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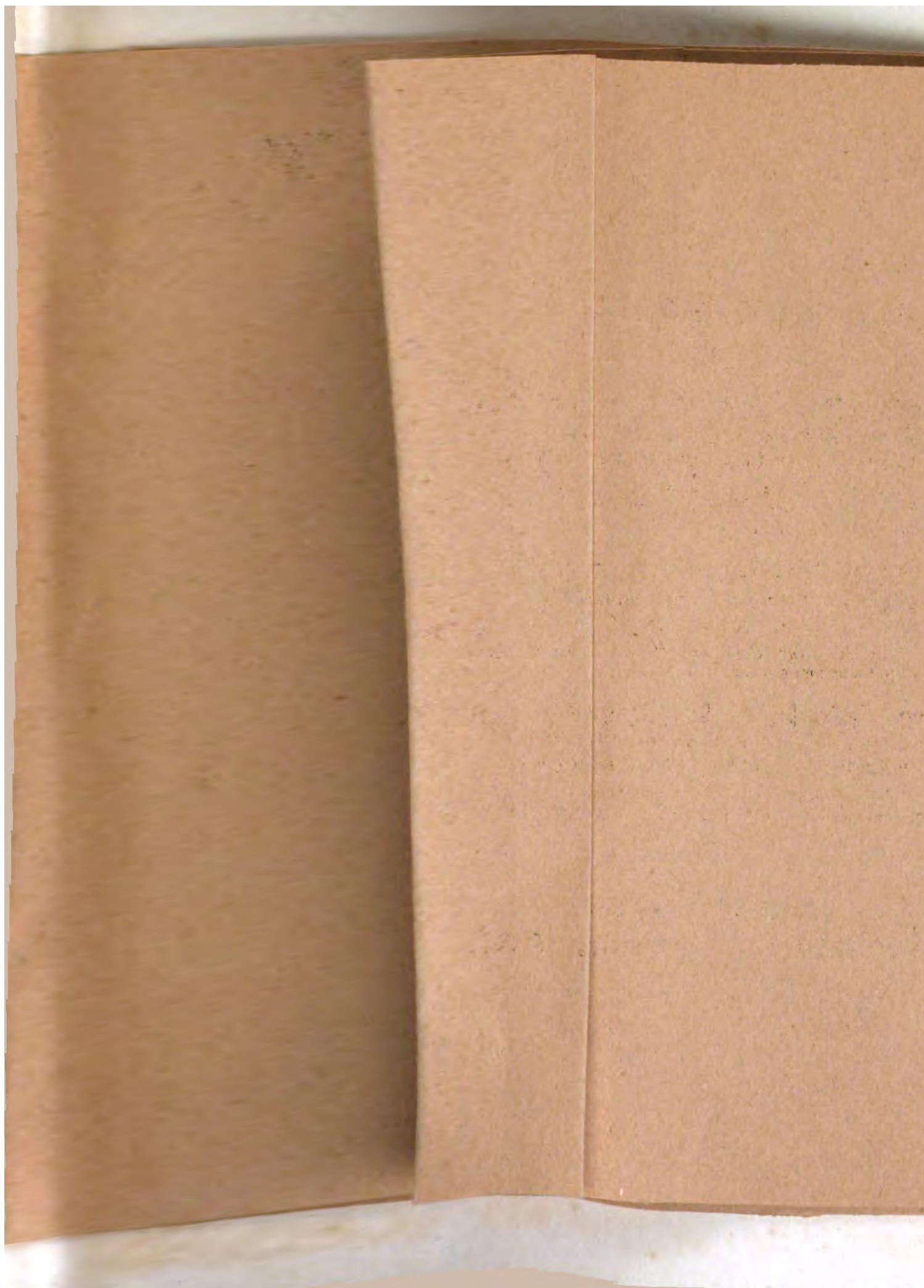
A KING'S TREACHERY



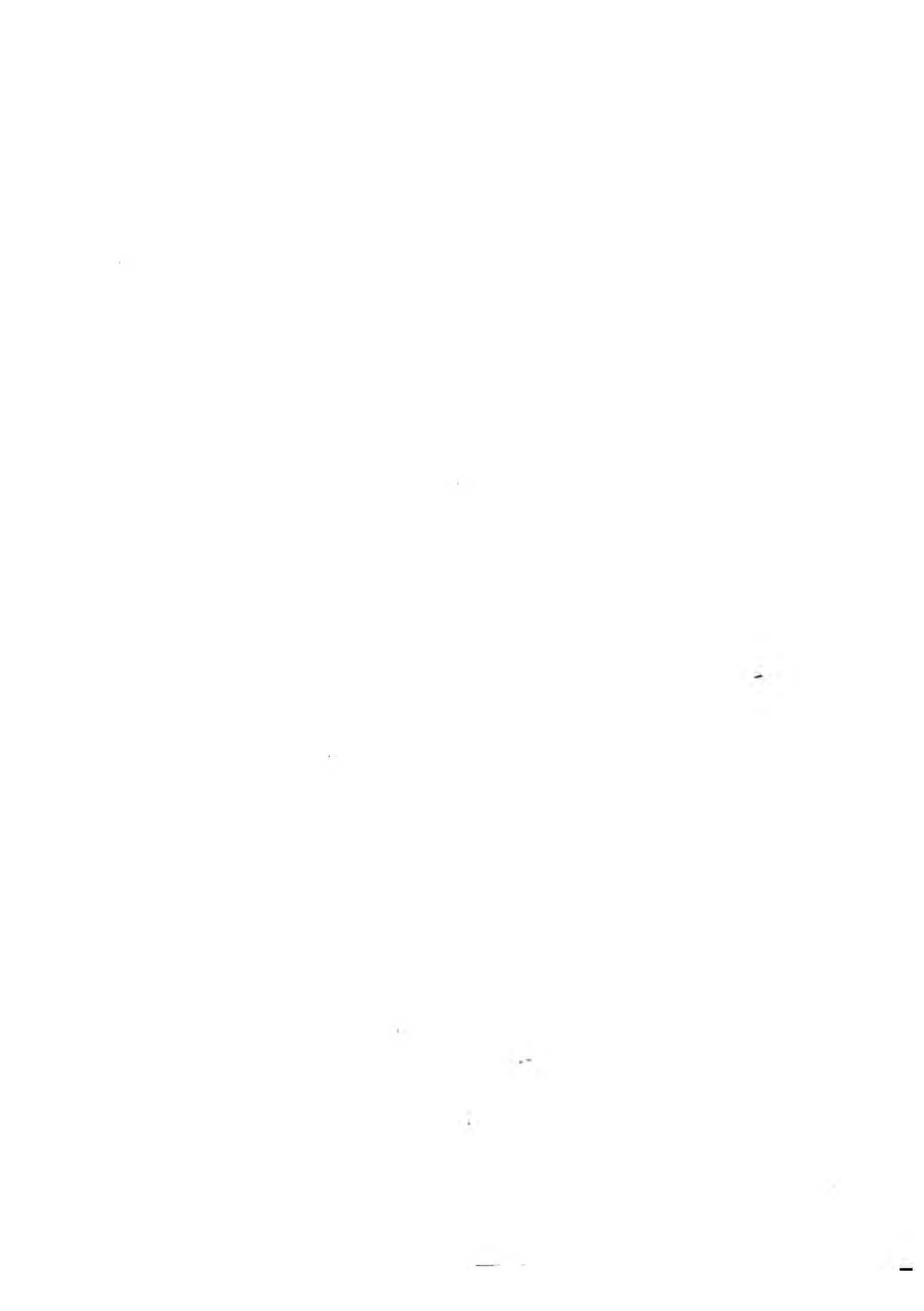


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A KING'S TREACHERY





SHE WAS SWAYING, AND I THOUGHT SHE WOULD HAVE
FALLEN.—Page 109.

Frontispiece.

A KING'S TREACHERY

A ROMANCE OF THE HUGUENOT
PERSECUTION

BY

ALBERT LEE

AUTHOR OF

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WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILSON CROMBIE

LONDON

THE PILGRIM PRESS

16 PILGRIM STREET, E.C.



FIGURE 1. THE DEITY OF THE DEITY

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"THE FROWN OF MAJESTY" "THE BARONET IN CORDUROY"
"THE KEY OF THE HOLY HOUSE" "THE GENTLEMAN PENSIONER"
"KING STORK OF THE NETHERLANDS" ETC.

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A KING'S TREACHERY



CHAPTER I.

2

THE COMING OF MARC ARBEY.

IT was the custom in my father's house to end every day with the reading of a Scripture portion and with prayer, which seems to me a meritorious conclusion to any day, whether it has been one of holiday or of labour.

"You can never do anything," my father used to say, "unless you have a conscious hold on the strength of the arm of God; and unless you pray, you never know where the arm of God is." He would sometimes say to us: "Prayer opens the blind eyes, and one sees then how near to our side the Lord is—which, in these troubled days, is knowledge well worth having."

There was one particular night when we rose from our knees, and were awaiting the mother's "Good-night" kiss, when the silence in the street outside was broken in upon. There came the sound of many feet, and drawing back the curtain and looking out, we saw armed

men going past in haste. They were marching from the Louvre, not far away, and when we turned our eyes in that direction, and looked at the dark and heavy mass of buildings, barely visible since the clouds obscured the moon, we saw the soldiers pouring out at the corner gate.

For an hour at least the armed men went by, all going in the same direction.

After a while some of our neighbours were seen standing at their doors, and we followed their example; and when a young officer halted just in front of us, to watch his company of soldiers march past, we asked him what this thing meant.

"Huguenots, madame!" he exclaimed, answering my mother's question laconically.

"But are these men Huguenots?" she said in a surprised tone.

The soldier laughed.

"Nay, madame, but 'tis Huguenots who cause them to be on the move at this late hour. Word came to the King's ears that Admiral Coligny is marching on Paris, intending to invest the city and force his way in, if possible, that he may compel his Majesty to his own way of thinking."

With that the soldier swung round, and marched away.

Thousands must have gone by in that long hour of watching, but that was all the information we gained—that the Huguenot army was marching on the capital.

It was news which could not fail to set all Paris palpitating—some folks with dread, and many with hope. These wars between the rival parties within the realm had been keeping France in a state of unrest for years.

When it was said that there was peace, men doubted whether it would last the month out. A chance meeting in the palace between two men of the contending factions might well lead to hot words, possibly to serious conflict; and none knew how soon two armies would be again in the tented field. A surly look from the King, or a slight from the Queen-Mother, might send Coligny forth from Court, and the kingdom would once more be in the throes of civil war.

I know not how France has endured it for so long a period—that long-drawn-out misery which comes of strife and thwarted ambitions. To me it seems that the centuries have gone on in their dreary round of terror. In the olden days there were burnings at the stake. The villeins were in the hands of their merciless lords, who too often met resistance with a rage that was like the fury of untamed beasts. Tongues were cut out, ears were sliced off, hands were hacked away, great districts were devastated; the sole motives of action were “vengeance with the passionate, and success with the crafty,” regardless of suffering, and the result was that the wretched people could do nothing but submit in dumb terror.

Thus much I have read of in respect to the past history of France, but in our own days I saw nothing to indicate that tenderness was more rife than it had been. Assassinations were of constant occurrence. Men hated those who were of the opposite party with an intensity which made the thoughtful still more grave and anxious for the consequences. On the whole, things worked against the Huguenots, for the Catholics obtained the upper hand most frequently. Brotherhoods

were formed with the idea of doing those who adhered to the Reformation doctrines all the mischief possible—in trade, in politics, and in domestic life, and many a time in secret meetings some of them were doomed to die by pistol or by sword—by any means, so that there should be one Huguenot the less in France. It was this which ultimately drove the Huguenots to arms, and distracted the country with all the horrors of civil war.

But to return to that night which particularly concerns my story.

After we had gone into the house again we closed the door, barring it well, since, in a city which was none too safe even in daylight, there was no other manner of security after darkness had set in. It was the general custom for every honest man and woman to go to bed early, after the sunset angelus.

But who could sleep when such news had come—when possibilities had to be considered? when, should Coligny be defeated, there would probably be massacre within the capital, as there had been before, after a Catholic victory?

We sat on, and talked, but at last my mother said it was time to go to bed. She was saying this when we were startled by a knock on the street door.

“Who comes at so late an hour?” asked my father, twisting himself round, one hand on the table, and the other on the arm of his chair, and gazing towards the window.

“I will go and see,” said I, rising to my feet; and crossing the room I entered the passage, loosening the dagger at my belt while I went, to be prepared for

emergencies. My sister came behind me, carrying a candlestick in her hand.

"Go back, Louise," I whispered.

"No, Henri. I will come and know for myself whether this night summons means good or ill. Ah! there comes the knock again."

Louise had scarcely said this when we were startled by hearing a voice through the keyhole.

"For pity's sake, hasten! I am hard pressed!"

In a moment I was at the door. The chain was unhooked, the bar removed, the bolts drawn, and then the heavy iron-cased door moved on its hinges, and a man, without waiting for an invitation to enter, slipped into the passage. He did not speak, but turned and closed the door, quickly but softly; then, as I drove in the bolts, believing that there must be danger for him, he stood with his back against the wall, and shutting his eyes, and holding his hands to his chest, breathed heavily, as though he had been running hard and desperately.

Speech was impossible with him, so that it was useless for us to put any questions until he had recovered his breath. So loud was his breathing that my father and mother came into the passage, and stood and gazed in silence at the distressed man.

"'Tis Marc Arbey!" exclaimed my father, looking at the stranger in surprise. "I thought you were at Rochelle, Marc!"

"So I was, M. Gaston," panted Arbey; but he waved his hand as if to bid us ask no questions until he had time to recover from the effects of his haste.

Without a further word, my father took him by the

arm and led him into the room, first bidding me see that the street door was made secure.

"Did you hear the name, Henri?" whispered Louise.

"Yes," I answered in a low tone, so that the stranger should not hear me. "It must be that Marc Arbey who is secretary to Admiral Coligny. More than once he has placed himself, as every Huguenot knows, between his master and the assassin's knife."

By this time we were in the room, and the man, sinking into a chair, gradually recovered his breath.

"Give me a cup of wine," he panted.

My sister left the room at once, and following her, I brought back a flagon and a cup. Louise carried in some food as well, lest Arbey should be hungry, but he put the food aside. His hand trembled as he lifted the wine-cup to his lips.

He was a broad-shouldered, well-built man, with a face that was pleasant to look upon. His hair was dark, his eyes were clear and blue, his shaven cheeks were somewhat thin, but there was no doubt as to his strength. There was the look of a scholar about him, too, an air of refinement, a nameless something which led me to feel that he was a man above the common run, and one who had no mind for what was mean and shifty. Although none but my father had ever seen him, we knew much of him. He had done too much for Coligny and the Huguenot cause not to be known alike by his friends and enemies. He was of noble birth, and yet insisted on serving Coligny, and, as his secretary, forwarding the cause of Protestantism in France.

Arbey was a scholar, but he was a capable soldier

also. Not more than thirty years of age, he was already a veteran, and it was said that his body was scarred in many places. He had been in the thick of the fight at Jarnac when Coligny had command of the Huguenot rearguard; then, at Coligny's wish, he had gone to Condé's aid when the gallant Prince made his famous charge with a handful of men into the heart of the Catholic army. More than once, when Condé was beset, Arbey's sword struck down those who seemed to have the Prince at their mercy; and Condé was not killed until Marc Arbey was lying senseless beneath the tramping throng of the enemy.

CHAPTER II.

PELLISON'S TREACHERY.

AFTER he had told his story we understood why Arbey was in such a breathless state when he entered the house.

Coligny had sent him into Paris to call upon some of the leading Huguenots in the city, and tell them what the admiral's intentions were. He had stolen into the capital and seen many of the principal men of the Protestant party, and had proposed coming later to my father's house; but he was perilously near to never doing so because of the perfidy of one whom he had every reason to rely on. He had gone to the house of M. Pellison, who welcomed him, and heard what he had to say, and, since it was late at night, had persuaded him to stay and sleep.

"It was nothing but a trap in which he lodged me," exclaimed Arbey indignantly; and went on to tell us of what had chanced.

Worn out with his arduous day's doings, wherein by strain and stress the work of two days was compassed within little more than twelve or fourteen hours, he had flung himself into a great chair near to the door of the bed-chamber to which Pellison had conducted him,



HE BREATHED HEAVILY, AS THOUGH HE HAD BEEN RUNNING
HARD AND DESPERATELY.—*Page 5.*



thinking that presently he would undress and get into bed. But he fell asleep. When he awoke the candle had burnt into the socket, and there was no light in the room but what came from the fitful moon, whose pale beams penetrated through the uncurtained window. It threw a deep shadow across the chair, and also the bed, so that where he sat he was almost in darkness.

Stretching his limbs, feeling better for the short sleep, but thinking he would say his night-prayer and try the quality of the bed, he was startled by a sound like the click of a latch. He sat upright, and gazed around, and presently saw a panel in the oaken wainscot open. A man entered with a dagger in his hand, and it gleamed as it caught the moon-rays. After him came three others, each stepping in with stealth.

Since it was evident that assassination was meant in order to obtain possession of the papers he carried, and realising that the odds were too great—one man against four—Arbey determined to get away, if possible. The door at his left hand was within touch, and turning to it softly, he pulled back the bolt; then, opening it noiselessly, slipped out of the chamber and drew the door after him.

Feeling his need in such extremity, an ejaculatory prayer escaped his lips as he went forward. In front of him was the long corridor. He passed down it quickly. On either side were doors, all closed, save one out of which light streamed. Here was an added peril, and Arbey wondered whether it was possible to pass without being seen.

Only halting to feel for his weapons—the pistol at his belt, the sword at his side—he went forward in spite

of consequences. Before he had gone far he heard the noisy opening of a door behind him, and the sounds of men coming in pursuit. Driven forward thus, compelled to go whatever the risks, he hurried past the open door, seeing as he went by that M. Pellison was coming through it into the corridor to know what the sudden outcry meant.

At the end of the dark passage he took the wrong turning, and felt that he was doomed unless God interfered to help him. He prayed as he went, for then, as at many another time, he realised prayer as the blessed refuge of a man's ignorance and dread.

The staircase was on his right, but he had forgotten the fact, and, turning to the left, found before him another corridor. Knowing that he had made a mistake, but that it was too late to turn back, he went forward swiftly, looking for some possible exit, but his going added to his danger. Although he went on his toes, the boards creaked.

The men who were following heard, and M. Pellison's voice, becoming more and more distinct, convinced Arbey that the master of the mansion was overtaking him. Swift though the fugitive was, the others, knowing the place so well, gained on him. Looking ahead, he saw to his consternation that the corridor was a *cul de sac*, and he knew that he must turn and fight, whatever the odds.

Then a way of escape providentially presented itself. There was an open lattice window in the corridor, through which the moon was shining, and Arbey saw his opportunity. The window led to a verandah, and, turning sharply, he passed through and slammed the window behind him. A man who was close at his heels turned

quickly too, but he came with a crash against the glass, and as the lattice door yielded to his weight, he fell, cut and bleeding, on the stones.

A great bunch of evergreen hung over the stone palisading, and, taking the risks, Arbey leaped at it, and lowered himself to the garden below. Hastening across the grass lawn, he left his pursuers so far behind that when he came to a high wall he had time to decide as to the best way of scaling it. Before long he dropped into a narrow passage, badly paved, and very dark.

Turning to the right, Arbey discovered that he was near to the Tour de Nesle, so that he was on ground he well knew, and, thinking that his pursuers were yet in the garden, went more leisurely. When he turned towards the Porte de Nesle, and was passing a postern he had altogether forgotten, the gate suddenly opened, and he found himself face to face with M. Pellison and three or four other men.

It was a moment when it was necessary to tarry in order to escape. He drew his sword before his treacherous host had time to do the same, while for the others, they had not thought to see him pass so soon, and were unprepared for his coming. With a sudden rush he struck Pellison in the face with the handle of his sword, and the man staggered back with a cry of pain.

Still desirous to avoid a fight at so great a disadvantage, Marc Arbey fled, with every man at his heels; but turning down many dark byways, he evaded his pursuers and reached our door.

There was silence when Arbey ended his story, but

presently my father spoke. I saw that his eyes kindled with some thought that was in his mind.

"You prayed, M. Arbey, and did not pray in vain," he exclaimed.

"In vain, M. Gaston?" said Marc. "Who would dare to think it vain when a man or woman truly prays? Is it not said that in the time of trouble we are hidden in the Almighty's pavilion? Where am I now? Who brought me here but the Lord, in whom I put my trust?"

The strong man's face glowed with thankfulness.

"Then let us thank God," said my father.

"With all my heart. What better moment, what better place than this?"

Going on his knees, only waiting until we were kneeling about the table, Marc Arbey poured out his soul in thankfulness for what he deemed his great deliverance.

Yet scarcely had we risen from our kneeling-place when there was a loud knocking on the street door, and a peremptory voice demanded admission in the King's name.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH.

I RECALL the thrill almost of horror which passed through the little group when that noisy summons broke in upon what was an almost sacred silence, since we had but just left the presence of God. I looked at those who were about me, and saw that their faces were white with fear; for here was something that would test the courage of the bravest that ever breathed. My father's hand trembled while he stroked his beard, as if wondering what to do.

My first thought was that M. Pellison had seen Arbey enter the house, and knowing that the presence of such a man in Paris would be news of moment to the King, had gone to the Louvre and reported that Coligny's emissary was in hiding under my father's roof. It was supposition, of course, and nothing more; but it was only too possible now that M. Pellison had turned traitor to the cause of Protestantism. As for the consequences, we knew that if the King's messengers entered our house, and Arbey should be discovered, he would be carried to some dungeon, and once there was absolutely certain of death.

"Go to the door, Henri," said my father hurriedly.

"Parley with those who are there as long as possible if they want to enter; and do you, M. Arbey, follow me. I must put you into hiding until I know whether this late call means danger."

I lingered until I saw Marc Arbey and my father pass into the garden, and then went to the door, on which some one began afresh to beat loudly, while calling impatiently—

"Open, in the King's name!"

When I threw the door back on its hinges, and stood boldly in the open space, five men were before me. Four of them were of the palace-guard, each armed with a great sword, such as the guardsmen were wont to carry. The fifth, who simply bore a baton in his hand, and with which he had been beating on the door, was M. de Baze, one of the officers of the Guard at the Louvre, whom I knew intimately, and with whom we were on the friendliest terms. Indeed, he had a wish to marry my sister, but as yet she had told him she had no answer for him that would be pleasing.

When I saw him, and saw, too, as the moonlight fell on his face, that there was nothing sinister in it, but something of a smile, as if he rather enjoyed the idea of having startled the household by this summons at so late an hour, my alarm diminished considerably, so that I stood with a studied ease on the doorstep and greeted him.

"Why do you come hither at such a time, M. de Baze?" I asked.

"Nay, M. Gaston, that is not the question," was his response. "Why are you not in bed, since 'tis nearly midnight?"

I laughed, although I was far from being at ease.

"May not men do as they please within their own four walls?"

"Not when it pleases his Majesty that they shall sleep," came the guardsman's answer.

He laughed. It was, however, only a momentary pleasantry, for he was serious when he spoke again. But by that time he had stepped into the passage to be out of hearing of the men who were with him.

"M. Henri, I am here on a disagreeable errand, and I sincerely wish some one else had been deputed to undertake it. M. Pellison—a renegade, by the way, since he is betraying a friend and a Huguenot—went to the Louvre just now, and lodged some information to the effect that Marc Arbey, Admiral Coligny's secretary, has been in the city to-day, that he intended—having him in his power, as he thought, because he was his guest—to hand him over to the authorities for conspiring to do the King some personal mischief, but that he contrived to escape the house. He followed him, and saw him disappear down this street, and I am under orders to go through every house and search for him.

"Do you understand my position, Henri?" he asked after a momentary pause, and seriously.

Confident that my father had a secure hiding-place in view, and that by this time Marc Arbey was in it, I answered with an ease that must have lessened M. de Baze's suspicions, if he had any thought that the Huguenot leader's secretary had come to our home.

"I understand perfectly," I said. "By all means come in and see for yourself. You are welcome to any secretary of Coligny's whom you may find under

my father's roof. But, seriously, was it not a scurvy trick on M. Pellison's part to send you here, seeing that he, like ourselves, is a Huguenot?"

"Say that he once was such," exclaimed De Baze. "I count him a renegade, a shameless turncoat whom I could spit upon with very sincere pleasure, although his change of attitude may be of considerable service to the King. But let me in, for I must see for myself whether M. Arbey is here. If not—and I hope not," he added in a low voice, so that the men with him should not hear—"there are other houses to search."

Bidding two of the guardsmen enter, and accompany him, he walked with me into the room where Louise and my mother were standing, trembling with dread. They knew full well that late night visitations from those who came in the King's name boded nothing but ill. Many a gentlewoman lay in dark dungeons in some of the miserable prisons in Paris, and many a household had lost its head, without knowledge as to whether the absent one yet lived or had been already done to death.

"Have no fear, ladies," said De Baze kindly, when he saw how perturbed they were. "I have come, not because I would, but because I must; because, to my regret, I was sent hither. M. Pellison believes that M. Marc Arbey is here, or in some other house in this street, and I have been told to find him. Louise, you will believe me when I say that I would gladly forfeit much rather than bring pain to any of you?"

My sister saw that he was distressed, and that his mission was in every way distasteful, and her answer came sincerely.

"Could I do other than believe you, M. de Baze?"

My father entered at the moment, and without a word or show of recognition, as though M. de Baze had been an absolute stranger, and not his daughter's suitor, he beckoned to him gravely when the reason for this midnight visit had been repeated. He took M. de Baze through the house, flung open doors of rooms which were empty, and others in which the men and women servants were sleeping. Most of them started up in their beds in terror, but the King's officer bade them not be alarmed, but be silent while search was made. He threw open cupboards and chests, went to places likely and otherwise, but although, as a matter of conscience, De Baze made a thorough examination of the house, he expressed his relief when he discovered nothing that lent colour to M. Pellison's charge.

"M. Gaston," he whispered to my father, when his men had gone out of the room where we were all standing in real relief to find that the search had proved fruitless, "I should never be happy if I were the means of bringing any trouble to your home."

With that, when he had bowed low to my mother and Louise, he quitted the room in my company. Before he reached the street, one of the men spoke.

"Monsieur, we have not seen the garden."

"The garden?" exclaimed De Baze, with simulated surprise. "Of course. Strange that we did not think of that!"

My father had heard the soldier's words, and had come to the room door, where he stood looking into the passage. He saw that De Baze had no alternative but to search the place if he would not rouse the man's suspicions. Without waiting for a request, he led the

way into the garden, and bade De Baze search wherever he would. The two soldiers, carrying lanterns, went everywhere—to bushes, to outhouses, stamping on their floors, and listening for hollow sounds; but it was all in vain. There was no sign of the presence of Marc Arbey, and at last the King's emissaries were gone, and we were alone once more.

"Go into the garden and bring in Marc, Henri," said my father, when he entered the room, after watching the soldiers tramp down the street. "De Baze contrived to whisper to me, unknown to his men, that he would not come again to-night, but that if Arbey lay hidden in our house it would be safer to get him out of the city before daybreak. 'Unless,' he added, 'you have a safe place, not likely to be ferreted out if another should come later on—say to-morrow—to search in my stead, which I may say is very probable.'"

I lost no time, when I had been told where Arbey was in concealment. At the bottom of the garden was an empty house, and when I walked across the grass, that I might go silently, and not scrape my boots on the gravel paths, and stood below one of the windows, thinking to climb up to it and call for Marc, I heard him speak in a low tone.

"Is the way clear?"

He was at the lattice window, which was just ajar.

"Yes. The soldiers have gone."

The window was in deep shadow, so that Arbey scrambled out without any risk of being seen had any of the neighbours been looking into the garden. Then going from bush to bush on the dark side, we entered the house, and breathed more freely.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE ON THE CITY WALL.

WHEN we were seated at the table again, Marc told us what his business in Paris was. Coligny had deputed him to call on certain rich Huguenots to ask for gifts of money, or loans, with which to carry on the war against the Catholic party, and, wherever possible, to induce likely men to quit Paris and join his army.

"He mentioned you in particular, M. Henri," said Arbey, looking round at me, and laying his hand on my arm.

"I am ready," was my instant response.

I looked at my mother, and saw that her face went pale at my words, but she offered no objection, although I know it was pain to her to spare her son to all the risks of war.

"I could not say 'No,' my boy," she said, when she caught my inquiring look. "It is God's cause, and if you do not return I shall know that you died while doing your duty."

They were bravely spoken words, but none the less she buried her face in her hands, and I saw the tears coming between her fingers. It was the same with Louise.

I went to my mother, and put my arm about her shoulder.

"Mother," said I, bending low, "I will not go if you desire me to stay, but duty——"

"Oh, I know it, my boy," she interrupted. "Duty calls, and my son must go! Other women have spared their sons for the cause, and I must! Go, my dear, and fight as a boy of mine ought to fight. Remember, Henri, 'tis for a sacred cause!"

I stood and looked down on her, and felt, while she strove hard to recover her calmness, that to have a good mother was to go into the sternest battle of life well-armed, for I should have her prayers. Those prayers, and all her loving thought, went far towards my full equipment for the new life I was to enter upon, however dangerous it might be.

I turned to my father, who was resting his elbows on the table and his head in his hands.

"Father?"

"I say what your mother says, my son," he exclaimed, but I detected a tremulousness in his voice, so different from the staunch and almost stolid utterance he was wont to have in ordinary conversation.

Presently my mother wiped her eyes, and, putting on a brave show, said that we had better be going.

It broke up the almost intolerable silence, and we began to talk of the manner in which we might find an exit from the city. Decision was a difficult matter, for we had certain knowledge that thousands of soldiers were now on the walls to await a possible Huguenot attack, while every gate must needs be held by a double or a treble guard.

At last our plans were made, and Arbey and I went on our perilous way.

The street was dark when we made our exit from the house, for the moon had gone down, and there was nothing to break up the darkness but the dingy horn lanterns which were swayed by the fitful breeze in the deserted streets.

At first we went on boldly, meeting no one; but when we drew nearer to the city walls we found ourselves in busier quarters. Men stood here and there in groups of twos and threes, talking of the probabilities if Coligny's army ventured to assail the capital. Now and again one or another peered into the darkness, as if to discover who we two were, but no one accosted us.

That was something to wonder at, and presently, finding that the groups increased in number, or that men were walking up and down in couples, some of them soldiers who might at any moment turn and challenge us, we determined to be more cautious. Consequently we left the narrow streets, and went into yet narrower ways, now going down winding passages, sometimes making a mistake and getting into blind alleys, and finding it necessary to retrace our steps. One might easily have been lost in this network of passages and streets and narrow lanes, but I had been in them frequently from my boyhood, so that at last I brought my bewildered companion out of the labyrinth to a spot where I bade him halt while we considered what next thing we should do.

I wanted the home of Louis Mignard, one of my father's workpeople, but we dared not walk boldly to his door and knock for admission. From every point

came the sound of tramping soldiers; the jingling of metal, the stamp of heavy feet upon the stones, and sometimes the fall of some weapon from a careless hand. Occasionally we heard some men singing noisily, regardless of the fact that many who dwelt in the vicinity wanted to sleep. The whole neighbourhood bespoke disturbance; and even the stables, the inns, and the squalid houses where those dwelt who stole or starved, were now filled with soldiers who drank and sang and gambled, waiting for a call to arms if the report proved true that Coligny meant to make a bold bid for the possession of the capital.

"What shall we do?" asked Marc, when we stood with our backs to a low wall, and thus were in darkness and unobserved.

"On the other side of this wall is Mignard's garden," I said. "It seems to me the simplest plan will be for us to climb over, and then decide on what shall next be done."

Marc assented, and asking me to give him a helping hand, he scrambled up the wall, and sat there, waiting for me to join him. He put down a hand, caught mine in his, and presently I was at his side.

We listened intently, but there was no sign of any one being in the garden, so that we dropped into it quietly. Going forward, between trees, and bushes, and beds of vegetables, we came to a narrow flight of stone steps, with the wall on one side, and nothing to prevent one from a nasty fall on the other. A cock was crowing although day-dawn was far away at present, but doubtless the unwonted noises had disturbed the bird, and he contributed his share to the general hubbub.

At the top of the steps we found the door. I had often been to the house before, and knew not only the garden, but those perilous steps down which Arbey would have fallen more than once, had I not gripped his hand tightly to take him past the broken places. The house, moreover, was familiar to me, and yet, when we stood at the door, I hesitated. Under ordinary circumstances those who were within would have been in their heaviest sleep, but now we heard sounds which convinced us that the place was alive with men.

"Stand behind this water-butt, Arbey," said I to my companion. "No one will see you there, even if any should come out and have some fancy for perambulating the garden."

"What of yourself?" he asked, half protestingly, and thinking of my danger.

"I am known," I whispered. "I have but to concoct some message for Mignard from my father and all will be right. It is your presence that constitutes the difficulty," I added candidly.

Arbey went behind the great tub in which Mignard collected the rain-water which fell on the roof of his house, and then, assured that he was comparatively safe, I ventured to lift the latch and walk into Mignard's home.

The old man was sitting with his wife in the room into which the door opened, and a candle guttered in its socket while the couple sat by the table, apparently disconsolate. They were possibly accustomed to the coming and going of men by this time, for neither of them looked up when I entered; but on my greeting them, Mignard started to his feet and turned to stare at me.

"What brings you here, M. Henri?" he asked.

"I must needs tell you cautiously," said I, looking about the room, half expecting to find some soldiers in the darkened corners of the room.

"You can speak freely, monsieur," Mignard answered, "for none are here beyond ourselves—at present," he added significantly. "But was it safe to come here?"

"Surely I am known in Paris as my father's son?" I answered lightly, although I was by no means easy in my mind, and I realised the extremity of my danger quite as much as Mignard.

"But your father is a Huguenot, M. Henri, and that may mean much to-night, since they say that a Huguenot army is somewhere outside the walls, waiting to assail the city. Already they have shot a man whom they suspected of seeking to escape into the open country."

"Here, in this house?" I asked, startled out of my assumed equanimity.

"No, monsieur. But who can tell what those noisy fellows upstairs might do if they surprised you here, and knew you to be the son of M. Gaston."

I stood and considered. Would it be wise to stay? Would it not be well to return home? So far as safety was concerned it would be the better place; but what of duty? Coligny was rallying his forces in order to win religious liberty—the right for every Protestant in France to worship God with the same freedom and safety accorded to those who were of the Catholic faith. Could I shrink from joining him?

In those swift moments, when I reviewed my position, and sought to decide upon my course, I recalled what I had heard the preacher say in his sermon on the Sunday

just gone by. "Frequently persons forget that God is in their life, fulfilling His purposes. They flee from what is painful; they lose their bearings in life, and know not which way to turn; they do not fancy there is help for them in God. Yet God *is* with them. Each one of us has a place in His purpose; and that place we shall find, not by fleeing from what is distressing, but by submitting ourselves cheerfully to what He appoints."

I thought of those words, and it seemed to me that if I turned back, now that I had set forth to play my part in the great cause, I should be unworthy, and God might well censure me, and curtail His blessings.

"Mignard, I am going out to join Coligny," I whispered.

"'Tis madness, monsieur! The rooms where the windows are, in this house, and everywhere along the walls, doubtless, to-night, are full of armed men, this one excepted. Can't you hear them tramping about overhead? How, then, can you get out of Paris?"

"I came here because this seemed the likeliest place," I answered; but my heart sank when I heard the soldiers' voices, and also saw Mignard's face. Should I have to go back, after all, to my father's house, and remain idle while Coligny and his comrades were fighting against such tremendous odds? And there was Marc Arbey. His life was forfeit if he were found within the walls. They would hang him for spreading what they chose to term sedition.

"Mignard, I *must* go to Coligny," I added. "There is no help for it. I must take the risks, and you must allow me to go through the window there."

"'Tis barred, monsieur, and the bars cannot be filed

away while men may enter the room at any moment," the old man objected.

He had barely finished speaking when there was the heavy tramp of feet down the stairs; the door on that side of the room was suddenly flung open, and an officer entered.

It was De Baze!

CHAPTER V.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CITY.

DE BAZE halted and looked at me in amazement. Then his handsome and honest face clouded over with perplexity, and he stood before me as one who had now to decide between duty and friendship.

“What are you doing here?” he asked. “Why have you chosen to come here, of all places in Paris, and at such an inopportune hour?”

He spoke the words almost testily, as if he thought I must be mad to be so indiscreet on such a night.

“Do you forget that not long since you were searching for Marc Arbey?” I replied, putting my question against his.

“Could I forget? But what has that to do with your being here?”

I went so closely to him that he heard my whisper—

“Do you recall what you said to my father as to Arbey quitting Paris without delay?”

He started.

“Do you mean to say that he is here?”

“I mean to say that I want to get him out of Paris, and that is why I am here. Mignard is one of my

father's workmen, and I thought we might get out of the city by making use of one of his windows."

De Baze began to pace the floor to and fro, saying nothing in response to my words. He appeared oblivious of everything save this thought which my presence had set going in his mind. Once the staircase door opened and a soldier entered. Seeing his officer, he saluted; then, staring at me curiously, he passed out to the garden. A fear entered my mind that he might see Arbey, and I drew near to the door, opened it, indeed, and stood in the doorway to know whether he was likely to discover Marc; but I heard the man going down the broken steps, and in a little while his feet crunched on the gravel path. That contented me, and I returned to know what De Baze meant to do.

He came to my side at once.

"M. Henri," he whispered, "I am going to risk rank, life—everything an officer of the King's Guard counts dear—for your sister's sake. I can imagine her anxiety now that you have started on your perilous errand, but for the love I bear her I mean to help you."

I grasped his hand. I whispered to him that even otherwise I would delight to call him my brother. But there was no time for more.

