in close order, the men protected with steel caps and breastplates, but their limbs free, and equipped each with a spear, a battle-ax, and a sword. Then more horse. Next, heavy tumbrels bearing cannon, more than three times as many as ours, rumbled along. So, with alternating horse and foot, the enemy came on the field. Wheeling to right or left, as it reached the plain, each division took its place in the long line marked out by the guidons.

After a little interval, a dazzling cavalcade came into view. First rode a squadron of five hundred horse, completely accoutred from head to heel, the élite corps of the royal army, every man an expert swordsman and mounted on a powerful Norman steed, trained like his rider. Then, beneath a huge banner of white silk, heavy with gold-embroidered fleurs-de-lis, pranced and caracoled a gay troop of youthful courtiers, gorgeous with many-colored scarfs and nodding plumes, and burning with impatience to

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flesh their swords in heretic blood. In the midst of these the prodigal duke, resplendent in a complete suit of armor of burnished silver and mounted on a white charger, gleamed like a meteor through the clouds of dust raised by thousands of hoofs.

Opposite him, on a stout Spanish stallion, sat the King of Navarre, bareheaded, in a rusty coat of mail over a weather-stained buff doublet, holding in his hand his casque, still bearing the mark of a blow which I saw him receive at the taking of Cahors, when a stone pitched from a roof felled him senseless to the ground. He sat in an easy attitude in his saddle, sometimes smiling brightly, as he watched the glittering line of the enemy forming, sometimes turning to address some remark to one of his officers or to issue some order for the regiments still taking position in the rear of us. For all our troops had not yet completed the crossing of the river. And this circumstance, together with the fact that we held the stronger position, reconciled us to the loss of the tempting opportunity which Joyeuse's disorder offered. We would fain have hurled ourselves upon him from our higher ground, while his formation was still incomplete. But discretion compelled us to await his attack.

While we thus sat, watching the enemy deploy, I glanced from the long array, glittering with the pomp and pageantry of war and bright with banners of various device, to our line, as it stretched away on either side of my master. What a contrast! Our men, plain, sober, and stern, in dingy coats of mail

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and war-worn habiliments, with a tattered standard here and there fluttering over them, grimly awaited the enemy's onset. They were, mostly, tried men. Among them were hundreds who had followed the Admiral in the earlier wars, and had fought valiantly at Dreux and Moncontour and on the disastrous day of Jarnac. There were few who had not followed their present leader on more than one field and learned to know his mettle. They had supreme trust in him ; and good reason he had to smile serenely, as he glanced to right and left down the long line where those hardy veterans sat their horses, in calm confidence.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

COUTRAS.

WHEN the hostile line was fully formed, a priest stepped out in front and, lifting high a gilt crucifix, gave the Church's blessing to the host of the Leaguers. Then the bugles merrily rang out the advance, and banners waved, pennons fluttered, and the sunlight danced on quivering lances and glittering helmets, as the line moved forward.

Just when Joyeuse's bugles were sounding, and my master, well in front of his corps, had placed his casque, with its waving white plumes, on his head, had lowered his visor, and was laying his lance in rest, Monsieur Damours strode forward from the ranks.

The lines in the stern Calvinist minister's face were tense, and there was fire in his eye. His look reminded me how, as a boy, I saw him come into the chamber where my master's father lay with a mortal wound, and so unsparingly rebuke his profligacy, that the dying man sobbed convulsively, in an agony of remorse, while Mademoiselle de Rouet, in mingled shame and rage, fled from the room.

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"Sire," said he, "I have a message to you from my Master, who is no respecter of persons. It has just now come to my knowledge, that recently, at Rochelle, you brought shame into the family of a most worthy Christian magistrate, whose daughter you seduced. He is here now, having come to ask such reparation as is possible for the grievous wrong done to his child and his household. Oh, I implore you, Sire, to repent of the evil you have wrought, ere it is too late, and to do tardy justice. We are on the point of joining battle, trusting in the sacredness of our cause. Can we expect the blessing of the Lord of Hosts, when we willingly harbor evil among us, and set at defiance the laws of God and man? Repent you, I pray, ere it is too late, and let us join in earnestly imploring the divine forgiveness and blessing."

"Damn the meddling parson!" muttered my master. But in a moment he was on his feet and, with head bared and bowed in token of deep contrition, he said aloud, so as to be heard by the neighboring ranks, "I own your rebuke just, most worthy Pastor, and you have spoken as becomes a faithful watchman on the towers of Zion. I acknowledge my wrong. Now I pray you and all who hear me, to take notice that here, before the great Judge, I promise and swear, if I survive this battle, to make all possible reparation to this injured family. I beg you now to implore forgiveness of God for me and His blessing on our arms."

Then he dropped on his knees. The whole Huguenot foot within sight instantly followed his ex-

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ample, and the horsemen uncovered and sat with bare heads, while the pastor prayed that God would pardon our leader and guide our army to victory.

The moment that he ceased, a great volume of sound burst from our ranks, as a thousand lusty throats chanted the Huguenot battle-hymn, heard on many a field, the psalm, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered," in the verse of Marot, the first poet of the Reformation, and in the music of its martyr, Goudimel, whose body, butchered at Lyons in the great massacre, the Rhone bore down to the sea. So it was that we met the foe.

The enemy's foot now advanced in compact order. There were three heavy reports, with three puffs of smoke, and three gaps in the opposing line showed that Rosny was already doing good work with our three guns. They were all that we had, but they had been so well placed, that they did frightful execution in the close ranks of the royalists, whose more numerous cannon were too far in the rear and did us no harm.

On the other hand, Lavardin, charging at the head of the superb squadron of five hundred heavy-armed horse, swept back our light cavalry, under La Trimouille and Turenne, like straw before a whirlwind. The enemy even cut their way through our ranks into the very town of Coutras and, seeing our centre broken and disordered, already began to shout, "Victory!"

But the day was saved for us by a reserve corps of harquebusiers, who opened fire upon Lavardin's vic-

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torious horse in flank and, delivering deadly volleys at short range, fairly mowed them down. The enemy, checked in the very moment of triumph, first wavered, then broke in retreat. It was gunpowder against steel, and gunpowder won.

Upon this disordered array the King of Navarre now launched his own corps, himself at the head. Our cavalry, with their animals fresh and vigorous, swept down upon the shattered ranks and easily drove them in wild confusion, then wheeled and fell upon the Leaguers' infantry in flank and rear, cutting them down, before they could form a new front.

Meanwhile the Protestant harquebusiers were doing deadly work upon every body of the enemy within range. And what, at the first, looked like a defeat for us was turned into a splendid victory.

Soon the enemy were everywhere in utter rout. Scarcely an hour had passed since the first encounter, and already the field was strewn with their dead. The gilded Parisian youth who had followed Joyeuse, as they fondly imagined, to the slaughter of heretics, either lay dead or wounded on the ground, or were fleeing in hopeless panic. The magnificent Duke himself lay stark, in his armor of burnished silver, befouled with dirt and besmeared with his own blood. In every part of the field there was nothing, on one side, but confusion and carnage, and, on the other, the wild riot of slaughter.

Our men, elated with victory, shouted to one another, "La Motte! La Motte!" to stir up the spirit of vengeance for the recent massacre of one of our

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regiments at the village of that name. They speared and pistoled and cut down the scattered fugitives without ruth. Only here and there some body of the enemy's horsemen, more disciplined, rallying around their pennon, rode slowly off the field, covering as well as they might the fleeing rabble, wild with fear.

My master, in his very element and glory, careered over the field, now shouting an order to some of his officers, now pointing with his dripping sword to some lingering group of the enemy, to be attacked.

Once I passed a little beyond him and, with a half-dozen good swords close behind me, rode hard after a band of horsemen retiring slowly. One of them turned in his saddle and gazed steadily at me, then said something to his comrades, who stopped and faced about, while he wheeled his horse and deliberately advanced to meet me.

It was Bonrepos.

Just then my master came galloping up. No sooner did I mention the name of my approaching adversary, than he caught the spirit of the occasion. He saw that a mortal combat was about to take place between us, and all the knightly traditions of his race were astir within him.

"Hold!" he commanded in his most masterful tones. We both reined up and sat still, a few feet apart. Then he beckoned to Bonrepos's comrades to advance. Cautiously at first, but more boldly as they observed his gestures of truce, they rode forward.

Meanwhile more of our people had come up, at-

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tracted by the unusual spectacle. Thus each combatant was backed by a considerable following.

"Dismount!" came the imperious command. Each obeyed and gave the reins of his horse to a comrade.

"Back!" he cried to those who pressed forward, sweeping his bloody sword in a half-circle on each side, to indicate the formation of a ring. So thoroughly did all the spectators catch the contagion of his chivalrous spirit, no one thought of exchanging a blow, but the wings on either side advanced, until they almost met, encircling us.