"Mignard," said De Baze, turning to the old man, who, with his wife, watched us curiously, and doubtless wondered at our whispered colloquy.

"Monsieur," responded he, and standing up he waited to know what De Baze would say.

"I saw a tiny chamber upstairs, and in it is a window. Can we not smuggle M. Gaston into it? As to what you and he may arrange to do after that I have nothing

to say. Mark this only, that I must not be told. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, monsieur," was Mignard's quick response.

Whispering that he would go upstairs and see that the men kept out of the way for a little while, De Baze grasped my hand and left the room. I heard him stumbling up the dark staircase, and a door closed with a bang. Then I heard his voice, and the men who had been talking and laughing loudly grew silent. There was a short interval, and other men came from the chamber close by and entered the room; then the door shut noisily, and the sound of De Baze's voice alone broke the silence.

Going to the outer door, I called in Arbey. Remembering how De Baze had gone up with many a stumble, I suggested that we should draw off our boots, and doing this, and carrying them in our hands, we followed Mignard, who led the way into a tiny room, not more than large enough to hold a bed and a chair.

"How shall we get out of this?" I asked, turning to the window, and gazing into the country outside the city walls.

"I'll get a rope, monsieur," came the answer, and with no other word the old man descended the stairs again. Meanwhile we drove the bolt into its socket to guard against intrusion, and while waiting we drew on our boots and stood in readiness.

Mignard was not long away, and when he returned he had in his hand a rope which would suit our purpose admirably. Arbey, whose peril was more pressing than my own, placing the noose under his arms, scrambled through the narrow opening with great difficulty, for like me he was a big man, and the window was but

small. Regardless of the difficulty, however, he was presently outside, dangling in mid-air, while Mignard and I lowered him slowly. Presently the strain slackened, and the rope was ready to be pulled up again.

It was now my turn, but I was anxious as to Mignard's ability to sustain my weight.

"Have no fear, M. Henri," came the answer when I mentioned my anxiety. "I am strong, and shall not loosen my grip. Go at once, and the gracious Lord go with you! May He bring you back with Coligny," he added fervently.

I squeezed my way through, and then was at the old man's mercy. I imagined the strain upon him with my great weight, and more than once it seemed to me in my descent that the task was too much for him. The distance was considerable, and a fall would mean broken bones, perhaps a broken back, and an end to my career as a soldier in the Huguenot army. Now and again my body, with the jerking due to Mignard's frantic efforts to hold me up, bumped against the smooth stones of the massive wall, and once my head banged so heavily against them that I was nearly stunned. It required an effort of will to stifle a cry of pain, which would probably have betrayed me; but at last I felt Arbey's hands, and a moment or two later I was on the ground in safety.

It was something to thank God for.

Throwing off the rope, which was quickly drawn up, and looking round to see that the way was clear, we walked quickly from the walls, favoured by the darkness. Had it been moonlight we should have been seen and shot at, but it was so dense a night that we

barely saw each other when we walked side by side. Once we heard a shot and a cry. Possibly some unfortunate Huguenot had been detected in his endeavour to pass beyond the ramparts. Behind us we heard the challenge of sentinels and the shouts of roysterers.

When the city was some distance behind us, we were alarmed by hearing the sounds of the trampling of horses. They were approaching from the right, and were coming forward with jingling harness and the thud of hoofs. We saw the dim outline of a bush close by, and, making for its shelter, hid within it until the danger had passed. It was a strong force of cavalry, riding outside the city, reconnoitring, and probably intent on intercepting any possible bodies of Huguenot troops.

When they drew level with us, the officer in charge called for a halt, and for a full quarter of an hour the horsemen waited there, holding us in suspense, and adding to the possibilities of capture. They were so near that the ground shook at our feet when an impatient horse stamped his hoof; the snorting of the chargers, and the creaking of the leather of the saddles seemed to be all around us. We were encircled by danger. But it passed. There was a sharp word of command, and in a few moments the whole troop wheeled round and rode away.

Not waiting for the sound of galloping hoofs to cease, but only for the darkness to swallow up these horsemen, we went across the country at a run, only pausing at times to regain our breath and confer afresh as to the course we should take.

The way was clear, and nothing came to hinder our progress. At such an hour there were no wayfarers, nor

were any troops on the road to Paris. It was almost like riding through a land that had none but sleepers or the dead in it. Growing bold when we found so little sign of life, we kept to the highway, passed through hamlets and villages, but always proceeded with caution lest we might suddenly be confronted with the King's troops, or others who would demand a reason for our being abroad at such an hour.

As Arbey and I proceeded, alert for every sound, startled sometimes by a sudden noise in a copse close by, or at some mysterious movement we did not understand, we could not but feel anxious and alarmed. Gradually, however, as the absence of human life continued, and there seemed to be nothing living but in some house in which a solitary light was burning, we gathered confidence, and the hunted feeling sensibly diminished.

Day began to dawn at last, and we thought it wise not to travel, but find rest somewhere. It was necessary, and not expedient merely, for Arbey was showing signs of exhaustion. We called at a charcoal burner's hut in the forest, and since he knew me, and was as true a Huguenot as any man I was acquainted with, I had but to tell him of our need and his home was at our service instantly. With the place standing so far back from the road, we were little likely to be intruded upon, and, as it proved, we passed the day in undisturbed and refreshing sleep.

It was night when we ventured on the road again, and before day dawned once more, we came into touch with Coligny's army. A sentinel called on us to halt, but he knew Arbey, and we passed through the sleeping camp to the general's pavilion.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ARMY ON ITS KNEES.

INSTEAD of quietness we found, when Marc Arbey entered the spacious tent where the commander had his quarters, that several officers were standing in the outer section in little groups, and talking together with a seriousness suggestive of disaster.

“What is wrong?” asked Arbey, halting and speaking to some who were standing near to the tent door.

“Coligny is ill, M. Arbey,” said one.

“Seriously?” inquired the secretary, looking anxious.

“Dying, monsieur, so the leeches say.”

“God forbid!” cried Arbey. “What of the Huguenot cause in such a case?”

“’Tis what we are all asking,” came the grave response. “When Coligny is gone we have no leader—and then?”

The officer raised his hands to indicate the hopelessness of such a situation.

As we passed from group to group, the despair of those who were Coligny’s right-hand men grew more and more pronounced. Some spoke of the young princes as yet remaining if the general should die; but, as one remarked, the Prince of Béarn was incomparable so far as bravery went, yet he was young, and in every way unequal to

the task of leading a great party, now that so many of the Catholics were clamouring for the merciless stamping out of Protestantism in France. Some went so far as to suggest that the army should be disbanded, and that every Huguenot should look to his personal safety.

"'Tis wrong!" cried one who had just come out of the general's quarters. He was a tall, lean man, whose bald head was covered with a black skull-cap, and who wore a Genevan gown, which in some sense relieved his look of leanness. He carried in his hand a Bible, out of which I suppose he had been reading while kneeling at the sick commander's bedside. He had heard the suggestion while he came forth, for it had been spoken so loudly that every one in each little group paused and listened.

"'Tis wickedness," the old divine exclaimed, speaking again. "Shall we say that God hath forgotten, and that He hath forsaken our cause because it hath pleased Him to lay Coligny low? What if indeed he died, doth God's cause die? Is He dependent on men's arms, and brains, and courage? Nay! It is sin to think so! What may well be said when God takes one from us who seems indispensable? What but this, that though God's workmen die and are buried, His work continues. So must it be in regard to this sacred cause for which we are all fighting."

The old man, holding his Bible to his breast, went through the pavilion with downbent head, and the men who stood round drew back, and made a path down which he walked without a word. But at the exit he halted, and turned.

"Gentlemen," said he, when all eyes were on him,

“Coligny will not die if prayer avails. Let us call the army together, and then will we plead with the Lord of Hosts to spare us that crowning sorrow.”

“It shall be done!” exclaimed the Prince of Béarn, who had come from Coligny’s chamber with Pastor Chambard and had walked slowly and dejectedly at his side. “Gentlemen, go forth and gather the men together, and we will pray. An army on its knees must prevail with God.”

The pavilion emptied in a few moments, and before many minutes had passed, the soldiers, regardless of rank or discipline, came from their tents, even those who were on sentinel duty coming also, and crowded round the pastor, in whose saintliness they all believed, and whose power with God they felt to be so real a thing.

The old man, standing on one of the great guns, where he could be seen of all—for the night had gone, and the grey dawn had come—held up his hand in token of silence, and there was an instant hush. Then his clear voice, which gave no sign of age, rang across the throng of armed men.

“Soldiers of Christ—for such you are if you be true men, and loyal to the cause—the Admiral, as you know, is ill. I have sad news to tell you—the leeches, who are skilful men, tell us that he is dying.”

A cry came like a great sob, and many a man who had not known what fear was in the most strenuous hour on the battlefield hid his face in his hand.

“God forbid!” cried one far back in the rear.

“Ay, brother, God forbid!” said Pastor Chambard. “But we are in God’s hands. He putteth down one, but He raiseth up another. But I have not asked you to

assemble thus to give you time for despairing thoughts. I want you to believe that God is on the side of the Huguenots. I want you to go back on your experience, and recall the many times when prayer has counted as a mighty factor in our campaigns."

Chambard opened his Bible, and his eyes flashed when he looked up from the book. In the fast increasing morning light men saw that his face was aglow with confidence.

"The Bible opens, soldiers, at that place where the story tells of the fight of Israel with Amalek. Do you not know the story—every one of you? When Joshua fought while Moses was praying, the people had a grip on the arm of God. It is my message! It comes to me straight from the Lord!"

The pastor's fine voice rang across the assembly, and his face kindled with enthusiasm.

"Believe it, men! God is moved by prayer. God will bring our leader from his pavilion, and we shall go forth with the resistless tide of battle against Amalek—against those who are endeavouring to crush out truth, and we shall win! Shall I tell you what I read before I came from my tent to pray just now with Admiral Coligny?"

There was a murmur in acquiescent response.

"It was this: 'A little band could withstand an empire when the intercessor's hands were outspread over their array.' That is our case to-day."

Pastor Chambard paused and looked around on the thousands of armed soldiers. His brave words had driven away the look of despair. Men whose cheeks were wet brushed them with their sleeves, and instead

of depression, they raised their heads and stood erect, with hope on their faces.

"To your knees!" the divine cried; and by one impulse all knelt—prince and common soldier, the man of rank and the man who, in the eyes of his fellows, was but obscure—and waited while the words came forth in a torrent from the lips of him who lived so absolutely under the heavenly Father's eye, and had such confidence in His willingness to hear. I had never heard such pleading with God before.

At last the prayer was ended. Men rose to their feet and gazed at their neighbours. They grasped each other by the hand as if they had entered afresh into a holy brotherhood, and slowly they walked back to their tents, or to the duty of the hour.

Later in the day there was a stir in the camp. A horseman came galloping in, his charger white with foam, his own face and armour splashed with mud, and his whole aspect indicating news of the greatest moment. He rode to the pavilion, outside which the Prince of Béarn was standing.

"What news?" Béarn asked, as the man sat swaying in his saddle.

"Marshal de Cossé is on the march, Prince, intending to drive our men out from La Charité."

The soldier needed to be helped down from his seat, and when his feet touched the ground he would have fallen had Arbey and I not been at hand. He was stiff and shaken with his wild ride, during many a mile of which he had been hard beset by those of Cossé's army who desired to intercept him and prevent him from

carrying news to Coligny's camp. Slowly, but in detail, he told the Prince of Béarn what he knew, and when he had no more to tell, he was dismissed to obtain refreshment and rest.

The news thus brought spread through the camp with surprising rapidity. It was not alone in the officers' quarters that opinions were expressed. Not a man in all the Huguenot army but felt the thrill of excitement at the thought of approaching battle. Where there had been anxiety, since Coligny was in what seemed the last extremity, now a sense of confidence possessed the men because, led by Chambard in their prayers, they had committed the cause for which they dared so much to God. The soldiers did not wait for orders, but throughout the camp there was an activity which surprised me. Men furbished their armour, sharpened their weapons, saw that guns and pistols were in working order, that weak places in their corslets were strengthened, and so far as human care could go there was a readiness which left nothing to chance.

Meanwhile the Prince, believing that Coligny was too ill to take the initiative, called a council of war in his pavilion, but the discussion which took place was a heated one. Chambard was present, and urged the advance of the army to meet Cossé. Many of the younger men declared the Huguenot cause would be irredeemably disgraced if retreat were ordered, but some timorous spirits counselled this latter course. When, after hearing all that had been said on either side, the Prince stood to put the momentous question as to the action to be taken in this grave crisis, a voice was heard, weak and tremulous, but imperative.

"Prince, I must have a word on this matter!"

Every eye turned towards the door of the pavilion, and not one who was present refrained from an exclamation of astonishment; for leaning heavily on the arms of Arbey and an officer named Fourcard was Coligny himself. Forgetful of pain and weakness, he had risen from his bed after much debate with himself, and bade two of those who were in attendance take him to the tent where the council of war was being held.

"It will be your death, Admiral," the leech had protested angrily.

"It will more likely be my death if I remain here while my officers may be deciding on a course which will spell ruin to our cause," was the quick retort. "I heard you say, De Guiche, that my death was inevitable. Did you not?"

"I did, monsieur," the leech answered unwillingly.

"Very well, then; since I am to die, better ten thousand times go to my Maker and say that I ended my career while trying to save the army which carried the Protestant banner, than lie in this bed and die at my ease. Arbey, give me your arm; and you, Fourcard."

With that Coligny rose from his couch, the sweat-drops forming on his brow because of the pain the movement caused him. Leaning on the arms of these two strong men he went to the council with slow and heavy step, now and again halting because of weakness and an excess of pain.

"We should do well to return, Admiral," said Fourcard, who walked at Coligny's right hand. He spoke in distress, because he knew by those drops of sweat on the general's forehead that the movement was pressing his master's endurance too far.

"Go forward, my dear Fourcard," Coligny answered faintly, and reeling to such an extent at the moment that he would have fallen had not De Guiche, who was following closely, thrown his strong arms about him.

"It is madness!" exclaimed the leech.

"Nothing is madness that means service in extremity," retorted Coligny, who pulled himself together by an effort of will.

When he entered the tent and took us by surprise, there was a breathless silence. I even heard the buzzing of a bee within the pavilion, which a few moments before had been noisy with invective and angry protest.

"I cannot, and need not, go to the table, messieurs," said Coligny, straightening himself, but still locking his hands in the arms of those who were supporting him on either side. "Kindly gather round me, and let me hear what has been done."

There was an instant movement, and he was speedily surrounded by the wondering captains. Coligny sat in the chair which the Prince himself brought, and then listened while Béarn recounted briefly the course of the discussion. Weak in body, the admiral's mind was as keen as it had ever been. Sickness and pain had in no degree dimmed his mental perception, and sitting there, in the midst, he was alert, and incisive in his criticism of what had been contended in the council. Then for a while he sat with folded hands in deep thought.

Presently the grey head was raised, and Coligny's eyes scanned the men who were standing round him.

"Messieurs, we will go forward and meet Cossé," he said, speaking in decisive tones, as though none would think of questioning what he said. "We shall march

as soon as the men can be called together. Unfortunately that may take some time."

"Not more than an hour, General," said Béarn. "The men are eager. The news of Cossé's advance has filled them with enthusiasm."

"Then the word is 'Forward.' Messieurs, when the trumpet sounds the 'Advance,' you will find me in my place at the army's head."

With that Coligny put up his hands for Arbey's and Fourcard's arms, rose by their help to his feet, and in the manner of his coming returned to his pavilion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CHÂTEAU.

I HAD thought to accompany the army in its march to meet and fight the Royal troops, but before many minutes had passed Arbey sought me.

“Coligny wishes some one to ride round and call in some scattered bodies of troops who are on outpost duty, and take them to the bridge of St. Reimbert,” said he, when he found me. “I suggested that you would perhaps be willing to undertake that task, M. Gaston.”

“With the greatest readiness,” was my instant response. “Give me a horse, and some instructions, and I will go at once.”

“Then I will find you a score of mounted men, and send one with you who knows how the troops are posted,” said Arbey. “Be here in twenty minutes, and come full armed.”

Half an hour later we were on the move, our horses going across the country at a canter, since time was precious. Before we had gone far we heard the sound of a trumpet, the clear blast ringing up the valley, and halting for a moment or two to watch, we saw a horse litter move away from Coligny's pavilion, and as it went forward at a walking pace, the whole army

followed the gallant, and, as every one thought, the dying general.

"What with the Admiral's splendid pluck, and Chambard's stirring words, the army should achieve a triumph to-day, monsieur," observed a trooper who was riding at my side, serving as my guide.

"True," I exclaimed, "and in God's name we will do our share."

The men received my words with a shout, and a moment later we spurred our horses, and were once more on the way. Before the glorious spring day ended I had five hundred men at my back, and rather than keep them with me while we scoured the country for a hundred more, who were posted in more distant spots, I bade one of the captains lead the force to the bridge at St. Reimbart, wait there if Coligny had not arrived, or follow him if he had already crossed.

When they had gone—a splendid body of seasoned soldiers, full of enthusiasm and longing for the fray—I rode with a few of my men eastwards. In the darkness those who were with me, knowing the country no better than myself, confessed that they were lost. After a brief consultation we agreed to separate, and ride off in couples in three different directions, hoping thus to pick up some of the men we were seeking, if not all. Without waiting for the others, those who succeeded in gathering some men together were to ascertain from the peasants the road to St. Reimbart, and hurry thither, to reach the army in time to take part in the battle.

My companion and I rode on in the darkness, only now and again exchanging a word, since we were too

intent on discovering some signs of life, and in consequence some one who could put us into the right road. At last, far up the hillside, we saw a light, and made for it, thinking it might be a peasant's hut where we could make inquiries; but after going some distance we found ourselves unable to get any nearer to it, since a broad and turbulent stream rolled between. Riding slowly, hoping to find a bridge, we proceeded for a mile or two, but at last the light was no longer to be seen, and we were, if anything, more lost than before.

Halting, since we knew not what to do, we talked over the course we had better pursue, and while doing so I heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs, going slowly, and not far away. Denis Hody, my companion, raised a loud cry, and the horseman answered.

"What is your will?" came his words out of the darkness.

"We have missed our way," Hody called back.

There was at once the sound of hoofs again, and since we knew that the rider was approaching us we turned and rode to meet him.

"Where would you go?" asked the horseman who presently became visible, and pulled up suddenly just as his horse's head came into contact with that of the animal Hody was riding.

A brief colloquy ensued, and the stranger, when he heard that we had been gathering up the scattered parties of Coligny's army, declared himself ready to do anything that would be of service to the admiral.

"Seeing that I am a Huguenot myself, monsieur," he said blandly, while we rode on with him, one on either side, "'tis but natural. We must needs pass my château,

however, and if you will come in and take refreshment I can send a man with you who knows every inch of the ground, and will doubtless know where to drop on some of Coligny's soldiers. They have been moving freely in the neighbourhood of late."

This was altogether to our mind, for our horses were dead beat, and a rest and some corn would do them so much good that we should more than make up for lost time by increased speed. As for myself, I was famished, and the prospect of a substantial meal was pleasant.

"What say you, Hody?" I asked, turning to the trooper.

His answer came readily: "I could eat the toughest bit of meat that ever was, monsieur, and enjoy it, for I was never so hungry in my life before."

M. Lorin, who was offering the hospitality, and whose name I recognised as that of an undoubted adherent of the Reformed Faith, laughed loudly.

"One may trust a hungry soldier to eat when once he gets his legs under a well-spread table. But let us mend our pace." With that he sent his horse forward across the grass, deserting the beaten road, and before long we had come to some iron gates, through which we rode.

At the end of the winding avenue we draw up before a beautiful château. It was surrounded by a broad moat, and this was spanned by a drawbridge which had been let down while we were approaching. The porter knew the call of the master, so that we had not to wait more than to allow M. Lorin to take the lead, and pass in.

When our horses clattered into the courtyard, we heard the creaking of the winch, and the heavy draw-

bridge rose behind us. We were shut in for good or ill, for safety's sake, so Lorin said, since the rogues and vagabonds were just then taking advantage of the distracted state of the country, and were rendering it necessary for gentlemen to guard against the bands that were roaming about and pillaging defenceless places.

Half an hour later I was sitting at M. Lorin's table and with us were his lady and a beautiful girl whom they called Elizabeth Grisart. She belonged to Holland and was there on a visit only. Again and again I watched her, and although I had seen so many beauties in Paris, and in my rides through France, none had so attracted me as this girl, so pale, so delicate and refined. Every look and word declared her an amiable and accomplished woman. There was no need for her to say towards which side her sympathies inclined when we spoke of the disturbed state of the French King's realm. Her eyes flashed with pleasure when I told of Coligny's determination to spend what little of life remained to him in the endeavour to secure the triumph of the Huguenots.

"I must go," said I at last, regretfully, for I could gladly have stayed a while to know more of her; but when I rose from my chair there was a sudden clamour in the corridor.

"How now?" exclaimed M. Lorin, turning to the door in displeased surprise, for it was flung open noisily, and without ceremony the man I had seen at the drawbridge came in, pale, and bleeding from a wound in the head.

"There are a score of men in the place, monsieur," the man panted. "How they got in I cannot think, but while I was seeing to the strange trooper's comfort in the

kitchen, I saw a villainous face at the window, then another, and when Hody jumped to his feet to join me as I hurried out to know how they got there, we were beset by a score at the least, and have had to fight hard to enter the house again and bolt the door."

"Get the men together," cried M. Lorin, and, turning to the wall, he took down a sword.

"Madame, go to your chamber," he said, while doing so, "and take mademoiselle with you. This is a matter for men, and if you be at all timorous perhaps M. Gaston will not object to keep a special eye on your safety."

Half a dozen men went past the open door at the moment at a rush, each looking to his arms as he hurried by, and following the lead of the porter. Before I had time to speak, Madame and Elizabeth Grisart had turned to go, and when they reached the corridor the women servants were there, pale, frightened, and trembling, some weeping with fear.

"Go with them, M. Gaston," cried Lorin, who, waiting no longer, went down the corridor at a run, his bared sword gleaming as the lights of the lamps fell on the polished blade.

"It will not gleam like that when he has done with it," exclaimed Madame Lorin proudly, while she watched her husband's going. The first fright had passed, and now she sought to calm the women who were cowering, some of them rocking themselves as they sat on the floor in the abandonment of despair.

"Have no fear, wenches," cried madame, "M. Lorin and the men will more than hold their own! Can you doubt it, who know him so well? As for ourselves, we have M. Gaston to watch over our safety, if any

should chance to get past the guard and come to this part of the house."

Her calmness served to reassure the women, and one by one they rose to their feet and followed us, crowding at our heels while we went to madame's room. At the door I stood on guard, wishing, as the clamour increased, that I was able to go and make the defence the more assured; but here was my charge, and I stood alert.

The fighting appeared to be on the western side of the château, and from what Madame Lorin suggested it was evident that a gang of vagabonds, who had been roaming through the country, a hundred strong, or more, had turned their attention to this château, intending to storm and sack it. The prospect, if they were successful in their attack, was truly horrible, for these men, rendered inhuman by tyranny and want, were little better than savage beasts, and wherever they got the mastery neither man nor woman was allowed to live, but was tossed into the flames of the burning house.

Madame and Elizabeth stood at the door with me, although I implored them to go in and fasten themselves within securely. The women of the household, more timorous, had huddled together in the room, sobbing in their fear.

"Go and see how they fare," exclaimed the mistress of the château presently, turning to me. "But do not stay. Return quickly, monsieur, to reassure these frightened women."

I went reluctantly. My fingers were itching for a share in the fight that was going on somewhere near the drawbridge, as if M. Lorin had driven the miscreants back so far; but I was loath to leave the women to the mercy

of any accident. In the distant part of the house could be heard loud shouts: "A bas les Huguenots!" and then a scream of pain, or a curse, or a cry of rage. That cry, which turned the blood cold, gave token of the character of those human wolves who were assailing the house, for it was always a Huguenot dwelling on which the wandering pack centred its murderous attention.

I had gone as far as the end of the corridor when a woman's scream caused me to stand and swing round on my heel. Then, with an exclamation of horror, I ran back as fast as my feet would carry me. At the farther end of the corridor was a door, and this was now open, and through it were pouring some men—half naked, some of them, ragged every one, dishevelled, begrimed with filth, lank and lean with want.

They came quickly, but I ran more rapidly than the swiftest, and succeeded in reaching madame's door just as the first of them came up. In his hand was a dagger, and with this he made a desperate lunge at me, but my sword disabled him, and he lay on the floor bleeding, and cursing us and all other Huguenots. By this time the passage was blocked with a score who, fortunately for us, in their savage eagerness pressed each other so closely that they had no room for free play with their weapons.

One after another went down before my resistless thrusts, for my sword was a thing I well knew how to use. Yet, as the fight proceeded, it appeared a hopeless contest—one man against so many. But I would not suffer myself to consider the odds. I thought instead of those women behind me, defenceless, and threatened with such an awful end if these creatures I was holding back once got the upper hand. More than once I felt the

stab of steel in my body, but, keeping the knowledge to myself, I fought on.

In the midst of a sudden and concerted rush to overwhelm me, one man got under my guard and passed behind. His idea, doubtless, was to do this, and strike at my back with the murderous knife he carried. In such a case it was not only death for me, but the château and all within it were doomed. In the brief moment I had for thought I wondered what I could do. I dared not turn my back on those who were pressing me so hard, and yet there might be the thrust of that knife to bring about my own undoing.

In a momentary glance I saw some one step forward. It was Elizabeth Grisart. She grasped a dagger in her delicate hand. Madame Lorin also had one, and while the latter came to my side to stay the rush of a second man who was bending low to make a dash past me as the first had done, Elizabeth threw up her hand, then brought it down, and there was a scream of pain. Was it she, or that unkempt creature, who uttered the cry? I dared not look round to see, for the men were pressing on more than before.

A moment later Elizabeth was at my side, and three of us now held the corridor,—I, with my dripping sword, and on either side of me a gentle woman who, face to face with such a dreaded alternative, had put her fears aside and felt constrained to take part in the fray.

Suddenly those who were in front of us seemed to stay their hands. Some paused for a moment to scream out curses; then those who had been pressing on me turned and fled down the corridor in a mad panic, many of them throwing down their weapons as they

went. The men of the retreating throng who were nearest to us thrust those who were stopping their flight out of their way, trampled over one who had fallen, heedless of his screams of pain while he lay beneath their stamping feet, and in a few moments, but for those who lay dead before me, or wounded and unable to crawl away, the place was empty.

I thought I would turn to see what this strange ending of the fight could mean. Elizabeth was still at my side, and she was gazing down the corridor. Suddenly she screamed with fear, and before I had turned I felt a scorching pain in my side. The floor, and corridor, and Elizabeth seemed to sway. A moment later I knew no more.

CHAPTER VIII.

A KING'S TREACHERY.

I WAS lying in a bed when I opened my eyes to consciousness. M. Lorin was sitting by my side, and a leech was watching me anxiously.

"What does this mean?" I asked, feebly enough.

"It means that after you had held the corridor so gallantly, M. Gaston, and placed me and all within the château under such lasting obligation, the rascal who had gone past your guard sprang up and stabbed you in the side," said Lorin. "But lie still and be content."

"'Tis easy to say that, M. Lorin," I answered, but only falteringly, for I felt weak and ill. "What about my duty to M. Coligny? I ought to have been on the way to the army to take part in the coming fight with Cossé."

"My dear Gaston," said Lorin, laying his hand on mine, which was resting idly on the quilt, "be quite at your ease on that matter. Coligny met Cossé yesterday, fought him, and although the King's army numbered fourteen thousand men, and Cossé was well provided with artillery, Coligny, with half that number, and sadly lacking in great guns, gave him a thorough beating, captured everything in his camp, and the beaten general is flying back to Paris."

"What of Coligny?" I asked eagerly. "Is he dead?"

"No. He was supposed, as you said, to be dying; but he is recovering."

"It was the answer to the army's prayers, M. Lorin," I muttered. "Methinks I told you how the army went on its knees?"

It was good news, and, closing my eyes, I rested in contentment. Surely God had heard the army's prayers for its leader, and Protestantism in France yet had Coligny to fight its battles.

Before long I asked whether Elizabeth was safe. I still had my eyes closed when I put my question.

"Open your eyes, M. Gaston, and see for yourself," exclaimed a sweet voice, with something like laughter in it — laughter born of relief because I was not dying.

I turned my face and saw her.

"Thank God!" I said. "I was afraid that since I had been so grievously hurt, you, too, might have come to some harm when I was not able to protect you."

"M. Lorin was there to look after me and madame," said Elizabeth. "You do not know what happened. How could you when that dreadful man—more beast than human—struck at you with his knife? He had been lying so still that I thought I had killed him; but when the others saw M. Lorin and some of his men coming up at a run, and turned and fled, the fellow sprang to his feet suddenly and struck at you. A moment later, just as you fell, your man, Hody, killed him. This horde of wandering vagabonds, so we have since heard—for 'twas two days ago—were set on us

by a neighbouring Catholic noble, and were led by a priest; but M. Lorin treated them so roughly that they went off in something like a panic."

It was a delight to hear her talk, although there was pain for me with every breath I drew. She and madame were my nurses for the days that followed, and some of the women willingly took their turns in looking after me. Gradually I grew better, and since the news that came to the château as to the condition of the Huguenots was reassuring, I found a real pleasure in my slow convalescence, since I was in such company.

To begin with, Coligny did not die, although it was thought by friend and foe alike that he would never survive that supreme and exhausting effort of leading his army to battle. It was news which made one thankful, for Coligny was the only hope of Huguenotism in France. There was more news to follow which tended to lessen those despairing feelings which possessed the Protestant party, who thought themselves in a hopeless, if not a ruined, cause. Some one brought word that the King and the Catholics were filled with alarm when, on top of the tidings of Cossé's failure and disorderly retreat to Paris, came the unwelcome and startling information that some thousands of German soldiers had entered France, and were going by forced marches to a rendezvous fixed by Coligny. Where the Court had thought to crush the Huguenots, now it was realised that disaster might overtake the Royalists instead. The consequence was that they saw the necessity for peace before it was too late. It seemed to Charles the Ninth, and his mother, Catherine de Medici, that Coligny might sweep down on Paris and compel the King to agree to humiliating

terms—an intolerable thing for a Catholic monarch to submit to.

One afternoon M. Lorin came in to say that a friend had arrived at the château to see me, and my host had scarcely gone out of the room when the door opened and De Baze entered.

“Odilon!” I cried, delighted to see his handsome face once more, and not only for his sake, but because he could tell me the home news.

I could not move to greet him, but he came and, bending over my couch, embraced me with the tenderness and love of a brother.

“What of my mother?” I cried, too eager to wait for him to say anything.

“She is well, but anxious concerning you. I believe no hour in the day passes but she prays for you, and none ever come into the city but she wonders whether they know how you are faring.”

What De Baze said of her brought the tears to my eyes. I asked with equal anxiety about Louise, and his face flushed with mingled pleasure and regret.

“More beautiful and lovable than ever,” he exclaimed. “But more difficult to win than I thought, since the widening of the breach between Huguenot and Catholic in France fills her with a sense of dread lest, loving me, we might some day find that the difference of faith would estrange us. But how could such a thing be? Henri, I love her more than man ever loved woman before; yet she tells me that so long as I am Catholic and she is Huguenot she can never be my wife.”

De Baze did not stay long, for the time at his disposal

was very short, and it was necessary for him to ride hard to be back at Coligny's camp at the hour appointed. He had come from Paris with the Deputies from the King, who were empowered to make certain proposals to Coligny for a conclusion of peace, and the negotiations were proceeding when he had left the camp to come to me.

He gave me a letter from Louise before he went away, and he had no sooner gone than I broke the seal.

I read the first portion with sincere pleasure. It told of home, my father, my mother and herself; of her exercise of mind as to De Baze, and a dozen other things I was glad to hear of. But when I came to the second half, I was consumed with anxiety. It ran thus—

“The King proposes peace, but the proposals are not sincerely made. They cover the most sinister purposes; they are meant to hide the most startling and shameful duplicity. We have heard—but how I will not tell you—that this is a snare into which Coligny and the leading Huguenots are to be drawn.”

Then followed certain particulars pointing to the perfidy of the Queen-Mother, and the willing co-operation of her son, the King.

“Let Coligny see these papers.” So ended my sister's letter. “Let him have them at whatever cost, for otherwise the fate of thousands of our people will be something too dreadful to contemplate. 'Tis a plot to gain time for the overthrow of the Protestant religion in France.”

I need quote no more. What Louise said in the letter was revelation of amazing double dealing, and there was every need that Coligny should know without



“MADAME LORIN,” SHE SAID QUIETLY, “I AM GOING
TO COLIGNY’S CAMP.”—Page 58.

delay, and that he should know it before he agreed to the offers made by the Deputies on the King's behalf.

Elizabeth and Madame Lorin were in the room, and they looked at me anxiously while I read my sister's epistle. Madame came to my side when she saw that the letter fell from my hands, while I lay back among my pillows in my helplessness.

"Is anything wrong, Henri?" she asked.

"Read that letter from the beginning of the third page, madame," I exclaimed; and while she perused what my sister had written I watched her face. It grew pale, the paper trembled in her fingers while she perused the sentences; then she sat down and buried her face in her hands.

"Such scandalous duplicity!" she exclaimed. "It must be told to Coligny ere it is too late."

"It must!" I cried. "Help me to dress, and bid them make a horse ready. I must go to Coligny."

"It is impossible!" protested Madame Lorin.

"Impossible," echoed Elizabeth, for at my desire she had read the letter with Madame Lorin.

"Then ask M. Lorin to go with the letter to Coligny," I cried.

"Alas! that, too, is as impossible, for he is just gone from home and does not return until to-morrow."

It was exasperating to think that for want of knowledge so many should be lured by fair promises to something like ruin—to death, without a doubt. Yet I could do nothing to save Coligny. I had risen to my feet, and the pain bore me back helpless to the couch, and my wound seemed as though it had broken open.

We sat and talked, but we could think of no plan by which Coligny could be made aware of the truth and comprehend the contemplated treachery.

Presently Elizabeth rose from her chair. Her beautiful face had a look on it such as I had never seen before. She bent down, and taking the letter from the floor, where it had fallen, she put it into her bosom.

"Madame Lorin," she said quietly, "I am going to Coligny's camp."

"You, my child?" exclaimed madame in amazement.

"Yes, I am going. Coligny shall be told, and I will go. Please," she went on, holding out her slender hand in protestation, when we attempted to dissuade her, "do not object. If you will not let me have a horse, I will walk. If you will send a trusty man with me, to save me from insult on the road, so much the better. But I am going to Coligny's camp."

With that she left the room; and before many minutes had passed I heard the clatter of horses' hoofs on the stones of the courtyard, and presently the great gate clanged and I knew that she was gone.

I had my fears, but little did I know what was to happen before I saw her face again.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMAN'S DARING.

THE determination of Elizabeth to ride to the Huguenot camp was the more wonderful when I considered that she was not ignorant of the perils which beset those who ventured to ride through France in such distressing times.

The attack that had been made on Lorin's château was not an exceptional experience, for bands of the peasantry, goaded on by priests, and often led by them, stopped wayfarers on the roads, demanded an answer as to which side they favoured—the King's or Coligny's—and if they had the effrontery to confess themselves adherents of the admiral they were hung on the nearest tree, and left there to rot, while the mob went elsewhere to burn a farm or ravage the estates of the rich adherents of Huguenotism.

I knew this, and all the time Elizabeth was absent I lay and tossed on my bed, forgetting my physical pain in the mental distress lest anything should chance to bring her bodily harm. It appeared to me such an amazing thing that one so delicate and dainty should possess such moral courage, and run such infinite risks for the sake of the Huguenot cause.

Again and again, many a long hour before she could possibly return, I asked if she had come back. Madame Lorin was as anxious as myself, and twice she went to the stables and bade a man saddle one of the swiftest horses and ride, well-armed, along the road to overtake or meet Elizabeth, and bring her safely through the dangers that must of necessity beset her. For now it was night, and it was intolerable to think that a frail girl and a solitary attendant were exposed to perils which strong men only braved under compulsion, and never from choice.

It was daybreak when Lorin returned. We heard the beating of hoofs in the courtyard, and I half rose from my couch with the cry: "She is here!" I was disappointed when I was told that it was the master of the château.

Madame Lorin brought in her husband, and when he heard what had transpired he was incredulous at Elizabeth's daring.

"Why did you suffer her to go?" he cried, almost angrily.

"She gave us no choice," protested madame. "Henri could not go, and there was this treacherous treaty in Coligny's hand which might mean ruin to the Huguenots, and she declared that if we would not provide her with a horse she would go on foot, and unattended. What else could I do?"

"Bring me some food!" exclaimed Lorin after he had paced the floor, and while it was being set upon the table in my room, that he might hear as much as possible from me as he ate, he left the chamber.

"I am going to meet her," he said when he returned,

and he ate standing, hearing what I could tell and asking questions. In a brief space he was gone, carrying food in his hand, and shortly after he had quitted the room I heard him ride away with half a dozen well-armed men in his train.

It was the longest day I ever spent. The hours were packed with care, but through them all I grew to know what my feelings were towards Elizabeth Grisart. Her gentle attention when she took her turn at nursing me had made me realise that the happiest moments were those which were spent during her period of attendance. Her hands soothed me when my pain was great, her voice was like music and drew away my thoughts from my bodily suffering, while her quiet confidence maintained my hope, although the leech had told me he thought I must die. More than once, when I seemed to be slipping away from life, her presence and her words brought to me the resolution that I would not die. Because she was in the world I would live. Now that she was displaying her heroism, risking everything—life itself—for the sacred cause, I knew that I loved her, and that if she died I should find that life had lost its greatest charm.

It was growing into dusk when I heard the great bell in the courtyard ring loudly. There came also the sturdy voice of M. Lorin, the thud of the dropping drawbridge, the sound of the opening of the iron gate, and the clatter of the feet of many horses on the courtyard stones.

But had *she* come? Men were there, but what of that one woman who was all the world to me? Had they found her? and if they had, how? living, or dead?

So many had been lying on the roadside in France in those troublous times who were too far gone to tell of what had chanced, and because death came before speech and consciousness returned scores passed out of life and were never able to tell their story.

It appeared to me that minutes dragged into hours before news was brought to me.

"Marie," I said to the woman who was in attendance, "go and see whether Mademoiselle Grisart has returned with the men now in the courtyard. Come back and tell me. Do not stay to ask questions, but return instantly."

The woman, who had answered a score of my questions, and had said as many times things which she thought would set me more at rest, went out at once, leaving the door wide open. I heard her feet going on the floor of the corridor at a run, and the beating of her dress against her knees, and presently she returned, breathless.

"She has come back safely, monsieur," she cried. "And I heard her say that she had seen Coligny."

"Thank God!" I muttered.

Then the room grew dark. The strain of the long hours to one who was ill and weak, and full of pain, had exhausted my powers of endurance. While all things were being shrouded in the deepening twilight I heard the footsteps of people in the corridor, Lorin's voice, madame's, and Elizabeth's.

Then everything was blotted out.

When I awoke to consciousness, and was able to see and speak, I recalled that interminable and anxious day. I opened my eyes and saw Madame Lorin and Marie in

the room, but before they seemed aware of my revival my eyes searched the apartment for Elizabeth.

"Is she safe?" I asked.

"Yes," said madame, who started when she heard my voice. She rose, bent over me and kissed my forehead.

"Did she get to Coligny?"

"Yes. But do not speak, my dear boy. Lie still and rest. Be content to know that all is well; that although it was a terrible journey, she returned without a scratch, and that the cause was saved."

"May I not see her?" I asked impatiently.

"Not just now," came madame's answer. "You have been ill again, and for three or four long weeks we have been watching, fearing that you would go out of life without saying a word to any of us. Now, blessed be the dear Lord! you have come back to us, and the leech said that if you awoke gently, and knew us, all would be well. Sleep, Henri. Lie there and be content."

She held my hand in hers, and smoothing my forehead soothingly, she sat on and on, while I lay in gladness, and praised God in mind that all had gone well.

But the truth had to come, and it brought me great disappointment. Elizabeth had set forth on her perilous journey, and with Morny, a man-at-arms, to bear her company, had met with dangers which made it wonderful that she ever came back alive. She had reached the camp, had seen Arbey, gave him the letter, and told him all. Marc Arbey took it to Coligny, but bade her stay in seclusion in one of the tents, so that none of the Deputies should see her and suspect her errand.

Coligny read the letter and was indignant. He sent for his chief officers and read it to them, and when, soon

after, the Deputies came to the pavilion to resume negotiations, he told them what he knew, and declared that if they were in the camp an hour hence he would hang them, since they had dared to come on so dishonourable an embassy.

Then I heard of the return journey—of the men who had gone to meet her at intervals, and of their difficulty in reaching Elizabeth; of Lorin's ride, and how he had found her shut up in some wayside hut by a howling mob of peasants, armed with scythes and knives, who, enraged at the gallant defence made by her three attendants, had begun to pile wood about the place to burn it down. There was a short but desperate fight when Lorin rode up, in which one of his men was killed, but the mob eventually scattered and the road was clear for home.

"But where is Elizabeth?" I asked.

I had listened to the story, but wondered that through all those hours she did not come to see me.

"Is she ill?" I added, following up my former question quickly. The bare thought brought the sweat-drops to my brow.

"No, Henri," said madame. "She is gone home. Some traders were passing, and since her time was long gone by, and her mother needed her, they called for her on the way, and she went."

It was disappointment unspeakable. I wanted to tell her of my love—to ask her to be mine, to let me feel her soft lips on my cheeks, to hear her say that she would marry me; and, alas! the opportunity was gone. It was maddening. As I lay with a sense of hopelessness, my weakness displayed itself. I was not given to

tears, but now they came, and my cheeks were wet. Then I felt a cool kerchief wiping them away, and there was a warm breath on my face, as madame whispered, although no other but myself was in the room to hear.

“Henri, she came here, just where I am standing, and the tears came. Ah! she wept to leave you. She turned to me, and said, ‘Madame, I love him, and it breaks my heart to leave him, for I know he loved me. But I must go. Duty calls me home.’ And with that she flung her arms about you, as you lay all unconscious, and she kissed you again and again, long and passionately, your eyes, your cheeks, your lips.”

It was bliss to hear such words. I had no more tears to shed, for here was cause for new and wondrous joy. Now I had but to grow strong and go forth to find her.

CHAPTER X.

DISQUIETING PREMONITIONS.

WHEN I had thoroughly recovered I returned to Paris under a strong escort, which Lorin had provided, since the country was in such an unsettled state. Coligny had not only broken off negotiations, but made such preparations for the continuation of the war that the Queen-Mother urged Charles the Ninth to grant the safeguards which the admiral demanded before he would again listen to any proposals for peace. These were forthcoming, and at last the Peace of St. Germain-en-Laye was signed.

The prospects of the Huguenots were brighter when the civil war was ended than they had ever been, and when the camp was broken up, and the Protestant army was disbanded, the soldiers returned to their homes with a very sincere relief. A letter had come to me from my father in which he stated some of the terms of the treaty, and if they were honourably adhered to, France might become happy, and Protestants throughout the realm would have no more to fear on the score of religious persecution.

I read the letter to Lorin and madame one evening, and these were the words it contained—

“ We never hoped for such concessions, and when one considers them well there is much to be grateful for. There is an amnesty for all past offences. No one is to be punished for having served under the Huguenot banner, so that you, my son, may return to Paris so soon as you are sufficiently strong to travel, and without any fear of arrest.

“ Not only so, there is to be no interference with any one on account of their religious opinions. They may dwell in any part of France, and none may molest them if they choose to read their Bibles in their own homes, and pray. Liberty of worship is not as freely granted as we could hope for; but it is better as it is than as it was. Before this treaty was signed we could never have public worship according to our own desire. Now, in every province throughout France, two towns have been selected, and the Huguenots have the right to hold public worship in the suburbs. But only in the suburbs, which is a restriction I do not appreciate, since many of the aged ones must needs be deprived, because of the distance to the place of meeting.

“ Then we have a restoration of political rights. Hitherto, as you know, no Huguenot has been permitted to hold an office of State; now he may, and that is a welcome concession. Many, because they joined the Huguenot army, lost everything. Their property was confiscated, down to the last livre, but by the treaty all that was so forfeited is now to be restored. Think what that means, say, to our old friend Galliot, the lapidary, who lost everything, and was deprived of every means of making a livelihood since he was hounded out of Paris,

absolutely without money. He has come back again, and his daughter Emilie and he are settled down comfortably once more. What is more, they have restored to him his treasure-chest, and his curios, untouched; and, as you know, the strong-box contained things that were priceless."

This was good news, and I read and re-read the letter. It was gladdening to one's heart to know that peace was settling over France once more, that the desolation which afflicted the land would pass, that the authorities would now be able to turn their attention to the lawless bands that were burning, and pillaging, and murdering, and causing as much suffering in France as the war itself. It would mean the return of prosperity, the revival of trade, and consequently work for those who were thrown out of employment. It followed, therefore, that there would be less starvation, and the little ones who so often hungered would have a better chance of healthy growth.

But would it last?

That was the question M. Lorin asked, for he was dubious. He had no faith in the sly and crafty Queen-Mother, and the young King was a master in the art of dissembling. He would not believe in their sincerity, but was convinced that the Peace was nothing more than a hollow sham; that their Majesties were throwing dust in the eyes of Coligny and his associates, to blind them while they were preparing some iniquitous coup which would render Protestantism weaker than before, and enable Catholicism to triumph.

Lorin was soon afforded proof of this, for he went away on pressing business. On his return home a week

later, he exclaimed, when we were sitting quietly at the evening meal—

“It is even as I said. The Peace is a hollow sham. The promises made to the Huguenots are as worthless as the paper on which they were written, and we are going to be no better off than if Coligny had made an unconditional surrender. While I have been away I have had abundant evidence of it. I went to Nantes, and saw that there and in other towns the Catholics are allowed to remain armed. They placed guards at the city gates to prevent exiled Huguenots from returning to their homes, although the treaty declared they were at liberty to do so. I saw M. Duval present himself at the gate the night before last, and one of the men on guard not only refused to permit him to pass, but when he protested his right by virtue of the treaty, and therefore attempted to enter, the fellow deliberately ran him through with his sword, and said, as Duval lay writhing on the stones—

“‘Now, monsieur, you may enter Nantes if you dare.’

“When I protested, the man swung round and faced me, with his dripping sword held menacingly.

“‘Who are you?’ he cried.

“‘I am M. Lorin,’ I answered, laying my hand on my sword; and nothing but the knowledge that I am one of the best swordsmen in France saved me from Duval’s fate.”

In spite of Lorin’s prognostications I was, like thousands more, glad that peace was restored. I know that an old writer once said that an unjust peace was to be preferred before a just war. How far that is true I cannot say, but, at all events, peace under any con-

ditions, it seemed to me, was good for France. It gave her breathing time—time to repair mischief, opportunity for men to arrive at a better understanding.

I spoke some such words as these to Lorin, but he shook his head.

“You may think me a croaking raven, refusing to accept what, on the face of it, looks like a blessing to France. I wish I could agree with you, Henri, but I cannot. I think, sometimes, that there is coming a day for our country which will be so terrible that the past experiences, and all the expressions of savage hate between the rival factions, will count as gentleness in comparison.”

“Do not suggest it,” I cried. “It is too dreadful to contemplate.”

“It is,” he said quietly, “but none the less the conviction grows upon me. My week’s absence from home, when I saw and heard various things, did not serve to reassure me. I see evil in front of us. The conviction that there is something wrong comes with an insistence which distresses me. It intrudes upon me in the daytime, when I am busy; it comes to me in my dreams; and although I try to bring myself to believe that things will work out right, I fail. I cannot put the uneasy feeling aside, and I intend to see to the defences of my château.”

In later days I realised that his words were prophetic; that the dark shadow of evil which had fallen across this country gentleman’s soul was cast there by something terribly tangible and real.

A few days after Lorin’s return I went home.

It was glorious weather while I travelled, and France

looked her best. The sunshine, the sounds of country life, the jubilation of the birds, the slow content of the cattle, the careless delight of the half-naked children who played about on the greensward in front of the dilapidated huts in which they lived, and the sound of women within singing to their babes—there was nothing in all this to make one think of evil—nothing in the way of warning that all was not well in France.

Paris was busy, gay, indeed, when I rode through the streets. Catholics whom I knew gave me their pleasant greetings. Some grasped me by the hand and said they were glad to see me home again. Others, when they said the same thing, added that it was delightful to think that there was to be no more war, and that men and women were content to forget their differences.

As for home, when I entered and was welcomed there by those who were so dear to me, I realised the joy of life almost to its full. Almost, but not absolutely; for Elizabeth was far away, and I was disquieted when I thought of the perils which beset those who adhered to the Reformation doctrines in the Netherlands.

I told my sister about her, and her sympathy encouraged me.

“Tell me about yourself, Louise,” I said, when we sat in the garden in the afternoon, with the birds in full song about us. She had received my confidences, but had said nothing about her own concerns.

“Well, brother,” she answered, dropping her embroidery into her lap, and folding her hands, “Odilon de Baze loves me—I know it, not merely from what he tells me, but from a hundred tokens. As for me, a sister does not often talk to her brother of her love, but why should

I *not* speak? Henri, I love him with my whole soul, and my greatest joy would be to have Odilon for my husband. But——”

“Why ‘but’?” I asked, for she had made a long pause.

“I am a Protestant, Henri.”

“And he is a Catholic,” I responded. “Should that be a hindrance?”

“It is an insuperable one,” she answered sadly. “It would be an unequal yoking together, and we should, I fear, often find ourselves at variance. Father would never give his consent. I spoke to him concerning it, and he replied emphatically that he would never say ‘Yes’ to our marriage so long as De Baze was a Catholic.”

I spoke to my father that night when the others had gone to bed. I told him of my love for Elizabeth Grisart, and he delighted my heart by declaring that he would welcome her as a daughter, for he had heard of what she had done in carrying the message to Coligny to beware of a treacherous peace.

“Louise and Odilon de Baze love each other, father,” I ventured presently.

“Yes, my son,” he gravely answered. “I know of no man I would have so gladly received as my daughter’s betrothed, but he is a Catholic, and for that reason I can never consent.”

“But think of Louise,” I exclaimed, laying my hand on my father’s, as it rested listlessly on the table.

“I do, my son. I never fail to do so. She is in my thought night and day—a darling girl whom I cannot love too well. But as for this proposed marriage with

De Baze, can two walk together through life if they be not agreed? Could there be any home happiness when husband and wife are opposed in that superlatively great question of religion? There is no difference of opinion so passionately expressed as that of religious belief, and I can only see misery for them if Louise and Odilon de Baze marry. Louise—dear heart!—thinks me cruel, perhaps.”

“She does not father,” I interrupted.

“Thank God for that, dear boy,” he exclaimed. “It pains me inexpressibly to forbid her marriage. Perhaps in God’s good time the obstacle may be removed. De Baze may conscientiously turn Protestant. Conscientiously, mind you, Henri,” my father added quickly. “Were he to throw aside his faith merely to gain Louise, I should scorn him, much as I hate Catholicism, and in such a case I would do my utmost to frustrate him. Should he ever become one of us he must come because he *must*, because he sees and feels that he must sever himself from what he believes is error and superstition. He shall not otherwise be my son.”

There was silence between us. What my father was thinking of I do not know, but my own thoughts were on Elizabeth. I wondered whether I should ever see her again; whether I should be able to speak to her of my love, and tell her that my father would gladly have her as his daughter.

“Henri,” said my father, breaking in upon my reverie, “since you seem sufficiently strong to undertake the journey, I want you to go to Leyden and transact business with Van Müller for me.”

My heart leaped within me. Surely, once in the

Netherlands, I could go farther, and when I had done my business in Leyden see Elizabeth?

"I will go gladly," I cried, rising to my feet in my eagerness.

My father smiled.

"I understand your readiness," he exclaimed. "You are thinking of Elizabeth Grisart?"

"I am," I answered candidly. "Father, I will do your business to the best of my ability, and then I will, with your consent, go forward to look for Elizabeth, and say to her what is in my heart to say."

"Go, and God be with you," was the response.

But who could have told of the manner of my search for Elizabeth, and of the circumstances under which we were to meet?

CHAPTER XI.

PRESENTIMENTS.

A BUSY week passed before the preparations for my journey were complete. So far as the business arrangements were concerned I might have started on the following day, but there were other matters which compelled delay.

On the Wednesday I was ready, and, having said "good-bye," I rode through the streets and out of the city. There were several commissions in my hand, since it was known to many of my father's friends that I was taking this somewhat daring journey, and letters and verbal messages were entrusted to me which not only meant many deviations from the straight road, but a considerable lengthening of my absence from home. The most important of them all was the conveyance of a letter from my father to Admiral Coligny, an errand I undertook with considerable trepidation.

Hody, the man-at-arms who had been with me when I first met M. Lorin, had become my body-servant when it was known that the Peace was signed and the Huguenot army was disbanded. I told him what my destination was, and although the journey was likely to be full of rough experiences he expressed his readiness to go with me.

"'Tis touch and go, I know, monsieur," said the man. "But surely we can take the risks, and with common care we shall come through safely."

I was relieved to find him ready to go with me, for he was in every way a fine fellow, and during the time I had known him I had grown to like him greatly. He was a capital soldier, never shrinking from danger, reliable, honest to a fault, intelligent, and full of resource, so that if ever we should be hard pressed I could depend on him, and on the soundness of his judgment.

"Look well after my son and I will see that you are well repaid," said my father to Hody, as we sat in our saddles at the door and were about to ride away.

"I'll do that, monsieur, without any such thought to spur me on to duty," was the man's hearty response.

"At all events you will have a mother's blessing," said my mother, trying to smile, although she failed in the attempt, and wept instead.

"That's well worth having, madame," said Hody quietly. "I had a mother myself once," he added huskily, "and I valued her blessing. She died, madame, at Vassy."

He said no more, and turned away, sending his horse forward. We understood, for many a mother had died at Vassy that day when the massacre of Huguenots took place under circumstances of atrocious malignity.

It was evening when Hody and I rode up to the château which Coligny had made his home, and when my name was taken to him he sent word to say that he would see me at once.

He was sitting in his chair when I entered his room, and I saw how much need he had of care, so pale of

face was he, and thin. Yet on his face was a look of wonderful relief—the look of a man who had shaken off great responsibilities, and was able to rest without having any doubt as to whether the cause of which he was the leader would suffer while he took his ease.

“Things have changed, M. Gaston, since you saw me in camp,” he exclaimed cheerily, holding out his hand to me.

When he had read my father’s letter, he talked to me of many things. He insisted on my staying at the château as his guest for the night, and it was late before we parted. While he held my hand, he said that he intended to place himself under great obligation to me.

“Your father tells me in his letter that if you can be of any service to me I am welcome to your aid, and that I shall doubtless find you willing for my sake, as well as for the sake of Huguenotism.”

“I am absolutely at your service, monsieur,” I exclaimed without hesitation, for Coligny was one whom I counted it indeed a privilege to serve. Apart from the consideration of religious patriotism I would have risked much for him, since he was such a man among men.

He looked at me, and I saw the pleasure in his face.

“I am charmed to hear you say so, M. Gaston. I want you to take a letter for me to the Prince of Orange; to see him personally, at any cost.”

I bowed. It was a commission that was fraught with danger, and those words, “at any cost,” were ominous.

“At any cost?” I repeated, with a flutter at my heart.

“At any cost, M. Gaston: death, if needs be. I want to impress this upon you, that in all probability the

salvation of France depends on the safe carriage of my message to the Prince's own hand."

I did not hesitate, although I knew that I was committed to infinite danger—death as likely to be the end as anything; but I should have counted myself unworthy had I done so. If for the sake of our great cause one was not prepared to risk everything, save honour, he must indeed be counted despicable, unfitted to take his place in a momentous struggle.

It is true that throughout the night I considered the risks I ran, and the numberless perils that were likely to be encountered when once I crossed the frontier; but when I rose and dressed without having lost myself in sleep for a moment in all those hours, I was resolute on doing to my utmost what impressed itself on me as my clear duty. I felt that when I saw Coligny, ere I started, I could say to him what I had read somewhere, but where I could not remember—

"Master, go on, and I will follow thee,
To thy last gasp, with truth and loyalty."

I said it when I saw him standing on the château steps, waiting to hand me the letter. He grasped my hand, and to my amazement bent low and kissed it.

"May I have many who will say and feel as much," he said, his eyes gleaming when he raised his head and looked me in the face.

"You seem anxious, monsieur," Hody ventured, when I had gone in silence for many a mile, in spite of the exhilarating morning and the beauties that were everywhere.

"I have reason, Hody," I answered.

"You have reason indeed, monsieur," was the man's remark, when I told him what Coligny had asked me to do. "None the less, monsieur," he said presently, "'tis duty, and we will do it. We will not shirk the risks."

"You mean to go through with it in my company?" I asked, noticing how the man had taken up the commission as though he had to share in it.

"Would you doubt it, monsieur?" was Hody's rejoinder. "Please God, I'll not leave you while I live, and until I see you once more safely under your father's roof. If for nothing else, I want your mother's promised blessing."

Instead of being depressed at the prospect of so much danger, the soldier gathered up his reins, which he had suffered to fall on his horse's neck, and quickening the pace, to which my own horse responded, he rode on, whistling gaily, calling attention to a score of things of interest, and seeming to take up the task before us as though care and danger had no place in it.

We were singularly fortunate in our journey while we were in France, for we met none of the marauding bands of peasantry. Now and again some disreputable fellows passed us on the way, in twos and threes, and looked askance at us, but two stalwart men, well-armed and mounted, were more than they had the temerity to challenge. There were instances where such had dared to stop wayfarers and demand an answer as to whether they were Catholic or Huguenot, and there was a rough levying of blackmail whatever answer was given, since robbery was the motive in every case and not zeal for a religious cause.

When we crossed the frontier, and were in the Netherlands, we saw on every hand that there was no exaggeration in the stories that had come through to Paris, and, indeed, were common property in France. We had heard that the gallows and the stake were in constant operation, and what we saw bore out every statement. Edict after edict had been issued against all who, living in the Netherlands, dared to embrace the Reformation doctrines. Death was the universal penalty, and it affected people of every rank and every condition.

I recall a letter which came one day to my father, and in it was this startling statement. It was "death to pray with a few friends in private; death to read a page of the Scriptures; death to discuss any article of the faith, not on the streets only, but in one's own house; death to mutilate an image; death to have in one's possession any of the writings of Luther, or Zwingli, or Ecolampadius; death to express doubt respecting the Sacraments of the Church, the authority of the Pope, or any similar dogma."

Wherever we went we saw the consequences of these and many a later edict which multiplied the horrors of a land where the Papacy carried out its scheme for the extermination of heretics.

Yet in former days the land was a happy one; and prosperous also. Many a man and woman whom we met on the country road, or to whom we talked when we asked for leave to sleep in their homes, spoke of days when the aspect of life in the Netherlands was very different. One especially with whom we lodged in Leyden, while I did the business my father desired

me to give attention to, whom Hody knew, and who, therefore, did not hesitate to entertain us, sat and spoke of days gone by. But first of all he went to the door to be assured that it was bolted against intruders. Even then he spoke in a low tone, not to be heard if eavesdroppers were near.

"The streets, as I remember them when but a tiny child," he said, "were busy and gay. Are they busy now? Shops displayed valuable wares, and booths were erected everywhere, and laden with luxuries on which the well-to-do readily spent their money. Mountebanks stood at different corners of the streets, and, not infrequently, ballad-singers walked among the crowds, bawling out songs to the people who were bent on holiday. But we never see, and never hear, anything of that nature now. What it is in Leyden so is it everywhere. The whole country is painfully excited about the increasing cruelties of the Inquisition."

I had seen it all for myself while Hody and I rode through the country. Trade was desperately bad. Things of beauty were not purchased, for had they been there was no telling when longing Spanish eyes might be followed by grasping Spanish hands, and what should have adorned the homes of the Netherlanders would be carried away to the houses of those who collected the taxes.

More than this, people were almost afraid to be seen speaking with each other, lest the person with whom they spoke should prove to be a secret heresy hunter. Foreigners were no safer than others, and fled from the country. The best workmen and their wealthy masters, realising the insecurity, quitted the Netherlands, and

carried their skill, their trade, and their money elsewhere. Many a street in once busy towns, where the heavy waggons used to roll by, laden with merchandise, was silent now. The grass grew in the roadways, so little were they used.

What I heard, and what I saw, made me shudder; and when I thought of my darling dwelling in a land like this, where every man, woman, and child was under the great national and comprehensive sentence of death to which the King of Spain had affixed his signature—a sentence which might be put into force any day, whenever the Governor or his subordinates cared to do so, in an awful and indiscriminate massacre—I turned hot, and faint, and sick at heart. For might not she be among those who were thus sent to their doom?

Many a time the impulse was to let business go, and finding her, beg her to return with me to France, to find a home in my father's house in Paris, or stay a while in M. Lorin's château, rather than stay in what so many in Europe were calling "the Spanish slaughter-house."

Elizabeth Grisart's home was near Antwerp. I looked to my business in Leyden, and having completed it satisfactorily, one evening I asked Hody whether he felt disposed to start for Antwerp that night.

"'Tis a risky business," he objected. "A few hours either way would not make so much difference, monsieur, whereas to us it might make all the difference to our own necks."

He must have seen the disappointment in my face, for he added instantly—

"If it be important in your estimation, monsieur, I

am ready to start now, should you say the word. The horses can be saddled in a quarter of an hour, and we can get out of Leyden before sunset."

"Hody," said I, for I thought it well to let the man know what was in my mind, "all that I have heard of the doings of the Inquisition in this dreadful country has roused in me an anxiety that is becoming intolerable. You may remember Mademoiselle Elizabeth Grisart?"

"Could I forget her?" exclaimed the man. "There are not many such women in the world as she. But what has she to do with our leaving Leyden and travelling through the night?"

"Everything. She left M. Lorin's house before we returned to Paris, and went to the Netherlands to be with her mother, who needed her. I have a presentiment—it has been growing on me during this week that we have been in Leyden—that she is in trouble, or at all events will need the aid of a couple of strong men like ourselves."

The man's eyes softened.

"I have seen, monsieur, that she was much to you," he said, and there was such gentleness in Hody's voice that I wondered. "Monsieur, do you know where to find her?"

"Yes."

"Then let us start at once. If you will see to what must be done towards getting your belongings together, I will have the horses here in a short time."

He did not wait for further words, and in less than half an hour we were in the saddle and riding through the grass-grown streets.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUINED CHÂTEAU.

WE travelled on in spite of the darkness, but being strangers, and not knowing the road, we often called at houses on the wayside to make inquiries, especially when the road divided and we knew not which of two, or even three, directions to take. Some whom we disturbed were cheerful enough, and ready to give information, but others, lacking the grace of courtesy, and having no care to be disturbed at so late an hour, were surly and curt, and would not take the trouble to be explicit in their directions.

More than once, because of this, we found ourselves lost among the numerous water-ways, having nothing to indicate the direction we had to take; while at other points we were going slowly in the darkness along a causeway with water, and consequent danger, on either side. At one time, when we knocked up a miller and brought him out of his bed, we found that we had missed the road, and must needs retrace our course for three or four miles, so that by the time midnight came our horses were jaded, and we were obliged to confess ourselves unable to proceed.

“What shall we do, Hody?” I asked, when we stood at the parting of the ways.

"Give up at all events for to-night, monsieur, and stable our horses if possible. 'Tis evident we shall not find ourselves repaid if we count on progress as payment."

I reluctantly acquiesced, and since the middle road, by reason of the ruts that were in it, seemed to indicate more traffic than the others, we travelled along it until we came to an inn. To our discontent it was tenantless. Throughout the Netherlands the deserted inn was a common thing, either through lack of custom by reason of decreasing trade, or because the landlords had fled from the impositions of the tax-collectors or from fear of the creatures of the Inquisition. We came to one, however, that was still kept open, and although the master of it yawned, and was, generally speaking, not too gracious, he showed us the stables, where we groomed our horses with our own hands while he put some supper on the table.

We found that the château where Elizabeth and her mother dwelt was ten miles distant when we drew up before an inn at noon on the following day, and only waiting for a meal, we pressed on, thinking to get to Uerf during the afternoon.

Once on the way in this last stage, I felt jubilant. There came no premonition of disappointment, and throughout the ride I had the thought that soon I should see Elizabeth, and before I went to rest that night would have told her of my love. I had no doubt concerning the answer, for Madame Lorin's story of the manner in which she said farewell while I lay sick and unconscious, was indication of her readiness to yield to my wooing. Hody guessed my secret—my love for her

—and he fell in with my mood. When I quickened my horse's pace his own was level with mine on the instant, and his own joviality vied with my gladness.

"Mademoiselle will be surprised to see you, monsieur," he observed, as we drew near to the village where the great house in which she dwelt was situated.

"Without a doubt, Hody, for she does not dream that I have come into the Netherlands."

Hody nodded his head. And presently—

"If you will not deem me impertinent, monsieur, I would suggest that you persuade her to return to France, since this is no land for any one to dwell in who values life."

"It is my intention," came my answer; and, without waiting to say more, I spurred my horse to be the sooner at her home.

On the way we rode past a house; almost palatial it must have been at one time, but now it was in ruins. There were signs everywhere that it had recently been in flames, and now it stood desolate and charred and blackened amid the scorched trees.

"Spaniards' work, monsieur," said Hody, turning in his saddle to look at it, when we brought our horses to a walking pace. But neither of us imagined that the ruined pile concerned us in any way. A feeling of genuine regret swept through my mind that any one should be so wantonly dispossessed of such a beautiful home; but when we left the place behind, my thoughts were centred on finding the home where Elizabeth was dwelling.

We passed house after house, but did not halt because they were all too unpretentious. Madame Grisart was

known to be a woman of wealth and station, and could not be supposed to live in any place so humble as these we passed.

At last we had walked our horses slowly through the village from end to end, and saw before us the open country, but nowhere was there any château where the Grisarts could be living. Nothing but cottages, huts, and farmsteads were there, so that presently I pulled up and turned my horse half-way round. In so doing I confronted Hody, and surprised a strange look on his face.

"We must have missed the house," I said.

"Let us inquire, monsieur," came Hody's quiet answer, and after his boisterous cheerfulness his manner impressed me. It brought to me a sense of anxiety. While I was wondering at the change in him, he called to one who had just entered the road through a gateway, and the man, hearing him, stood and waited for us to draw level with him.

"Can you tell me where Madame Grisart lives?" I asked.

The man looked at me, and seemed loath to answer. There was a grave look in his face, which I did not wonder at, since Netherlanders could scarcely be cheerful under the present conditions of their daily life.

"I can tell you where she lived once, messieurs," came the answer.

I felt hot, and a fear crept through my soul. Was I too late?

"What do you mean, man?" I cried, exasperated at his deliberate speech, while my whole soul was impatient. I wanted to know the full truth at once.

"I mean," said the Netherlander stolidly, "that Madame Grisart and her daughter have gone, and God only knows whither. They lived in the great house yonder, but a few days since a company of Spanish troopers rode through the village, halted there, and ere long the place was in flames. We thought, perhaps, that they came to make the ladies prisoners—to carry them to the Blood Council, and we watched to see them when they rode away."

"Were the ladies with them?" I cried, for the man's story was torturing me.

"No. The soldiers went away laden with spoil—jewels, so I judged, from what some of them carried. A brass-bound chest was on one horse's back, tied to it securely with ropes, and I concluded that it was Madame Grisart's money chest. There were other things—but no lady with them."

"They may have perished in the flames!" I exclaimed, horrified at the possibility.

The man gazed at me, as if to read into my sincerity. Probably he considered my eagerness mere pretence, with some sinister purpose behind it. Duplicity was the characteristic of foreigners who had dealings with the Netherlanders.

"Perhaps so, monsieur," he said presently. "But I think not. When the soldiers were gone the whole of the villagers turned out to see. We went through the place, and looked everywhere amid the smoking ruins for something that would tell us whether Madame Grisart and her daughter had been burnt, but we found nothing."

The man turned from gravity to sudden passion, like the sweeping of a lake's smooth surface into storm.

“These Spanish devils!” he cried, his hands clenched, and grief sweeping across his face; “they have no mercy! In the name of religion they are robbing everywhere, and are only happy when they are marking down ruin on whatsoever they touch. But, thank God,” he added softly, “I do not think they found those saintly women. We think some one gave them warning of the coming of the soldiers, and they got away.”

We learnt nothing, although we spent the remaining hours of the day in making inquiries. We put up our horses, and searched the ruins of the burnt château during the following days. We obtained ladders, and climbed to half destroyed rooms to see whether any were crouching there, dead, but able in their stillness to assure us of the cruel story. It was all in vain. Nothing living, and nothing dead, was found, so that we began to think with the man whom we had met that the members of the household had escaped before the soldiers rode up to the gate. It was a relief to think so, for there was the possibility that my darling was alive.

But where was she?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIELD-PREACHING.

IN spite of all our inquiries we found nothing in the way of any clue as to the whereabouts of the missing ones. I caused it to be known that I would give fifty crowns to any person who would take me to the place where Madame Grisart and Elizabeth might be hiding, but although the news was carried quickly nothing came of it. No one came to earn the money, for none brought any information.

“If any knew they would tell you, monsieur,” said Werf, the man we had greeted at the gate on the day of our arrival, and who had aided us in every possible manner. “The good God knows that the people here are poor enough,” he added, “for there is little to earn, and many mouths to feed, and food is scarce.”

For a whole week Hody and I scoured the country. There was not a road nor a lane, however unpromising, which we did not traverse, nor did we pass a house without halting to make inquiries. There were ruined windmills here and there, and we went through them; outhouses, deserted farmsteads; but it was all vain searching, and as the days went, and we rode back to the inn that we made our headquarters dejected and

worn and hungry, we lost more and more our hope. And the loss of hope is like the setting of the sun—it so soon leaves one in the absolute darkness of despair.

I wondered sometimes, in those weary, hopeless days, whether there was any efficacy in prayer. Many a night when the inn was silent, and I had tried in vain to sleep, I got out of my bed, and kneeling, prayed. It was always the one theme—that I might find Elizabeth. Better, I sometimes said in my pleading, better to find her dead, and know that she was at rest in the Eternal keeping, than fail to discover her whereabouts, and think of her for long and weary days and endless nights in the cruel grip of the Inquisition, the very mention of which brought terror.

Sometimes when I had prayed the darkness of my night of sorrow seemed to be changed into a pillar of fire. I rose from my knees, got into bed again, and slept, confident that God would make all right, sooner or later, and some day I should hold my darling in my arms. But at other times—Ah, me! there came on me the horror of a great blackness, and I crawled back into bed, shaken and hopeless. I had not long been lying there before I was conscious that I had wronged God by leaving my kneeling place in despair, and once more I knelt and asked that the horror of blackness might pass, and that trust might return to me again.

I know not what to say about myself and my attitude towards God when, one day, Hody and I came to the conclusion that further search was useless. I rode dejectedly, with my man at my side, subdued and chastened like myself. For he, too, so he told me,

had prayed very hard; and when I looked him in the face I believed him.

"And the answer has not come, Hody," I said in a quiet, hopeless tone.

"No, monsieur," came the dispirited response.

We rode that day for miles, and two less communicative men surely never travelled side by side than we, for scarcely a word passed between us. I was turning over in my mind what the good, simple-souled landlady of the inn had said to me.

"Monsieur, I remember a preacher at a field-preaching once saying that prayers have an ancestry, and that that ancestry is trouble, struggle with circumstances, and helplessness; that the sublimest strains which men have uttered have been towards God in moments of mental agony. Perhaps the absence of that dear lady, whom we all loved, is God's own doing, monsieur. He means to draw the best out of your own soul, so that you may more consciously have dealings with Him. Try and think, monsieur, that it is well."

When she shook my hand, at parting, she said, in a low but confident tone—

"M. Gaston, I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not. I must tell you more, monsieur. A conviction came to me in my prayer that, in your further journeyings, you will find the woman you are seeking."

I turned all this over in my mind while I rode along. Sometimes I grew hopeless, and was truly plunged into the depths; but recalling what the good woman of the inn had said—of that conviction which came to her in her prayer, that I should ultimately find the dear one I was seeking—I became exultant, and spurring my horse

rode on, I knew not where, but where God led, that I might find her.

Two days went by, and meanwhile, bearing Coligny's commission in mind, I made inquiry judiciously as to where the Prince of Orange might be found. Some professed not to know—perhaps they really did not; but sometimes I thought they could have told me had they pleased, but would not, lest by telling what they knew they might betray the Prince. It was wise to be cautious, for the Duke of Alva had placed a great price on his head, dead or alive, and it was common knowledge that assassins were searching for his Highness in order to win a great reward in rank as well as money.

Talking the matter over with Hody, whom in all things I found to be as true as steel, I came to the conclusion that it would be well to go to Antwerp and make inquiry there. That course we pursued without delay. My idea was that when once I had discharged my obligations to Coligny, and had seen the Prince, I would commence afresh my search for Elizabeth, no matter what danger I might incur; for love laughs at penalties and never estimates the risks.

Long after sunset we came to an inn, but having found it closed and forsaken we rode on to look for another. Our horses did not seem to be tired, but they were undoubtedly hungry, and we persuaded a miller to sell us some corn for them. He did it cheerfully, and provided us both with a substantial meal. Had he been able to do so he would have housed us, but he declared that it was impossible, and consequently, after an hour or two of rest, we mounted again and rode on.

After a time the moon rose, and we saw the way

clearly. But we saw what caused us some surprise ; for here and there, out of the houses on the road, and down lanes which led into it, came people, some cautiously, some timorously, as if they would turn back instead of going farther.

"Where are these people going?" said I to one who was walking by himself at the roadside.

He turned his face to me, and as the moonlight fell on it I recognised in this lonely wayfarer a well-to-do man whom I had met in Leyden.

"Who are you, friend, that you should put that question?" the man asked.

"Well, since I know you to be Martin Does, from Leyden, I may as well confess that I am Henri Gaston of Paris," I exclaimed.

The man's face brightened instantly, and he came across to me with an outstretched hand which I shook warmly.

"Since I know you for a Huguenot, M. Gaston," said Does, "I do not mind telling you what is afoot to-night. 'Tis a field-preaching, and Pastor Materin is to be the preacher. Will you join us?"

"I am on the way to Antwerp, and my business is pressing," I responded.

Martin Does laughed.

"A man will find it difficult to get into Antwerp before daydawn, however pressing his business, because the gates are closed at dusk; and since 'tis only five miles away, you could spare an hour or two and miss no business. Alva keeps the city gates well locked at night, and you could not scale the walls. Come, monsieur, and you will find yourself repaid tenfold, for of all the

field-preachers there is not one to compare with Pastor Materin."

I agreed, and went forward under Does' guidance. Holding on by my stirrup, with Hody on his other side, he kept pace with our horses and talked freely. I told him I desired to find the Prince, and bidding me bend low, so that he might whisper in my ear, he told me where his Highness was lodging in Antwerp.