Then he deliberately rode around us, as we two stood facing each other, with set features, fully knowing that one at the most would leave the field alive. And surely he never looked more kingly, nor sat his horse more proudly, than when he thus acted the herald-at-arms in this strange list. Having seen all to be in readiness, he reined up his charger and backed him into the opening between the wings on one side, then rose in his stirrups and sonorously proclaimed:

"The lists are set. These two gentlemen have a mortal feud of old. They are met here to fight to the death. It is the old trial by wager of battle, which our ancestors honored and practised. God show the just cause! Gentlemen, lay on!"

We crossed swords. I knew immediately that my opponent was in quite another mood than when we last encountered each other. The wary swordsman was gone. Instead, he attacked with a fury I had never before met on any field. So sudden and fierce

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was his onset, that, at the first, the advantage seemed to be with him. As he pressed me back, a low murmur of applause was heard behind him. That nettled me. Then the thought of this man's inveterate enmity, of Sophie and her cruel wrongs, and of her waiting love, fired me, and I threw my soul into the work.

"Bravo, Jean! Well thrust!" cried my master, at my first rally; and the sound of that familiar voice, which I had so often followed where honor led, inspired me afresh, and I redoubled my energy. To myself I seemed an avenging spirit, smiting a fiend from Hell, as I fiercely plied my foe with edge and point.

I gained first blood, in a cut across the forehead, and a huzzah from our side showed how eagerly my comrades' hearts went with me in the fray.

Bonrepos seemed only the more infuriated by this check and fought more savagely than ever. Wiping away with his left hand the blood streaming down and almost blinding him, he rained his blows like a madman, so wildly, indeed, that I had not long to wait for my opportunity. Then, with a quick lunge under his guard, I sent my sword clean through him, narrowly missing the heart.

A wild cheer rose from our side, as I withdrew my bloody weapon, and my antagonist tottered back and fell on the sward.

In a moment, with fresh elation, our men were about to dash upon the enemy. But the King of Navarre shouted in commanding tones, "Hold! Let

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not a man strike a blow! These Catholic gentlemen are here by my invitation and under my safe-conduct. They shall go off this field untouched. We have submitted this cause to God, and He has declared for the right." Then he told off a half-dozen of our gentlemen, to ride with the royalists and escort them in safety from the field. It was a knightly act, in the very spirit of that chivalrous age whose traditions he so dearly loved.

Bonrepos lay dying, blood issuing from his mouth at every gasp. One of his friends, kneeling beside him, supported his head. He still glared at me with savage hate, as I have seen a wild boar die with fury in his eye. As I felt his gaze fastened on me with that relentless rancor which not even death could quench, a strange fancy came over me, that this man, going out of this world with deadly enmity toward me ruling every thought, would follow me through eternity with his implacable hate. It was, moreover, an ill preparation to meet the great Judge. The sight of his death-struggle softened me. I would fain see him die in peace and penitence.

I approached him. As I drew near, he strove convulsively to raise himself, but sank back, the picture of impotent, but deathless hate.

"Baron of Bonrepos," I said, "I have suffered great wrongs at your hands, through one who 'is dearer to me than life. But the account is settled here. You will soon have another account to render. I forgive you all. May we not part in peace?" And I extended my hand.

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His outstretched hands clutched the turf convulsively. His eyes rolled, and a great spasm contorted his features. With a prodigious effort, he gasped out, blood streaming from his mouth with the exertion, "I have—no forgiveness—for you—Count de Chambord—"

"I am no Count de Chambord," I answered quickly, "but plain Jean Fourcade, henchman to the King of Navarre."

The dying man fixed on me a strange look of surprise and inquiry, then gasped out, "Under the name of—Count de Chambord—you—intrigued with—my wife—"

Before I could repel the accusation, I was pushed aside by my impetuous master, who threw himself on his knees, seized the dying man's hand, and cried passionately, "I am the guilty one. As the Count de Chambord, I visited your wife in your château of Bonrepos. It is I who need your forgiveness, and I implore it."

With his last strength the Baron drew away his hand from the other's grasp. His glazing eye was fixed upon him with a sullen vengefulness, as he said in broken accents, "So! I have followed—the wrong man—these years. The harridan—Marie" (Marie Roseau, he meant) "described—this one" (turning his eyes toward me) "as the man. Her" (meaning his wife) "I dealt with—myself." And from his tone one easily guessed that some terrible fate had been visited upon the frail woman.

There was something so horrible in the spectacle

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of a man dying filled with unappeasable hate, that his friend who supported him asked whether he should not send for a priest, who should help him to make his peace with God.

“With God!” exclaimed the dying man scornfully. “No! He has fooled me—and robbed me—of my revenge.”

Then, with a last effort, struggling to raise himself, he gasped, “I—defy and curse—Him.” A great gush of blood followed the words. His head fell over on one side. He was dead.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

A GREAT VICTORY THAT LED TO NOTHING.

WHILE distant shots told that our men were still pressing the pursuit, we rode off the field to the castle of Coutras.

Nobody would have imagined, judging from my master's demeanor, that he had just won the first pitched battle ever gained by the Huguenots in the long series of desultory wars that had gone on, with intervals, since his childhood; nor that all Europe would shortly be ringing with his praises. He seemed the most unconcerned person about the place, gay and light-hearted as usual, but not the least elated by his great victory. I had often seen him prouder of some notable stroke in killing a boar or a bear.

The castle-yard was crowded and in the utmost confusion. Here was a group of captured nobles, awaiting my master's pleasure to declare the terms of their ransom. There, apart, with a guard watching over them, lay the bodies of Joyeuse and his brother. In another place surgeons were tending some of the wounded officers, for already all the rooms in the

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castle, save two reserved for my master, were crowded with the like ghastly tenantry.

At every moment came in horsemen with fresh tidings of the magnitude of the victory, many bringing standards taken from the enemy, and all full of exultation. Coligny, men said, in all his career had never struck such a blow. Four hundred Catholic gentlemen lay on the field, and ten times as many of their men had fallen in the battle or been cut down in the rout.

Amid all this sat the victor sidewise on the edge of a table, twirling his casque, humming now and again, as cool as if he had but come in from a morning's ride, a verse of a ballad, whose refrain was :

“Souvent femme varie ;
Bien fol qui s'y fie.”

Peronneau came up. “Sire,” he said, “I hold Sautrai prisoner. I would have brought him before you, but the miserable devil begged so hard, that I spared him. He thought you would order him to instant execution. What is your pleasure about him? If you care to ransom him, he will gladly give every sou that he can scrape together.” Sautrai had been in most intimate relations with my master and had deserted him, three years before, at his utmost need, and, like all renegades, had been among the bitterest of his foes.

“Bid him begone, without ransom or fee, and see to it that he keeps better company, in the future.” Then he laughed a little laugh, half indifferent, half contemptuous, and added, “Certes, I don't know at

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what price to appraise such cattle as he." Then he went on humming as before.

Next came the ministers, Damours and Chandieu. They had longed and prayed through years for such a triumph of the cause as this. They had supplicated the divine blessing, before the encounter, and, when the glittering Catholic host had melted before the onset of our weather-stained soldiery, they had offered a solemn service of thanksgiving on the bloody field. Now they saw the fruits of the victory slipping away, as it seemed to them, through the ill-timed generosity of our chief. They had come to remonstrate with him on his too great leniency.

"Sire," they said, "we would remind you that God has laid upon you a great and solemn duty. He has delivered the enemy into your hands. By His help, you have this day smitten them hip and thigh, even as Samson smote the Philistines. It is for you to remember that the prisoners are not personal enemies, whom you may deal with as you list. They are the foes of God, and it behooves you to mete out to them stern measure."

"Even so, worthy pastors: the foes of God. And, methinks, I have often heard you preach God's willingness to forgive. Which, now, think you, is nearer His mind, Jesus commanding that we bless our enemies, or Samuel, in Jehovah's name, hewing the captive king in pieces?" The ministers were silenced, and he resumed his humming:

*"Souvent femme varie;
Bien fol qui s'y fie."*

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A yet sorer disappointment than the release of prisoners was in store for the zealous pastors. They were doomed to see the fruits of this splendid victory in very truth slip away; nothing done to follow it up; no line of march taken to strike some other body of the enemy; Condé and Turenne, impatient at the inactivity into which my master had sunk, so soon as the pressure of immediate peril was removed, leading off their forces to other points; and the rest of our troops disbanding and rapidly dwindling away. Within two days' time, our army, which might have been led, in its prowess, to other great achievements, had shrunk to a handful, while my master was engaged in his one serious occupation, love. He was preparing to visit his mistress in Pau. Give him her company, and there was little else that he cared for.

And, indeed, he had enough reason to love the Countess of Grammont, "la belle Corisande," as he truly did, though to be constant to her was not in the possibilities of his nature. For not only she loved him without stint, but she had thrown her whole soul and all her means into his cause, when it seemed to be at its lowest. She had given her money to equip a regiment and had sent her only son to fight near her lover.

A serious anxiety had arisen in my mind, in consequence of the dispersion of the royalist army. The château of Bonrepos lay a few leagues to the north-east of Coutras. It would certainly happen that some of the fugitives would take refuge there, and it might be, that, Catholics though they were, the Robervals

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would be rudely treated by the disorganized and exasperated soldiery. I longed, moreover, to bear to her parents the tidings of Sophie's safety and of the death of their persecutor. The strange vindication that had come to me from the lips of Bonrepos himself, was a topic on which I was eager to converse with them, understanding, as I now did, the ground of that ruthless enmity that had so long pursued me and them as well.

I stated the case to my master. He immediately assented. "But," he added, "you will need to go well backed. The country will be swarming with prowling fugitives. Take a good squadron, strong enough to carry out your plans by force, if need be. But by all means avoid any collision whatever. Show a flag of truce, if you meet with any considerable number of the enemy, and make it understood that you are not bound on an errand of war. Here," he added, with a second thought, "take this. I fancy they will respect my authority now." And he wrote an order for me to proceed to the château of Bonrepos and bring Monsieur Paul Roberval and his family, peaceful Catholic subjects, at their own desire, within our lines.

When I went out to procure an escort, not only could I not find a squadron available, but I could not even gather single troopers sufficient to make up the necessary force. Great numbers had not yet returned from the pursuit. Those who had were weary, and their horses jaded. Therefore I was compelled to defer carrying out my plans until the next day.

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At dawn of the following morning, I started with my escort. We found all the roadside and the fields full of the traces of yesterday's great rout. At a distance of many miles beyond the battle-field there were grim corpses, lying where they had fallen at the hands of our men. All had been plundered of anything valuable they had possessed. Whatever the soldiery had overlooked did not escape the peasants, who, in knots of three or four, were everywhere wandering through the fields and byways, following the line of pursuit, eagerly talking together and relating their observations and adventures. As they turned over the dead and ransacked them, an occasional gleeful shout announced that somebody had made a find.

Farther on we noted now and again the bodies of miserable wretches who had escaped the slaughter, wounded, only to die under some hedge or in the corner of a wall.

As we reached the country beyond the limits of the pursuit, smouldering fires by the roadside showed where soldiers had bivouacked through the night, and we soon came upon small knots of them walking dejectedly northward. They eyed us with mingled sullenness and fear.

Near noon we came to Bonrepos. It had been seized, as I anticipated, by a strong force of the enemy, who held it as a rallying-point for their scattered troops. At some distance from the château an outpost guarded the road. I advanced to it, displaying my flag of truce. An officer came forward and conferred with me.

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On my handing him the order from the King of Navarre, his manner showed that he entertained an immense respect for the writer. With the utmost courtesy he assured me that he would immediately send word to his commanding officer of my arrival and my errand, and he doubted not that I should effect my object without difficulty.

While a lieutenant was gone with this message, our troopers dismounted, baited their horses, and lounged about on the grass, while I conversed with the officer of the guard. I found him a most reasonable man, a moderate Catholic. The army which had been so disastrously defeated, he told me, might be considered the army of the Holy Catholic League, rather than of the King, for the Duke of Joyeuse had so thrown himself, with his habitual impetuosity, on the League's side, that he was supposed to have lost the friendship of his master. As for himself, he said, he had no sympathy with bigots, and he would have gladly seen the League receive a check, at less terrible loss. He freely laid all the blame of the disaster upon the vanity and rashness of Joyeuse, in hastening to engage us, before Matignon could come up, in order that he might have the sole glory of the victory which he expected, and upon his incompetence, in so poorly disposing his troops, that he had thrown away the advantage of their superior numbers and better equipment.

It was not long before the lieutenant returned, bringing with him, to my great joy, Monsieur Roberval.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

JEAN FOURCADE HAS THE LONG-DEFERRED INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE'S FATHER, AND THE LATTER IS FULLY SATISFIED.

MONSIEUR ROBERVAL was overjoyed to see me. But when I told him the news of Sophie's being safe and not far away, the good man embraced me and wept on my shoulder. The days since we parted had been days of anxious and fearful suspense, filled with gloomy apprehensions; and now that he received the tidings of Sophie's well-being, and of her and his persecutor's removal forever beyond the possibility of doing them harm, his overstrained mind was inexpressibly relieved.

I told him that my errand was to convey him and his family, if they were willing, to Alby, where Sophie was, and that in that quiet and secluded place, well within the shelter of our lines, they might, at their leisure, determine where their future home should be.

I added that my master was deeply interested in his welfare and in the furtherance of my hopes, and had sent the squadron which he saw, for his protection.

The poor man's joy was unbounded. A transition

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from gloom and anxiety to well-being and peace so sudden was scarcely credible. Moreover, he was greatly rejoiced at the prospect of leaving Bonrepos, which had been the scene of so much that was hateful and horrible to recall. Though he had not suffered any actual indignities at the hands of the soldiery, he apprehended that his further stay there would be most inconvenient, if not impossible, since the place was likely to be held as an outpost of the royalists. On all accounts, therefore, he was most glad to be able to leave it.

He returned to the château and, ere long, reappeared with Madame Roberval and Jacqueline, whose joy at meeting me was enhanced by the thought of leaving behind them that abode of terrors and of being reunited with Sophie. I had brought a spare horse for Monsieur Roberval, and pillions were found for the women in the Baron's stables. So, Madame Roberval behind her husband and Jacqueline behind one of our troopers, who was a small man with a stout horse, we set out on our road.

By the way we had full and free discourse about the occurrences which had filled the years since my first coming under the Robervals' roof, and the long-deferred explanations were now made, so far as was needful; but, indeed, recent occurrences had, in great part, rendered them unnecessary.

I related the particulars of Bonrepos's death, and dwelt especially upon what he said as to the deception which had been practised upon him by his wife's maid, in describing me as her mistress' lover.

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“ Ah! ” exclaimed Monsieur Roberval, “ this throws indeed a new light upon the matter, and clears up what has been inexplicable to me. I rejoice that circumstances have fully acquitted you, and I freely welcome you to my heart, as you have already won the highest title to my gratitude by your devoted services.”

Then he told me all that he knew, and from this, with the facts already within my knowledge, we were able to piece out the following story.

For a few days after the adventure in which I was wounded under the walls of the château, the matter was kept profoundly secret. The domestics, who had rushed upon the scene with lights, had found only a dying man, his comrade having escaped. They were left to their own surmises. Only the maid, Marie, knew the facts.

But, after a few days, there appeared a woman who claimed to be the man's wife, and who came to demand justice for his death, which she had traced to Bonrepos. In the mean time the Baron had returned to the château. When the woman came before him, crying for satisfaction for the death of her husband, which she supposed had taken place at the hands of some of his people, he made inquiries among them, and heard the story of an encounter under the walls and of the finding of a man just dying. This investigation gave the maid just the opportunity which she coveted, of turning her master's wrath against me; and she did not hesitate to sacrifice her mistress to her revenge.

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Then befell my unfortunate exposure of myself to Bonrepos, when he was hawking near Monsieur Roberval's house. So soon as his eye lighted upon me, he was struck with the fact of my being a stranger, and with my resemblance to the description given him by Marie. Inquiry converted suspicion into certainty. The date of my coming to the Robervals' house agreed exactly with that of the incident at the château.

When the Baron returned, disappointed, after his fruitless pursuit of me, he vented his sullen wrath upon poor Monsieur Roberval. Why had not the latter informed him, as the lord of the manor, that he had under his roof a wounded stranger, whose coming was attended with so unaccountable circumstances?

"You have harbored," he said, "a Calvinist and a traitor, one of Navarre's officers. Your Paul Sabatier's true name is Count de Chambord. And that is not all." Then he told him the story of his wife's intrigue. He concluded with fiercely taxing my poor host with being the instrument of my escape from his hands.

To all this Monsieur Roberval had nothing to answer in his justification, but his utter ignorance. It never occurred to him to doubt the truth of the story. All the circumstances seemed to point with fatal force to me as the culprit. Added to this was my strange reticence as to my antecedents, during my entire stay in his house; and, above all, my hasty flight, so soon as I had seen the Baron approach his door.