There were now hundreds of people on the road. Men and women walked forward in one direction, some singly, speaking to no one, others in little groups of threes and fours. Most of them had small books in their hands, which I presumed were copies of the Scriptures, the possession of which would have been the warrant for death had an Inquisitor or a Spanish soldier found such a thing upon them. Some of the men carried lanterns, some had unlighted torches, and on all went, silently, and not a word was spoken to add to the sound of the ceaseless and inevitable tramp of feet.

"Are they not afraid, Does?" I asked in a low voice, when we came to a spot where every one turned sharply to the right and walked across the grass.

"They carry their lives in their hands," the answer came; "but they will not count the cost since they are going to meet with God."

As the people—some of whom carried babes—moved on, I noticed that many of the men had weapons in their possession. Swords were strapped on their thighs, pistols were stuck into their belts, and some openly carried an arquebus, or a pike, or a javelin.

"Do they mean to fight?" I asked, pointing to a group of men who hurried by, all of whom were fully

armed and apparently capable of coping with the soldiery.

"They mean to worship God, M. Gaston," said Does; "and, if need comes, they have the wherewithal for self-defence and for the guarding of these women. They see no virtue in going like lambs to the slaughter."

I looked down, and saw for the first time that Martin Does had a sword girded on his thigh and a brace of pistols in his belt.

"Have you ever fought at one of these field-preachings?" asked Hody, who, so far, had not spoken.

"Yes. Alva's soldiers leave us no alternative, and if we do not fight you can imagine how they would butcher the women and the babes, whom they must bring with them or stay at home and miss the worship."

When we came to the meeting-place the moon was flooding the land with light, and I saw that it was a secluded spot, well chosen to guard against surprise. I had heard of the field-preachings many a time, but I had never seen anything approaching what I saw that night. Leaving my horse with Hody, I went round with Does.

It was a veritable stronghold, for men, beforehand, when the field service was determined upon, had come to the spot to make preparations. Fallen trees were placed all round the great open space, making a great enclosure. Where there were no tree-trunks there were waggons. Impenetrable bushes were left untouched, since they made a natural barrier. In places where trees grew thickly, planks were nailed from tree to tree, or branches were lopped off and heaped between the trees, to stop the rush if Alva's horsemen came.

There were gaps in this great enclosure, through which the people poured in a ceaseless stream, and standing at the several entrances were men who had pedlars' packs at their feet. A small torch was fastened to the side of every pack, which was filled with books, and as they passed many halted to purchase one and then went on.

I wondered more and more. All round the enclosure stood armed men, three, four, and even five deep, according to the strength or weakness of the barricade, and each man's sword was loosened in its scabbard, and every gun was ready for instant use. The centre of all was occupied by women, and older men who were, perhaps, too feeble to fight, and so, as the moon shone on, I watched the faces.

They were pale, yet scarcely timorous, for they had come here in boldness to worship and to hear from the preacher's lips what light God had to break forth from His Word. Insensibly my eye ranged over the great sea of faces, many of the women holding babes at their breasts, and waiting expectantly, or hushing a wailing little one to silence. There must have been three or four thousand present—certainly not less, and probably many more.

One side of the enclosure was reserved for the preacher, who presently mounted on a waggon, and stood up, holding a Bible and a smaller book in his hands—one such as the pedlars had been selling at the entrance.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALVA'S TROOPERS.

HE was a tall, lean man, whose hollow cheeks gave one the impression not alone of ill-health, but of asceticism and over-tiredness. The face was deeply lined, and the thin hands trembled, perhaps from weakness, possibly from suppressed emotion. His head was covered with a silk skull-cap, and over his shoulders hung a Genevan cassock which made some amends for his bodily leanness.

There was an instant hush when he stood, turning the pages of the hymn-book. It contained sublime hymns collected or written by Clement Marot, and also the Psalms of David versified by the same talented French poet.

"Let us sing," said Pastor Materin.

His clear voice carried without exertion in that hush to the farthest corner of the great enclosure, and presently, when having read a line or two, he began to sing, thousands took up the strain, and sang with holy fervour, as if forgetful that the sounds would travel through the still night air, and perhaps tell Alva's troopers that a great field-meeting was in progress.

Happily, I remember thinking, when I saw some look

at the lines, and others, who knew the words, clasping the books to their bosoms, and singing as though ills had no weight with them just then, it was well that they did not know much, if anything, of the character of the man who wrote the hymns and put into form the psalms that thrilled them. Otherwise those godly ones, who dared so much for the sake of righteousness, might have refrained from using them, and thus one beautiful part of that wonderful open-air service, and an inspiring part, would have been absent. That would have been a real loss, for hymns of praise are an inestimable means of blessing.

Here, to me, is one of the strange things of human life—that a man who is godless or unworthy may write such beautiful words, so helpful to the devout. One who knew Clement Marot told me of his light and flippant character, of his graceful and fertile fancy, his lively wit and moral instability. Indeed, he was a man of the world; one who cared more for the company of the dissolute than the godly; yet he produced those hymns which went so far to aid the persecuted in their secret worship. His hymns became known because he became the fashion, since the tendency of the Court in France at the time had been towards Lutheran opinions. Some ladies of high rank, I had been made to understand, patronised Marot, and sang his poetical version of the Psalms until the fashion changed. But the hymns lived, and here were these devout ones using them in their night assembly.

But this is a digression, and I return to that gathering in the forest.

I need not follow the service through, although

every part of it impressed me—whether the Bible reading, with the preacher's running comment while he read, or the prayer which could not have tarried on its way to heaven. But it was the sermon which went most surely to my own soul. Pastor Materin had a wonderful attraction for me. His figure was commanding when he spoke, although he was lean as a lath. His voice was sweet, and sonorous, and flexible, and his action was that of a man who was moved to the depths of his soul by the theme he set forth for the encouragement of those who had risked so much in order to hear a message from God.

I recall a great deal of that sermon, and in it the preacher bade the people remember that God chastened those whom He dearly loved. "I suppose," he said, while all in the assembly hung upon his words, "I suppose that in the days to come this age in which we live will be called the Age of Persecution, and men and women will read of what we have done and suffered for righteousness' sake with wonder in their hearts. There will be wonder at the lack of mercy, at the wanton cruelty, at the absolute callousness on the part of the persecutors as to the sufferings of others. Yet will not the wonder be as great that so many endured the contradiction of sinners against themselves?"

"Dear ones, there are many things I have seen with my own eyes, and I have been amazed when I thought that once upon a time the Divine Lord preached mercy, tenderness, compassion, and a kindly consideration for the feelings of others: but so little of these things is in the hearts of those who are our persecutors, and yet call themselves after the dear Lord's name. This is the

Age of Weeping. Our harps hang silent on the willows, and we weep because the altar of God's mercy is reddened by the brand of the bigot and stained with the blood of the martyr."

Pastor Materin was speaking thus, holding every one spellbound, when there was a sudden alarm. The outposts came in, shouting as they came the terrible tidings that Alva's troopers were advancing.

The spell was broken. Faces that had a calm look on them, that even bore a smile, as if so much was forgotten of what was grievous, and joy came instead because the Lord had made this great enclosure His holy temple, and was actually with them, bestowing His benediction—those faces lost their smile, and instead of calm came terror. The revulsion startled them out of the contemplation of great and holy things. They were brought back swiftly to the cruel realities of life—to grim and awful possibilities—the rack, the dungeon, the stake, and death, that awful quaternion of the Inquisition.

The calm and quiet gave place to panic.

"Go out by the southern end," cried one who leaped into the waggon in which the preacher stood, and the man waved his hand towards the spot he named.

The women went hither in a body, striving to go quietly, but finding it impossible to put aside their fears. In a few brief moments they were a struggling, screaming, panting mass, intent on escaping from the troops, whose brutality, when let loose, was a byword.

The rush was directly on the spot where Hody and I were standing with our horses, and although I had thought to go to the place where the men were standing

resolutely with their arms to cover the retreat, it was impossible. We were borne away with the crowd. Even our horses, that fortunately did not show signs of fright at the noise, gave place before the pressure of the hurrying women, and we had no alternative but to go, like many another man, with that irresistible stream of startled humanity.

When we extricated ourselves, I suggested to Hody that we ought to go back and join the men who were holding back the troopers.

"It would be sheer madness, monsieur. Have you forgotten your trust from Coligny, and your need to see the Prince? Suppose you fell into Alva's hands, and the letter entered into his possession, it might meet the eyes of the Queen-Mother in Paris, and bring war again to France, and evil to our cause."

There was no doubt as to Hody's bravery, but he foresaw possibilities, and advised retreat.

We mounted our horses and rode on cautiously, lest we should trample the frightened people under the iron hoofs, and all the while there were sounds behind which told of desperate fighting.

Even thus, however, the brave men who remained to cover the retreat did not succeed in holding the soldiers back. Looking round, I saw a score and more whose steel armour gleamed in the moonlight, and they were galloping across the greensward among some women who were going towards the west. It was terrible to see them striking down the defenceless ones, and riding among them with their rearing and plunging horses.

I hesitated as to the course I should pursue.

"Hody, we ought to return and play our part."

"No, monsieur. Let us try and save these women who are here," my companion answered.

A solitary horseman came galloping after those who were flying past us, and Hody's soldier instinct caused him to spur his horse across the sward to intercept him. The Spaniard avoided him, for he had set his mind on doing harm to the greater number, and therefore must needs get among the women. I saw the trooper swerve, and make his horse plunge by, and then I spurred my own to meet him. The tired creature responded nobly, and thus we met. A brief fight ensued, and finding my passion rising at the man's lack of chivalry, I urged my horse full tilt against his, and a moment later the creature was galloping with an empty saddle, but dragging after him his master, one of whose feet had caught in the stirrup when I hurled him out of his seat.

Far behind came other troopers, but there was a claim on our immediate help. There were two women near us whose faces I could not see, because for a brief spell the moon had gone behind a cloud. It was clear that they were in trouble, for one went forward lamely. The other, slim and young and graceful, was holding her by the waist, while the older woman had thrown her arm about her companion's neck. If they went on thus the oncoming soldiers would overtake them.

There was no need to speak to Hody, who was at my side. Going to the women, we dropped out of our saddles, and without waiting to know what had happened I caught the lame one in my arms, I lifted her on my horse's back, and climbed up behind her. Hody did the same with the younger woman, and

then, setting our horses going, we rode on in the hope of escaping.

"What was the reason for your slow going?" I asked of the woman who was with me on my horse.

"A shot went through my ankle just now," she answered faintly.

"Take us to your home," I cried; "point the way. How far is it?"

"A mile or more. Bear to the left."

She said no more, but gasped with pain.

Turning to the left we travelled as fast as we dared under the circumstances, Hody coming on behind so closely that our horses were almost touching.

A wild cry made me look round, and in the rear I saw some of Alva's horsemen, five in all, coming on at a gallop. At the pace they were making they would soon overtake us, and death would have been inevitable had we failed to escape them.

"To the morass!" exclaimed the woman who was riding with me.

"'Tis too dangerous," I protested.

"No. We know the way through."

In a few moments we were at the edge, but my courage failed me, and Hody likewise. We were aware that a false turn to left or right would involve us in a horrible death, and we hesitated. Yet behind us were the soldiers who would have no mercy, and not many moments divided us.

Suddenly the young woman on Hody's horse slipped from the saddle, and going to my rein, led my horse into the place I feared to enter. Hither and thither she wended her way, going with surprising swiftness,

looking always ahead. Hody was following closely on that devious path she took into the heart of the morass.

To our consternation the Spaniards, whom we hoped to evade, began to follow boldly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MORASS.

THERE was no time for any halt, and none for speech, and scarcely any for consideration, for it was now a matter of life and death with each one of us.

Seeing that the soldiers were risking the passage across the great morass, I dropped out of the saddle, and drew back to join Hody, while the younger woman went forward, leading the horse on which the other sat, not only with the utmost confidence, but with consummate skill, along the devious way. More than once I had reason to know that our danger was as great from the swamp as from the men who were coming after us, but, as I thought, a hundred times better was it to be swallowed up here than fall into the hands of such relentless ones as those who were the minions of the Duke of Alva.

“What if they overtake us?” I asked of Hody, who had but just recovered his footing after having slid into the waters and mire.

“Fight them, monsieur, and hold them back while the ladies get away,” came the resolute answer.

There was no need to do this. Even while Hody was speaking, we saw one of the pursuers' horses take a false

step, and he and his rider plunged headlong into the marsh and began to sink. The horse struggled desperately, knowing full well that it was for his life, and in his frightened plungings he shook the startled rider from his seat, and sought to regain the path. Again and again the gallant creature got his forefeet on more solid ground, but as often he slid back, and had to commence anew a hopeless task. The man himself, having lost his place in the saddle, was in a more precarious state than his charger. The waters covered his head again and again, and not until the others had dismounted and joined hands, so that one of them might grip his hair when he seemed to be sinking once for all, did they succeed in dragging him from the horrible place. He lay like a dead man on the path, helpless and exhausted, after such a fight with death.

The soldiers next turned their attention to the horse, for he was in need of a helping hand, and after a time he stood, worn out and trembling, and with his head hanging dejectedly, on the treacherous but more solid ground.

We had halted, spellbound, to watch the issue of the struggle. Even our personal peril did not render us callous, and there was a sense of relief when we realised that the morass had been cheated of its victims. There was yet greater satisfaction when we saw that the soldiers prepared to return, not daring to venture farther into the marsh. From them, at least, we thought we were safe, and we prepared to go forward and secure our escape.

We did not, however, count on the vindictive spirit of our pursuers. Baulked in their endeavour, enraged to think that we had gone beyond their reach, since they

dared not follow, they stood a few moments gazing across the marsh at us. Then they went to their saddles, and taking from them their muskets, they deliberately levelled them at us, and at a word from one of their number fired. The shots whistled past us, but happily none in our little group received any hurt.

"It is sheer devilry," shouted Hody, and he levelled his own pistol and fired back in return. The nearest man cried out in pain, and shook the hand which held his musket while he was watching to see if any of us had been hit. The weapon tumbled to the ground and slipped into the morass.

"One danger the less," muttered my man. "Let us go forward lest some of us should be hit. On, mademoiselle."

The younger woman went forward without a word, turning now to the right, then to the left, along a winding way, to which she stooped at times to see more clearly where she could go with safety.

I judged her to be the younger more by her figure and her activity than from anything else, for as yet I had neither seen her face nor heard her voice, save in an occasional ejaculation. The faces of both were muffled, as if they had gone to the field-preaching with a wish to escape recognition, and as we moved forward in the dim light, I found myself wondering who she was, and what she was like.

It was no time for the satisfaction of my curiosity, for life at that moment was in the balance. We had escaped the soldiers, but we had to be alert lest the hungry morass should engulf us. Once we nearly came on disaster. The moon was obscured, and consequently

it was difficult to see. The woman went more slowly, setting her feet down with growing caution, even sliding one foot on the soil to discover whether it would bear her before she raised the other. I had gone on to her horse's head, and was walking on the other side, following her example, and then, as I thought, the ground grew firmer.

Suddenly her feet slid from under her, and she was gone! When I swung round at her cry of alarm she was up to her waist in the slush of the marsh. In an instant I was on the horse's other side, seeking to reach her; but finding that whether standing or stooping I could do nothing, I flung myself full length on the path, the horse bending down and looking at me, sniffing my body curiously. From where I lay I threw out my hand and caught her wrist. Then I drew her in, nearer and nearer, although the morass seemed to be hungrily gripping her, as if it would suck her down and keep her there forever. It was horrible to think that I should lose her after all. Strength and resolution, however, conquered, and before long I had drawn her out.

She lay helpless for a moment, her saturated, mud-clogged dress clinging to her, and preventing her free movement. But she was safe! When I saw that this was so, I rose cautiously, lifted her to her feet, and throwing my arm around her waist held her while she recovered; for she was swaying, and I thought she would have fallen.

"Thank God!" she murmured. "And thank you, also, monsieur," she added. "Mother, I am safe," she cried, throwing back the hood that had hitherto covered her head and hid her face completely. It was as if she

wanted her mother to see that she was there in all reality.

At that moment the moon came from behind a great bank of cloud, and rode on through the heavens, sending down her clear and silver light almost as if it had been day. And then I gasped in astonishment.

"Elizabeth!" I cried, regardless of everything but this, that she whom I held in my arms was the woman whom I loved beyond all words, whom I had been seeking for days, for whose safety I had prayed, and to meet whom I had hoped and longed.

She turned and gazed at me, but my face was somewhat in the shade.

"Who are you?" she faltered, as if, although she could see but little, she had a conviction borne in upon her. It may have been my voice; or was it a woman's intuition?

"Is it Henri Gaston?" she asked a moment later, almost timidly, as if afraid of a negative answer.

"It is, my darling! my best beloved!"

I threw my arms about her and kissed her—her face, her lips, her forehead—again and again. Regardless of the others she slipped her soft arms about my neck and kissed me in return, murmuring between her kisses her love and thankfulness.

"Oh, Henri, my love! my darling! Thank God for His kindness in sending you! Henri, kiss me again, on my lips. Hold me close to your bosom so that I may know that it is the man I have prayed for, and loved, and longed for! Ah, my dear Lord! it is mercy and love that bring him here to me!"

The others must have watched in wonder when, at

last, we ceased alike to kiss or speak, but simply stood there, with the great morass on every hand, and thought of our joy.

"Mother," said Elizabeth presently, lifting her head from my shoulder, where she had been resting it in sweet contentment, "this is he of whom I have often told you. Henri Gaston, the man I love. Oh, mother, I thank God for bringing him to me! Mother, let me bring him to you, that you may see him."

She drew my lips down to hers, and kissed me again; then, taking my hand, she led me to her mother, and placed me where the moon could fall on my face.

"Mother, look at him!" cried Elizabeth joyously, forgetful of everything but this delight of my coming. "Look at his dear face! He is the man I thank God for, who, it is my joy to know, returns my love. He has not said so, but I know he has come in search of me. Bend down, mother, and kiss him. Tell him how I have longed for him, and prayed for him!"

"My darling," I faltered, "Hody and I have been searching for you everywhere."

"It is true, mademoiselle," cried Hody, who had been watching intently this unwonted scene in such an unwonted place; for surely lovers never met in a fashion like to this. "High and low my dear master has gone, spending sleepless nights, and always careless of weariness. Well, the good God in whom we trusted heard our prayers after all."

It was a marvellous thing—a strange, weird place to tell of one's love; but it was as God willed. When hope had almost gone, we met—here, in the midst of the treacherous morass.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOUSE BY THE MORASS.

AN hour later we were at the end of our journey, lodged in a house to which Elizabeth, her mother, and their servants had fled when word came that the Spanish soldiers were on the way to search the château.

What the motive was which prompted that wanton and disastrous visitation we never knew, but if one might judge from what happened so frequently in other cases, it was to compel Madame Grisart to make a ruinous contribution to Alva's treasury, and if the officer in charge chose to do so, to hand the mother and her daughter over to the Inquisition, since they were suspected of heresy. It was the old story. We had heard it everywhere, and had seen again and again that there was no exaggeration in the reports so frequently passing as to the intolerable weight of the Spanish yoke.

The house in which Elizabeth and her mother lived was unpretentious in every way. No one who rode by would have suspected that those who lived there now were once so wealthy as to excite the cupidity of the grasping Governor of the Low Countries. Had it not been for a timely warning brought to them they would

at best have escaped only with their lives; but that stolid old Dutchman whom we met in the village, who had dropped no hint as to the service he had rendered, had brought information which gave them two hours' start, and saddling their horses for them, he had sent the women away into the dark night, none knew whither. Werf spoke truly when he said that he was ignorant as to their whereabouts, for they did not know themselves what they would do when they rode forth. The only idea the two ladies had was to put as many miles between themselves and the Spaniards as they possibly could before daydawn. Some of the servants went with them, but others travelled across the country to their own homes.

Happily they had not gone penniless. They had to leave their money-chest behind, but they took as much as they could carry in strong leather bags, and hung them on the saddles. They also took the most valuable of their jewels, but little more; for Werf came into the house, and setting ceremony aside, almost forced them to go away. I have smiled many a time since, to think how well he kept the secret when we were with him, lest after all we should be nothing more than spies.

Throughout the long night they travelled, wondering where they should go. When they had ridden some distance, they conferred together as they rode, but could come to no decision, until one of the serving-women came alongside and suggested the home where her mother dwelt.

The house she named was empty, but it was made ready in a few days, and then Elizabeth and her mother went to it, and settled down to a life of quiet

and seclusion. It was their one hope to live thus, unobserved, until they could arrange to leave the country and go elsewhere—perhaps to England, as so many Netherlanders had already done.

Their position, in spite of the isolation of their home, was a perilous one; for since Alva's soldiers had been on their track, and had found their château deserted, there was no further safety to be hoped for. There was always the danger of some unfortunate contretemps, some chance meeting with a Spaniard who knew them, to be followed by a summons to appear at the Council of Blood, or by a visit from the dreaded Familiars of the Inquisition. In the first case liberty might be purchased by an absolute surrender of all that they possessed, down to the last crown; but if the Inquisition made its claim, neither money nor entreaty would avail. The penalty in that event was always torture and death.

This was the position when Hody and I met them, and aided them in their endeavour to reach home after the breaking up of the field-preaching.

In spite of peril we were happy in those days of reunion. Hody was content to ride about the country, and now and again he brought us word that it was unsafe to venture on the road to Antwerp. The Spanish Butchers—as Alva's troopers were called—were out. The field-preaching had whetted their swords, had awakened their lust for heretic blood, and, what was more, on two occasions he had seen the Familiars engaged on their cruel mission.

The house stood so far away from the line of traffic, and was so well hidden in the forest, that a score of troopers might have passed within a hundred

yards and not have known that a house was near. At night every light was shaded, and the shutters closed, so that wayfarers would not suspect that a woman and her daughter, much wanted by the Spanish authorities, were close at hand.

It was not an ideal place for any one who was delicate to dwell in, for on one side of the bit of land on which the house was built was the morass, and on the front and the other sides was the forest. When I watched Madame Grisart, who suffered greatly because of her wounded foot, which was slow in healing, I thought that it would be well to get her away before the mists that rose around them at night undermined her health.

Once, when I began to grow uncomfortable concerning the delay in seeing the Prince, Hody and I started for Antwerp, promising to come back the same night if possible, but we deemed it prudent to return before we had ridden any distance. We rode to a bit of rising ground—a mere hillock which commanded a view of the flat ground for a long distance. A mile away was the road, cutting straight across the meadows, and on it were wayfarers and traders—some on foot, others on horses or in litters. But every one was stopped by some soldiers whose arms and armour gleamed in the sun, and looked formidable even when so far distant. Once a couple of horsemen who were intercepted, swung round and galloped back, but the soldiers followed. There were puffs of smoke, presently the sound of shots, and the two horses fell dead on the road. The men were secured and carried away, probably to the Blood Council, as Hody suggested grimly.

“It is not safe to go farther just now, monsieur,” he

said presently, for, so far as we knew, there was no way into Antwerp other than that on which Alva's troopers were moving.

Two more days passed by, and still my mission was unfulfilled, and I had the fear that the Prince might leave the city before I could see him. The letter which Coligny had given me, and which I carried hidden away in the folds of leather in my boot, while it was a standing menace to my safety, seemed sometimes to burn my foot, as if to remind me that my duty called for more daring effort.

We made the attempt in consequence one night, and got as far as the road, but we had not gone many yards before we heard the sound of horses and the jingling of military harness, as well as the heavy roll of gun-carriages. There was only time to drop back out of sight before the moon sailed from behind the clouds, and we saw, far on towards Antwerp, a great body of troops; first of all a score of men or thereabouts, so that if we had gone forward rashly we should have encountered them and received their challenge. In their wake were other horsemen—hundreds of them, perhaps thousands—an army, with its guns and baggage.

It was only possible to return to Elizabeth's home again, with our mission unfulfilled.

"I will take you across the morass," said my dear one on the following morning, for, like me, she realised the danger of delay.

Her suggestion gave me the opportunity of putting a question I had forgotten to ask.

"How is it that you know the morass so well?"

She looked at me and smiled.

"I have always felt, my dear, that there would be need perhaps for a sudden escape, and knowing that the Familiars or the soldiers would come to grief if they ventured into the morass, I have gone to it again and again, testing its winding paths, and discovering the reliable places. That was why I knew how to cross it the other night, although I had never taken the risks by moonlight. Then, however, was a time when risks had to be taken, unless we submitted to capture."

When Hody and I were ready for one more venture, she led the way. At the edge of the swamp she halted.

"Henri," said my darling, "look along the path, and tell me what you see."

"Nothing," I answered; "nothing more than an apparently winding path at intervals, which runs into the heart of this great marsh."

"Nothing but that?" she asked smilingly.

"Nothing."

"And yet I have always deemed you observant," said Elizabeth half reproachfully.

"But I observe nothing here to make one part of the morass look different from another," was my retort.

"Then am I greatly relieved, Henri. Look at that."

She bent down and pointed to a twig stuck into the soft ground. Rising, she went a few feet farther, and pointed to another, stood for a moment, turned carefully and slightly to the right, walked forward, and pointed to a third.

"What do you make of those, Henri?" she asked.

I understood. She had gone cautiously, foot by foot, sometimes by inches, and marked where there was safe footing, and thus she had marked the way. It was so

unapparent to one who merely saw the twigs, that a thousand people might have failed to suspect the wayside marks, which indicated where safety lay. Here and there I saw the zigzag path, and traced it from where we stood. She told us presently always to keep on the south side of the twigs, horse and man, and we should cross safely, coming out at the spot where we had entered when we were chased by the troopers after the breaking up of the assembly in the forest.

She led the way, halting now and again to show us where the danger was greater; but there the twigs were numerous, and now that we were looking for them in broad daylight it was scarcely possible to make a mistake. In this manner we reached the other side and stood on solid ground.

A grim sight met our gaze. Here and there lay the unburied dead—the worshippers who had been shot down and left to rot where they fell. Alva's men had never considered the right of those whom they butchered as heretics to decent burial, and callous after the onslaught, as well as when they came in the fury of their unreasoning hate to break up the field-preaching, they left the wounded to die, and rode away, daring the friends of the dead to come, even by stealth, to carry them to a grave.

"Good-bye," said Elizabeth, putting her soft hands about my neck. "The Lord watch between thee and me when thou art absent, my beloved."

That was all. But her soft kisses, and the look in her loving eyes, were never to be forgotten. She stood just within the morass, to which I insisted she should go before we rode away, and again and again when I halted and looked back she was there, waving her kerchief, and

sometimes throwing me a kiss across the increasing interval. She was still standing where I had left her when we turned aside and entered the forest, and presently we saw her no more.

Had I known how I should next meet her, and where, I am afraid love would have been stronger than duty in its appeal to my inmost being. Even loyalty to one's word, and loyalty to a cause however sacred, when measured against the constraining power of love, while peril besets the loved one, tends to weakening. I have wondered many a time since, what I should have done had I been able to look into the future, and see what threatened my darling. Could I have left her to seek for the Prince of Orange, to give him that pressing message from Coligny? Of the many problems in life this is a difficult one to solve: Which has the stronger claim upon a man? The safety of his loved one, or the discharge of a promise, the carrying out of which may mean safety to the cause a man espouses?

It is well for us and those whom we are called upon to serve, that God drops the curtain between us and the coming days.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRINCE IN ANTWERP.

THE road through the forest was little more than a sheep-walk, and since it lay far to the south of the highway which Hody and I had hitherto found impracticable, we did not meet a single soldier on the journey. Not even when we left the forest behind us, and came into the open country, was there anything to suggest danger.

Finding that by this devious course many hours had been spent, and the day was promising to close in upon us ere we reached the gates of Antwerp, we spurred our horses, and got within the city just in time. Before we had ridden any distance along the street, we not only heard the clang of the gates behind us, but the call of the officer of the guard for the watch to come out for night duty.

"Just in time," muttered Hody, who, placing his hand on his horse's flank, turned round to gaze at the men trooping out of the guard-house to take their places. "Well, 'tis one stage of the journey done. Next comes the question, monsieur, 'Where is the Prince?'"

"Did I not tell you that I knew?"

"You told me nothing, monsieur," said Hody bluntly,

and I half suspected a grievance because I had kept something back from my comrade when we were both so evenly faced with danger.

"'Twas quite an oversight," I hastened to say. "Martin Does whispered the knowledge to me when we were on the way to the field-preaching, and much has happened since then."

"That's true, monsieur," said Hody, whose face brightened as soon as he perceived that I had not wilfully kept him in ignorance. Even then he did not ask where the Prince was to be found, but shook his horse's rein and rode on at my side.

"Does said that he was lodging at the house of Frau Perronet, down by the quay, next to the armoury," I whispered, bending towards my man, who looked at me in amazement.

"There? Next-door to the place where they are whom, of all men in the world, he would wish to avoid?"

"The nearer to them the more likely to escape suspicion," I rejoined. "Martin Does was of that opinion."

"True, monsieur. But 'tis daring, to my mind, up to the point of foolhardiness, begging the Prince's pardon. But there! he knows best," he added, almost grumblingly. "Do you know the way?"

"No, I must inquire."

"There is no need," was the somewhat testy exclamation. "I know Antwerp well, monsieur, and the tighter we keep our lips in such a place the better."

Not another word escaped him for the remainder of our ride. We went down by-streets, avoiding the main

thoroughfares, and coming to an inn we left our horses there, and secured our beds.

I confess that I did not like venturing so near to the armoury, where the Spanish soldiers might be present in force, but putting bold faces on the matter, and by strong endeavour looking a great deal more easy in our minds than we felt, we drew near to the house of Frau Perronet. Hody was not only a man of resource, as I had long before discovered, but he knew Antwerp better than he had given me to understand. Years before, when but a boy, so I discovered later, he had spent a year in the great city, and had prowled about to such purpose that almost without hesitation he took short-cuts, and knew of narrow lanes, and even of yards, through which one might pass and escape the watchmen, who were likely to be more inquisitive than would be pleasant.

Had we been challenged I should have been able to plead business with some of the Antwerpian merchants, and I could have mentioned my father's name freely, and shown my credentials. Inquiry, if it were made, would have resulted in the answer that he was wont to trade largely in goods which found their way into such a great commercial centre. Yet caution was the safer plan, and Hody, serving as guide, adopted it from first to last.

After traversing a veritable labyrinth of narrow lanes, we came to a great thoroughfare, approaching by a narrow passage which opened into it under the shadow of an archway which spanned the street. Standing in the darkness, my man looked up and down. Frau Perronet's house was close by, and the doorstep was actually standing so near, and was so much in the shadow, that

we were able to pass to it without being seen by the watchman, who was standing in the middle of the road not fifty yards distant.

"Stay where you are, monsieur," said my man, giving me a gentle push back into the passage. "I will go up to the door and see what I can get to know. Then I will return and tell you."

"Nothing of the sort, Hody," I expostulated. "Why should you take all the risks, while I go free and take none?"

"Well, sir, you have friends," he answered significantly; and then regretfully, "I have not one in all the world, unless I may call my master one."

I grasped his hand in the darkness, for I was moved deeply by the tone in the faithful fellow's voice. He gripped mine tightly, and then, dropping it, turned to go away. When I saw how he persisted I made no further objection. In a brief space he knocked at the door, and after a slight delay some one came. There was a little altercation in whispers, and presently Hody returned to me.

"Come, monsieur," he whispered.

Without losing a moment by asking questions I went with him to the door, which was partly closed, but when we reached the doorstep, to my surprise it opened silently. I wondered how, in such a brief space of time, Hody—a stranger and a foreigner—had contrived to secure an entrance to a house where the Prince was hiding. It was so reasonable to imagine that the enemies of Orange, suspecting that he was lodging under Frau Perronet's roof, would seek to assure themselves of the fact by subterfuge, and Hody might easily have

been, for aught that those in the house should know, an emissary of Alva, who was straining every nerve to encompass the capture of the leader of the Netherlanders. I found my answer the instant I stepped through the doorway and stood in the passage.

"Frau Perronet, this is my young master; and, by the way, I have not told him that you and I are old friends. Have no fear concerning him. He must see the Prince without delay."

"If the Prince is willing, he shall do so, François Hody," came the buxom woman's answer. "But I will first get knowledge of his Highness's wish in the matter. Come this way, M. Gaston."

She took us down the passage to a comfortably furnished room, and left us standing there. A flickering candle on the table showed us that we were in a typical Dutch home, spotlessly clean, with nothing to suggest affluence, and certainly not a place where any would expect to meet with one of the most notable men of Europe. There was this, however, to be considered—that the Prince of Orange had entered Antwerp by stealth, and was too greatly menaced to do other than lodge in the most unsuspected place.

We did not speak, but stood in silence with our faces to the door, waiting to know what Frau Perronet would have to say to us on her return. Would the Prince see me? Evidently Hody had told her of my errand, for she had left the room without asking me a question. She was not gone long, and when she stood in the doorway she beckoned to me without uttering one word.

I crossed the room at once, and when I stood by her

in the passage she remarked that Van der Wehr would see me.

“Van der Wehr!” I exclaimed in a bewildered tone. “I want the Prince of Orange; not Van der Wehr.”

Frau Perronet smiled at my protestation.

“That is all right, M. Gaston. Van der Wehr is the Prince’s name to-day, and will be so long as he dares not come out in his true character in Antwerp, or until there is some necessity for changing it.”

When I entered a room a little lower down the passage, Frau Perronet announced me, and stepping forward I saw some one standing at the table, waiting to receive me.

But could that be the Prince who had won European fame, and while acknowledged on all hands to be the first statesman of his age, was also one of the most capable of living soldiers? Here was one dressed as an artisan, in somewhat shabby clothing, with none of those things in the matter of apparel or equipment which distinguish the man of rank—no sword, no lace, and the like, but a simple workman who appeared to be taking his ease after a heavy day’s toil in the factory.

None the less it was the Prince of Orange, and this was his disguise. He was not old—not even middle-aged—for at most he was barely thirty-nine years of age; yet his face gave one the impression that he was well advanced in life. The furrows on his brow, the lines in his face, the stoop at the shoulders, the grey hair, all bore testimony to the care that had aged him before his time.

“You come from Admiral Coligny, M. Gaston?” he asked, and having scrutinised me keenly he held out his

hand. I suppose the swift examination assured him, and as he was reputed to be an expert reader of character he judged me to be what Hody had told Frau Perronet I was.

"Yes, your Highness," was my answer to his question; and without waiting to be asked my business, I told him at once that I had come from the leader of the Huguenots with a letter which was esteemed of consequence.

"Thank you," was the quiet response, and he stood expectant, waiting for the document to be put into his hands.

"You must permit me to sit, your Highness," I exclaimed. "The letter was important, and I had to carry it in a secure place."

Sitting on a chair near by, I drew off one of my riding-boots, and ripping open the leather on the inside, brought forth a little parcel, necessarily somewhat crumpled, but otherwise readable.

There was a smile on the Prince's face while he watched the proceedings, but he made no remark when he took the letter from my hands. A great load was lifted off my mind when I parted with it, and saw him break the seal which bore the impression of Coligny's signet. He read it by the candlelight, while he stood slightly bending forward to see what was written on the crumpled paper. Then he sat, and leaning over the letter, with his elbows on the table and his head resting in his hands, read it through again more deliberately. After a while he rose to his feet, and walked to and fro with somewhat agitated steps, now clasping his hands, then restlessly changing his attitude, and standing still

with folded arms. There seemed to be no solution to the difficult question that was exercising his mind, and presently he sat at the table once more, and while his hands lay on it, folded together, became lost in deep thought.

I felt that the letter so absorbed him that he forgot my presence altogether. The minutes went by slowly, and he did not move. He might have been nothing but an inanimate lump of flesh but for an occasional deep breath, but at last he aroused from what seemed stupor, but was in reality the most intense mental activity. Turning towards me a grave but kindly face, he spoke.

"M. Gaston, I must see the Burgomaster, and it would be well that he should see you. Will you accompany me?"

"Does your Highness venture into the streets at so late an hour?" I asked in some surprise.

He smiled.

"It is the only time when I dare to do so. It is true that I am in disguise—and what it is you see for yourself," he said, with a gesture as if calling attention to his condition and general shabbiness. "I am afraid men would suspect me if they saw me traversing the streets in the broad daylight. It is my misfortune not to be able to serve my countrymen openly; that I have to do so much by skulking. Still, why should I worry on that score if in the end I serve them to some good purpose?"

We stood and talked a little while, the Prince asking questions freely as to the condition of my religious compatriots in France.

"And does Coligny trust that subtle, double-faced Queen-Mother, Catherine de Medici?" he said presently.

My answer came readily: "I am afraid he does, your Highness."

"Afraid? Then you have no faith in her promises?"

He appeared to catch eagerly at what I said, as if anxious to find that he was not alone in his ill opinion of that subtle-minded woman who ruled France, and seemed to set the King at nought. He was asking me whether I had any faith in that woman.

"None whatever," was my response; "nor would I trust her whether she smiled or frowned."

"Nor would I, monsieur," cried the Prince, halting in his restless walk up and down the room. "She has ever seemed to me a woman who plays on the more disgraceful passions of men, and I believe she would readily stoop to take up the assassin's dagger and use it remorselessly if she found that it would serve her purpose."

"That is a hard thing to say, your Highness," I ventured, almost protestingly; yet I was in full accord with what he said of the woman who ruled the destinies of France.

"A hard thing?" exclaimed the Prince, looking at me keenly. "Surely not! She is a clever woman, but she is everything, almost, that is bad: crafty, subtle, cat-like, a woman whose death would benefit the nation."

"My father has said something similar, your Highness," I remarked when he paused. "He believes that she and her son have some disgraceful scheme on hand

and that some day we shall rue our confidence—I had almost said our supineness.”

“God forbid!” he exclaimed fervently. “I would fain hope that France has nearly come to the end of her troubles.’

CHAPTER XVIII.

RED-ROD AND TITELMANN.