Partly in order to remove themselves from my reach

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and knowledge, and partly because they dreaded the continued anger of their powerful landlord, the Robervals left that neighborhood, at an early day. Subsequently they fixed their abode in Cahors, as the securest place, it was thought, in the royalists' hands. Some time after our capture of that city and the scenes of pillage and violence which followed the withdrawal of the greater part of our army, to Monsieur Roberval's unspeakable surprise, the Baron suddenly appeared, with a following, and most courteously tendered to him a refuge at Bonrepos.

Almost any quiet place would have afforded a welcome haven from the perils and hardships of the existing situation at Cahors, and he gladly accepted the Baron's offer, only to learn very soon that he and his family were not guests, but prisoners.

Moreover, while they were the immediate sufferers, I was the person against whom his wrath was directed. For what revenge upon me, the supposed seducer of his wife, could be half so sweet as to carry off my lady-love and make her, willing or unwilling, his mistress, and then, probably, discard her with contempt?

Only the exigencies of war, detaining Bonrepos for long periods, once for more than a year, at a distance from his château, prevented the execution of his devilish scheme.

Conversing of these matters, which covered so much time in their happening, though they have occupied so few pages in their relation, we whiled away the hours of the journey to Coutras. It was near nightfall, when we reached the castle. The first thing

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which struck me was the scantiness of our forces in the neighborhood. Already that dispersion of our men which, owing to the loose organization of our army, invariably followed every engagement, had begun. All the day, different leaders had been riding off with their following. No doubt the prospect of continuing the campaign would have kept them together. But no sooner was it settled in a council of war that our advantage would not be followed up by marching against the enemy, than each commander, consulting solely his own wishes and convenience, either stayed or led his force away, as it pleased him.

Having found a chamber where Madame Roberval might rest, I took her husband in and presented him to my master. The latter received him most warmly and wished him joy of his future son-in-law, with some kind words about my faithfulness to him. Then he added, "I have learned with sorrow that he has suffered, and you, too, through an indiscretion of mine." Then he related in his own way the particulars of Bonrepos's death and the discovery which the latter had made, when dying, that he was the offender whom his vengeance should have sought. He referred to his own share in the matter, as the former lover of the Baroness, without the least embarrassment, as if he were mentioning the most ordinary occurrence and the most natural relation. This singular frankness was, evidently, quite appalling to Monsieur Roberval. But he could not fail to be favorably impressed with my master's simplicity and friendliness.

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I observed that the latter was superintending the removal from the walls of some of the numerous captured banners, which had been used to drape them. I inquired, for what purpose.

“Ventre-saint-gris!” he answered, “I am having them packed, to take them to the Countess of Grammont. Who better deserves them than she, who has made so great sacrifices for the cause?”

It was settled between the Robervals and myself, that we should set out on our journey to Alby early in the morning.

My master was starting at the same time for Pau. Our roads would lie together for a few leagues, as far, namely, as Marmande. So we made one party and rode merrily on our way.

He was in great spirits. Was he not on his way to the woman who, at that time, ruled his heart? What cared he for aught else? War, government, business, diplomacy, had their claims. Hunting, cards, wine, were not without their attractions. But, after all, the one abiding, supreme, absorbing interest in life was love.

At Marmande we parted. He wrung my hand with every mark of affectionate interest, then rode off, at the head of his little company, blithe as a lark. As I turned in my saddle and watched his figure disappearing over the crest of a hill, this thought came into my mind: Who is right, he or I? He goes to his mistress, I to my bride. He seeks the ideal in women. I seek it in Woman, and cherish a woman only because I see womanhood realized in her.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

FROM SUNLIGHT TO BLACKEST DARKNESS.

HOW can I have the courage to write what I am about to set down? How can I calmly tell how the sun of joy was struck out of my life, and disastrous night settled about me; how all sweetness became bitter, and all beauty, hideousness?

It was near nightfall, when Monsieur and Madame Roberval and I rode into Alby. We left our horses at the inn of the Red Stag, where, four days before, Sophie and I had eaten our last meal together, and went to the house of Madame Boismaison.

We were full of joyful anticipations, my friends in the thought of clasping their daughter in their arms, and I at the thought of Sophie. But a strange premonitory chill struck us, at our entrance into the house. The maid who opened the door for us looked constrained and downcast. There was no sound of cheer, no voice of welcome. A portentous silence reigned. I listened for Sophie's light step. Instead, I heard a grave and measured tread, and Madame Boismaison entered, and with her my doom.

At the sight of me she burst into tears and wrung

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her hands, moaning with speechless grief and shaking her head to and fro. While we men sprang to our feet in alarm, Madame Roberval sank back with almost a shriek.

"In God's name, Madame," I cried, "what is the matter? Where is Sophie?"

"Gone! Gone!" was all that she could articulate between her sobs.

I was dumb with amazement and a nameless dread. We were, all of us, under a spell of terror. Monsieur Roberval was the first to regain his composure sufficiently to ask some explanation from Madame Boismaison.

So soon as she could master her emotions enough to speak, she told us this story, interrupted by sobs and passionate exclamations of grief.

Two days since, near evening, a lady—a court lady, she judged from her appearance and dress—had ridden up to the door with a man. While the latter remained outside, the lady dismounted at the door and asked for Mademoiselle Roberval, saying that she had come to congratulate her on her escape. Sophie had hastened to meet her visitor. Meanwhile Madame Boismaison was seated in an adjoining room. A screen covered the open doorway. She thought the visit a merely formal one and did not withdraw out of hearing. The interview had not progressed far, before she forgot the indelicacy of her position in the absorbing interest of what she heard. Unseen, she listened to the entire conversation, which she repeated, as nearly as possible, as follows.

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The strange lady, on being ushered into the parlor, came forward with great effusiveness to meet Sophie, saying, "Mademoiselle Roberval, I greet you with all my heart. I have heard much of you these many years past; and all the story of your recent perilous adventures has been told me. I come now to offer you my warmest congratulations on your happy escape. Pardon this seeming intrusion. Any friend of Monsieur Fourcade is my friend. Of course, you have heard him speak of me. I am Angélique de Rebours, of the Queen of Navarre's suite."

"I thank you, Mademoiselle, for your courtesy. Be seated, I beg you," Sophie said in a formal and constrained voice, and then added stiffly and with evident distrust, "I have not, however, the honor of knowing you, even through the mention of your name."

"What!" cried the other, "Jean Fourcade has never spoken of me, when he has told me so much of you, how you rode on horseback, in a page's suit, and, for that reason, were refused admission into a nunnery, and all the rest! I thought that my name would have been familiar to you, and that we should meet as old friends."

"It would seem, Mademoiselle, from your account," replied Sophie, with hauteur, "either that you are mistaken, or that you refer to a different gentleman from the one whom I know."

"I mean Jean Fourcade," replied the other quickly and with decision. "There is but one Fourcade at the court. And let me tell you again that he and I are close friends these many years."

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"You surprise me, Mademoiselle," was the stiff reply. "I have supposed that, as an humble attendant of the King of Navarre, Monsieur Fourcade could not aspire to be an associate of the high-born ladies who are the Queen's maids of honor." The last words with a sarcastic inflection.

"Oh! the blessed simplicity!" cried the other, with impudent laughter. "Among us little it matters, noble or not noble. It is one thing to have a friend, and quite another to take a husband. So long as a man is young and gay and handsome, he will not lack friends."

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle," replied Sophie, in a voice that showed her resentment of the other's insolent freedom. "I have reason for believing that Monsieur Fourcade has lived in great isolation at the court, and has had but few friends, even among the gentlemen."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mademoiselle de Rebours derisively, "Jean Fourcade in great isolation! Ha, ha, ha! The merriest fellow and the jolliest ladies'-man of them all! The life of every masque or revel! And, let me tell you, when it was announced that he had gone to rescue a young lady from imprisonment, I'll wager there were a round dozen who would have willingly endured some hardship of captivity, to have a so charming rescuer and so thrilling adventures with him afterward."

"Mademoiselle de Rebours, may I ask you not again to refer to my recent painful experiences?" answered Sophie with dignity. Then, suddenly see-

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ing the stolen badge, she said in a voice that had become tremulous, "Pardon me, Mademoiselle. I see that you wear a small knot of ribbon. May I ask where you got it?"

"That trifle?" replied the visitor, carelessly. "Oh! I scarcely remember. I found it, it seems to me."

"Excuse me, Mademoiselle," said Sophie, in a voice that had quickly become stern and accusing. "You scarcely found it. Will you not exercise your memory and try to recall how you came by it?"

"Oh! well, then, if you must know," flung out the other defiantly, "it was given to me—given to me, who had the best right in the world to it. And since the rôle of catechist seems in order, let me have a turn. You seem much interested in this tawdry bit of ribbon and this cheap pin. Have you, perchance, seen them before?"

There was no answer.

"Ha!" suddenly cried that damned actress, with an air of angry suspicion that would have deceived an older head than Sophie's. "'Twas you that gave it to him! Liar! He made light of it. 'Twas given to him, he said, by a little country girl who once cared for him. Then, with a laugh, he pinned the thing where you see it. Traitor!" Here she began to storm. "I see, there is more in it. You love him! Your precious adventures on the road were, perhaps, not so coldly innocent as he has represented them. Villain! He would be capable—"

Here Madame Boismaison, unable longer to restrain her indignation, burst into the room and interrupted

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the arch traitress, crying, "Mademoiselle de Rebours, I cannot suffer you longer under this roof to insult my guest. Is it not enough, that you have wantonly slandered an honorable gentleman, my friend? Must you also assail the virtue of his affianced wife?"

"His affianced wife!" shrieked the visitor, and bounding to her feet, she raged like a tigress before the two women, while Sophie, deathly pale and nerveless, vainly tried to face this furious creature with composure. "Jean Fourcade's affianced wife! My lover for these many years! Dares he talk of marrying? He shall rue it. Affianced, forsooth, to that rustic simpleton! He who has not had a secret from me for years,—he marry another! He who has had more money from me than from his master! He,—he who met me last night at the inn at Montauban, and whom I but left this morning! Perfidious villain! No wonder that he would have dissuaded me from coming to Alby, and thought Marmande a better place for me. Ha! it was a happy idea of mine, to come and look at this piece of innocence that he has esquired about the country, modestly habited in boy's clothes."

Here Madame Boismaison succeeded in interrupting her to say angrily, "Mademoiselle de Rebours, I insist on your leaving this house immediately. You insult an innocent young lady. And, surely, you slander Monsieur Fourcade. I have known him some years, as an honorable gentleman, upright and serious, incapable—"

"Serious! That is too droll," jeered the other, her

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manner changing from apparent fury to cynical mockery. "Oh! he knows well the canting Calvinistic drivel. Among your psalm-singing set he can hold his own with the longest face among you. He has all the pious phrases on his tongue's tip. I mind how, many a time, he has convulsed a roomful of gay company with his imitations. Sometimes he roars like a Calvinistic parson in the pulpit. Then he whines in Scripture phrase like the pious bourgeois, or snivels demurely like a bourgeois wife or daughter, whose 'virtue,' forsooth! is something celestial. And the gentlefolk who despise all these hypocrisies and love a gay life, shriek with laughter."

Then, again changing her manner, she shook her hand warningly at Sophie, saying, "Never dream that you will have him for your husband! If he cared to marry an adventuress who has ridden about the country with him, at his lordly bidding, I should have something to say to it."

Sophie lifted her hand and tried to speak; but the words died on her white lips. The other, with a parting gesture of menace and rage, flung herself out of the room and was quickly gone.

Sophie sat staring stonily into space, white as marble, her face drawn, as if she had been struck by the hand of death. No words, no efforts of her hostess could rouse her. In vain Madame Boismaison cried, "O Mademoiselle Roberval, my child, do not believe that vile woman. Do you not see that she is a lying adventuress, one of those shameful creatures who disgrace our court? In slandering Monsieur Four-

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cade she has some hateful end to serve. The court is full of intrigues. Lying is a fine accomplishment there. And that brazen manner! Would you credit a woman who openly avows her own shame?"

Her words fell on unheeding ears. Sophie heard not. Her thoughts, if she was conscious, were busy far away.

After a while she came back to the present and to her surroundings. "And, oh!" said Madame Boismaison, "it was pitiful, it was heartbreaking, to see how patient and sweet she was! Not a word of accusation, nor even of murmuring. She bore her great trouble as unrepiningly as if it had been a misfortune laid upon her by the hand of Heaven. She was utterly silent about it and could not be led to speak of it in any aspect. I thought, Monsieur Fourcade, that she would have rallied her strong faith in you against the slanders of that vile woman. But it seemed to be swept away, as if by a great wave. She did not utter one word in defense of you, more than of accusation. I wondered that she yielded so readily to the attack of a brazen, intriguing creature."

Here the good lady paused and looked at me appealingly.

Alas! I knew too well what had sapped Sophie's trust. It was that fatal confidence which she had wrung from me. And I was silent. I caught her father's searching eyes fastened on me half-accusingly.

Madame Boismaison presently resumed, saying: "She retired early to her room. I could not sleep for the thought of her. Once in the night I went to

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her, to see whether there was aught that I could do. I found her awake, staring into the darkness with the same look of unspeakable woe, and she gently repelled me with the same impenetrable reserve. She seemingly had but one wish,—to be left alone with her trouble.”

In the morning she appeared, wan and haggard, but calm, and with the air of having formed a fixed purpose.

After a time she asked permission to send out a servant with a note. Shortly thereafter Father Anastase, of the Church of the Four Evangelists, came to see her.

They conferred together a long time.

Within an hour after his departure, two elderly nuns from the neighboring convent came. After a sad farewell to her hostess, Sophie went away with them. In vain Madame Boismaison, in her motherly interest, had made a last effort to ascertain her purpose. Sophie and my fate were inexorable. Her only reply was, that her father would be satisfied with her course. When her hostess asked, “What am I to say to Monsieur Fourcade?” she answered only, “This letter will tell him all.”

The good lady, on finishing her story, burst anew into lamentation.

“Oh!” she wailed, “my heart bleeds for her, so beautiful, so gentle, so patient in her great suffering! Already we had learned to love her tenderly. And now she is gone. If she had but been willing to talk to me, ah! I would have been as a mother to her,

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Madame Roberval. But, alas! what could I do? We were so helpless. But I forget; I have not yet delivered the letters which she left."

Then she went away and brought two letters, one of which she handed to Monsieur Roberval and the other to me. I tore mine open. It ran thus:

"MONSIEUR FOURCADE." (My God! what a chill that address sent to my heart! This from my Sophie! This from my bride, whose arms had enfolded me, whose last words had been words of cheer and bright hope, whose love should have welcomed me even now! The words swam before me. I caught my breath and, somehow, read on.) "Good-by forever! Though my heart may break, it shall never stoop to dishonor.

"When these lines come to you, I shall be beyond your reach. Think not to find me or, by any means whatsoever, to move me from my purpose. Betrayed already, I thank the good God that He has saved me from the deeper shame of being your wife.

"I trusted myself wholly to you,—my honor, alas! in the keeping of a heartless profligate. Scarcely parted from me, even while I prayed for you, you hastened to desecrate our union, to me so holy, to you a pastime, to be laughed over with a mistress.

"Through all the years when the distrust of those nearest to me shadowed you, my heart never swerved from its faith. I gave you my love and followed you with my prayers. Now I learn that they were wiser who warned me against you. No human

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tongue alone could ever have convinced me. But I have seen the proof of your faithlessness.

“Only a few days since, in my pride, I spurned the shelter of the Church. Now I go to bury my shame beneath the shadow of her pity and to do penance for my folly.

“The good God will not refuse a broken and contrite heart.

“My remaining days are His. May He lead you to repentance and a better life!

“Farewell forever!

“SOPHIE ROBERVAL.”

The letter fell from my hand, and I sank back, my eyes shut. The blood seemed to have left my heart. For some moments I hovered between sense and unconsciousness. When I opened my eyes, I met those of Monsieur Roberval fixed upon me with a look set and stern. I had no strength nor courage to utter a word. My heart was like a stone. What hope could I have of convincing him of my innocence, when Sophie, for years my champion, had become my accuser? I seemed to see, in the bitter reproach of his stern silence, the distrust, fixed by years of habit, and so lately removed, renewed with redoubled force by the damning evidence of Sophie's charge. Could I expect that his faith in me would be stronger than hers? If I should offer the bare and simple truth, was it to be thought that he would credit it? Then there was the guilty sense of the folly by which I had put myself for a moment in the power of a devilish

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intrigante. Say what I might, out of my own mouth I should condemn myself.

How long we sat thus, I nerveless, with downcast eyes, and dumb, he rigid, as if he had been a statue of Minos cut in stone, I know not. A sea of horrible heart-searching and keenest self-reproach seemed to roll over me and bury me in hopeless sorrow and shame. Only we two there; for, happily, our hostess had led away Madame Roberval.

At last Sophie's father broke the awful spell. His words fell slow and icy, as had he been a judge pronouncing doom.

"Monsieur Fourcade," he said, "we part here now forever. Only yesterday, through the confession of your profligate master, you were cleared of the dark imputation that has so long rested upon you. At last the long trial of my daughter's faith, I hoped, was about to be rewarded with happiness. Alas! you have justified my worst suspicions. This time there can be no mistake. Evidence of your guilt has come to her, so damning, that even her strong faith is overborne.