IT was growing late when we left the house in order to call upon the Burgomaster of Antwerp, and even then, when the streets were deserted, we did not venture out by the door through which Hody and I had entered.

The Prince led the way to the kitchen, where Hody was in comfortable converse with Frau Perronet. The table was covered with the remains of a meal, and my body-servant, having tested to the full the quality of the contents of the housewife's larder, was enjoying himself immensely, evidently forgetful of possible dangers in such a Spanish-ridden city as Antwerp. He sprang to his feet when we entered, and, without wasting words, I told him where I was going.

Then I go also, monsieur," exclaimed my trusty man, buckling on his sword.

I looked at the Prince inquiringly, and Hody saw the look and spoke at once.

"Pardon me, your Highness, for saying that where my master goes I go. I do not intend to allow him to pass out of my sight, and especially in a God-forsaken country like this."

It was spoken sturdily, and the Prince, far from resenting what was said, smiled.

"It is well, M. Gaston, when a gentleman has such a loyal retainer. By all means go with us," he added, turning to Hody.

While the Prince was speaking he had unbuttoned his doublet, and slipped Coligny's letter in his bosom. Then I saw that he wore a fine coat of chain-mail, and understood why he did so. I recalled that more than once the assassin had struck at him, and this same coat of mail had been his salvation. Alva had put a great price on the head of Orange, and had promised not only money, but rank to any man, no matter whom, whose knife or pistol should lay his Highness low. He thought to bring about the submission of the Netherlands if he could deprive them of their brilliant leader, and was willing to pay a great price in consequence.

The city was in total darkness, for the moon had not yet risen, and when we crossed the little yard at the back of the house, and passed through a doorway into a long passage, we could scarcely see our hands before our faces. There was nothing to guide the wayfarer but an oil-lamp hung out here and there, but even these were deemed unnecessary, since none were supposed to be traversing the streets after eight or nine o'clock at night.

"Where are you going, Prince?" asked Hody in a whisper. "I may tell of some short and safe way since I know Antwerp well."

"To the Burgomaster's house," came the answer.

"Then allow me to serve as guide."

Hody seemed to have recalled the prowlings of his

boyhood, for he went forward with confidence, pursuing his way amid the labyrinth of passages and streets with an ease and knowledge which surprised us both. He avoided the main streets wherever possible, since, as he remarked once, the Spaniards were very fond of being in them after dark, and the night-hawks of the Inquisition were often on the search for prey.

Even thus, however, it was necessary to take the risks, and after a time we came to the Place de Meir. We had just emerged from a narrow passage, and had gone a few yards down the splendid thoroughfare, when we halted in no small alarm, for we heard the sounds of an approaching company of horsemen. We thought to hurry back to the passage we had just quitted, but were stopped ere we had gone many yards. A broad street lay between us and the place we wanted to hide in, and down this other horsemen were riding.

"What shall we do?" I inquired, fearing more for the Prince's safety than for our own. It was his risk more than ours that was so great, for if we were questioned I had papers about me which would suffice to explain that I was the son of a French merchant come to Antwerp to do business. That would serve my purpose, possibly, but what would serve the Prince?

We looked around us, hoping to find a hiding-place, if it were nothing better than a *cul de sac*, or a stableyard, but no such place was near. Hody presently espied a porchway, dark and forbidding, and, pointing to it, suggested that we could hide behind its pillars.

When we came to it we saw that that was impossible. The torches which the approaching horsemen were carrying would dispel the darkness, and the pillars were not big

enough for three men to hide behind. It was evidently to be that or nothing, and while we stood there we could hear how near the horsemen were drawing. They were singing as they came, not Spanish songs, such as would seem reasonable when coming from a soldier's lips, but shameful parodies of the hymns and psalms which the people sang when they met for worship. They were vile and blasphemous, and when a stanza was ended a shout would follow, and comments that made one blush for manhood which could be so debased.

Just then my eyes fell on a broad door close by. It looked like the gate to a warehouse or a stableyard, and I suggested that we might climb over it. When we ran to it, we found that it was not fastened. It gave before a slight pressure, and we slipped in quickly, closing it after us quietly. The gate opened into a great yard filled with waggons and other heavy carriages, and going farther into the place, we found ourselves near to a broken window which looked out on the street. Standing there we could see without being seen, and we waited thus for the danger to pass. Even thus, in some sort of security, I loosened my sword, and had it in readiness in case it should be wanted for use, and judging by the sound he made, Hody did the same. As for the Prince, he stood at my side alert, and I felt confident that if any of those men who were riding along the Place de Meir thought fit to search the yard, which was scarcely probable, he would not yield tamely.

It so chanced that the two parties of horsemen met exactly opposite the place in which we were hiding.

A challenge came on the instant.

"Who goes there?" cried the officer of the larger body of men.

"The Master of the Inquisition," came the instant answer, and this was followed by a question, put half in earnest, part way in jest: "How comes it that Red-Rod is in Antwerp?"

"One might well ask the same question concerning Peter Titelmann," was the sarcastic response. "As for me, I am here on pressing business—looking for his Highness the Prince of Orange."

The last words were spoken in lower tone, but our quick ears caught them, standing where we were, the broken glass permitting every little sound to filter through.

"What! Is he here? In Antwerp?" came the sharp inquiry, and the tone indicated the surprise of the Master of the Inquisition.

I looked at this man—one with such an unenviable reputation; a man with a thin, pale, and intensely cruel face, and a thin body that seemed as though it had been worn down with the incessant activity he displayed in hunting those who were heretics.

"Yes, here in Antwerp, of all places in the world," answered Red-Rod, who was the Secular-Sheriff of the Netherlands. The name had been given to him because of the red-coloured baton he carried, as the token of his authority. No less cruel was this handsome man who sat his horse with an ease and grace which impressed me. His reputation was that of one who was relentless in his errand. He delighted in butchery, and many a Netherlander's home was burnt by him, while blood marked his way through whatever city, or village, or

hamlet he visited. Alva had but to suggest a course, and Red-Rod was ready to elaborate the most brutal and heartless scheme. So amazing was his versatility in matters of cruelty that a new device for inflicting loss and suffering came almost weekly.

It only wanted Alva to complete the group, and we should have looked on the three most relentless of persecutors, a trio whose hands were stained, not with the blood of hundreds only, but of thousands of unoffending citizens. Here, however, were two out of three men who made the fires burn fiercely for the martyrs, who reared the scaffolds on which the noblest were beheaded, who made the streets run with blood, who kept alive all the fury of persecution. Yet they sat there, in the saddle, commenting callously on what they had seen, and done, and purposed to do, in order to put an end to what they called the "reprobate and damnable sects," because the latter kept the dominions of his Spanish Majesty in perpetual dissension and misery.

While they spoke of these things, they punctuated their words with laughter, and expressed the wonder whether some more effective method could be devised that would render the people more submissive.

"Never, Red-Rod, until we get the Prince of Orange into our hands," cried the Master of the Inquisition.

"Then let me tell you in confidence, Master Titelmann, that I am even now on my way to the house where his Highness is lodging, and before the night is gone he will be in one of Antwerp's dungeons."

This was spoken so quietly that few could hear the words, but the two horsemen were so near to our hiding-place that we heard everything that passed.

"Ha!" returned the Inquisitor. "How do you come to speak with such certainty?"

"Listen," said Red-Rod. "Orange is in the city, disguised as an artisan, and going by the name of Van der Wehr, lodging, of all places in the world, in the house of Frau Perronet, which is next-door to the armoury. Did ever one hear of such effrontery? I am on my way to arrest him."

"Come and tell me how you fare," said Titelmann, gathering up his reins and preparing to ride onward.

"Nay. Come you to me at the armoury an hour hence, and you shall see this Prince, and know how he carries himself when in captivity."

There was a laugh, a mutual salute, the two bodies of horsemen passed each other, and Red-Rod rode on to the house of Frau Perronet, to effect the capture of the Prince of Orange.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FAMILIARS IN THE STREET.

“IT was fortunate, M. Gaston, that you arrived with Coligny’s letter, and so brought me away from Frau Perronet’s house,” said the Prince, when the street grew silent again, and we were still standing at the window of the stableyard. “Fortunate, did I say?” he added a moment later. “Nay, I ought to have said, ‘In the mercy of God.’”

He spoke reverently, and in the darkness, to which our eyes had grown accustomed, I saw him bare his head.

“It gives one confidence, M. Gaston, for the future,” he said presently, when he replaced his cap. “God brought me from thence, and for a wise purpose. But let us be going. Hody, do you know of a quiet way to the Burgomaster’s house?”

“Your Highness shall be there in ten minutes,” said my retainer, who crossed the stones softly, and opening the gate with caution glanced up and down the street to discover how far the way was clear. “Come at once, softly—quickly,” he added. “There’s not even a watchman within sight, so that we may venture to cross and get down yonder side-street.”

In a few minutes we were at the Burgomaster's house, approaching it from the back. As we drew near to a door in the wall of the garden, dark and secluded, I wondered how we should enter, but the Prince took a key from his bosom, unfastened the door, and stepped into a garden. He must have guessed my surprise, for he volunteered an explanation.

"The Burgomaster, knowing that it would be unwise to enter his house by the front, gave me this key, and thus I can go in quietly and unobserved. I have done so on two or three occasions."

Passing through the garden, almost groping our way, for it was so dark, we came to the house, where one or two windows only were lit up.

"Stand where you are," said the Prince, leaving us and going to the nearer window. When he had tapped on it gently, he returned to my side and waited silently. It was for but a few moments, for within we heard the quiet drawing of bolts, and the door opened stealthily.

"Who is it?" came a whispered inquiry.

"The Prince," was the instant answer; and without waiting for an invitation his Highness stepped across the threshold, and stood in a passage only dimly lighted by a solitary lamp, sufficient to dispel the darkness, but scarcely more. One could not, indeed, tell the manner of man who had opened the door.

"Come in," said the Prince, speaking to me and my man.

"Who are these?" asked the Burgomaster, for so he proved to be. He put the question anxiously, as if he almost suspected treachery, not being able distinctly to see the Prince.

"They are friends. Messengers from Coligny."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Burgomaster, evincing considerable surprise.

"Yes. And their coming to Antwerp brings me here to-night."

"Come into my room," said the chief magistrate, who, having thrust in the bolt and turned the key to make the door secure, led the way to an apartment only a yard or two distant. We halted for a little while in a handsomely furnished apartment, but the Burgomaster passed through to an inner chamber, the door of which was hidden by a beautiful piece of hanging tapestry.

"Come this way, your Highness — and you, also," beckoning to Hody and myself.

"We are safer here," he said when he had closed the door. "No one would intrude on me in my bed-chamber."

When I looked around, while the Prince was holding an almost whispered conference with the magistrate, I saw abundant tokens of the Burgomaster's wealth. Here, as in the outer room, were costly hangings, pictures that must have cost great sums of money, and many treasures only within the reach of a man possessed of great riches. The bedstead, too, was canopied and curtained, and furnished with costly linen, and an embroidered coverlet, on which were worked, in silk of many colours, the arms of the famous city over which the Burgomaster was supposed to preside.

Once or twice I was called upon to answer a question connected with my mission to the Prince, and then I returned to the other side of the room, where Hody stood in silence quietly looking about him.

"M. Gaston, the Burgomaster says that I must not remain here," said the Prince, when the colloquy came to an end. "Yet I dare not return to Frau Perronet."

"I dare not permit you to stay, your Highness," interrupted the chief magistrate hastily. "God knows it is a matter of expediency to send you away, and not one of churlish lack of hospitality. I can hide you for a few hours, but to-morrow Red-Rod comes here by appointment, to talk over many matters of moment, and he has a way of bringing his men in, and they go prowling all over my house. No corner is safe from their prying eyes. I always feel that they suspect the presence of some secret chamber, and are hopeful of finding it."

"What is to be done?" I asked, with great concern.

"I was about to suggest, M. Gaston, that you should accompany one of my trusty men to the house of Ernst Meyer, the armourer. You might discover whether he would put up the Prince until his Highness can get away from the city."

"Is he likely to take him in?"

"Almost certain; especially if you deal with him candidly."

"I will go willingly," was my answer, although it seemed an undesirable venture. The experiences of the night had already tried my nerve, and I was wishful for quiet rather than enter on fresh risks. Still, the Prince's safety meant so much, and I could not retreat from this responsibility.

"I must needs go with my master," said Hody as soon as I had spoken. "Besides, the Prince may need us all."

"As you will, my friend," said the magistrate, smiling at the man's devotion and his determined tone.

Leaving us together for a little while, the Burgomaster returned with a short, clean-shaven man, by no means a typical Dutchman

"This is Maartens, and he will get you safely through the streets—of that I feel confident. You have but to follow his leading, and he will keep you clear of mischief more readily than any man inside the city gates to-night."

Maartens presently led us through the garden into the lane by which we had come hither, and once there he took us along so many tortuous ways that I wondered how it was that he did not lose himself. I do not think I ever knew a man so alert and skilful in avoiding danger. If a watchman passed, he knew of a hiding-place, and when some soldiers went by, going smartly, he found a recess with astonishing readiness.

We passed round two sides of the beautiful cathedral, but it was so dark that we saw nothing more than its great black mass. Suddenly Maartens, just as we were going by the entrance, slipped behind one of the buttresses, drawing us with him.

"Not pleasant company that," he muttered, and looking across the road we saw two strange beings passing a house. The hanging oil-lamp showed them to us—two figures robed in black. Their heads were covered with heavy black hoods which fell over the shoulders, so that none could see the faces of the men, if they were such. Ghostly and horrible they seemed to me as they went by slowly, with no means of seeing out of the darkness of their forbidding hoods but through the eyelet-holes. Their going seemed more dreadful because they went with

noiseless tread. The cloth-shod feet showed from beneath the long robes at every stride, but not a sound was heard.

They went by rigidly, looking neither to right nor left, and might have been black spirits passing, so silently did they go.

I shuddered, and involuntarily turned to the Prince, but it was so dark in the shadow of the buttress that I could not see his face. Yet I could imagine that it would be deadly pale, as I am sure my own was; and even Maartens trembled, for I felt the movement.

They were Familiars, and before I had been in Antwerp another four-and-twenty hours, I witnessed such creatures going through the streets in the broad light of day. Out of those eyelet-holes, when two passed me on the following morning, there flashed angry, vulture-like glances, although the heads barely moved either to left or right. The faces of strong men in the busy streets turned pale, as if those eyes stared at them, and singled them out for attention from among the many who jostled each other on the pavement. Some who saw the strange-looking pair crossed themselves, and stepped from the path into the gutter to allow them to pass without hindrance. The touch of the hem of their garment, one would think, was something to avoid. The robed ones went on, making neither sign nor gesture, waiting for no one, not even pausing where the traffic was greatest. There was no need. Those who drove waggons pulled up their horses to allow them to pass, and crossed themselves. Even richly-dressed men, undoubtedly of rank, held back the horses they were riding, and made no attempt to move onward until the Familiars had passed in safety.

We waited in the shadow of the cathedral until the

Inquisitors had passed out of sight, and could not hear our footsteps when we began to move along the unfamiliar path.

Maartens bade us follow him, but he did not venture to speak in more than a whisper, so baleful was the influence of those dreaded creatures of the Inquisition. Going with him down the narrow, twisting street, we halted at the door of a house which stood a little way back, out of line with the others on either side of it. Walking up the steps, Maartens knocked. The noise, to my too ready ears, seemed great enough to awaken every sleeper in the street, and I dreaded the consequences if our guide found it necessary to repeat the summons.

Happily the door was quickly opened by a dark-eyed, round-faced, pretty-looking girl of fifteen, who, having stared at us inquiringly, put out her hand by way of greeting to Maartens.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ARMOURER.

“YOU are welcome, Master Maartens,” she exclaimed.
“We thought you had forgotten us.”

“Forgotten you, dear little maid? Nay, I never forget my little Marta, nor her mother. Where is she?”

“Within, but busy,” the girl replied, looking past the Burgomaster’s man to see who bore him company. “Who are you bringing here at such an hour?” she asked, pointing to the artisan at Maarten’s side.

“Some friends of mine, whom I trust you will have the opportunity of knowing. Let us in, Marta, for some Familiars went this way a few minutes since.”

“Familiars!”

The girl scarcely spoke the word. It came with a gasp, and I saw by the lantern light that her rosy face grew pale, and the eyes that had been laughing when our guide had stepped over the threshold, and chucked her chin with his forefinger, no longer looked merry, but startled.

“Oh, come in!” she exclaimed, turning away as if she dreaded to look into the street lest she should see the black figures in the doorway.

Without a moment's delay we entered, and Maartens thrust the door together, drove in the bolts to their sockets, and twisted the great key in the lock.

"Come this way," said Marta, and we followed her down the long passage till we came to a closed door. There the girl halted and threw it open.

"Mother," she exclaimed loudly, entering the room.

A woman, dressed like a widow, was sitting at the table, busy, as Dutch wives were wont to be, with some domestic task, but when she heard her daughter speak she turned, her needle half-way through the cloth in her lap, and her eyes wide open.

"My child?" she said in that subdued tone peculiar to people who are somewhat deaf; but when she saw a little, meagre man in the doorway, and three others behind him, she rose to her feet, her work dropping to the floor. A startled expression came into her face.

"Who are these?" she asked; but seeing Marta smile, she lost her frightened look and came forward with a pleasant greeting.

"We live in perpetual fear, Peter Maartens."

"We all do, Marianne," said he, putting his lips to the woman's ear.

"Who are these?" she asked again.

"Friends of the Burgomaster," the man responded. "We are no night enemies, Marianne, come to do you harm."

"No, Peter. 'Tis a true and honest friend, and these must be true, since you bring them."

I saw that her eyes were full of tears, and I marked the tremulous tone in which she spoke a moment later, while Maartens held her hand in his.

"The Familiars were here last night, Peter. They came last week, and the week before that, and they have done so every week since they took my husband away and tortured him to the death. They declared that he confessed to having left some books behind him here that are full of heresy, but I have told them again and again that he did not. I thought, when I saw you standing in the doorway, that they had come again, although yesterday they professed to believe me, and said that I should be troubled no more, so long as I remained a faithful daughter of the Church."

For a little while we stood in silence. The memory of the last few weeks was too acute for Marianne to restrain her tears. She hid her face in her hands, and turning her back upon us, wept. Maartens sought to comfort her, while we stood near, silent, but sympathetic, in the presence of a sorrow we could in so great a degree appreciate.

"God has him in safe keeping, Marianne," said Maartens; "and in His hands your husband is at peace."

"Yes, Peter, I know it. But I have lost the joy of his companionship here, and it breaks my heart to think of all he suffered. Dear heart! I recall with admiration his constancy to what he thought was right, although he was a heretic."

Gradually Peter talked her back to quietness.

"Marianne," he said presently, "although he was a heretic he was a good man."

"There was never a better," sobbed the widow.

"And he is gone to heaven," said Peter soothingly.

"I wish I was as sure of going," the woman exclaimed, wiping her eyes.

"Think of it, Marianne. He is at rest. His life was such a ceaseless battle. It was a long, wearing, wasting struggle to get at what was truth, and he chose what you and the Familiars call heresy. But whatever else he did, he chose God! And can't you believe that the dead are blessed when such a struggle is ended, and they are born into a world where their life is bliss?"

The paroxysm of grief ended presently, and while we stood waiting I looked at the Prince. His face was grave. There was a strange look upon it which set my thoughts going. It seemed to me that if he had ever considered the struggle too great, it was no longer a matter of choice with him as to whether he would persist in the endeavour to liberate his country from its thralldom, and drive out the Spaniard and the hateful Inquisition.

A moment or two later he spoke, and my run of thought proved to have been correct.

"M. Gaston," he said, speaking quietly, "I have sometimes thought that I must give up this contest and come to terms with Spain; but never will I do so, now that I see with my own eyes what the Spanish occupation means in the homes of the people."

"Will you persist, your Highness?" I asked.

"To the death," was the earnest reply.

Presently Marianne asked, "Why have you come here, Peter?"

"I want Ernst Meyer, your next-door neighbour, to do the Burgomaster a favour, and hide these friends of his until they can get away from Antwerp."

"Why not have gone to him direct?" asked the widow.

"I did not dare in face of what he told me a little while ago. He forbade me ever to show myself at his street door, lest suspicion might be aroused. Suffer me to pass round to the back, and get at him that way."

"Nay, Marta shall go and tell him you are here."

The girl was gone in an instant, and in a short space she brought in the armourer.

He was a big and brawny fellow, whose arms were all muscle, and who appeared able with a single blow of his fist to hurl the biggest of all Inquisitors to the ground with ease. Stalwart as Hody was, he seemed to me short by the side of Ernst Meyer. His broad shoulders gave one the idea of immense strength, and his clean-shaven face bore a look of determination which would have made another man think twice before he ventured to assault him.

Yet there was a gentleness in his look when he gazed down at the widow whose cheeks bore traces of recent tears.

"He is a man to be trusted," whispered the Prince to me, and the confidence was such that he put out his hand for Ernst to take it.

The armourer, when he had gripped it, and so tightly that I saw the Prince wince, bent and looked keenly into his Highness's face. Presently his own grew pale, and a bewildered look was on it.

"Come here, man, and let me look at you," he exclaimed, still gripping the Prince's hand, and drawing him towards the light, so that he might see him more distinctly.

"I crave your Highness's pardon for the liberty I have

taken," he said at length. "I did not know who you were."

Without another word he went down on one knee, and still holding the Prince's hand, kissed it, as one would who renders homage to a ruler.

"What can I do for your Highness?" he inquired presently.

"Stand up, Meyer, and I will tell you. The Burgomaster sent Maartens with us to ask you to afford me safe hiding until I can contrive to escape from Antwerp. Red-Rod has discovered where I have been staying, and I dare not return to the house. Can you shelter me a little while? Will you?"

"I both can and will, Prince, and, please God, it will be a bad day for Red-Rod if he puts foot over my threshold. All I have is at the service of your Highness."

We were turning to say farewell to the widow when Ernst Meyer intervened.

"Prince, you must be content to be guided by me, if I am to hide you."

"It goes without saying, Meyer."

"And stay in hiding until the way is clear."

"I am in your hands unreservedly," came the answer from the Prince.

"That is right, then," was the hearty response.

The armourer spoke cheerfully. Undeterred by the threats that were thrown out against those who harboured heretics, or enemies of the Spanish Government, he turned on his heel, and led the way, first into his garden and then into his own house.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HIDDEN ROOM.

“**I** AM sorry to put you into any sort of jeopardy, Meyer,” said the Prince, when we stood in the room in which the armourer proposed to hide his Highness.

“Do not think of it,” came the response. “One blessing is that you came at night, and that no one saw you enter. I only fear the Inquisitors. Those accursed Familiars are always ferreting out heresy. They smell it as keenly as a terrier smells a rat, and some day, when they pass the door, they may sniff, and know that some one is here who should not be.”

The man shrugged his shoulders, and made a grimace.

“It is doubly kind of you to run the risk,” said the Prince, on whose serious face came a grateful smile.

“Not when your safety is in question,” cried Meyer, whose strong voice rang, and made me wonder whether any chance wayfarer in the street might hear. “Besides, your Highness, since Maartens is to be relied upon not to give you away, and the Burgomaster is certain not to do so, no one will have reason to suppose that you are in my house.”

The armourer laughed at his thoughts, for even in the presence of the Prince he was absolutely natural.

"I do not intend to put out a signboard to say that I have the Prince of Orange in my place," he said, and his face was broad with smiles. "'Tis Maartens, here, who will advertise it, if any one does; but if he ventures on such a course I will beat him into a jelly before I have done with him."

The armourer laughed again, and Maartens joined in, for he enjoyed the joke immensely. Even the Prince ignored his danger and was amused.

"If you have any doubt as to Peter Maartens, Meyer, we will keep him here, where we can always have our eye on him," he suggested pleasantly.

"No, indeed. I'll have no Peter Maartens in my house when the Prince is here. There would not be room. But let me show your Highness where I propose that you should go if there is any danger threatening, or when it comes to sleeping time. 'Tis a bit of my own handiwork, Prince."

"First of all, we'll suppose you are sitting here, and I see danger when I am in the shop, I shall ring the bell—just one warning note. Then you go to the fireplace—so!"

The armourer crossed the floor to the grate, and bending down he felt about with his hand. There was a slight sound, like the click of a latch, and we saw the back of the fireplace move. It opened more and more as Meyer pressed it, until a chamber sufficiently large to hold half a dozen persons was seen.

Following the armourer through the opening, we

entered the secret chamber, Ernst carrying the lamp with him. When we looked around we knew that it would be somewhat dark even in broad daylight, for there was no window save in a space where a small stone had been beaten out of the wall on the side where the street lay. That was a small matter if peril approached in the shape of Familiars, or Alva's emissaries, on the lookout for heretics, or the enemies of Spain.

"You need not be in here long at any time," said the armourer. "The outer room will serve during the day, unless there is a special reason for hiding; but you must sleep in here at night."

"I have told you about the bell?" said Meyer presently.

"Yes. But it might awaken suspicion," observed the Prince.

"Perhaps it would," came the armourer's response, but he reflected before he spoke again. "Suppose, then, that Red-Rod's spies suspected that you were here, and came to find you, well, I would cough like this."

Meyer made such a noise that it could have been heard on the roof, even had he been in the cellar. I started at the sudden explosion; so did the Prince and Hody, and the armourer laughed his loudest. In this man's company danger seemed to be minimised.

He had more to say when the laugh was over.

"While they were coming up the stairs you would all slip in here, close the door—so!—and keep still. They may tap walls as much as they list, and go down on their cruel knees as often as they choose; they may peer here or anywhere, and not one token of your

presence would they get, unless you betrayed yourselves by your own foolishness. In such a case it would serve you right, but it would be bad for me."

He paused, but a thought occurred to him.

"Pardon my bluntness, Prince," he exclaimed hastily. "I ask your Highness's grace, but I forgot myself. I am a plain blunt man, and unaccustomed to the company of princes."

The Prince smiled.

"Think naught of that, Meyer. I love a man best when he is natural."

"Let me show you the ins and outs," the armourer continued, but more quietly. "To get out of this place you press the knob—so! Now come out, and let me show you how to get in, for I should not be here to help you, perhaps."

We followed him, and each one in turn put his hand into a little indentation, and pressed hard, first forward, then to the right, and with the pressure the whole of the wall fell back, sufficiently wide for us to pass in one at a time.

"Practise that for all you are worth," said the armourer; "then there will be no hitch in case of emergency."

"Now come downstairs, and see the mistress," said Meyer, when he had cautioned us that if we had to go into hiding we must leave nothing about—no cap, no scarf, no sword—to betray the fact that the room had been recently used.

"Will not suspicion come when you are found taking in extra provision for three hungry men?" I ventured to suggest, for all manner of fears possessed

me, with this responsibility of having the Prince in our care. The Burgomaster unexpectedly threw that responsibility upon us when we left him. Hence we were to be the guests of Ernst Meyer also.

The armourer stood with his back against the wall and roared.

"Man!" he exclaimed presently, his sides shaking with laughter, "the retailers would think naught if I brought home a whole ox! I am told a score o' times in the course of a month that I could polish off a side o' bacon in a week, without calling in a friend to help me. And I believe I could do it easily."

He laughed again, for the idea of astonishing the shopkeepers amused him mightily.

"There is no manner of need for any outside talk," he went on to say, when he had brushed the back of his great hand across his eyes to take away the tears. He turned on his heel, and, tramping down the stairs, preceded us to the kitchen, where his wife sat in a settle before the fire.

"Wife, here's company—more refugees! and they have a doubt as to the capacity of our larder. Show them what sort o' stock we have in the house, for they think the shopkeepers may wonder at our getting in extra provisions for three hungry men."

Smiling at her husband's words, Frau Meyer curtsied to us, and having bade us welcome, expressed a hope for our safe hiding and ultimate escape. Having said this, she went to a door and threw it wide open. The armourer took up a lamp, and, going in before us, held it up so that we might see.

"Didst ever see better food than that, Peter?" he

asked, laying his hand on Maartens' shoulder. "Or ever more of it outside of a castle?"

It seemed to us who stood within the larder as though Meyer had stocked the house for the maintenance of a small garrison. There were hams and sides of smoked bacon hanging from the ceiling. A huge round of pickled beef lay on a board, ready for to-morrow's boiling. There was a sack of flour in the corner, another of buckwheat meal beside it, and baked loaves in plenty, even for hungry men. Ernst's wife pointed to many proofs of her capability as a cook, for pasties lined the shelves, and half a dozen fowls hung by the legs, ready plucked, and only waiting for the oven. A big barrel of ale lay on a stand, while a quantity of eggs lay piled in a dish close by.

"What thought they, Peter, when all that came home?" asked the armourer, giving Maartens a dig in the ribs, which nearly took the lean man's breath away; but the only response was a nod and a laugh.

"Of course there are the workmen to feed," Meyer added presently. "They don't go home to their meals in the daytime."

Returning to the room we were to occupy, the armourer became serious again, and craved the Prince's pardon for his levity. He suggested that Hody and I should sleep on the couch or hearth in the outer room, and that the Prince should make the secret place his sleeping apartment, so long as his stay was compulsory. He added, however, that there was little to fear.

"They all deem me a good Catholic, and a loyal citizen—and am I not? Not a Familiar in all Antwerp would suspect me of being a heretic. They would rather

come and ask for shelter if the Antwerpeans suddenly took it into their heads to rise against the Inquisition."

Having assured himself that we were thoroughly capable of manipulating the opening of the entrance door to the hidden room, Meyer and his wife brought up a meal, and when it was ended bade us good-night, and left us to take a much-needed rest.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAN AT THE WHARF.

DANGER threatened the Prince, and not so much Hody and myself. In a great port like Antwerp it was easy for us to pass as traders, and with the papers I carried on my father's behalf always ready to be shown on demand, I was able to move about the city and make calls on business men without arousing suspicion. My personal knowledge of the Prince's whereabouts, and my connection with him, combined to make me nervous, and as a result of all this I felt that eyes were on me, when probably no one took the slightest trouble to give me a thought beyond the fact that I was a Frenchman, and that my retainer was of the same nationality.

Our first morning's experience was not too reassuring. We were standing at the window, looking out from behind the curtains, careful not to show ourselves to passers-by, or to those who might be in the rooms of the houses opposite. It was not a busy street, but people were frequently coming and going, and not seldom gentlemen rode up and halted outside Meyer's shop to speak about some armour, or to have something done to their weapons. It was a little trying, for one

wondered whether they came on other business ; whether, for instance, when three Spanish officers halted outside, and had some sort of colloquy with the armourer, who stood bareheaded, they had come to talk with him on matters other than those which concerned Meyer's daily work. In these men we recognised three who had been riding in the street with Red-Rod the night before. We glanced round the room anxiously to see that nothing lay about on the chairs or floor to suggest our occupation of the place, and also saw to the entrance to the hidden room, so that on any alarming signal we might quickly disappear. Then, in no small anxiety, we waited and listened, in case Ernst Meyer should give his warning cough.

It was a relief to see the men ride away, and watch the armourer standing in the middle of the street, gazing after them until they disappeared round the corner. His face, when he turned to enter the shop, betrayed no sign of anxiety, and we breathed again more freely.

Scarcely had he gone out of sight when there was a soft tap on the door, and when Hody opened it we saw Marta standing outside. She entered, her face all smiles, made a low and pretty curtsey to the Prince, and asked how we had fared during the night. She stood and talked a little while with a nonchalance that was charming, as though it was a daily matter with her to talk to princes. Presently she told her real business—that her mother suggested that if we grew tired of remaining in one room all day, we might come to her house after sunset by the back, when none of the neighbours could look out from their windows and see us.

While we were talking, we heard the shouts of boys

and men, hoots and cat-calls, and turning to the window, we watched curiously, wondering at the meaning of this disturbance. A crowd passed by, made up of boys and girls, and not a few of such men as spent their days in lounging at the wharves or the street corners; fellows out at the elbows, hungry because they would not work, and discontented in consequence. It was a noisy throng who not only screamed and whistled, but now and again stooped to pick up mud from the gutter, or any filth or garbage that lay in their path.

A man was walking slowly on the causeway opposite, with bent-down head and shamefaced look. Now and again he turned this way and that, as if in search of some narrow passage into which he might run, to escape from those who were swarming about him and heaping on him their insults. Two Familiars followed, but were never hustled by the crowd. Sometimes they stretched out their white hands, and pointed to him who walked a few yards ahead of them.

He was tall and thin. His beard was matted for want of combing, and his slim body was covered with the *san benito*—"the blessed coat of penitence"—a long, coarse yellow tunic, with a large red cross on the front, another like it on the back, and all over the yellow cloth were painted black devils in all manner of attitudes. He was one of the prisoners of the Holy House, not far away, who, having been carried to the prison of the Inquisition, had taken the vow of penitence, having recanted and sworn to submit to all the pains and penalties which his merciless judges might see fit to order.

This was a part of his punishment. Once a week,

for six months past, the Familiars had taken him through the streets to be the laughing-stock of the thoughtless, receiving the curses of the Catholics, who reprobated such as much as the most stubborn of the heretics, always returning, lame and sore, and covered with mud, to his filthy cell.

I heard a sob at my side, and, turning, saw Marta. Her eyes filled with tears, especially when the penitent turned his face to look at the house in which she lived and shook his head sorrowfully.

"'Tis my uncle," she said, when the noisy crowd had passed. "They took him from us months ago, but he repented when they led him to the torture chamber, and this is how they punish him. This is what they call 'showing mercy,'" the girl added scornfully.

We went out later in the day with considerable trepidation, going by the back door at the bottom of the garden, which opened into a long and narrow lane. It was desirable to do so, in order to see to our horses; and it was well, since we found the keeper of the inn somewhat sulky because of our absence. He concluded that we had gone away, leaving the horses on his hands to eat off their heads in the stable, with no prospect of payment unless he sold the creatures—a course he did not care to take.

We made some sort of excuse—I do not now remember what—paid him some money down, and asked him to look to the Burgomaster of the city for payment, in case my business did not allow me to return for a few days. In this arrangement I had in view the possibilities of being unable to walk the streets of Antwerp without some endangerment of our liberty,

and of having to lie in hiding until the Prince could get away.

It was necessary, having spoken on this matter to the innkeeper, to go to the Burgomaster, and telling him about our horses, ask him to see to them until I should ride away. They were two valuable creatures, and I did not want them to suffer for lack of attention. His response was instant, for he sent at once for them and lodged them in his own stables, promising that they should be fed and exercised. Then we talked together as to how the Prince could be got away from Antwerp.

"Let there be no skulking, M. Gaston," said the chief magistrate. "Go in and out of Meyer's house boldly, by the shop door, and not by any back lanes, or the Spanish spies will be dogging your steps."

"And the Prince?" I asked, somewhat doubtful as to the wisdom of this policy.

"Bid him be alert, and make use of the armourer's hidden room. Tell him not to venture out of the house, night or day."

I looked at the Burgomaster in surprise, but, understanding fully, he smiled.

"I know all about the hidden room, M. Gaston. The armourer has served me well before to-day. He has helped me more than once when I had some one on my hands who required safe hiding, and necessarily I wanted to know that he was in a position to accord it."

We followed the advice of the Burgomaster, but the armourer appeared to be somewhat anxious when we walked into his shop, and waited until a customer had gone out.

"Is not this most unwise, monsieur?" he asked

when the shop was empty, but he nodded approvingly when I told him that the Burgomaster had suggested that there should be no skulking.

"He ought to know, I suppose," he added. "None the less I would have preferred the back door. At all events try that way when it is dark."

We moved about freely for the next day or two, and saw much of the splendid city. Yet there was not the busy, prosperous air we had anticipated in view of what we had heard of its immense trade. We had read of the Exchange, where as many as five thousand merchants came together to do business, but there were not the crowds there used to be, and one to whom I spoke shook his head, and said, in a whisper, that Antwerp had seen her best days, and had ruin in front of her, now that the Spanish occupation was becoming so tyrannous.

We went to the famous cathedral, and I did not wonder when I gazed at the beautiful edifice, and watched the marvellous spire rising up to the sky for four hundred feet and more, that the Emperor, Charles the Fifth, had declared the sculpture which adorned the building so delicate that it ought to be covered with glass.

It was growing dark on the third day while we loitered at the wharves, watching the shipping. Hody presently called my attention to a man who now and again cast furtive glances at us. It could not be an unusual thing to see a man standing near, and I said so; and presently I forgot him altogether. Not so Hody, who, while we moved on among the piles of merchandise, saw this man again and again.

"I am confident he is following us, monsieur," he exclaimed presently.

"Then let us go home," I answered; and turning, we passed the man, almost brushing against him. Hody scrutinised him—and so did I—endeavouring to see his face, but that was not possible, since he was quite in the shadow at the time.

Going quickly on our way to the armourer's house, we did not pause until we came to the cathedral. There we halted to hear the beautiful bells chime the hour. Standing well back against a gateway, we looked at the great building, now bathed in the moonlight.

By this time it was late, and the streets were empty, none being within view but the watchman who came and spoke to us civilly enough, for a wonder, and bade us hasten to our lodgings, since it was near the hour when none should be out of doors without special permission.

We turned to go at once, after bidding the watchman good-night, but Hody unexpectedly bundled into a wayfarer who was apparently coming in an opposite direction. He trod heavily on the man's toes, and the sharp pain caused the stranger to speak savagely.

"Was not that the man we saw on the wharf?" I asked of Hody, when we were walking away.

"I thought so, monsieur."

On reaching the street where the armourer dwelt we turned suddenly at my word, and the same man was not far away, coming down on the other side, which was in the shade. He ran off when I crossed the road to challenge him, and we lost sight of him.

"I would propose, monsieur, that we do not go

in just yet," said Hody. "Suppose we walk down this alley."

We followed out the suggestion, and only after going down many streets, taking many risks with the watchmen, and doubling frequently, did we venture into the lane and find our way at the back into the armourer's home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE EMPTY HOUSE.

“**I** MUST e’en go to-night and see the Burgomaster, and bid him hasten his preparations for the departure of the Prince,” said Meyer, when I told him that we had undoubtedly been followed while coming home. “But first we’ll have some supper.”

His Highness had already gone to his bed in the hidden room, so that we judged it unnecessary to trouble him. For ourselves, Hody and I being hungry, the suggestion of a meal was welcome, and before long we were seated at the kitchen table. The armourer piled up our dishes with frizzled ham and eggs until I protested—and Hody, also, although he was blessed with a good appetite—that there was sufficient for a couple of men to eat on my own plate alone.

The good-natured fellow laughed, and went on with his meal heartily. It was but a snack to keep us going, he said, when he had eaten sufficient for two men at least, and rose from the table, brushing off the crumbs from his tunic, and drawing the back of his hand across his lips. He crossed to the corner of the kitchen for his stick, a cudgel loaded with lead at the knob, and formidable in the hands of a man with average strength.

I wondered what the using of it would mean when Meyer found it necessary to defend himself.

The armourer saw the look on my face, and laughed.

"It would quieten the stoutest man in Antwerp, monsieur, if I had to use it."

"Now what am I to say to the Burgomaster, monsieur?" he asked, when he had buttoned his tunic and stood ready to go.

"I had better go with you, Meyer, and speak to him concerning one or two other things. But would it not be well to leave it till the morning?" I asked, for I had in mind the peril of traversing the streets by night, and the dogging of our footsteps had somewhat shaken my confidence.

"No time like the present, monsieur," came the armourer's reply. "God only knows what may chance between now and the morning, with that fellow following you about. 'Tis because of that that I am taking the risk to-night."

We went out cautiously. Hody wished to go with us, but Meyer said that two were really one too many, and my man would be useful near the Prince, and ready for emergency. Looking up and down the street, we went a little way, but presently Meyer bade me stay in a doorway while he went forward to see that the road was clear. Presently I heard a cautious whistle, and a moment or two later joined him. With the exception of a watchman here and there we met no one on the way, but these guardians of the city knew Ernst, and being on friendly terms with him, were content when he said openly that he had pressing business with the Burgomaster.

Once we passed a windowless building which stretched along one side of the street. It rose gloomily and threateningly, and cast a black shadow across the road. Meyer had been whistling gaily, as though he had not a care on his mind, but he broke off suddenly, and took my hand, which he gripped tightly, as much to reassure himself, perhaps, as to detain me in my progress.

Not far away was the street corner, and round it came two Familiars, and between them walked a woman. They were walking slowly, but midway between the corner, and the spot where we halted, they paused. We heard in the silence the jingling of keys, the noise as of one of them turning in a lock, then the further scream of opening door hinges. A sound like a woman's sob fell on my ears, and what was like an oath under Meyer's breath followed.

"Had it been elsewhere, and not nigh to this hell on earth, which the Inquisitors call the Holy House," the armourer muttered, "I would beat them down, and rescue the poor creature; but a cry would bring a swarm of black-robed ones about us, and you and I would accompany yon poor woman, unless in the *mêlée* she contrived to escape. And what good would be done then, monsieur?"

The woman fell in a senseless heap on the stones, so that the Inquisitors, with many angry words, bent down, raised her in their arms, and carried her through the open doorway. The door closed with a clang. I heard the sound of the shooting bolts, and the clank of an iron bar with which those night-hawks of the Inquisition made the place secure.

It was amazing how this thought of the Inquisition seemed to paralyse strong men like ourselves. It

possessed some awful influence against which none dared to offer resistance. I remember how we almost slunk past the place, and my own face burnt with shame, while I despised myself, and called myself a coward, to watch and not resist such a thing as this which I had just witnessed. I could only excuse myself with the thought that the mysterious and overwhelming influence was irresistible. I felt my arm powerless; my courage left me; my heart seemed to fail me. I cannot express my sense of shame, nor my sense of absolute helplessness. A blow from each of us would have sufficed to lay the Familiars dead, and the woman would have been free; but neither of us dared to strike.

At last we reached the Burgomaster's house, and told him of the man who had dogged my steps. When I had ended he sat down with folded arms, and gazed into the burning logs on the hearth, as if searching amid the red glow and the hissing flames for some help or some suggestion.

"Bring the Prince here, M. Gaston," he said after a long silence. "Bring him here to-morrow night. I will give you a pass which the city watchmen may respect. They generally do," he added.

On our return to the armourer's home we went in silence. A feeling of depression came to me, and I seemed to communicate it to my companion. I could not shut out the thought of that poor woman at the door of the Holy House, and without anything leading to it I thought of Elizabeth. What if it had been she whom those Familiars had taken to their cruel care? Ha! then all sense of consequences should have gone! I would have faced the whole brood of those black-robed men rather

than suffer my darling to be carried into the place from whence Hope and Mercy were excluded.

It was a relief to enter the house; and without pausing I mounted the stairs to know whether Hody had anything to tell of what had transpired in my absence.

"Nothing has chanced, monsieur," came the man's answer to my inquiry.

When Meyer left us for the night, we closed the door and lay down, but neither of us undressed. I think we had each one a presentiment of coming trouble, and do what I would to court sleep it would not come. If I closed my eyes I saw those black-robed creatures prowling in the streets. I thought again of Elizabeth, and my thoughts were distressing. I could see her—my darling—being led away, like the poor girl we had seen carried into the Holy House. It tore my soul to think about it, and as I lay on the floor I clasped my hands, and begged God to guard my dear one and keep such sorrow from her. The prayer served to set my mind more at rest, so far as my dear one was concerned. I felt that I could leave her in God's strong, capable, and loving hands; and realising the comfort of staying myself on God, I slept.

How long the sleep lasted I do not know, but Hody awoke me by shaking my shoulder vigorously. I was on my feet instantly, asking what had happened.

"Come to this window, monsieur. I could not sleep, and consequently I came here, and have been standing watching. There is something to see."

Going to the window, I looked out eagerly, wondering what was happening. The moon was going down, and it

was but sufficiently light just to see what was transpiring. There were two black-robed figures on the causeway nearly opposite to Meyer's house, one carrying a lantern in his hand. The pair went slowly, sometimes pausing to look, now at the doors of the houses, then at the windows, and up to the roof.

We watched them in breathless suspense, and drew back from the window when the Familiars halted on the pavement exactly before us, and gazed at the armourer's house. I stood rigid, staring in terror, my eyes seeming to quit their sockets while I watched every movement. One of the Inquisitors pointed to the window out of which we gazed, but the other made a gesture of dissent, and turning full round, faced the house behind him. His companion swung round with him.

The house was an empty one, or appeared to be, but this apparently determined the Inquisitors to search it. They went to the door and sought to enter, but found it securely fastened. Turning from it, they walked to the window, which opened at their touch. It was at no distance from the ground, and an active man could easily climb in. Regardless of dignity, and bent on entering in whatever way was possible, one of the men, with the other's aid, climbed in, his companion handing him the lantern, which had been set upon the stones for the time being. We then saw the Familiar cross the room and disappear, but presently the street door opened, and the waiting Inquisitor entered.

We watched intently. For some time there was no sign of the presence of the men within—nothing to indicate their movements—and we came to the conclusion that they had put out the lantern, and were

looking through the window to see what might be passing in the armourer's house. It was an uncomfortable sensation, and disconcerting, to conceive those searching, stealthy, merciless eyes looking across the street for some sign that might serve to bring us within the awful toils of the Inquisition. Later the suspense became intolerable, and I could almost have chosen discovery rather than be in such a state of uncertainty for a prolonged period.

It was a relief at last to see them reappear with a light in room after room, beginning in the cellar; to watch them likewise tapping on the walls, as if searching for some hiding-place. In the room on a level with that in which Hody and I were watching, we saw them tear away some woodwork, and also go on their knees to examine the floor. But the search proved fruitless, if, as we suspected, they were looking, say, for the Prince. They came out of the house after a while, and then we trembled at their next movement. Would they come across to Meyer's house?

They halted on the doorstep, and so long did they remain there that we concluded that they were going to wait until daybreak. But finally they descended to the causeway, turned towards the cathedral, and walked away slowly, and with evident reluctance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HERETIC HUNTERS.

THE day that followed was crowded with anxiety. We were afraid to go to the window, afraid even to leave the house. Whenever a knock came on the door we started and wondered. If any passers-by halted beneath the window we thought it must be the heretic hunters who had decided to search the armourer's house. It was a welcome relief when the darkness set in, and the curtains were closely drawn, so that we might sit about the table and talk, and know that we were not overlooked by those hawk-eyes from beneath the black hoods.

Before the evening was very far gone Ernst Meyer came in to say that he must leave us, since he had to call on some one on important business. His advice, imperative even to the Prince, was, that if we heard any suspicious sounds we were to creep into the hidden room.

"Better be in darkness and safety than here, where there is comfort but no security," he observed; "but see that you leave nothing in this room that shall tell tales."

He espied a Bible on the table. The Prince had

found it in the hidden room, and had been reading it. The armourer pointed to it.

“That book, your Highness, must not be left here. I would put it into yonder place now, for in the hurry it might be forgotten. Were the Familiars to find it they would pull the house down stone by stone rather than miss the chance of finding you. And as for me, it would be the rack for certain; and I confess myself somewhat of a coward when I think of falling into their clutches.”

The Prince got up from his chair at once, and taking the book in his hand, bade me open the entrance door to the inner chamber.

“Is there aught else that would betray us?” the armourer continued, when the Prince returned empty-handed. “Yes, there’s his Highness’s sword. Will you belt it about you, Prince? or toss it in yonder?”

The Prince buckled it to his body at once, saying that if need arose he would use it, for none should be carried to the Holy House tamely.

“That cloak and scarf,” cried the armourer; “the cap; look around, and make a thorough clearance, and then I can leave home with an easy mind.”

He said this almost testily when he saw thing after thing lying about—articles which, if left in the room, would convince the Familiars that the place had been occupied by others than the armourer and his wife.

At last he was satisfied, and with a final warning he descended the stairs, and left the house at the back.

It was approaching ten o’clock before he returned, and Peter Maartens was with him. He brought word that instead of going to the Burgomaster’s house, as

arranged, we were to make for the harbour, where a ship was in readiness to take the Prince to any place he might name. In every way this was a better arrangement, and as we might leave as soon as we pleased, it was not long before we were ready to go. We stood in a group, and the Prince was telling Ernst Meyer how he appreciated the generous treatment he had received, and promised a fitting reward as soon as he was safely away from Antwerp.

He stopped in the middle of a sentence, and the look on his face alarmed us. We turned to mark what he was gazing at, and then my heart began to beat wildly. We had not noticed, while we were talking over our plans, that first one Familiar had stolen into the room, and then another, until, when we swung round, as many as six of them stood between us and the door.

For a few moments we were dumb, and watched those silent, black figures, whose only sign of life was the flashing of eyes through the eyelet-holes of their hideous hoods. The armourer's jaw dropped, and he trembled—a man who feared no other in fair combat. His fear now was such that the heavy cudgel he had brought with him into the room fell from his hand to the floor noisily. Hody appeared irresolute, but he was fingering the dagger at his belt unostentatiously and ominously.

“What is your will?” the Prince inquired, becoming our spokesman as our natural leader.

“Need you ask?” said one of the Inquisitors sternly. “You are reported to us as heretics, and, your Highness, since we have found you, we must needs claim you as ours, in view of the fact that the Duke of Alva has so

completely failed in his search for you. You must come with us—and these.”

He waved his hand while he spoke, to indicate that all must accompany him and his companions.

“What if we refuse?” asked the Prince, with wonderful calmness. He seemed in no sense distressed at this disastrous turn of events, and spoke almost with non-chalance.

“None ever refuse,” exclaimed the Familiar sharply.

“I asked, ‘What if *we* refuse?’” was the Prince’s response, brushing aside the Familiar’s retort with an imperious gesture.

“Refusal is out of the question.”

I glanced around on my companions, and my eye caught Meyer’s, whose first terror had passed. He had just stooped to pick up his cudgel, and he returned my look in such a manner that a hope sprang up in my mind that there would be no tame submission on his part. I felt confident that the Prince would not follow the behest of the Familiars unless compelled by overpowering physical force, and I determined to stand by him.

“I ask again, ‘What if we refuse?’” the Prince said more sternly than before, and by this time he deliberately brought his sword round within easy reach.

“You will be taken to the Holy House against your will,” came the insolent rejoinder. “What is more, you must come at once. We have no time to waste in bandying words with heretics whose proper place and reward are the dungeon and the torture chamber.”

The armourer went round to the Prince and whispered to him.

The answer was an approving nod. Then he spoke.

"We do not intend to accompany you."

While the Prince was saying this, Ernst Meyer stepped quickly to the door, and stood with his back against it.

"M. Gaston," continued the Prince quietly, and turning to me, "will you go down the stairs and look carefully to the doors. If they be open, close and secure them. Then look into every room, and note whether there be others with whom we have to deal in addition to these."

The Familiars crowded round the door to prevent my exit as soon as I moved towards it, but the armourer thrust them aside roughly, and while he kept them away at arm's length, I passed out of the room and down the stairs. The street door was standing wide open, and before I closed it I looked up and down the street, to discover whether other Familiars, or any of the city watchmen were there; but the street was empty. Closing the door, and making it secure, I went from room to room, to assure myself that no Inquisitors lurked within, and that the windows were fastened. Quietly, too, I glanced into the kitchen, where Frau Meyer was sitting sewing, altogether unconscious of what was transpiring in the upper part of the house. It was ample proof of the stealth with which these creatures of the Inquisition moved. At last I hastened upstairs.

I stood in the open doorway and gazed in amazement on the scene before me. Three of the Inquisitors were lying on the floor, the others standing with their backs to the wall, the Prince and Hody with their swords



SIX OF THEM STOOD BETWEEN US AND THE DOOR.—Page 174.

unsheathed, and the armourer with his cudgel. They were ready to use their weapons if the Familiars did but move.

The explanation came to me later, that when I had quitted the chamber the Familiar who had been the spokesman of his party had turned and cursed Meyer.

“Those are ugly words from one who belongs to the Holy House,” retorted the armourer, with some sarcasm; and when another curse yet more emphatic followed, he yielded to the impulse, caught the angry Inquisitor by the robe, tore off his hood, and gripped him by the throat. Another of the Familiars was about to rush to his companion’s assistance, but Hody caught at him and did as Meyer had done.

The Inquisitors were sinewy men, and a glance convinced my comrades that under ordinary circumstances many would stand small chance with them in a trial of strength. Their anger suffered them to stand hindered like this only for a few moments, for they and the others flung themselves on the armourer, who guarded the door, as if they intended to beat him down and make their escape.

He was ready for them. He gripped the robes of two at the neck, drew back his strong hands so that the men nearly lost their footing, then brought his hands forward once more with tremendous force, so that the heads of the Familiars came together with a crash. Loosening his grip, he suffered the stunned men to drop to the floor. A third attempted to fasten himself on the armourer, but he shook him until the Inquisitor’s teeth rattled, until, indeed, he was absolutely helpless. Then

he hurled him backward, and the man, falling with a crash against the table, lay on the floor unconscious.

This was the position when I entered the room. It was now a question as to what the next step should be. I could not forbear a smile, serious as the situation was, when I saw Meyer's face. The burly fellow looked so happy, and bending over the men on the floor, he nodded at them, and said that things could not be better. He stood upright again, and beckoned to the Prince, and Hody, and Maartens. They gathered about him at the door, and we discussed the course we should now pursue.

"We must get away at once," said Maartens, in a voice too low to be heard by the Inquisitors.

"What of those three men yonder?" asked the Prince, pointing to the Familiars who, in spite of an attempt to appear indifferent, were trembling with fear. "Those on the floor," continued his Highness, "will do no harm for a little while, but these are unhurt and could easily get away"

There was silence for a while, for here was a genuine difficulty.

"Could we not knock their heads together and quieten them?" asked Meyer; but the Prince's answer was an emphatic negative.

The armourer scratched his head ruefully.

"It would do them no harm, Prince, and they deserve it, considering how pitiless they have been. I would do it gladly, just to let them have a taste of pain. At the worst it would not be so bad for them as the rack, or the thumbscrew, or any other of their horrible tricks have been for so many others who were at their mercy. And they did it all in cold blood," he added, with a

savage glint in his eyes, as if the memory of what his friends had suffered maddened him.

The Prince's answer was decisive.

"I will not have it done, Meyer. We will bind them, and put them all three in the hidden chamber. These also," he added, pointing to the unconscious men who lay on the floor.

It was a short task to strip the Familiars of their robes, and in spite of their protests and resistance they were taken into the secret place and bound securely. The unconscious ones were taken there also, and rendered helpless by binding, so that they should not, on their recovery, release their companions, and get away to give an alarm.

Then we were free to go.

"You must come with us, Meyer," said the Prince. "I must make up for what you lose here—but that we can talk of later. And your wife. Go and tell her, but be not long, for time presses."

Before many minutes had gone we went out of the house, not into the street, but into the passage at the end of the garden. Once there we began our journey to the quay.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WILD RIDE.

THE journey to the harbour, owing to the knowledge possessed by Peter Maartens, was safely accomplished. He had evidently spent the day in arranging with those who were known to be favourably disposed to the cause of the Prince of Orange, for to my astonishment we scarcely needed to traverse any of the streets. We went down dark lanes, rendered darker yet by overhanging trees, came to gates which led into gardens, and which were either left unfastened or were opened on the instant by some one unseen when Maartens tapped on them. Sometimes we passed into houses, and then through the front doors into a street, only to cross it to another house, and out again at the garden door at the back.

In this way the harbour was reached.

Passing among the great piles of merchandise on the wharf, and always going warily, we came to some steps where a boat was waiting. Maartens left us for a few moments, and satisfied himself that it was the boat we wanted. When we had descended, and stepped in and took our seats quickly and silently, we were pulled by muffled oars to a vessel which weighed anchor even

before either of us had stepped on board. She was moving when our last man came up the side and stood on deck, and going down the broad stream without a light, to escape notice in the well-timed darkness, we were many miles away from the port before the moon began to show herself.

No one challenged us, and before morning broke we were near to the sea.

Taking leave of the Prince, and those with whom we had shared so many dangers during the last few days, Hody and I were put ashore, and landing near a house which Maartens spoke of, we followed his suggestion and requested shelter, rest, and food. They were granted without hesitation when we named the Prince, and for many an hour we lay asleep after the weariness of the exciting day and night we had been spending.

Van der Ryk, our host, lent us horses, and late in the day, with his son to bear us company and show us the better roads, we went forth to find Elizabeth.

An unaccountable anxiety oppressed me while we rode silently, for it was deemed wise not to talk too much. The experience I had had in Antwerp had made me realise more than ever the terrible possibilities of life in the Netherlands, especially for any who had the temerity to embrace the doctrines of the Reformation; and from these possibilities I could not separate my darling. I thought of the girl I had seen in Antwerp, walking between the minions of the Inquisition, and I shuddered when I considered that Elizabeth was not immune from such an experience. The Inquisition knew no respect of persons. Youth, age, beauty, decrepitude, wealth, poverty

—none of these availed as a plea for exemption from torture and death.

We rode into a town, the name of which I now forget, and young Der Ryk took us to a house where we could rest, since it was well not to go too far while our horses were tired. We could be on the road again in the morning, and with good travelling we should reach the house by the morass before evening set in.

The journey, so far, had brought us no excitement out of the ordinary. Occasionally we were stopped by troopers who roughly demanded our business, but when they heard that I was the son of a French merchant, come to the Netherlands on business, and that those who accompanied me were my servants, they suffered me to pass without further inconvenience. It was clear that the Spanish authorities were anxious to maintain friendly relations with the King of France, and would consequently not hinder his subjects who were engaged in the Netherlands in genuine commercial transactions. I wondered how far their consideration would have gone if they had known that I was a Huguenot.

After a sleepless night, I rose early and dressed. While doing so I heard the braying of trumpets, and before long the trampling of horses. Going to the window I looked into the street, and saw a horseman approaching. He rode a magnificent charger with rich trappings, a grey horse that seemed to know that he was carrying one of the great ones of the earth, and bore himself with due pride.

But who the rider was I did not know. The man was thin and tall. He sat upright, for age had not yet begun to bend his shoulders, any more than, judging

from his lean and yellow face, pity had softened his hard heart. His sable-silvered beard fell in two long waving streams upon his richly embroidered coat, which, being open at the front, displayed a shining breastplate of steel decorated richly with gold.

Was it the King of Spain? I asked myself that question, but it could not be he if the generally accepted description of the Spanish sovereign were true.

Was it Alva? the duke who had charge of the Netherlands, and who was ready to enrich and ennoble any man, whether well-born or of the scum of the earth, if he would bring him the head or the dead body of the Prince of Orange, or present ample proof that he had compassed the Prince's death. Was it he?

"Who can it be?" I asked aloud, and I was startled at receiving an answer from some one behind me. It was young Der Ryk. He was looking over my shoulder, but I had not noticed him in my absorption while the horseman rode forward.

"'Tis the Duke of Alva, monsieur, and may God's curse fall on him!" he cried. I saw the look of hate in the young man's face when I turned round, and marked that his hands were tightly clenched together.

I made no instant response, for I turned quickly to see who followed the duke. At his side a gorgeously dressed cavalier was riding, and behind him came three hundred musketeers, wearing chased and gilded armour—men who had achieved great things in battle, but had acquired an intolerable contempt for every Fleming, of whatever rank. Their bearing was insolent. They might have been men of high degree, looking as they did with such contempt on their betters, some of whom were

the most notable men of the town. There was a scornful smile on the faces of the soldiers when these citizens drew aside, and wondered to see the cavalcade ride on without halting. For these townsmen had come by appointment to greet the duke, who, although he saw them waiting, did not deign to stay his progress and speak, but left them to follow after, until he should find it agreeable to himself to confer with them.

I wondered that these high-spirited Netherlanders could submit to such contempt, and apparently so tamely, but I had not yet realised how overwhelmingly strong was that iron hand that held them down. In my ignorance I uttered my thought aloud to my companion—

“I had rather chop this hand off at a blow,
And with the other fling it at thy face,
Than bear so low a sail.”

I had yet to learn the splendid spirit that moved the people—a spirit that was merely held in check until the Prince of Orange was ready for his deadly thrust at the oppressor.

“Why has the Duke of Alva come hither?” I asked, when we sat at breakfast with our hostess.

“Because 'tis rumoured that the Prince of Orange is here in hiding,” said Frau Bocholt. “I have been praying that the good Lord would, in His mercy, carry the dear man into a safe place, away from murderous men like this duke.”

“Then your prayer is fully answered,” I exclaimed.

“How do you know that?” she asked eagerly.

“Because my man Hody and I sailed down the Scheldt with his Highness in a ship a day or two since, and we

did not part company with him until the vessel was in sight of the sea. He must be in Rotterdam by this time, and consequently in safety and among friends."

"Then with my whole soul I thank God! Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

The woman's eyes gleamed, and I saw her tears, but they were those of thankfulness.

"Thank God! the cruel duke cannot now touch the Lord's Anointed!" she exclaimed again. And "the Lord's Anointed" the Prince was indeed in the eyes of those who were groaning under the Spanish yoke, and were being beaten with King Philip's scorpion whip.

We left the town as soon as breakfast was over, and when we came to the district with which Hody was well acquainted, we parted with Der Ryk, and rode onward. I was full of hope, and, if such a contradiction could be, full of foreboding at the same time. One moment I thought of the girl to whose home I was riding, thinking of the greeting she would give me, picturing her sweet and beautiful face, and the eyes that would sparkle with delight when she would run down the house path to come to my arms and be kissed. Then I thought again of that street scene in Antwerp, of the Familiars and the maid they were taking to the Holy House. Ah! why did that picture recur so often? Why were my meetings with her and this scene so invariably intermingled? The meeting should promise joy—the picture that always came was dreadful to contemplate. I feared that instead of laughter I should hear a sob; instead of twinkling eyes I should look on grief and a tear-stained face, and anguish, the anguish that is always more wearing to the soul when it is born of hopelessness.

I was never a cruel rider, and rarely used the spur, but when this thought came I spurred my horse on, spurred him to his maddest speed, until the roadside seemed but a line of hedge with little distinctness, until the mud and stones flew up dangerously when the iron-shod feet beat on the road, and until the creature's body was covered with foam.

Hody, equally well mounted, sought to keep pace with me, wondering whether I had gone mad, whether I had determined to end life by taking boundless risks, for more than once, where the road bent, I turned my horse to the wall, or the stream, and leaping, took wall and stream without a thought as to whether they were beyond the powers of the creature I was riding.

The frenzy passed, but not the anxiety.

"I thought you had suddenly gone mad, monsieur," cried Hody reproachfully, when his horse drew level with my own, whose nostrils dilated with the furious pace and strain. Then I told him, and his only answer was—

"It could not be, monsieur. Mademoiselle Grisart lives in a place to which those night-hawks never come."

"Pray God it may be so," I muttered.

I allowed my horse to recover somewhat before I put any pressure on him again, but even thus we rode on with speed, since I could not rest content, and felt that, whatever were the consequences, I must know whether Elizabeth was safe.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FAMILIARS IN THE MORASS.

A WAY in the distance I saw the morass, and the house where my darling lived. There was the curling blue smoke coming out of the chimney, and everywhere were signs of peaceful country life. There was nothing to indicate that tyranny had intruded on the scene, for in the late mellow afternoon light the sights and sounds were reassuring. Two or three horses and some cattle were grazing in the meadows on this side of the homestead. Some storks were standing in the pools, too replete with food to trouble themselves to look for more. Once or twice one flew overhead, perhaps for the mere pleasure of the flight, and birds were everywhere, enjoying the daylight before the sun went down.

But none were there whom I hoped to see. Possibly they were at their afternoon meal, and therefore remained indoors, but I wished that instead they might be in the open air. Then Elizabeth would see me, and would come to meet me, even while we were yet far apart. I thought of and almost felt her shapely arms about my neck, her breath on my cheeks, her soft lips on my own ; but that was not to be.

Still, it would be a delight to ride into the yard, leave my horse there, go softly, and entering the house stealthily, throw open the door and surprise them at the table. How glad they would be! How they would spring to their feet with a happy cry! It would be as delightful as if they were without. My darling would come to my arms, and then the joy of meeting!

Hody broke in on my reverie, for now that I had thought of seeing them indoors I had forgotten everything in the outside world.

"Monsieur," he cried, "look away to the left. What do you see?"

I was startled at his tone; then I pulled up my horse suddenly, when I had gazed in the direction in which he was pointing. I was aghast with fear because of what I saw. I seemed to feel my hair lifting at the sight.

In the distance, on a narrow causeway which skirted the morass, I saw a group of people—four in all—moving slowly. At first I could not comprehend. It appeared as though four women went on in leisure, but while we gazed the group began to assume shape. Two of the four were women, but the other two! Who could mistake? The Inquisition blotted the landscape with those horrible robes of black which rendered the wearers so inhuman, so fearful in their appearance, so soul-chilling in their influence on all with whom they had any dealings.

"Familiars!" exclaimed Hody, for I was speechless, and my man, without waiting to know my will in the matter, yielded to a sudden impulse and spurred his horse.

As for me, I sat in helplessness and continued to gaze. I was in a stupor. I could neither move hand nor foot. I could neither shake the rein to set my horse going, nor use my spurs, but sat and stared.

Hody turned and looked back, pulled up his horse, caused the creature to swing round, and rode back to me.

"It may be madame and mademoiselle, monsieur," he cried, when he reached my side and saw me staring like some demented one. "Rouse yourself, monsieur!" he almost shouted when I did not move, and gripping my arm he shook me roughly to awaken me out of my inertness. When he saw me turn my startled eyes to look at him, he drew his hand away from my shoulder, grasped the reins, and going forward drew my horse along with him.

This aroused me, and I was myself again. I realised my man's purpose, and the revulsion from stupor, and helplessness, and overwhelming fear, was one of mad desire to make up for lost time. I caught up my reins, which had fallen from my hands, and took my horse under my own control.

"We must save them, Hody!" I cried. "Whoever they may be those Inquisitors must not have them!"

We went on now at a great pace, meaning to overtake that distressing group. The shortest cut was through the homestead. The door of the house stood wide open. Some cattle stood in the yard blinking, and chewing some hay that lay about, and presently a woman, hearing the sound of horses, came out of the house.

"Who is gone with those Inquisitors?" I cried, not waiting to give a word of greeting to the woman, whose

face was streaming with tears and who was dishevelled in her grief.

"Madame Grisart and Mademoiselle Elizabeth," she answered, with a sob, and wringing her red hands.

I waited to hear no more, but rode forward in hot haste and hotter anger. Murder was in my heart. If I could not save my darling and her mother without shedding blood, I would neither spare my strength nor my fury.

It was not a long ride. The Inquisitors had had a great start, but they went on foot, and the women were going slowly and reluctantly. They were on the other side of the marsh, and were now on the track which led to the place where the field-preaching had been held. I understood why they went in that direction. There was a monastery four miles away, and they undoubtedly determined to take Elizabeth and her mother there, probably purposing to convey them elsewhere later on for a formal examination before the Inquisitors. The path, however, led very near to the edge of the morass—not more than two or three yards away, so far as I could remember.

We went on without a word, save at one moment in our ride, when Hody spoke—

"We shall save them, monsieur?" he asked.

"Yes," was my answer.

"At all costs?" said the man.

"At all costs! at the cost of death for two Inquisitors, if necessity calls for such a price," I cried passionately.

"Then we are both of one mind," was the grave response of Hody, who set himself to drive on his horse at greater speed, as if he longed to begin the contest.

After that we did not speak. The hard breathing of our steeds, the creaking of the saddles while we rode—we heard these sounds but did not heed them. I was thinking rather of the agony of mind my dear one and her mother were enduring, the pain of anticipated torture, the distress, perhaps, at the thought that I should come and find them gone to that place from whence none came forth, unless as a penitent, and that course would never be taken by my Elizabeth. Even while hot anger was holding me, I felt the thrill of pride by reason of my confidence in her resolute loyalty. I knew she would never recall a word, or a thought, or a single atom of her belief. She had once said to me, when we were talking together—it was the night before I left her to find the Prince—"If I should ever be called upon, Henri, to enter the torture-chamber, you will know that I shall be faithful unto death. I shall never deny the Lord who bought me—never!"

When I saw her face I knew that she would be true.

All this passed through my mind, and was a spur to my own endeavour. What if a score of Familiars came to intercept us? My horse's hoofs should beat them down, and rather than be hindered, and lose my darling by the threatened delay, I would use my sword as well. I loosened it in the scabbard, and Hody, seeing what I did, followed my example. I looked round at him and saw his face. The look was sufficient. He himself might have been the lover of the dear girl in front of us.

Suddenly a strange thing happened.

We were nearly at the corner where the path swept round the edge of the morass and left the causeway. I

had already seen Elizabeth take her mother's hand, and thus for a few yards they went, both going with down-bent heads. Never did women walk more dejectedly. A Familiar was on either side, but there came a change. Did Elizabeth think that in those hideous hoods the Inquisitors could not see well sideways, and only when looking straight in front? It must have been so; for with a quick movement she stepped back, still gripping her mother's hand, the Familiars, suspecting nothing, going forward almost mechanically. Before the men were aware the two women had crossed the narrow space between the path and the morass, going swiftly, almost at a bound.

The Inquisitors swung round, probably hearing their swift steps on the soil,—their first intimation of the unexpected course on the part of their prisoners. For a moment they seemed to be bewildered at this unwonted movement, for so few, if any, ever ventured to oppose their will and seek liberty in flight.

Elizabeth and her mother were in the morass before the dark-robed ones realised what had happened. They were more than half a dozen yards on the path of it before the Familiars began to move forward, and then, still gripping her mother's hand, Elizabeth went on, going farther and farther into the place which, if they took but one false step, would swallow them greedily.

Hody saw it and shouted out his wonder. I, too, had exclaimed in amazement. Elizabeth's sudden action recalled to me her presence of mind and her bold attitude during that desperate fight in the corridor, when the peasantry were invading M. Lorin's château. She was making a bid for liberty, and I wondered whether, if the

Familiars ventured to follow into the morass, she would use a weapon to defend herself. I knew that she carried one, for she protested more than once to her mother and myself that it was only right that a woman should protect herself when her life and liberty were threatened. If a man went armed in perilous days, why not a woman?

The Familiars followed, and I noted how they went. They bent forward slightly, as if to watch the footprints Elizabeth and her mother left behind them, but since they went more slowly, because more uncertainly, the women drew ahead every moment. Long before we reached the spot where the two had entered the dangerous track, they were a considerable distance on the way, while the Familiars were beginning to realise that their perils were increasing.

Then I called across the morass.

"Elizabeth!"

"She heard my voice, turned quickly, and saw me. Then she waved her free hand, for she still gripped her mother's, and called back in surprise and delight—

"Henri, my beloved!"

"Stand where you are, while we deal with these men," I shouted.

"No. We are nearing a spot where they will not dare to follow. Ride round and meet us on the other side."

The Familiars turned slowly, afraid to do otherwise because the ground on which they stood was too treacherous for careless movement. Even thus, with all their care, one collided with the other, who lost his footing and fell. As he tumbled he slid away, and

presently was plunging waist-high in the mire, just as the Spanish soldiers had done when we were escaping from the field-preaching. He screamed in terror, and his companion caught at his hand, and by a prodigious effort contrived to pull him back, so that he was able to lie across the path and rise slowly to his feet.

This misadventure did not daunt them utterly, for they turned and went on, doggedly following the fugitives.

"Go round to the other side, Henri. You will be of greater service there," came the soft clear voice. "We are safe from those men at present. They cannot overtake us, since I know the way and they do not."

Waving her hand, she turned, and set her face towards her home.

"What shall we do?" I asked of Hody.

"As mademoiselle desires, monsieur," said the man, gathering up his reins.

We put our horses to the gallop, and going back to the causeway, we rode towards Elizabeth's home. Scarcely for a moment did we take our eyes off the women and their relentless pursuers, who were following with an amazing audacity. One could understand pursuit on dry land, persistent and untiring, even if the roads had been against the pursuers; but none who lived in the Netherlands were ignorant of the perils of the morass.

"I suppose one would call that devotion to duty," Hody observed; for while the men and their mission were hateful, one could not withhold some meed of admiration in watching their persistency.

Nearer and nearer Elizabeth and her mother drew towards their home, whereas the Inquisitors, compelled

in caution to go more slowly, were only half-way across. To add to their perplexity and peril, the night was coming on. The sun had gone down before Elizabeth made her disconcerting movement, and there, in growing darkness, they discovered that with every onward step they were advancing towards greater danger.

At last they came to a standstill. It was so dark that they could no longer see where to put their feet, and when Hody and I last saw them, before we entered a bit of forest land, to find our way through the homestead, round to the spot where Elizabeth would step from the morass with her mother, they were looking about them like lost men. One could not fail to note their bewilderment, yet it was impossible to sympathise with them, terrible as their position was.

It was something to know that my darling was safe now, at all events for the present. I had but to go on and greet them.

Leaping from our horses, we hurried across the intervening space which hid the marsh from us. We stood on the edge and gazed into the semi-darkness, and saw them coming slowly, since the path was difficult to find. But in God's mercy the last yard was safely trodden, and Elizabeth was in my arms.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WAYSIDE INN.

THAT night we rode away. Gathering together what was valuable, but carrying nothing other than this, and the clothes they wore, Elizabeth and her mother rode forth with us into the dark night. We went first of all to St. Nicolas, a small town half-way on the road to Ghent, where we could rest with some friends, make such arrangements as were necessary for a long journey, and ride on thence to France, where there would be none of those terrible experiences that had marked the home-life of the fugitives.

At St. Nicolas Madame Grisart made some arrangements in regard to money matters, and having satisfactorily completed her business, she said she was ready to proceed. We pushed on quickly through Ghent and Courtrai, and one morning, after we had travelled all the night, lest we should be overtaken, supposing that the Familiars succeeded in escaping from the morass, we rode across the French frontier.

Once more on my native soil I breathed more freely, and my companions halted to breathe a prayer of thankfulness; for now, we thought, there would be no more of the distressing scenes we were so often compelled to

witness in the land from whence we had just escaped. It is true that we were still in some peril. In spite of the truce between the two great factions, the Catholics and Huguenots could not conceal their rivalry, and the result was that our experiences at the inns at which we halted from time to time were not always of a pleasant nature. We either received great attention, or, when it was known to some that we were Protestants, we were subjected to some amount of incivility.

One landlord was especially obnoxious. A party of Catholics, gathered at a table under the great elm tree which faced the inn, and drinking, treated us with considerable contempt when one of their number, knowing me, declared that we were a company of canting Huguenots. They jeered at us, and the varlets of the stables and the house, siding with the stronger party, joined them, and were intolerably insolent.

"You must move on, messieurs," said the landlord, who had come out when he heard the execrations and the general and disgraceful outcry.

"But why?" I asked sharply.

"Because I say so, monsieur. If you stay here, you will get no service," the fellow responded insolently, taking his cue from his other customers.

I looked at the man, then at the horses. They were fresh as yet, and there was time to travel farther before sunset. The only trouble was that Madame Grisart and Elizabeth were tired, for we had been in the saddle ever since daydawn.

"Move on, monsieur," said Hody in a low voice. "We want no disturbance with the ladies in our care,

and the men yonder want to pick a quarrel. 'Tis easy to see that."

Unwillingly enough I accepted the suggestion, but not until Madame Grisart begged me not to remain.

"Very well, Master Landlord," I exclaimed, sufficiently loud for the men under the tree to hear, for they were now silently observing what I purposed to do. "We are going to Paris, and I will report your conduct and that of others to them that are in authority."