"What more can I say?" he added bitterly. "Doubtless you have but acted out your nature. In the time of your need we did for you what Christian charity demanded. You have requited our act by wounding us to the death,"—here his voice quavered,—"by destroying my daughter's happiness." Then his composure utterly broke down, and he sank with his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands, while his frame shook with deep sobs.

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Wretched as I was, the sight of his misery moved me deeply. Was he not Sophie's father? Was he not the gentle, courteous host, who, years ago, had nursed me to life and sheltered me under his roof, until strength had come back, always kindly, until suspicion, armed with seemingly fatal proof, had fastened itself upon me? Despite my own trouble, my heart yearned toward him.

I threw myself on my knees beside him, laid my hand on his heaving shoulder and cried, "Oh, sir, moderate your grief, I beg you. Sophie is the victim of an incredible intrigue. I swear to you on my honor, I have done no wrong. We shall seek her and convince her of this."

He dropped his hands quickly from his face, wet with tears, raised himself, looked me imploringly in the face and gasped, "If I could hope it! What proof do you offer of what you say?"

I hesitated. Indeed, proof I had none. Beyond my mere assertion of innocence, what was there that I could say? I was fatally conscious, how pitifully slender was my chance of convincing anybody of the truth.

I answered, trying to put in my voice a confidence which I was far from feeling, "Monsieur Roberval, I can only ask you to believe me, on my own word, that I have done no wrong, and that both Sophie and I are the victims of a foul and slanderous intrigue. Some day I may be able to prove it. For the present I must beg you to accept this statement on my simple honor."

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"Is that all?" he asked, mournfully shaking his head and dropping it on his hand, while he supported his elbow on a table. Then he continued, as if musing aloud, "The proof which convinced Sophie was stronger than a mere statement." Suddenly looking up, as if a new thought had occurred to him, and eying me searchingly, he asked, "What of the token which it seems that my daughter had given to you, and which she recognized on the person of this woman of the court?"

"It was stolen from me," I answered doggedly.

"Stolen from you! And by such a woman as you describe and as she describes herself!" exclaimed the old man, in incredulous amazement. "Surely, Monsieur Fourcade, you do not mend matters by this statement. How had she the opportunity of stealing it?"

"An indiscretion," I faltered, "an indiscretion which I deplore, a temporary forgetfulness, gave her the opportunity which she has used so cruelly."

"An indiscretion, Monsieur Fourcade! And you had but a few hours before left my daughter as your affianced wife! Surely, this passes belief. An indiscretion, let me remind you, was, under the circumstances, a crime. Your own statement, let me tell you, gives every weight of probability to the woman's story as to the relations which you have held with her."

"I swear to you, sir," I protested vehemently, "that my only relations with that woman have been those of mutual enmity and distrust. For years I

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have loathed her, and she has treated me with arrogant contempt. It is to avenge herself that she has concocted this hideous tale. I am the victim of a vile court intrigue. Let me speak plainly. Mademoiselle de Rebours was once the King of Navarre's mistress. Since losing his favor she has spared no exertions to regain it. My crime in her eyes is, that she knows me to be unfriendly to her, and, since she cannot win me to espouse her cause, she would ruin me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Monsieur Roberval, with a long-drawn breath, and eying me almost fiercely; "you would drag my innocent daughter within the polluted atmosphere of that depraved court. It is a happy escape for her. But let us go back to the subject under discussion. You would have me believe that your relations with this person have been innocent, even unfriendly. Will you, then, tell me, how it was possible for her to obtain the token which she flauntingly wore before my daughter's very eyes?"

I answered shamefacedly, "I can only say, sir, that I forgot myself for a moment, and she took quick advantage of it."

"What, Monsieur Fourcade!" exclaimed Sophie's father, with scorn depicted in every lineament; "you forgot yourself! Coming freshly from my daughter's innocent trustfulness, you could forget yourself with such a creature as this, a brazen courtesan, a discarded favorite of a sham royalty! Improbable as your story is,—and no doubt it is the best you can

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offer,—it condemns you beyond all palliation of your offense. Could I willingly give my daughter to a man so fickle, so depraved as you avow yourself? You have pronounced your own sentence and have confirmed the wisdom of my daughter's decision."

What could I answer? How could I plead to sedate old age the extenuation of scenes unknown to the even tenor of his recluse life, the wine, the woman's allurements, and my quick return to my senses? I sat in guilty confusion, the blood mounting even to the roots of my hair.

For a few moments there was dead silence in the gathering gloom of the apartment. Then Monsieur Roberval, rising, said coldly, "Monsieur Fourcade, we part now. I beg you not to make any effort to ascertain my daughter's abode. God knows, you have already done enough. Leave her in peace—if she will ever know peace again. Should you ever be able to bring any evidence in your behalf, you may hear of me through Father Augustine, of St. Sulpice, at Rochelle. I would, God knows, gladly see you vindicated—if it were possible. In the present aspect of affairs, I can only thank God that you are not my daughter's husband."

So saying, he was about to leave the room.

I threw myself passionately before him, seized his hand and cried, "Oh, sir, I beg you, in Heaven's name, not to leave me thus, not to leave me in ignorance of Sophie's abode—Sophie, who is my life and my soul!"

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He withdrew his hand from mine and answered coldly, "Monsieur Fourcade, so much as this I will say: I do not know my daughter's place of refuge. No doubt I shall know it ere long; but I see no reason for believing that I shall ever do aught toward bringing you two together again. She has done wisely in discarding forever one whose utter unworthiness Providence has kindly revealed, ere it had been too late. Her happiness is wrecked, but, thank God!" he added proudly, "not through any act of hers. I wish you good evening, Monsieur Fourcade." And he strode from the room.

Great Heavens! What a situation was mine—I who had come to that house, full of sweetest hopes! Ruined by a moment's folly! Is it always thus? Does Providence set no limit to the power of cunning wickedness to entrap and slay the unwary weak? Is this God's world or the devil's?

I longed for a place where I might hide my shame. I could not face my friends in the house,—my friends who should have rejoiced with a happy bridegroom. How would they adapt themselves to a disgraced and discarded lover? I tottered away, through the darkening streets, to the inn,—the inn where Sophie and I had eaten together—how long since? Ages, ages ago! I sought a chamber and threw myself on my face on the bed.

All night I lay there, motionless, but unresting. Grief for the loss of Sophie; shame for the weakness that had placed me in this humiliating situation; impotent rebellion against the cruelty of Providence

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which visited so dire punishment on a venial indiscretion ; desperation in the sense of my inability to decide what to do—these all kept my brain in a hopeless whirl. A clock in the house struck the weary hours, as I lay there, like a stone.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

HOW SOPHIE, UNWITTINGLY, BECAME JEAN
FOURCADE'S ACCUSER

WITH the cold gray light of day creeping into my room some degree of calmness came to me. One thing was clear: I must reach Sophie. In the face of her father's and the Church's opposition, I must find her, if it were possible for a mortal. *She* would believe me. *Her* heart would respond to my bitter cry. I would tell her all, and she would forgive me. Until I could reach her, my case was hopeless. My sole reliance was in her unbounded trust and her tried love. Everybody else would receive my story as her father had received it.

But where should my search begin? All France was before me, and against me the vast power of the Church, into whose bosom she had fled.

I rose from the bed. My knees tottered, and my brain swam, as if I were risen from a long illness. I looked out into the courtyard. A hostler was leading my horse and Monsieur Roberval's to water. Strange! I thought. They were on good terms. Nothing had come between them.

A thought came to me. I must begin in Alby.

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Perhaps Sophie was even now in the convent there. But how hopeless would be any effort to reach her directly through that channel!

But what of the priest? He might give me some help. A priest is still a man. And might it not be, that he would be moved by a strong appeal to use his influence in my behalf? Moreover, he would see the matter apart from the strong personal bias of Sophie's father. I would tell him all frankly and implore his intercession. Surely, the familiarity of his sacred office with all phases of error and suffering would render him capable of feeling with me. If I could but succeed in securing his intervention, while Monsieur Roberval was still in Alby!

I hurried down-stairs and inquired my way to the priest's house. The door was opened for me by an elderly woman, who told me that the Father was engaged in celebrating mass and directed me to the sacristy. A gray-headed verger admitted me and gave me a seat.

How long the mass seemed! But it ended at last, and the priest came into the sacristy. He was an elderly man, of an ascetic type, with a face denoting great acuteness and not less strength, but tempered by a certain air of distant kindness. I drew much heart from his appearance. He looked like one who lived far above the frailties of human nature and judged them sternly, but with pity. I rose, when he entered. He motioned to me to resume my seat. When I mentioned my name, he nodded and said quietly, "I expected you."

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"Assuming," said he, "that I know the purpose of your visit, you may enter on your subject at once. And I beg you to be absolutely truthful and unreserved in all that you may say to me. Thereupon it will depend, whether I can serve you—if you have come to seek my help."