One of the men—he whom I knew—sprang to his feet with an oath, and put his hand to his sword, but his companions pulled him down into his seat. The landlord changed instantly. He cringed, and I felt that I would like to kick him for being a craven.

"I would wish you to stay, monsieur, if I have room, for I should be sorry to give offence."

"I'll take the offence and not your room, landlord," I answered roughly, and shaking my horse's rein, I rode on, the others moving forward with me.

We were not to get away without something further being said. One of the gentlemen at the table came after us before we had put our horses to the trot, and going to the rein, held my horse."

"Hands off, monsieur!" I exclaimed, somewhat sharply.

"Nay, monsieur, I want to ask your pardon for our rudeness. If, as you say, you will report M. Ferry at Paris, it will do him harm, for already he is in sufficiently ill odour, and Catherine de Medici is scarcely in the humour to see Huguenot ladies and gentlemen exasperated, since 'tis her present mood to be friendly with them."

"Ah, then, 'tis because of this you crave the pardon

of these ladies for your jeers and spiteful sayings?" I rejoined, putting some very genuine discontent into my tone.

"I pray you, monsieur, do not attribute to me such a motive," the other exclaimed. "You are well aware, since you are a Frenchman, that between Huguenots and Catholics exists a real ill-will, and since I am a Catholic, I bear no love for those who differ from me. Still, as I count myself a gentleman, I crave the pardon of madame and mademoiselle for being ill-mannered enough to disregard their presence."

"What would you, then?" I asked.

"I would have you return to the inn, monsieur, that the ladies may rest, and also ask you to say nothing in Paris about M. Ferry."

I turned to my companions, and reading acquiescence in their faces, I accepted the apology on their behalf and rode up to the door of the inn.

We rested the night there, and were not further troubled. The landlord brought us of his best, the ladies were recipients of the fullest attention from the wife and daughter, and even the stable varlets were no longer uncivil.

All this spoke great things as to the influence of Paris over the provinces, and of the overwhelming power exercised by the Queen-Mother. It was characteristic of France at the time that "the waverers and the waiters on fortune" should array themselves on the side of the strong. If the Queen-Mother whispered her wish, Huguenots throughout France would receive courtesy and consideration. But I knew full well that if she did but frown we should see what France had

witnessed not long before, when the old Constable de Montmorency re-entered the Church of Rome, and heading a mob in Paris, stormed a Protestant Church, tore away the seats, and piling them up, with the Bibles on top of all, poured oil on wood and book, and set the pile blazing. Nay, more, that the mob would not stop at the mere burning of a building.

Save for unpleasant experiences like these we enjoyed riding through the country in the summer time. Occasionally we rode through a sleepy little town, the people of which did not trouble themselves much as to what was disturbing the outside world. More than once we halted at a château whose owner I knew, and the welcome was genuine, while the hospitality was boundless. Generally we rode leisurely, gazing at the beauties of the sun-bathed land, traversing the forest and skirting the rivers, fording streams, or halting to watch the people in the fields. It was not easy to believe that France had been devastated so often, and torn asunder by civil war so recently.

We found our way to M. Lorin's château, and waiting at the drawbridge, we saw madame coming to greet us, for the porter had gone in to tell who it was that waited without for admission.

"We stayed for no invitation," cried Elizabeth, bending in her saddle to kiss Madame Lorin.

"What has brought you here, my dear?" said the lady of the château, when the three women had ended their greetings.

"'Tis a story that requires long telling," said Elizabeth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MY SISTER'S LOVER.

LEAVING Elizabeth and her mother with Madame Lorin, I rode to Paris with Hody, intent on two things: one, to report to my father the results of my business transactions in the Netherlands, which were in most ways satisfactory, in spite of the general stagnation in trade; the other, to tell of what I had experienced in regard to my darling. They already knew of my love for her, at home, and I now wanted my father's permission to bring Elizabeth to Paris, and marry her there.

On my way I called at the château where Admiral Coligny lived. He was evidently pleased to see me, and listened with keen interest when I told him how and where I had found the Prince of Orange, and of the manner in which we made our escape from Antwerp.

"Thank God for that deliverance," the old man exclaimed reverently, and he leaned over the table and closed his eyes, and sat there a while with clasped hands.

"'Tis cross-bearing in these troubled days, M. Gaston," he said presently, not changing his position. "I suppose we are being made to know to the full that only those who bear the cross will ever wear the crown. Surely

there must be many crowns at God's disposal, since there are so many cross-bearers. The Lord in our time has suffered us to fall into the hands of such stony-hearted adversaries, men who are incapable of pity, void of everything like mercy."

He still was silent, but he presently roused himself.

"I ought not to talk like this," he exclaimed, "for God has sent peace to France. What is more, the King is friendly beyond all belief, and as for the Queen-Mother, she invites me and my chief friends to Court, and loads us with gifts and distinctions."

I knew not what to think. M. Lorin was not of the same mind as Coligny, and believed that the display of so much kindness was a blind, and that some deep-laid scheme for getting the Huguenot leaders into their power was being formulated by the Catholic leaders.

I thought this over when I left the admiral, and told Hody of my fears. He was of my way of thinking, and shook his head when I spoke of one thing in particular—how, when Coligny had been invited to Court, the King went so far in the matter of courtesy as to meet him on the road, and welcome him almost affectionately.

Hody's response was emphatic.

"He no more means regard and friendship, monsieur, than those Familiars we met in Flanders meant to be merciful to the people they tormented. 'Tis all words! deception! There is evil behind it all, and we shall know the extent of it to our cost as Huguenots, some day. It is done, monsieur, to disarm our suspicions."

"I told Coligny so, Hody, and he retorted sharply that I did the King an injustice by the bare suggestion. Then he took me into one of the apartments hard by his

library to show me presents of amazing value, and declared that even the great château in which he was living was a present from his Majesty, who also sent him a hundred thousand crowns."

"So much the worse for our cause," was Hody's emphatic response. "It means something — some dastardly scheme that is to be revealed only when the proper moment comes. Forgive me, monsieur. I can but feel that Coligny has been weakened in his resolution by his illness; that he has become credulous; that the harsh experiences of the past have dulled his perceptions. He is too easily hoodwinked."

Had I not been of Hody's way of thinking it would have been my duty to chide him, but I could do no other than acquiesce. While it was good to be nearing Paris, I was depressed, and filled with an unaccountable anxiety. I distrusted the smiles of my Catholic friends who greeted me when I rode along the streets, and the respectful salutes of the men in charge of the city gate through which we passed.

My father had such thoughts also, and when the warm welcome had come, and we sat about the table after the evening meal, and talked of all that I had seen and experienced, it wanted little in the way of mental effort to discover that my father regretted Coligny's optimism.

"He is too trustful," he exclaimed; "and one day we shall know it to our cost."

Presently he referred to Coligny's visit to the Court, and of the King's condescension in going to meet him.

"Such unnecessary and flattering attentions on the part of his Majesty ought to have aroused Coligny's

suspicious; for however kindly disposed a sovereign may feel towards his subjects, there is no call for him to throw aside his dignity in expressing his goodwill. A kind reception in his palace would have contented us all, without his going to meet Coligny on the road. He protests too much, and I do not like it. It brings one a sense of insecurity."

The conversation changed, and then I told of my experiences with regard to Elizabeth, of her love for me, and of my desire to make her my wife.

"Go and bid her to come when she will," cried my father. "A girl like that must be gold all through, and I shall esteem it a pleasure to call her my daughter."

As for my mother, and my sister Louise, they would have had me go that same night on the road to bring her to Paris so much the sooner. I was ready, and had not my father dissuaded me, and counselled rest and patience, I believe I should have gone.

"Wait at least a day or two, Henri," he said, smiling at my readiness, and at the eagerness of mother and Louise. "Besides, I want to know in detail of your business doings."

When my father and mother went to their room and left me sitting alone, a tap came on the door, and opening it, I saw my sister.

"May I come in?" she said. "I want to talk to you, unless you are tired and desire to go to bed."

"Of Odilon?" I asked, half mischievously, when she stepped in and I closed the door.

"You could not have made a better guess," she answered, looking for a chair. Then, sitting with her

feet resting on a little buffet, she folded her small hands and looked at me, half wondering how she should begin.

"Odilon loves me, Henri," she said awkwardly, and blushing.

"I knew it long since," I said, not helping her at all. I was so delighted to be home again that I found it somewhat difficult to be serious.

She was the sweetest-tempered girl in all the world, but my flippancy annoyed her. I saw it instantly, and bending forward I kissed her, and told her it was only my nonsense.

"Is it not well, sister?"

"I think so. But I want you to know how matters stand between Odilon de Baze and myself. He is a Catholic, and therefore father objects to our marriage."

Then she smiled.

"Odilon is vacillating in the matter of his allegiance to Catholicism," she exclaimed, her lovely face beaming with hope. "So I shall some day have him for my husband."

"Is he vacillating merely because that is the only way to claim you?" I asked; for I did not appreciate the change of attitude, much as I detested everything Catholic.

"No, brother," cried Louise. "A hundred times No! Would you attribute anything so base to Odilon?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"He is too honourable to so demean himself! Henri, do not think so meanly of my lover!"

"Nay, I will not, my sister, if I see reason otherwise,"

I said, drawing my chair closer to hers and taking her hand in mine. Then she went on again.

"He came to me a week or two ago, angry at what he sees at Court. He spoke of the lack of generous feeling on the part of those who should have displayed it. He has been reading the Bible I gave him, and marked down the manner of life there shown as being the life that should characterise the followers of Jesus, and it has impressed him. He had been reading Paul's chapter on Charity, and the beauty of it thrilled him. It did more. He has been putting what he has read to the test. He has measured those who are in authority by the Bible standard—the priests and the great Church dignitaries. He has been to Rome for the King, and returned sad at heart because he saw so much of wickedness among those who were supposed to display the character of our Lord. He noticed the neglect of their duty to the poor—there, in Rome, and here, in Paris, their unchristlike tempers, their evil living, their grasping ambitions. He says he cannot see Christ in them as he sees Him pictured in the sacred Word."

Louise paused.

"There it stands, Henri, for the present, except in this, that he says that he must see his way clearer, to come to some decision. He held me in his arms the other evening and said—you can scarcely imagine, brother, with what emotion—'Darling, I love you; but if my Church is the true one, I dare not leave her, even to call you mine.' And when he said that I wept, for I love him so."

"Would you have him change against reason and conviction, Louise?" I asked, for she was leaning her

head against the high-backed chair, and the tears came through her closed eyelids.

"I would not have him come at all, Henri, unless the dear Lord's love constrained him. And he will not come unless it does. Only last Saturday he said, 'Darling, I must be more convinced than I am before I can change. I must better understand the matter.'"

Then she kissed me, and went to her room.

A few days went by, and I was going along the passage. All my preparations were made for travelling to M. Lorin's château in order to bring Elizabeth to Paris, and I was to start on the following morning. At that moment the door of my father's room, just beyond, opened, and De Baze came forth. He did not see me, but went with downcast eyes to the street door and passed out. I stood and wondered, for he seemed to be a man stricken with grief—so changed from the De Baze I knew, who took the world lightly, and was able to hold up his head so boldly, whatever the trouble was that came his way.

Just then the door opened again, and I saw my father coming out, looking grave and troubled. When he saw me he beckoned to me to enter, and stepping back waited until I went in. He closed the door, and going to his table, spoke, but motioned first to me to sit in the chair close by him.

"Did you see De Baze go a moment or two since?" he asked.

"Yes, father. He looked as though in trouble."

"He might well be," came the response. "Poor fellow! Yes, and noble fellow, also."

There was silence then. My father sat buried in

deep thought, folding his hands tightly, as he always did when perplexed.

"You know, my son," he said presently, "that De Baze wanted to marry your sister?"

"Yes."

"I told him it could not be so long as he and Louise were not of the same faith. I could not allow my daughter to marry a Catholic. It would be an unholy union which I could not countenance. Now he comes to tell me that he stands in the position of one who feels convinced that sooner or later he must abjure Catholicism, and ally himself with the Huguenots. The consequences will necessarily be serious. He feels that if he tells the King, his Majesty will deprive him of his place in the Royal household. Not that he needs the money he receives, but necessarily he does not like to forego the honour of being in the monarch's service.

"That, however, is a secondary thing," my father continued, after a brief pause. "He feels that when he announces the fact that he is to become a Huguenot, he must cease to be your sister's suitor, and that all must end between them."

"What!" I cried, and I knew not whether to be angry. "Does he mean to jilt my sister? Will he play the part of scoundrel, by winning her love and then casting her aside?"

My father held up his hand, and spoke subduedly.

"You do not understand, my son. 'Tis because the man has a soul of honour that he will not marry Louise. I told him that so long as he was a Catholic he could not be my son, and now he comes to me, telling me of

the passionate love he bears for her. I could see it, Henri, I knew how great a struggle he must have had before he came to me—a conflict between longing and what he deems duty. He said this to me: 'M. Gaston, if I came and claimed your daughter's hand when I cease to be a Catholic, when I avow to the world that I am a Huguenot, you would have cause to doubt my honesty of purpose, the sincerity of my change. You would be able to say or think that I changed my faith to win your consent to our marriage.'

"'What of that?' I asked. 'What is it you wish to say?'

"I put the question to De Baze, my son, because he hesitated, and walked up and down the room restlessly.

"'It means, M. Gaston, that while it brings me unending sorrow—and sorrow to Louise—I must forego it all, and say I may not marry your daughter.'

"I understood. I told him I could not misapprehend. I told him more; that the matter should remain without decision for three or six months; that since I marked the stand he took, I could not misread his motive or misjudge his honour.

"And there the matter remains."

We sat in silence when my father had ended. I knew not what to say to all that had been said.

"Who will tell Louise?" I asked, presently.

"There is no need that she should be told," came a voice from behind us, and looking round, we saw my sister standing near the closed door. "There is no need. I have heard what my father said."

Then she sank on the floor, and burying her face in her hands, gave way to her grief.

“What does my daughter say?” said my father, who had gone on his knees beside her, and held her to his bosom.

“What do I say? That he is more than worthy of my love. But oh! to think that I must lose him!”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

IT was impossible not to admire De Baze for this renunciation. My father understood it—so, indeed, did we all—for Odilon de Baze had given a hundred tokens of the reality of his love. Who could fail to appreciate the mental anguish he had endured before he took the step he did? to decide on the great question of a change of faith, not from interest but from conviction, and yet to shrink from the natural conclusion that the change was made solely because he desired to obtain Louise for his wife. Who could doubt that he had wrestled with himself, and that every step taken to my father's house, to tell him of his position and decision, was a jar to his whole nature—that the walk thither was as painful to his soul as the last steps of a martyr to the stake?

“Do you blame him?” I asked my sister, when we sat and talked the matter over, later in the evening.

“Blame him? Blame Odilon? Nay, he is a truer man even than I thought!” she exclaimed. “But if you ask me what I would do, I say at once that I would plead with him—unwomanly though some might deem

it—to put aside his scruples and marry me, since I was assured of the honesty of his purpose.”

I left her and went to my room, and there I sat and pondered on this matter. It was a thousand pities that my sister's love should be squandered, and that those two, who were so fitted for each other, should be lastingly unhappy. The longer I sat the more the feeling grew upon me that De Baze should know what we thought, and after a while I took up my cap, buckled my sword on, and went out of the house.

When I crossed the threshold and walked down the street a little way, a gentleman of the Court passed me, and we exchanged greetings without halting. It was Antony Barrot, a man of rank and wealth, one of the King's equerries, and in consequence a man of some importance and influence. I heard his footsteps for a few moments, and then they stopped. Standing, I turned to look, and saw him at my father's door. In a short time he entered the house, and the door closed.

The incident annoyed me, for Louise had told me what had happened between him and herself during my long absence in the Netherlands. He had pestered her continuously with the declaration of his love for her, and his solicitation for her hand.

I do not use that term “pestered” offensively. I rather write the word down here to indicate persistency in what was an annoyance to Louise. For it mattered not where or when he found her. Morning, noon, or night, in season or out of season, making business which was sometimes trifling the excuse for calling at the house, stopping her if he met her while she was out riding, and holding her in converse while those who were with her

were waiting in an impatient little group a few yards away, wondering at his earnestness and my sister's manifest annoyance. It was all "Love's labour lost," as people say, for he was nothing to her. If her heart beat faster when she saw him it was from vexation, and not from what is termed in France "the tender passion."

I was displeased when I saw him standing at the door waiting for admission, but I went on; for what could I do? I had no cause for quarrel with him. My father had not forbidden him the house—scarcely dared to do so, indeed, for M. Barrot's influence at Court was too great for any one to give him offence lightly. I swung round on my heel discontentedly, and walked on towards De Baze's house, which was at the back of the Louvre.

De Baze was at home when I called, and when the woman who answered my knock led me to the room and flung open the door, I saw him sitting before the empty grate, with his feet stretched out, his hands thrust into the pockets of his coat, and his chin resting on his chest, a picture of dejection; and when he turned his face at my entrance, it was an embodiment of despair.

"Henri!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Why are you here?"

"I have come to ask you to be my brother, Odilon," I answered, putting my arm about his shoulder. "To tell you that we understand your position, and appreciate your honourable motive. But——"

"Henri," he cried, drawing himself away and interrupting me, "it cannot be! I love your sister. Man never loved a woman more! But I have changed my faith, and I would not have her think that I did so simply to clear away an obstacle to our marriage."

"We could never think such a thing of you, Odilon. We have sat and talked the matter over at home, and I have come to reason with you."

"As your sister's ambassador?"

"No; I think she would prefer to be her own emissary. I have come on my own initiative, thinking it well to let you know what my father said, what my mother thinks, what is in my own mind, and to plead with you, and beg you to believe that there could be no misunderstanding as to the position you occupy."

"But your sister?"

"She loves you as she has always loved you," I answered simply. "If anything—supposing such a thing were possible—she loves you more, since now she knows you to be the soul of honour. Were it not for this, that you might judge her to be unwomanly, I believe she would come herself and tell you that the change is her heart's delight, but that your conclusion as to the marriage is her lasting sorrow."

We stood at the window and talked. To all that I advanced by way of argument and entreaty for both their sakes, he had an answer, the force of which I could not fail to admit. It was a long hour ere I took his hand and said "good-night." I was coming away, realising that he would not shift his position for honour's sake, he was so sensitive on that point of being misjudged. I had gone out of the room, and had drawn the door after me, when he opened it and called me back.

"Henri," said he, when I had returned, and stood in the room with my hand on the latch of the closed door, "I will take a few weeks to consider. Ask Louise to wait. Tell her that at present she may admire me for

my renunciation, but she may despise me because as yet, and for a while at least, I cannot make a public announcement of my adherence to the Huguenots. There is a reason for it. Ask her to believe that it is out of my power to explain that reason, but that in the end she will see that I was wise in my delay. Yet I cannot but feel that she may despise me for staying, as it were, in the House of Rimmon—to act as though I were a Catholic, while in secret I am a believer in the doctrines of the Reformation.”

He swung round on his heel and walked the floor in agitation.

“I know she will despise me when you tell her. But I cannot help it. I can only hope, and faintly, that she will believe that I am doing what I am doing, not because I am a moral coward, but because the reasons are imperative.”

“Leave me, Henri,” he exclaimed at last. “The day may come when, although in the interval you may despise me, and may think me more despicable as a Huguenot than hateful as a Catholic, you will see cause to exonerate me from all blame.”

Returning home, I found my sister, and told her what had passed.

She took it kindly, with a fine faith in his integrity.

“He could be no coward, brother,” she declared. “If he says that he has ample reason for remaining for a while in what he calls the House of Rimmon why should I doubt his wisdom or his honesty?”

She even smiled.

“I shall win him yet, Henri,” she presently cried. “He loves me, and will some day be my husband.”

Drawing me down, she kissed me affectionately. "For being so dear a brother, so jealous for my happiness," she said, as her lips touched mine.

We sat and talked, and after a while I said that I had seen M. Barrot enter the house shortly after I started to find De Baze. She was not gay—she could not be while she was so sorely anxious concerning her lover—but her face had been more hopeful. Now, when I mentioned Antony Barrot's name, a cloud swept across it. She looked disquieted.

"Yes. He came to press his suit, and the interview was not a pleasant one.

I heard from her lips what had transpired. When M. Barrot pleaded with her to give him her love, she answered candidly that there were many gentlemen in Paris for whom she had a greater esteem, and she begged him to believe that his endeavour to win her hand in marriage was hopeless.

He stood back from her, and gazed at her a while in silence. When he spoke his words were—

"Louise, you shall marry me! I swear that you shall!"

"But, M. Barrot, I answer just as emphatically that I will not!" was her reply. "I will never marry a man I do not love. I am as likely to marry the pedlar in the street."

He would not take her answer as final.

"It shall be!" came his hot rejoinder. "If I cannot win you by love, I will win you by compulsion. Mademoiselle Louise, I will place you under such obligation, that for very shame you will not say 'No,' and you will take me for your husband." With that he left her.

I have since thought that when M. Barrot spoke in such a way he knew something of what was coming, of the awful terror which was shortly to descend on Paris. Catherine de Medici may have plotted in secret with her son for what was destined to bring the great tragedy into his realm, and ruin his name and fame, but it must have leaked out and come to the ears of Antony Barrot.

In the light of later events, I have no doubt that De Baze suspected something of which he dared not whisper, and for that cause elected to stay a while in the House of Rimmon to discover more. It proved later that he had no certain knowledge until it was too late, and that at the best he had only suspicion to go upon.

CHAPTER XXX.

LOUISE MISSING.

ELIZABETH and I were married, and never were man and wife more happy. Never did a young bride receive a fonder welcome than that which awaited her in my father's house. Her beauty impressed them all, my father, my mother, and Louise; but it was her charming manner, her sweet simplicity, the strange witchery in her every look and movement that won them all, as she stood in our great living-room and received their greetings. On that first night of her arrival in Paris, it looked as though they would not spare her to me for a single word, for my mother and Louise took her away that they might have her all to themselves. As for my father and myself, we were left to each other's company, to talk of this new daughter in our home.

"It will be delightful when I see Louise a bride," my father said, with something like a sigh; "but we must wait. Still, the girl seems more content. She has absolute faith in the future. She quite believes that she and De Baze will ultimately be husband and wife."

Many a pleasant hour followed during the next few

days, while we were looking for a house. There were many empty ones in Paris, since so large a number of Huguenots had gone away, caring more for the country with its drawbacks, than for the capital and its gaiety together with the sense of insecurity so many felt, in spite of the promising peace to which Coligny had consented. It was thus that we had a wide choice at our disposal. So many were the houses, that we did not know on which to decide.

Before that decision was made some pressing business rendered it necessary that I should go to Rouen, and much as I felt indisposed to leave my darling, there was no alternative but to do so. The business, however, did not take me long, and in a few days Hody and I were riding back to Paris.

"What is wrong?" I asked, when Elizabeth met me, for she heard my voice, and came out of the living-room to greet me. The woman who opened the street door looked perturbed, and I wondered, and when my wife paced the passage I noticed that in spite of her gladness at seeing me she was greatly distressed.

"Louise is missing," said she.

"What do you mean?" I cried.

Just then my father and mother appeared, and there was no doubt as to their anxiety. My mother's usually bright face had changed, and it was easy to see that she had been weeping. Even when I put the question again, the tears came.

"Tell me everything," said I, standing with the others in a little group in the passage.

"There is not much to tell," my father said gravely. "A note came at breakfast-time, brought, the woman

who answered the door said, by a man whom she did not know. Louise opened it and read it. It was an invitation to call on a friend in the Rue de Charras. She had finished breakfast, and went at once, laughing as she went, and saying to Elizabeth that she would ask Madame Collas whether she knew of a house which would suit a young couple newly wedded.

"The day wore on, but we thought nothing of her absence; yet when it began to grow dusk, and she did not come, we became anxious.

"Then a strange thing happened. Odilon de Baze came, for the first time since he told us what brought so much distress to your sister, and asked to see Louise. Before I told him anything he looked at our faces and read our anxiety.

"'Where is she?' he asked. 'Is anything wrong?'

"'She went out this morning to see Madame Collas in the Rue de Charras, and has not returned. I was thinking of sending some one to escort her home,' said I.

"A queer look came into De Baze's face, and for the first time I began to be really alarmed.

"'Did you say Madame Collas in the Rue de Charras?' he asked.

"'Yes.'

"'How could that be? Madame Collas moved out of the house three or four days ago, and I happen to know that she is not in Paris to-day. I will go and make inquiries.'

"Without waiting for more, De Baze went off, and he has not yet returned."

My father had scarcely finished speaking when there

came a loud knock on the door, coming with such suddenness and so imperatively that we were startled.

"They are here," my mother exclaimed, brightening, and wiping her eyes quickly, so that Louise should not see that she had been weeping.

The woman who had opened the door for me was standing near us, as if she must hear afresh the story of what had happened, for it was easy to read her disquietude, since all the household had such love for my sister. She went to the door quickly and opened. To our consternation De Baze was at the doorstep alone, looking white and troubled, and breathless with hurrying.

"Have you not found her?" we cried simultaneously.

"No. I was wrong as to Madame Collas having left her house," said De Baze, coming into the passage quickly. "She goes out next week. But let that pass. The important thing is this, that she did not write any note to Louise, nor has Louise been near her to-day. Where is the note?"

"Louise took it with her to her room," said Elizabeth. "It may be there now."

Turning, when she said this, she ran up the stairs, and in a short space descended with the letter in her hand.

"May I read it?" De Baze inquired, and when my mother told him to do so, he scanned the note through, then exclaimed, with more concern than before—

"There is some wicked work in this. The note purports to come from Madame Collas, but says, 'Come first to Number Four in the same street, as I shall be there on business. Then we may walk out together.'"

"Number Four?" said I, when De Baze ended. "That is where M. Fouquet lived."

"And where he does not live to-day," said De Baze. "At this moment he is in Nantes, and I am confident that the house is unoccupied."

"Let us go and look into the matter at once, Odilon," I cried. "There may be some mistake, but at all events we can discover what has become of her."

Disregarding my hunger, and the fatigue of a terribly hot journey, I turned to kiss Elizabeth, and went out with De Baze. While we tramped along the dark street we scarcely spoke a word, but pressed on to reach the house named in the letter. De Baze broke the silence at last.

"What say you, Henri? Shall we go first to show this letter to Madame Collas?"

"No. Let us first see what we can hear at Number Four."

The quicker way would have been along the riverside, but we chose instead the way Louise was more likely to take on her return, and presently, hot and worried, we halted at Number Four. We knocked again and again, but no answer followed. Some one came at last to the door of Number Three.

"No one is within, messieurs?" said the woman, rather asking a question than stating a fact.

"No one has answered our summons," De Baze said.

"I suppose not," the woman rejoined, somewhat tartly. "The family went away a week ago. I think, however, some one was there this morning, for I saw a lady knocking, and to my surprise she was admitted. However, that was no business of mine, and I have neither heard nor seen anything of her since."

We asked eagerly what the lady was like, and the

woman gave such a close description of her that we knew that it was Louise who had entered.

I looked at De Baze, and saw, by the light of the lantern hanging outside of the house from whence the woman came, that his face was very pale; but there was a determined look upon it which bespoke his resolution to get into the darkened dwelling by some means; if not by admission, then by force, rather than not at all.

"Madame," he exclaimed, turning to the woman, who was undoubtedly a caretaker, and not the mistress of the house, "I want you to help us, for I think you can if you will. The lady who called this morning is this gentleman's sister"—pointing to me—"and a note came early this morning to her, asking her to call at Number Four. Suspecting nothing, and knowing that M. Fouquet lived here, she came. She has not been heard of since, and we are naturally solicitous for her safety."

The woman looked at us keenly, and, evidently satisfied with her scrutiny, requested us to enter her home.

"Now, messieurs, how may I help you? Candidly, I cannot understand how I can possibly be of any assistance, however willing I might be."

"You comprehend the desirability of our finding the lady, madame?" said De Baze.

"But yes, monsieur."

"And we cannot get into Number Four."

"What then?" said the woman.

"Could you not go round by your garden, taking us with you, and go with us through the house, to see whether mademoiselle is there or not?"

The woman turned pale.

"I should be afraid, monsieur. Moreover, I know not who you are," she objected.

"I am M. de Baze."

"Of his Majesty's household?" the woman asked quickly.

"The same. This gentleman is M. Henri Gaston, the lady's brother."

The woman considered before she made reply.

"I would like to help you, monsieur, but suppose it were possible that M. Fouquet should discover what I had done, and had me marched off to prison—what then?"

"I would take such steps as should render that impossible."

While he spoke, De Baze quietly put down a number of gold pieces on the table, and I watched the woman's eyes. They glistened, and smiles came to her face. But a moment later I was startled to see a dirty, thin, but muscular and hairy hand pass from behind me and sweep up the little pile. A quiet chuckle followed.

"Peste!" cried the woman, who sought to catch the hand, since the money was hers, and looking round I saw a lean, dishevelled man slipping back into a seat behind us. We had not noticed him when we entered the place.

"Too late, Madeleine. The money is mine, but if these gentlemen choose to give you more, you may take it, and take them through the house next-door if you will."

"I meant the money for madame," exclaimed De Baze, who was irritated by the incident.

"And I, monsieur, have appropriated it to my own

use," said the man coolly. "You may look upon it in the light of entrance money; what else you choose to give may be taken by my wife for service rendered."

The man spoke with easy insolence, and his face had an ugly smile on it.

"I insist on your returning it to me," cried De Baze, the more incensed by the man's effrontery.

"You do? Then I insist, monsieur, on going into the street, and calling for the watch to arrest you for inciting my wife to break into my neighbour's house. See! 'tis there."

He placed the money on the table, folded his lean hands and looked at us, a sinister smile on his face.

None touched the money; neither the woman nor De Baze.

"Take it," said my companion. "We are eager to find this young lady, so keep the money as long as your wife is free to help us."

"With all my heart," cried the man, snatching up the gold, with a laugh. "I care not what she does now. None the less I wish you good luck."

Saying this, he flung himself back in the chair with a self-satisfied air, and the woman, lighting a lantern, took us into the garden at the back.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HOUSE IN RUE DE CHARRAS.

WHEN we were in the garden we saw that there was an opening in the bushes which separated this enclosure from that of Number Four, and while Madame Madeleine Courcy held the lantern, we crept through. She followed, covering the lantern with her skirt, so that no one should see us moving in a place where we had no right to be going at such an hour, and by stealth.

"She must be found!" said De Baze, and in such a tone, although he spoke but quietly, that it startled me. I set it down to his love, but there came a time when I saw that it was not love alone, but a consuming anxiety because of his knowledge of what was coming.

"What if the door be fastened, monsieur, or the windows?" asked Madeleine Courcy.

"We must get in somehow," I muttered.

Then De Baze spoke.

"Madame, do you think your husband would condescend to keep a watch on the front door if we made it worth his while?"

"It were best that you should ask him," was the dubious reply.

"Then pray do so, madame."

"Not I, monsieur. Go to him yourself. But why watch the door? Let us enter here at the back."

Saying this, she led the way, and we heard her exclaim in surprise a moment or two later; for when she put her hand on the door, it opened at her touch. She seemed afraid to enter, and De Baze, taking the lantern from her hand, brushed past her, and we saw what there was to be seen.

It was not much, for the long passage, while it was richly panelled, contained nothing but some pictures on the walls, but no furniture. Here on the right was a room with a doorway under the staircase, and farther on another door, leading into a room the window of which would look on the street.

De Baze had a suspicion like my own, and he nodded approval when he saw me turn the key in the back door, and taking it out of the lock put it into my pocket.

We then commenced a systematic search. The room near us was entered first, but it was empty. The furniture was superb, denoting the wealth of the owner. The room beyond was even more choicely appointed, but that was not surprising to any who knew M. Fouquet as a man of expensive tastes, preferring to live in a small way, so that he might the more readily surround himself with luxuries. But we wanted to find Louise, and these things had no interest for us then.

She was not there.

We required more light, and lighting one of the lamps I carried it in my hand. Madeleine, beginning fully to realise our consuming anxiety, set another burning, so that there was light in plenty, sufficient to show up

the darkest corners. Thus we went from floor to floor, away to the topmost room in the roof, where we had to bend low to keep from striking our heads against the timber beams. It was all in vain. There was not a single token of her presence, and we descended, thinking to leave the house, mortified at our lack of success.

"Is there a cellar, madame?" I asked, but the woman shook her head. From the look in her face I judged that she was sorry that the search had resulted in failure.

"Shall we go through the house again, more deliberately, messieurs?" she said, when we were at the foot of the staircase, and I was getting at my money to pay her for her service.

"Is it of any use?" asked De Baze hopelessly. "I would gladly give a hundred pieces of gold—five hundred, Madame Courcy—if we could find her!"

"But one more look," Madeleine cried; then she exclaimed: "Ha! what is that?"

She stepped forward quickly to the back door, and, stooping, brought back in her hand a lady's glove.

"Do you know it?" she asked excitedly, holding it up for us to see.

"'Tis my sister's," I answered, after examining it intently. But whether to be pleased or sorry at the discovery I did not know. One thing seemed certain, at all events—Louise had been in the house; and since the glove lay near the back door, it seemed to indicate that she had left by that exit.

Disregarding caution, so far as making our movements known to the neighbours went, since we had now good reason for our presence in the dark garden, we searched,

but found nothing. The back gate was open, and we passed through it, then turned to walk along the narrow lane which led directly on the road where the Pont aux Meuniers crossed the Seine. A yard or two away from the exit I stooped and picked up another glove, the companion to that which we had already found in Number Four.

Madeleine left us and went away slowly, but not without promising to go to my father's house if she heard of anything likely to throw light on this strange matter. Meanwhile, with those two gloves as the assurance that Louise had been decoyed, we stood bewildered, leaning against the low wall which kept passengers from falling into the dark waters of the Seine. How had those gloves fallen where we found them? Were they there by accident? or had she dropped them unseen, so that if we went to the house we should know two things: first, that she had been there, and then that she had gone, in the direction of the river? A third suggestion came, that she had surely not left the house in the broad daylight, or she would have been seen, and there would have been a hundred persons to whom she could appeal.

She had left the house. But where was she?

We went to the watchman's house on the bridge, and, answering our summons, the man waited sullenly to hear our business.

"Have you seen a lady cross the bridge?" asked De Baze.

"Hundreds of them," came the surly reply. The man clearly had no great regard for those who were of higher rank than himself.

"Within the last hour or two?"

"Not that I remember."

"Refresh your memory, my good fellow," I said, giving the man a bit of gold. "It will be worth your while to know something."

"What sort of lady, messieurs?" came the question, now put in a civil tone, and I described Louise.

"Yes, monsieur, I saw such a lady. She had two gentlemen with her, strangers to me, and they went over the bridge without a word. They came out of yonder lane, as though from one of those houses in the Rue de Charras. Oh yes, I remember it well."

I asked whether she appeared to go willingly, but the man could not tell. All that he could say was that they were going swiftly.

"Mademoiselle was between them, messieurs, walking weakly, so I thought, for each gentleman held her by an arm. I thought her ill."

We crossed the bridge, and then were as lost as though we had had no clue whatsoever. We met and questioned a score of men in the long night search, and had as many disappointments, and when we returned home, worn out with our ceaseless tramping, we felt that Louise was lost indeed.

Yet we were resolute not to be frustrated. She had to be found. De Baze, after a brief rest, went to the Louvre, where he was due for duty during the day, and telling his superior what his trouble was, obtained leave of absence, but he received the strictest injunctions under no consideration to be away after eight o'clock on the evening of Saturday.

"It is a matter of life and death, monsieur," said

M. Chambolle. "If you get into trouble through being late that night, you will have yourself to thank, and not me."

De Baze repeated these words to me on his return.

He spoke in such an ominous tone that some indefinable fear sprang up within me. Of course I did not comprehend the full import of what he said. If I had done so, I should have taken all risks and spent the intervening hours in telling others of the awful thing that was coming, going from one to another until I dropped from sheer fatigue, and could tell no more. Had I known I might have saved many valuable lives; but I was in utter ignorance.

"What did M. Chambolle imply?" I asked; but De Baze either did not know or would not say, for he gave me an evasive answer.

"It is difficult to tell what these men in authority and about the King's person mean," he said. "They are always wagging their heads sententiously, and dropping words that are enigmatical, and nine times out of ten what they say comes to nothing; but we heed them, because it is often the tenth word which is all-important. Meanwhile, Henri, let us not lose a moment."

Mounted on good horses, we went direct to the city gate which was nearest of access from the Pont aux Meuniers, and questioning the man who had been in charge of the keys up to midnight, we heard what filled us with a real belief that at last we had a clue worth following. He had seen a lady ride forth with two gentlemen and a couple of lackeys, and when we asked him to describe her, his description convinced us that

this lady was Louise. I had questioned Elizabeth as to the dress she wore when she went out, and the warden of the gate described her face and figure and attire so correctly that we had barely patience to wait while he began to prose away concerning other details.

"We know sufficient," cried De Baze, cutting the man's story short, but mollifying his somewhat offended dignity by bestowing on him a gratuity which caused him to open his eyes widely.

We spurred our horses in the direction he pointed out, telling us that from the look of the gentlemen he thought they belonged to the Château Mazarine, on the Nantes road.

"Of course, messieurs, I may be mistaken, but I am well-nigh certain that that was the destination, for I heard one of the men say something to his companion in a low tone, and I caught the name of the place."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SOLDIERS ON THE ROAD.

IT proved a fruitless journey, and a bitter disappointment, for when we arrived at the château we discovered that the lady we had been following was not Louise. Yet our hopes had risen with every mile we travelled, for again and again we met people who had seen four horsemen and a lady, and all whom we questioned gave such a description of her that we were convinced that our ride would end in discovering my sister's whereabouts. The question, indeed, which we discussed seriously as we went along was as to how we should obtain possession of her, for if it came to blows, there were only three of us, Hody counting as being in our party, while Louise had as many as four attendants, to say nothing of the men-servants whom we might expect to find at the château.