His grave kindness encouraged me. I told him briefly the story of my relations with the Robervals and of circumstances which long threw unjust suspicion on me, but had lately been cleared up. He listened very closely, with his eyes fixed on the ground, nodding from time to time, as if in confirmation of my story. When I came to the occurrences of the past few days, including Sophie's journey, under my care, to Alby, all of which I related just as I have set it down in this account, he seemed peculiarly intent and sat motionless. Without too much detail, but plainly enough, I told him of the meeting with Mademoiselle de Rebours and what had then taken place, neither concealing nor extenuating anything.

When I related the theft of the token which Sophie had given me, he looked up quickly and fixed his keen eyes on mine with a steady, searching gaze.

I concluded by saying, "I know, Reverend Father, that my affianced wife has talked fully with you, and therefore I appeal to you to help me in my sore trouble."

"What would you have me do?" he asked coldly.

"I implore your intercession with Monsieur Roberval, Reverend Father," I answered. "If he can be convinced of the plain truth, as I have related it to

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you, surely he will bring about an interview with his daughter. Then I doubt not that I shall be able to expose to her eyes the vile intrigue of which both she and I are the victims."

To this appeal he made no direct reply, but fixed a searching gaze on me and asked, "This object, which Mademoiselle Roberval recognized on the person of her visitor, you say was stolen from you?"

"I swear it, Reverend Father," I answered earnestly.

"An oath is both unnecessary and unconvincing," he replied dryly. Then he continued, eying me steadily, "As to all the particulars of your journey with Mademoiselle Roberval you have been explicit and truthful?"

"I have, Reverend Father," I answered firmly.

"Then let me tell you, young man," he replied with a sudden show of anger, "that you have but told half of the truth. And because you have suppressed all mention of one essential point, I disbelieve your version of what took place in the inn at Montauban. Had you followed Mademoiselle Roberval's example of absolute truthfulness, I had been more inclined to credit the remainder of your story. But you have been disingenuous and evasive where it was most essential that you should keep back nothing. You leave me no alternative, but that of doubting your truthfulness as to an occurrence in which all appearances are strongly against you." He paused.

Great Heavens! what could I say? I had not taken into account Sophie's strong feeling, which

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would lead her to humiliate herself before a representative of the Church, nor the religious training which would make her see in a priest the vicar of God. I found myself unexpectedly confronted with the all-penetrating power of the confessional.

In vain I pleaded that I had not wilfully suppressed any circumstance which I thought should properly have been mentioned.

The priest continued in a hard, judicial voice, "A marriage with a heretic is one which, under no circumstances, the Church would encourage. But when things have gone so far"—here he gave me a significant look—"I should be inclined to help you, if I believed you to be unjustly accused. Unhappily for you, I know you to be utterly lacking in needful self-restraint. And by your own mouth you have shown yourself untruthful. Therefore, I cannot but believe the worst of you. Your account of the occurrence at Montauban will not bear scrutiny. You have, moreover, betrayed the trust of an artless and confiding girl, by shamefully abusing your power, as her temporary protector. Even under the extreme circumstances of this case, I could not sanction the union of a pure and pious nature with an arrant profligate. Therefore, I count it a special exercise of divine wisdom that has thwarted your plans."

What could I answer? Sophie's relentless self-humiliation had raised a new obstacle in my way. To all my pleadings the priest answered by shaking his head in a manner which plainly meant that he was not to be moved. As I was about to go away, I

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turned and faltered out, "Reverend Father, in the name of pity, will you, at least, tell me, is she in the convent in this town?"

He strode once or twice up and down the room, before answering. Then he said, "So much I will say: Mademoiselle Roberval is not in or near Alby. She has gone into a retreat far away."

As I left the priest's door, I encountered Monsieur Roberval going toward it. He was about to pass me with a distant salutation; but I could not let slip the opportunity of making a last appeal.

"Monsieur Roberval," I pleaded earnestly, "will you not take pity on me and believe me, when I solemnly assure you once more that Sophie and I are, alike, the victims of another's crime against our happiness?"

He bowed stiffly and answered, "I do not question your unhappiness, Monsieur Fourcade. I wish it were possible for me to agree with you as to the cause of it." Then he passed on.

Was all the world in conspiracy against me? Now even Sophie's artless confession to the priest was used to condemn me. Fate seemed to weave around me a web which every moment grew tighter.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

HOW JEAN FOURCADE ENVIED ANOTHER'S MISERY.

WHAT boots it to tell the story of the next few miserable months, spent in frantic efforts to open some channel of communication with Sophie or, even, to get some tidings of her?

All the world from whom I could hope anything was against me. A moment's disloyalty had outweighed years of fidelity and turned the flood-tide of my fortune, that was sweeping me on to the goal of my brightest dreams, into an ebb remorselessly dragging me down to an unfathomed sea of despair.

Let me relate in brief words the story of those dark months.

It occurred to me, that, in her self-accusing mood, Sophie would most likely take refuge in that convent at Auxerre which she had once scornfully refused to enter on the only terms on which admission would have been granted her. Such an expiation her deeply religious nature would regard as fitting, and she would impose it upon herself relentlessly. Her letter, moreover, showed that this self-condemning spirit was strong within her. It was a forlorn hope; but I

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would not leave it untried. To Auxerre, accordingly, I went.

A deeper chill, foreboding failure, fell upon me, as I viewed the gloomy pile that had once so terrified me, as I contemplated Sophie's being immured in it, even for a short time.

At the same moment that my heart beat quicker at the thought, that I was looking at the very building which probably held her, the utter hopelessness of my undertaking came home to me with awful force. What could one expect of human sympathy from the ruling spirit of an institution whose character wrought itself visible to the outward eye in such a structure?

There were the same formidable preliminaries as on the occasion of my former visit,—the rap of the heavy knocker resounding through the wide, dreary hall; the little slide in the door pushed aside; a pale nun peering at me through a tiny window and inquiring my errand; admission into the chilly reception-room; the same ghostly Mother Superior, with the stony face and sepulchral voice.

The result of the interview was a foregone conclusion. On one side was pitiful pleading; on the other, flinty indifference and ecclesiastical scorn. I could not so much as learn whether Sophie was there. That prison would have seemed a paradise, and its ruling spirit an angel of light, could I have prevailed so far as to plead my cause for a single moment in Sophie's ear. Instead, the heavy door swung open and shut me out, like another Cain, branded with the mark of despair, going forth with the conviction,

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that I left the tomb in which her sweet life and my hopes were buried.

On the way from Auxerre how many an object recalled that other journey, so recent! Yet, what ages rolled between! On this hilltop Sophie had drawn rein, while she drank in the wide landscape and reveled in her freedom. As we rode through the solemn arches of this forest, how worshipful was her mood! Before yonder pile of ruins we had paused and speculated over its history.

Even Nature's radiant face was now changed to a frown. Then earth and sky were steeped in golden hues. The forests glowed with all the varied glories of their autumnal leafage. The heavens were a cloudless canopy above us, and on our right the mountains reared their jagged crests, clear cut. The air was full of life and inspiration. Now wintry desolation was everywhere. The trees, stripped of their short-lived splendor, which lay dank on the sodden earth, lifted heavenward leafless, mournful arms, as in dumb protest. A leaden sky wrapped all visible things in a melancholy monochrome. Life and cheer were gone. And the bitter air ate its way, with death-like chill, to one's bones.

When I came to the spot where Sophie and I had fled from the road, in fear of supposed pursuers, a strong impulse moved me to go and look once more on the scene of our one evening's brief happiness in undisturbed communion. Without difficulty I found the tortuous track, winding between tall trees and around boulders, to the little clearing in the forest.

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When I came in sight of the ruined cot, I was surprised to see a thin veil of smoke rising slowly from it and hanging in the heavy air. It was rudely roofed, too, with interlaced boughs, and the windows were similarly closed, while an old piece of sail-cloth, dirty and stained, hung in the doorway. Within I heard voices, a woman's and children's.

Having tethered my horse, I approached, unheard, and drew aside the primitive curtain. As the light fell within, and my head appeared in the opening, the inmates sprang to their feet from their squatting posture before the fire and would have fled, in terror, had there been another exit. A word or two calmed their fright.

There was the same half-human, hunted-looking man who, on the same spot, had peered in on Sophie and me; there was a gaunt woman; and there were three elfish, wild-eyed, hunger-haunted children. A squalid, ragged brood they were, famine-stricken and hovering on the verge of death. Apparently, they had had so bitter experience of mankind, that the mere sight of a human being filled them with dread.

Their story was soon told. The man's parents had lived in that same cot, contented and happy, till they were driven away by Francis I.'s soldiery, and their homestead burned. From that time misfortune had dogged their steps, and they had died far away, in abject misery. Year after year he had struggled on. Then had come a wife and children. At last, crushed by the *corvée* and the *gabelle*, by the land-tax, the window-tax, and all the iniquitous devices

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which a rapacious monarchy has invented for extorting the last denier from the wretched peasant-folk, harassed by the landlord and hounded by the tax-gatherer, he had fled in the night from the wretched cot which he had tried to make his own. With his starved family, he had lately made his way back to this home of his forefathers, knowing that here they would have, at least, a shelter, and might die in peace, unmolested by human hawks.

The misery of these harmless folk, victims, like myself, of the cruel passions of fellow-mortals, moved me deeply. Here, I said to myself, was a depth of bodily wretchedness that equaled my mental suffering. Had it been possible, I would gladly have done more for them. When I gave the man a pistole, at the first he could not believe his senses. Never before, probably, in his whole life had he touched gold. Then he fell on his knees and called down Heaven's blessing on my head. My own burden was lightened by the thought, that to these hungry people my little gift was almost a fortune, and that, at all events, it would long stand between them and starvation.

What a reversal of conditions was here! Once this man had looked in on my happiness and, doubtless, had envied me. Was I not one of those favored mortals to whom the gnawing of hunger was unknown? Now I looked in on his wretchedness and envied him. For what, compared with mine, was a suffering which a coin could assuage? And, at its worst, was it not lightened by love?

One slender hope now remained to me. It was,

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that I might succeed in securing the intervention of the priest at Rochelle whom Monsieur Roberval had mentioned to me. Thither, then, I journeyed.

Alas! I did but repeat the experiences of each former attempt. So fully was Father Augustine dominated by Monsieur Roberval's view of the situation, that a wolf seeking the shepherd's aid in stealing a lamb from the fold could not have met with more scornful refusal.

Now the last door of hope was shut. I must go back to my duties and leave my case in the hands of—could I say, Providence? From a vague abstraction it had become, in my thought, a malignant power. How had it dealt with Sophie, the believing and prayerful? Had it not sent to her a disguised devil and ruthlessly dashed her innocent happiness? Granted, that I was guilty and deserving of its most outrageous slings and darts, why was she, sweet soul, who never in all her life had wronged a single creature, involved in my punishment? Is Heaven so austere, that a pure and guiltless love, such as hers, must be bitterly expiated, as if it were a crime? Alas! how often her parting words came back to me, bidding me trust in Providence—that Providence which had pitilessly turned upon us and was driving us, the guilty and the sinless alike, with the scorpion-scourge of the Furies!

In impotent, sullen rebellion, I bore my lot as best I could, while the dreary days dragged along. The court, always distasteful to me, had become utterly hated. I shunned companionship and lived alone,

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brooding, brooding day and night. Worst of all was the occasional encounter of the Rebours. With mock courtesy, she bowed low and smiled a seeming greeting, while in her wicked eyes was a gleam of hellish triumph.

For all this, and though I loathed that woman, as a being less than human, I would have dragged myself on my knees and groveled at her feet, if I could have hoped to move her to recall the black lie that had blasted my life.

Once I bethought me of going to my master and seeking his intervention with her. If there was any person who could influence that demon to act humanly, surely it was he. What she would not do from a sense of right, it was possible that she might do, to stand well with him.

He knew the whole story. Of course, I had told it to him. When I now asked his intervention, he was full of sympathy and laid his hand tenderly on my shoulder. But he shook his head discouragingly. "Let me tell you," he said, "when you deal with the Rebours, you deal with a devil. That girl is capable of any crime that malice can effect. My faith! I believe that she exults in thinking of the misery she has brought upon you. And I am the last person who can help you with her. True, she would do anything for me,—yes, she would declare herself a slanderer before the whole court,—but, mark you, on one condition only. And that condition is impossible, absolutely impossible." He shook his head in a way that implied an irrevocable determination.

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Thereafter he was more than ever considerate of me. One day he came to me, and, putting his arm about me, as he was wont to do in the old days when we were boys together, his voice trembling, he said: "This will not do, Jean. You are but a ghost of your old self. You need rest and change of scene, my boy. Go to your home, our dear old Pau, and stay there till I send for you."

I was inexpressibly glad to leave behind the feverish air of the court and the faces that had grown hateful to me. Here it is quiet, and life is wholesome and sweet, and the faces I daily look upon are simple and true and kindly. I seem to have come out of a nightmare. But the dream is an awful reality, for it has burned itself in on my soul.

CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

JEAN FOURCADE AMID THE SCENES OF HIS CHILDHOOD.

IT is restful to be here, amid the haunts of my boyhood. But, alas! where can I find a balm for the wound that rankles in me day and night?

How sweet is the tenderness of my mother and sister! Good, simple souls, they have lived their lives, unruffled by storms. I went out into the great world, and they have been proud to think of me taking part in its battle. Now I come back to them, broken in spirits, envying their peaceful life, yearning for their sympathy.

I wander amid the places I once loved and look upon the well-remembered objects. The Gave still brawls along his rocky bed. There is the pool where I taught my young master to swim. In yonder still reach, where the shadows lie black, he caught his first trout. Beyond are the friendly hills, terraced and vine-covered. Back of them, on the rocky slopes running up to the distant craggy heights, little moving specks are goatherds, with their flocks, as in the old days. The smoke still floats away in thin wreaths from cottages scattered up and down the valley.

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Everywhere is peace. But for me there is no peace. In the whole quiet landscape nothing is changed, yet nothing is the same.

The familiar scenes charm me no more. Day after day I ramble listlessly among them, and seem another than myself. Cloud or sunshine is alike to me. A veil of darkness is drawn over all that I look upon. Life is a weariness, and all places are alike. I tarry here only because in this secluded vale I may have what elsewhere I cannot have—solitude.

For the greater part, I am filled with a sullen, dogged spirit. Fate has loosed against me its keenest shafts. In defiance I endure. If it has in store for me some fresh blow, let it come. I am prepared for any fortune.

At other times a sort of blind rage possesses me. I would go forth into the world and right my wrongs, or perish in the endeavor. But whither? Where begin? Then I almost rave with the sense of my impotence.

How long have I been here? It was early spring when I came. The trees were covering themselves with young buds. Ah, God! the trees were putting forth their leafage, when I wandered beneath them, in the old garden at the back of the house where Sophie lived, when first I knew her, and all my hours flew on golden wings. If but memory would fade out, and leave my mind a blank!

Spring has deepened into summer, and summer has become parched and sere as my life. But what to me are the seasons?

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Is this a sane world? Or is it all crazy? Or am I mad?

Is God in His right mind? Surely, even a crime might have been expiated. But this—

[The last part of the manuscript is written in a woman's hand, evidently that of Jean Fourcade's sister.—THE EDITOR.]

Alas for my unhappy brother! During the months that he has been with us, sometimes he has seemed sullenly resigned. Then he has been patient and industrious, saying little, but working almost incessantly on this writing, as if seeking to lose himself in it. At other times he has been driven, as it were, by a fierce spirit that would not let him rest. Then, for days together, he has roamed the hillsides and seemed incapable of feeling fatigue.

At such times we have feared that his mind was disordered. More than once he has started and muttered, "That accursed opal! How it glares at me! It is a devil's eye." Or he has raged and cried, "May devils drag her to perdition, the murderess!"

Of late his restless moods have been more frequent, and he has ceased to write. Three weeks ago a crisis came. A messenger from the King of Navarre brought this letter.

[The original letter is here attached to the manuscript.—THE EDITOR.]

"To Monsieur Jean Fourcade (in the care of the King of Navarre, at Nérac).

"MONSIEUR: When I held a conversation with you at Alby, some months since, I was not fully in-

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formed of all the facts in the case. Had I been aware of a circumstance that has but recently come to my knowledge, I should have taken a different tone with you. The crown of shame has been added to my grief, in learning that not my daughter's happiness only, but her honor, has been sacrificed to your wanton libertinism.

“ Since becoming aware of this fact, I have urged that you be allowed to make such reparation as is possible, by marrying my daughter. But she has strenuously refused to entertain such a proposal. So cruelly has she been wounded, that she is willing rather to suffer the humiliation of her present state, than to endure the deeper shame of being wedded to one who first took a base advantage of her love and then betrayed her to a mistress. The conventual influences surrounding her are, moreover, such as powerfully tend to increase her aversion to marriage and incline her more strongly than ever to the religious life.

“ I am, etc.,

“ PAUL ROBERVAL.”

When my poor brother had read this letter, he threw it down, ran out and saddled his horse, and, with scarcely a word of farewell, mounted and rode furiously away, like one possessed.

I have gathered these papers, which have beguiled for him so many heavy hours, and fastened them together, to await his return.

Alas! he does not come, and we have no word of him.

THE END.



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