We rode up to the iron gates, asking, when we halted, the name of the master of the house.

"M. Pierre Durand," was the porter's reply, and since we did not know the owner's name, he displayed some disposition to hinder us from entering. It was a natural stand for such a man to take with strangers.

"Let us pass in," cried De Baze imperatively, and

the man, impressed by his tone and appearance, opened the gate, but somewhat doubtfully and reluctantly.

The servants who saw us approaching stared hard, and one, coming forward deferentially, asked our business.

"We wish to see the lady who arrived a little while since," said De Baze.

I thought that as a matter of course the man would deny her presence, or that he would endeavour to prevent our nearer approach, or display some insolence, but to our surprise he called to one near by to come forward and hold our horses, and when we had dismounted he led the way into the hall.

"I will tell madame," he said respectfully. "What names shall I say?"

"Tell her that M. de Baze, of the Louvre, and M. Gaston of Paris, desire to see her," I exclaimed, and when the man turned on his heel and left us, the beating of his feet on the marble floor seemed like a knell to my hope.

I looked at De Baze, and saw that his face wore a strange expression. It was plain that he had a fear of disappointment.

"Have we come on a fool's errand, I wonder?" he said, in the tone of one who felt convinced that there was some mistake, because of the man's manifest willingness to communicate with the lady and tell her of our coming. He drew his laced kerchief from his bosom and wiped his forehead—a movement indicative of an inward fear. Still one could not build on disappointment until the real position of affairs was known.

"Will you step forward, messieurs?" said the man, reappearing after a brief absence. He waited for us

to approach, and led us along a handsome corridor behind the staircase. In a short time we were ushered into a room in which we found a lady. She was standing by the table.

Was it Louise? At the first glance one would have thought so, and my heart beat with pleasure for a moment. An exclamation of satisfaction escaped the lips of my companion, and he said quickly—

“ Louise ! ”

The lady's gesture, expressive of surprise, was followed by a question—

“ What is it, gentlemen ? ”

Then our hearts sank. It was not Louise, but a lady who might well be mistaken for her. When she spoke the voice was proof alone that we had come all this way in vain. It was a veritable fool's errand. De Baze gave expression to a cry of disappointment, which brought still more surprise into the lady's face.

“ What is it, gentlemen ? ” she asked again, and then with a sense akin to despair I quickly told the story of our quest. She listened in sympathy, and protested that it grieved her to think that we had come so far in vain.

“ 'Tis the loss, madame, of so much precious time, and time just now makes so much difference, ” said De Baze, with an emphasis which somewhat bewildered me. This frequent reference to loss of time began to have a strange effect upon me, and recalling the impressive desire of M. Chambolle that De Baze should be at the Louvre not later than eight o'clock on Saturday, I was compelled to wonder whether anything unusual was in the air.

Madame Durand insisted on our staying for refreshment, and sent word for our horses to be fed. She saw how tired we were, and read our distress in our faces; but in less than an hour later we were in the saddle once more.

De Baze was morose for a mile or two, then talkative, and morose again; and because of his many changing moods during the ride I felt certain that he had something on his mind. More than once I was on the point of questioning him, thinking that it would be well if he would unburden himself, but I desisted. I endeavoured to put myself into his place, and imagine what it would mean to me if it had been Elizabeth missing, instead of Louise. Was it not a lover's consuming anxiety that was troubling him?

"Odilon," said I at last, for I was compelled to say something, "if we find Louise, shall you put aside your scruples and marry her?"

"My dear Henri," he exclaimed in a choked voice, "I cannot think. I want to know beyond all else that she is safe. The question of marriage is a question for the future. The pressing longing in my heart is to know where she is, to find her."

There was a world of pain in the cry, as if some thought made her absence an agony.

"Henri," he cried, "I would give my hand to be burned, my body almost, the half of my wealth, ay, and my reputation, which is a precious possession, could I but have her safely in my own keeping for the next few days."

He would say no more, and for miles we rode on in silence, only speaking when it was necessary to consult as to the direction we should take, or what our next step

should be. Going across the country to discover what was possible before we turned our faces towards Paris, we met parties of soldiers, all marching to the capital. They sometimes went in tens, sometimes in little straggling groups, but often a score or two, and once or twice more than a hundred in the party, passed by.

That they were Catholics was plain, for frequently we heard them singing songs which referred with disdain and hate to the Huguenots. More than once we saw some horseplay when the men compelled wayfarers to halt and explain their business. We expostulated several times, but our interference was met with ribaldry or insolence, and on more than one occasion there was need to draw our swords in expectation of some rough treatment from the reckless men who were making their way to the capital.

"What does this mean, M. Forel?" I inquired, when we met an officer whom we knew, and who was in charge of about a hundred well-armed men.

"His Majesty is going to war with Spain, monsieur, so we understand, and wants to see his army in Paris before it goes to camp," came the answer. I found, later, that it was a deliberate lie, and I had my doubts even then as to the truth of M. Forel's words, when I noticed the strange look on his face. He glanced at De Baze, but my companion was staring into vacancy, and seemed neither to see nor hear.

"How much are your thoughts worth, M. de Baze?" cried Forel, thinking to rally him, but the answer came—

"Much more than you can ever pay."

The soldier laughed. I knew him to be impecunious, and although I was consumed with anxiety, I smiled.

"Well, M. de Baze, you will be in Paris for Saturday?" said Forel, as he sent his horse forward.

It was always Saturday, and the thought of this haunted me like a hideous nightmare. What could it mean? Was it only some Court function? Or was it really an appointment for the army to start on some meditated dash into Spain? The truth never entered my mind, and I thought of a hundred things rather than of the right one.

Striking out in another direction, going aimlessly because we had no clue, we came at last to an inn where it was necessary to give the horses some rest. Outside sat Arbey, whom I had not seen since the day when I left him in Coligny's pavilion, while I rode forth to gather in the stragglers for the attack on Marshal de Cossé's army. He came forward with outstretched hands, and while we sat later under the shade of the tree in front of the inn to eat, we told him what our errand was.

The landlord, who was waiting on us, could not but overhear, for we had no reason for keeping the matter secret, and he paused presently.

"Messieurs, pardon me, but I think I can throw some light on the matter."

We were alert in an instant. De Baze brightened up, and for the first time for many hours I saw hope in his face.

"Tell us what you know, landlord," he cried, swinging round to see the man more plainly.

"I saw M. Barrot and three men pass not many hours since with a lady, and although I did not see her face I should not be surprised if she proved to be monsieur's

sister. She rode as one who was disconsolate and unwilling; but perhaps that was my fancy. We become fanciful and fearful in these strange days, messieurs, when such untoward things are happening. Perhaps I see trouble when there is none."

De Baze looked at him fixedly, controlling himself only by an effort. When the man had ended, he poured in questions on him so rapidly that the landlord was bewildered, and asked him for time to comprehend and answer. Then it transpired that the little cavalcade had gone down a side lane hard by the inn, as if making for the Château de Brucknor, four miles distant.

"What say you?" said De Baze, turning to me.

"Go, by all means," I exclaimed as eagerly.

"May I go with you?" asked Arbey, who, like ourselves, without waiting to finish the meal, had risen from the table.

"Come and welcome," I cried. "The more we are the better, if there be a call for blows."

In a brief space we were on our way, the horses, after a good meal, being more fit than we could have hoped.

We rode through a lovely country, glad of the shade in the sweltering heat, while the sun blazed on the open plains. Soldiers whom we passed sometimes, and who were making for the highroad to the capital, looked greatly worn with travelling in the stifling air. They found their arms a burden, their pikes trailed after them, the arquebuses and crossbows were a weight they would fain have dispensed with. They, too, were going to Paris, and when they saw Arbey, whom so many knew, they cheered him derisively, or cursed him for a Huguenot. De Baze was equally well known, and

more than one expressed surprise that he should be travelling in Arbey's company.

"Men have strange bedfellows in these queer days," said one sententiously, and he turned away with a grimace.

At last we came within sight of the Château de Brucknor, and the heart of each man in our little party beat more quickly.

One moment we had hope. The next brought the dread of disappointment, since that would leave us in despair.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

IT was disappointment after all! Barrot had not been there, nor had he been seen by any at the château. All we could think was that he had turned down one of the many byways we had passed.

Although the sun shone with unwonted splendour that afternoon, when we turned our faces finally towards Paris we travelled thither in all the darkness of despondency. Despair took possession of our hearts because there was no hope to speed us. But if I suffered, I believe that De Baze suffered infinitely more. Once or twice he beat upon his breast, and through the long ride which followed nothing I could suggest sufficed to cheer him.

"She is lost!" he said again and again. "She is doomed, and I can do nothing to save her!" he cried once, when I said that there was Paris to search.

It was dark long before we drew near to the capital. Although the day had been one of stifling heat, and the sun had been merciless in his shining on the thirsty land, we had nothing for which to reproach ourselves in the matter of slack endeavour. Yet there was now, in the deepening calm of the evening, something which

served to still our passionate eagerness. De Baze seemed so crushed by failure that I laid my hand on his arm gently, and spoke in a tone so low that the others could not hear me.

"Odilon, my brother."

"I shall never be that, Henri," he answered brokenly. "You do not know what this loss means."

I misunderstood him, as well I might in my ignorance of that awful thing that was coming, and I still endeavoured to comfort him.

"Can we not put her in God's hands, Odilon?"

"God forgive me!" he cried. "I did not think of that!"

My words turned his thoughts in another direction, and this brought him relief, as to myself. In the beautiful quietness of evening something served to allay our passionate eagerness. The air gave forth a fragrance which had been unnoticed in the glare of noonday, and when we dropped out of our saddles to give our tired horses a temporary relief, and allow them to feed at the wayside, our feet brushed through the dew-laden grass. It was pleasant to feel the coolness as it penetrated our heavy riding-boots—delightful to throw open our tunics and permit the evening air to play on neck and chest.

As we halted and listened to the horses cropping the wet grass, the sound of a hymn came through the open windows of a house not far away. Some Huguenots were at evening prayer.

"The Lord shall be my confidence," came the words again and again, and it was a real rest to our souls. We heard the refrain when we mounted again to ride

forward, and it gave us encouragement. We drew rein after going onward a few yards, to hear the hymn to its close. The idea was uplifting, and when the music ended, and silence followed, we rode on with better heart.

"I had forgotten," said De Baze reverently, taking off his cap. "For the rest, God shall undertake for me."

There was some little delay at the city gate, but De Baze's name caused the iron door to swing back on its hinges, and we filed through. The horses were worn out, and only went slowly. Their riders were almost as weary, having the added burden which came with the knowledge of fruitless endeavour. We had such a disheartening story to tell. There had been some hope in my darling's heart, and in my mother's, when we drew up at the street door, but it was destroyed almost at the first word.

"What news?" said Elizabeth, running out and taking my hand in hers.

"None."

"None?" she exclaimed, with the catch of the breath which was almost a sob. "Oh, what have they done with her?"

De Baze went to his own home, declining my father's invitation to join us at supper, which had been waiting in hope of our return. When I told of all that we had done, there was blank silence. We could say nothing to comfort one another. We could suggest nothing that would slacken our anxiety. But, as my father said, we could pray; and, following his example, we knelt about the table. Prayer, as my father led it that night, seemed to open heaven to us, and then a stream of glory descended on the consecrated hour, and brought us hope.

Yet when morning came there was no further news. There was nothing which gave us any token or suggestion of my sister's whereabouts. De Baze called for a few minutes, but could not stay, for the King wanted him; but he said he would come in the evening to see whether anything had transpired.

"You shall know at once if I hear of anything," I promised. "I would not have you remain in doubt a moment more than necessary."

He went away, relieved at my assurance.

Unhappily there was no news to carry. I did no business that day, nor did my father. As for my darling, she insisted on going with me into the streets, and many a suggestion she made as we went, and many a glance was taken at her lovely face by gallants, and even by staid citizens.

"The pity of it!" I heard one say to another, who, like himself, belonged to the Court.

What did he mean? Was it insolence? "The pity of it!" that so beautiful a woman should be the wife of a Huguenot! Did he mean that? Possibly, for the man who spoke was one of the most uncompromising of the Catholic party.

Once, when we loitered near the Rue de Fosses, I saw the King ride by, and then I recalled what, in my care for Louise, I had forgotten. Coligny had been riding along this street the day before, accompanied by several gentlemen, when a man flung open a window, and taking deliberate aim with a pistol had shot the admiral, wounding him severely. The cry had gone through the city that he was dead, but happily that was not true. The King passed by while we stood

there, and as he rode on with a large retinue, we heard that he had been to see Coligny and had assured him of his grief at the dastardly attempt.

"Is that the King?" asked Elizabeth, looking after his Majesty, and not regarding the gentlemen in his train.

"Yes, my darling," I answered.

"That the King?" she exclaimed incredulously. "That? Then I do not admire your King, Henri," she added, with outspoken candour.

I was glad that we were standing where none could hear what she had said.

"His dress is kingly," she continued, "but he appears to me deplorably unequal to the task of ruling a great and distracted kingdom like France. Henri, he is a man not to be trusted; one who might well profess friendship to-day, and be one's worst enemy to-morrow."

I smiled. I agreed with every word of her criticism, and could have wished that I might have pointed to some redeeming qualities in his Majesty's character, but I could not.

We moved on to other streets.

Presently a horseman passed us. I thought he was Antony Barrot, and stepping into the road I stopped him; but instantly I realised that I was mistaken. Apologising, I told the rider I had thought him to be M. Barrot. The man received my apology ungraciously, and went forward.

Elizabeth, who had been looking on, watched him go down the street, and I saw the indignant look upon her face.

"Your French gentlemen are not as courteous as their reputation," she muttered.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON THE ROAD TO BAUNE.

THE experiences of the afternoon were somewhat disconcerting. There were some whom we counted in our circle of friends who differed from us on the score of religion, and yet, with what some would have considered broad-mindedness, continued their friendship in spite of our religious differences. Many a time, indeed, when war was raging between the two great factions of France, some of them, who were zealous Catholics, gave my father an occasional hint which put him on his guard, and in consequence we escaped many of those disagreeable experiences which ended in ruin for those who were of the Huguenot party. Some of them went so far as to interest themselves at Court on our behalf, with the result, that while several of our party were marked down for harsh treatment, and were mysteriously assassinated, we enjoyed a special immunity from danger and annoyance, and bore, as it were, the protection of the Court itself, so that we were not molested.

Strangely enough that afternoon we were treated by these same friends with a studied indifference. More than one cut us dead in the street, or, if we halted to speak to them, did not do more than exchange the fewest

words and hurry on. Some, seeing us coming, deliberately crossed to the other side, and, in more than one instance, went down some alley where it was scarcely possible they could have any business—where, indeed, it would be discreditable and damaging to one's reputation to be found.

That struck me as strange. The first slight annoyed me. The second roused my wonder. The third convinced me that something was wrong. It was only Catholics who did this, for our Huguenot friends stopped, and appeared to be delighted to meet us.

I marked this fact presently, and put it to the test, with the result that the next Catholic acquaintance coming down the street deliberately turned round, retraced his steps, and went into an armourer's shop, as if in forgetfulness he had passed the place. It was too palpable a slight to admit of mistake.

I looked at Elizabeth, so fresh and so charming, her sweet face glowing, although it clouded over now and again, when, perchance, she thought of Louise. An idea came to my mind. Were these Catholic friends avoiding me because of her? because I had married one from an alien land, known, of course, to be a heretic? The French people did not like the Netherlanders. There was, for one thing, trade jealousy; indeed, there were many conflicting interests which brought the saying into vogue—"The French have no dealings with the Netherlanders." Was it possible that any of my friends resented my marriage with this dear one at my side because she was of the nation across the frontier? My pride was wounded; my anger, too, was roused, and I determined that friends who could so deal with me for her sake, should have no more of my regard.

We went home about three o'clock in the afternoon, and found my father looking somewhat harassed.

"What is wrong?" I asked.

"An order has come from the Duke of Guise which he wants executed without delay, and I can do nothing since it involves an immediate journey for some one to Baune, and there is not a man about the place."

"I can go. 'Tis only six miles away."

"I did not care to ask you," said my father, who looked relieved.

"Shall I ride with you, Henri?" said my wife. "Yes, but I must," she added coaxingly. "I want a ride, for I have not had one since you brought me to Paris."

"Very well," I answered, delighted to have the ride in her company, and in a few minutes we were clattering down the street, making for the city gate which opened on the road to Baune.

It was a delightful ride in spite of the heat. To Elizabeth everything that differed from what she had been wont to see in her own country had an interest for her. She sometimes pulled up her horse to gaze at a farmhouse of antiquated type on the roadside. There were many of them, gaunt and high-gabled, with ancient barns along the sides of a great courtyard. It was her delight to watch forest and river, to look on green fields where men who had been to the wars were toiling in the hope of making amends for long neglect.

"Time is precious, my darling," I would say; "we want to get back before dusk."

"Oh, but 'tis so delightful," came the answer. "I think I love France, Henri. After the flat expanses of Holland, the hills and dales have such a charm."

"Come along, sweetheart," I would respond. "We'll ride out early to-morrow, and have the whole day for you to gloat on these beauties."

The roads were very much as De Baze and I had found them when we were looking for Louise—full of soldiers, and every man among them moving on towards Paris. They looked at us curiously, but, since they did not know us, no word passed. In my pride of my darling's loveliness I was pleased to see how the men looked at her, some askance, lest they might be thought over bold, but others with undisguised admiration at the rare beauty of her face. More than once some of them halted and turned to look after her.

Now and again we passed through a hamlet, and outside of the inns were soldiers, drinking, clearing the dust from their throats before they started on the last stage of their tramp to Paris. It seemed to me that soldiers were everywhere, and the thought impressed itself that by this time there must be quite an army within the walls of the capital.

"Why are you all going to Paris?" I asked of a little group of men who were waiting to be served with wine.

"The King has need for us, monsieur, but what that need we do not know. Possibly he finds Coligny and his Huguenots growing unruly, and we must needs be there to keep the Admiral in order."

The man who said it laughed heartily, and his comrades joined him.

"Ay, to keep the Admiral in order," shouted one, wiping his dry lips with his sleeve. But he turned to the girl who was busy attending to the calls for wine.

"Hi, wench! 'tis thirsty work tramping these dusty roads. Be quick with that wine."

We did our business in Baune, and when the horses had had a drink we prepared to go homewards.

"May I give you a serious word, monsieur?" said he with whom I had been talking concerning my father's wants.

"Ten if you will," I answered, but I was somewhat disturbed by the man's serious face.

"Get madame home to Paris as speedily as possible, and keep her in the house when once she is within."

"Why?" I asked in much surprise.

"I can scarcely say," came the answer, and the man's face turned red with confusion. "The soldiers are about, monsieur," he stammered, "and they are unruly." With a burst, he added, "Madame is too charming for one to think of any harm befalling her."

He would say no more, and, doffing his cap, he turned on his heel and left us.

I pondered as we rode out of the town, for the man had evidently not spoken idly. Making some excuse to my wife, I mended the pace, and we rode homewards quickly. I was anxious to be in the city before dusk.

Two miles distant from Paris, I pulled up my horse suddenly, for a horseman was approaching. He was riding quickly, but not looking before him. He was riding with his eyes downcast, as one in deep thought, but I recognised him as Antony Barrot. First of all I thought to bar the road against his progress by turning my horse round to block the way. Then I spoke, but the rider did not look up. I supposed that he was, like all the Catholics of my acquaintance, anxious to avoid

me; but since it was Barrot, and I had desired to have some words with him of late, I determined to stop him.

"M. Barrot," I cried, when I saw that he meant to pass me, and I put out my hand. Bending to that side, I caught at the rein of his horse, and pulled the animal up shortly.

"How dare you?" the rider cried, with anger which I knew was simulated, but when he looked up and saw me, he exclaimed—

"M. Gaston! I crave your pardon. I did not know that it was you."

I knew from his face that he was lying, and I was angry. None the less, however, I controlled my temper.

"'Tis what every Catholic friend of mine whom I have met to-day would say," I retorted. "They have either forgotten me, or have become strangely short-sighted, or else they have displayed a great anxiety to avoid me."

"Surely, M. Gaston, none would desire to do that," was Barrot's response. "But what is your will?"

"My will? Can you tell me anything about my sister, who is missing?"

"Your sister missing?"

Barrot looked amazed.

"Missing," he exclaimed again. "I hope not. God forbid that she has come to any harm!"

He spoke so sincerely that I dismissed all thought but that he was genuinely concerned at the news. Then for a little while we talked together, and I told him how she had been decoyed away from home, and how, also, De Baze and I had searched for her, and how hopeless we all were. His response was so emphatic, and his distress

so apparent that I believed him. His face displayed so much concern that I needed no assurance from his lips that he was unaware as to her whereabouts.

"Monsieur," he cried presently, "I have to call at the château yonder, but when my errand is ended I will ride back as fast as my horse can carry me to Paris. You know I love your sister, and that I desire to make her my wife. It will be agony of mind to me each moment that passes before she is found. If I succeed in my search, I will come and tell you instantly."

He waited to say no more. Doffing his cap to Elizabeth, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides, and the startled animal sprang forward leaving behind him a cloud of dust.

"Do you believe him, Henri?" Elizabeth asked, when we turned to pursue our journey once more.

"I know not what to think. He spoke sincerely."

"My dear husband, is there not such a thing as dissimulation?" was her response. "I am confident he knows where Louise is, and I think that when we get home you will do well to watch M. Barrot's movements. It will be the most certain way of finding your sister."

Before long the city came into view. After a little time Elizabeth pointed to it as it was bathed in evening light. But it was not the glorious sunset one was wont to witness, when behind Paris there lay a many-coloured, island-dotted sea, and golden shores. It seemed as if some awful figure rose out of sullen depths with outstretched hands, black and ominous, and all around it, while it crouched, there spread great blood-red clouds.

Elizabeth shuddered, and while we gazed a sense of coming trouble filled my soul.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CROSS ON THE DOOR.

DURING our absence on that ride to Baune, a note had come from M. Galliot, a lapidary who dwelt in the Rue de Sèvres, requesting my father to send some one to him to discuss an intricate business matter, since he was too unwell to leave the house.

“You will go, Henri,” said my father, when I had told him the result of my errand. “You know more of this than any one, and I cannot go myself, since the Duke de Guise has asked me to give him an appointment here at nine o’clock. It is near that hour now.”

I started without delay, knowing that the matter was of an important nature, and before long I was in the lapidary’s house.

The business was quickly done, although M. Galliot, naturally a very prosy man, was disposed to discuss it more fully than was necessary. Giving him the assurance that I thoroughly understood his desires, I promised to look into the question on Monday morning, and acquaint him with the result of my negotiations at noon.

We stood at the window without having the lamp lighted, and talked in the darkness, the grey-bearded man

on one side of me, and his daughter Emilie on the other. We spoke of my sister's disappearance, but into our conversation came also the inexplicable friendship of the King for Coligny.

"It must be sincere," protested Emilie. "Coligny is so astute a man, and his wariness has always rendered him remarkable."

This observation was in response to a suggestion of her father's that the King was playing a part which might serve to hoodwink Coligny, while his Majesty was concocting some sinister scheme which would be damaging to the interests of his Protestant subjects.

"I would, my dear, that I could be of your way of thinking," said the old man gravely. "I have no faith in the King, and none in his mother. I have detected meaning glances between them when I have been displaying to them some of my treasures, which they pretend they want to buy, and I cannot but feel that something is wrong, and that the Court has some designs upon the Huguenots."

"Not sinister ones, father," said Emilie.

"Yes, my child, sinister ones. I have grave doubts of the tortuous policy of Catherine de Medici, a woman who has sometimes lamented the defeats of the Huguenots, and yet is hand and glove with the Guises, who are our most bitter enemies."

The conversation dropped, for while looking out of the window we saw some men who came out of the darkness, as if to show themselves for a few brief moments, when the lights of the hung-out lanterns fell on them, and moved on into the darkness lower

down the street. Going by in mysterious silence, they wore on their sleeves a band of white, and in their hats a linen bow of the same colour.

We wondered greatly that all these men should pass in the same direction, and that without exception they wore that distinguishing badge on hat and arm.

Then for several minutes not a soul went by; but presently two men came into view, and halting under the lantern of the opposite house, they looked first at a piece of paper which one held in his hands, and then at the door. Judging from their gestures, they spoke in whispers, and he who held no paper, after looking around to see whether he was watched, went stealthily to the door and chalked a cross upon it. He did the same on the door of the next house, then crossed the street to the house next to the lapidary's.

The night being warm the lattice window was open, and we heard what was said now that the men had drawn nearer.

"Not that one," said the man with the paper, when his companion walked up to the door. "M. de Baux lives there, and he is one of us."

We asked each other what this could mean, but wonder soon passed into certainty. De Baux was a Catholic, but Campan and De Lambelle, whose doors had the chalked crosses on them, were Huguenots, and, counting in M. Galliot, none others were of that party at this end of the Rue de Sèvres.

While we were talking of this, the man with the chalk came up to the lapidary's door, stayed there, out of sight, for a moment, and turned away.

"That's done," said he, going to the other, who had

come just below the window. "There are no other Huguenots now, till we come to Nivernais' house. Then there is Horn; yes, and Paintendre—they are both of that kidney."

Anxious to get to the bottom of this unusual proceeding, and a suspicion having formed itself in my mind, I determined to put it to the test; but first I told my companions what I thought, and they began to be alarmed.

"Will you come and tell us if you discover anything?" asked Emilie Galliot. I knew that she trembled, and although there was no light in the room but that which came in through the window from the lantern on the opposite side of the street, I saw that her face was white with fear.

I tramped down the stairs into the street; then going the way the two men had gone, I walked quickly until I reached the house where Louis Nivernais lived. I looked at the doors of houses wherein known Catholics dwelt, and none of them had chalk marks on them; but there was one on Nivernais'. There was no mark on Riom's door, and he was a Catholic, fierce in his hatred of everything that savoured of heresy; but the doors of his neighbours on either side—Horn and Paintendre—were chalked.

Here was confirmation of my suspicion that some evil threatened the Huguenots in the Rue de Sèvres. Whether other houses not in that street were marked I did not know, but I resolved to walk on and discover for myself.

I was moving away from Paintendre's door when some one passed. It was Louis de Tessé, a dear friend



TO MY HORROR, THE CROSS WAS CHALKED UPON
THE DOOR!—*Page 261.*

of mine, and we loved each other although we belonged to the rival factions. He saw me, and swung round to face me, and then I noticed that, like the other men, he wore a badge on his hat and one on his arm.

I told him of the crosses.

"Go home, Gaston, and do not stir out to-night unless you wear a badge such as this," said de Tessé in a whisper, but not until he had looked round anxiously to see that we were quite alone and that no one was within earshot.

"Why?" I whispered back, for I was infected with the mystery that surrounded me.

De Tessé shrugged his shoulders.

"Were you a Catholic, Gaston, you would be safe. But you are not."

"And therefore I am not safe?"

"Hush! speak low!" said the other. "When you go home, see that there is no chalk mark on your door."

"Tell me," I whispered emphatically, gripping him by the arm, since he was about to move on, "what if my father's door should have a cross chalked on it?"

"Then God help you all! It would bring trouble within your home—trouble to all. But for God's sake, Gaston, do not say that I told you. Let me whisper in your ear. Catherine de Medici has declared against the heretics."

I had promised the Galliotts that I would return if I heard anything, but home pulled strongly at me and I was disposed to hasten thither. But I had promised, and must be as good as my word.

First, when I turned, I went to Paintendre's door, and taking off my cap rubbed vigorously at the cross, and it disappeared. I did the same for Horn, for

Nivernais, for Campan and De Lambelle. When I stood at the lapidary's door I rubbed the cross from it and entered the house. Stumbling up the dark stairs, I saw that the door was open, but between me and the window stood three persons, not two. M. Galliot and Emilie were there. The third was a man, and he was talking earnestly.

"You must come, M. Galliot," he exclaimed. "The mob will pass your door, and I shudder at the consequences."

While he spoke, the man laid a hand on the maiden's wrist, as if to urge her to stay no longer, but M. Galliot roused himself.

"There are my jewels and intagli," he cried. "I cannot leave them, monsieur."

"Then bring them with you. Do anything if you will but come. Where are your jewels?"

"In that chest, M. de Baux," answered the lapidary, pointing to a heavy, brass-bound box.

I understood. De Baux was a Catholic, but was eager to befriend his neighbours, and save them from this evil which threatened them and the Huguenots of Paris that night. He looked at the chest, which was thrust up against the wall opposite to the window, and saw that no one man could carry it. He had not yet seen me, for I was standing in the darkness.

Watching, I saw him while he stood silhouetted against the light which came through the window. He glanced at M. Galliot, a lean, weak man. Then he exclaimed decisively—

"'Tis too heavy to carry. It must stay behind. Come, monsieur, for life is more precious than wealth."

The lapidary laughed scornfully.

"What? More precious than the treasures for which I have ransacked the world, and on which I have expended years of care? The chest must go with us, M. de Baux, or we remain here and take our chance."

Emilie clung to her father's arm, entreating him to forego everything rather than run the fearful risk that De Baux had spoken of.

"Come, father. Life is more precious than wealth," she pleaded; but M. Galliot shook his head.

"I will not go without my jewels," the old man reiterated.

I seemed to be spellbound. I was wondering whether the man's wealth was more to him than life; whether the love of it so held him that he would face the dangers, and guard his treasure with his feeble hands, to die in front of it, perhaps, or would go, and suffer the jewels to take their chance. "All that a man hath will he give for his life." So it is said; but was the miser spirit sufficiently strong to prove the statement only true in part?

De Baux crossed the floor, and taking hold of the handle of the chest at one end, sought to estimate its weight. He raised it. Then I heard him exclaim: "Had I but a strong man here!"

The spell was broken. I was able to move.

"There is one here, M. de Baux," I cried.

De Baux swung round.

"Who are you?" he asked in a tone which conveyed the sense of fear, lest he was discovered in the act of aiding one who was marked for ruin that night.

"I am M. Gaston," I answered. "But let us hasten, for I must hurry home."

The lapidary was alert at once.

"Go home, M. Gaston. Look to the dear ones there. I can help M. de Baux."

The hope of saving his treasures put energy and strength into his lean body. Brushing me aside, while I bent down to help, and De Baux was at the other end, he gripped one of the handles, and bade De Baux pull. By their united efforts the chest was dragged across the floor, screeching on the boards as it moved.

It was absurd that a strong man like myself should stand and see this feeble old man, bent at the shoulders, weak in the knees, with thin hands lacking in muscularity, pushing at a box so bulky, and so far beyond his strength.

"Stand aside!" I exclaimed; and then De Baux and I drew the chest to the landing, and down the stairs, with many a dangerous rush which threatened to maim De Baux, who was going first.

At last it lay in the garden.

"I fear we cannot hoist it over the wall, monsieur," said De Baux in a whisper.

"Then will I remain here with it!" cried the lapidary, regardless of being heard by others.

"Hush! we shall be discovered and undone!" exclaimed Leon de Baux almost savagely.

"Why not get over the wall, and suffer M. Galliot to hand you the contents?" I suggested.

"Yes!" said the lapidary; and forthwith, producing the key, he flung the chest open.

"Can you do without me?" I asked, for I was longing

to go home and look to the safety of those who were so dear.

De Baux answered in a whisper—

“Go. See, M. Gaston, that to-night there is no chalk mark on your door. If you rub it off it may add to your safety. At all events it will lessen your danger.”

I waited to hear no more. I did not return to the house to go into the street, but walking down the dark garden, went out at the gate, where I found myself in the narrow lane. Running then at my utmost speed, I came to the bend which would lead me to my father's house in a short space of time. Just as I slackened speed somewhat, to take the turn, two men entered the *cul de sac*, and saw me. It was too dark to see who they were, nor were they able to recognise me. They only knew that some one was approaching them in tremendous haste.

“Halt, monsieur!” cried one, catching at my doublet.

“Hands off!” I panted, but the man gripped me tightly and pulled me up in my career.

There was no time for altercation. I beat about wildly and savagely for a moment or two with my fists, raining in blows with my fullest force, and the man who held me had to defend his face, and therefore took his hand away. I felt myself free, and went on at such a pace that, although they pursued me, I outdistanced them speedily.

At last I stood panting at my father's door. The street lantern showed it up plainly, and to my horror the cross was chalked upon it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WAITING.

I FLUNG myself into the nearest chair on entering the house, and for some moments sat panting, incapable of saying a word to those who gathered round me and saw the look of terror in my face.

My darling came to my side, and with her laced kerchief brushed away the great drops that stood out on my brow, and drawing forth her scent-tube she poured some of the reviving liquid on the dainty cambric, and passed the cool moisture over my cheeks and lips.

My cap was lying at my feet, and my father stooped to pick it up.

"How comes it to be covered with chalk, Henri?" he asked curiously.

"There is something terrible to tell," I answered, still panting. But I told in broken sentences all that I had seen and heard.

"It is death for us all," my father said, walking away as if to think. We watched him, terror-stricken. No one spoke. Face to face with this perplexity, with so much to assure us that we were doomed, we sat in helplessness. How could we combat this danger? or

how could we escape? My darling drew near to me, and her arm stole round my neck.

"Do you really think it is death, Henri?" she asked, putting her soft cheek against mine.

"None can tell but God, dear one," I answered, placing my arm around her and holding her tightly. "But if the danger intrudes here, I shall fight, for I will not have it that we should die like sheep at the slaughter."

Rising from the chair, I looked to my weapons—my sword, and the pistol in the belt. I went to the cupboard where we kept such things, and saw that a plentiful supply of powder was there. What with the muskets and pistols, we could hold back any who might come, at all events for some time.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and then the door opened noisily. Hody stood in the doorway, pale and anxious, like a man who had been standing face to face with death.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked huskily; and without waiting for more he walked to the sideboard, on which a great jar stood that held drinking water. He drank until it was empty.

"What have you heard more than that?" I said, when I had told briefly my own experience.

"That no man, woman, or child, is safe, monsieur, who is in a house which has a chalked cross on the door, and any one who ventures forth without a white badge is to be done to death. But there is no cross on *our* door!" he exclaimed, recalling the fact in much surprise.

"I rubbed it off myself," was my answer. "As I have rubbed off a score. But are we ready to hold the house if the mob assails it?"

"Certainly," said my father, who had not yet spoken. "But first let us pray. We will commend ourselves to Him who can frustrate our enemies. They cannot harm us if the Lord holds out His hand, and puts His shield between us and them."

I felt my confidence grow while we knelt about the table and my father prayed. It came to me as a blessed certainty that a good man's prayers would go up to heaven from those great depths into which we had been plunged, and would be listened to by Him who could answer. I remember well the closing words after the pleading for deliverance—

"To Thy great bidding we submit."

When my father ended, we stood in a silent group. Speech had deserted us. We could only think. As for escape, one knew not how to compass it. We could recall, presently, when words became possible, many a thing we did not understand. We realised now the meaning of the constant coming of soldiers into the city. It was declared that they were wanted for a war in Flanders, but it was impossible to conclude other than this now, that they were being brought into Paris to repeat the massacres that had taken place elsewhere in years gone by. This one was to be on a much more terrible scale. One could almost hear the bitterness of the lament that was to come, and picture the tragic doings that were to fill the night with woe.

Waiting there in silence, we realised the treacherous part that the King had been playing. He had made such loud professions of friendship for Coligny only to lead him into a false security. The invitations which had been sent far over the country to every château

where a Huguenot gentleman of importance dwelt, to come up to the capital with his family, so that the King and the Queen-Mother might have the pleasure of welcoming them at Court, were all a part of an iniquitous scheme. They were wanted in Paris to be within reach when the death-sentence was finally pronounced, and the executioners were sent forth from the Louvre to do their horrible work. It was all done with such smiles that hundreds of the leading men of the Huguenot party were at that hour in Paris, ignorant of the fate that awaited them.

We were talking, unable to think of anything that could be done to ensure our safety. Hody had gone round the house, looking to bolts and bars, to shutters, and everything that would win security. Our weapons were at hand, and it was only for us now to await developments.

Hody came in to report that the house appeared safe against the mob, provided they did not bring fire or cannon against us.

He was telling us this when we heard a knock on the door at the back of the house. Was this the beginning of the fray? Hody left the room to discover who was knocking for admission, and before long we heard the hasty and quick steps of some one in the passage.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE COMING OF DE BAZE.

IT was De Baze.

He stood in the doorway for a moment or two without speaking, and it was easy to believe that he was as distressed as any of us who gazed at him.

"Have you come to tell us of Louise?" my father cried.

If De Baze had done so, we knew that the news could not be good, for no one could look as he did and yet bring us word that would cause gladness.

"I would that it were so," he exclaimed, with a gesture of despair. "I have heard nothing. But it is not of her that I have come to speak. I have come for you! to take you all to a place of safety."

He paused a moment to wipe his face, for the great sweat-drops were there, telling of haste and distress of mind.

"There is to be a massacre of the Huguenots in Paris to-night, and I have come to take you to a place where none will think of looking for you. But you must come at once! Every moment is precious. It is nearly midnight, and at that hour the signal is to be given and the murderous work is to begin."

We were too alarmed to speak. My mother sat in her chair with folded hands, horrified beyond weeping, and she gazed at De Baze until he held up his hand and implored her not to look at him in such a way.

"You are a Catholic!" she exclaimed, now that he had apparently broken the spell that held her. "Why do you come to us?"

"I am no longer a Catholic, Madame Gaston. I was. But I am one no more. But of that anon. Even had I been one I would have come, risking everything for love of Louise. But there is no time for speech. In God's name, if you value life, come! Come at once, for it will soon be twelve o'clock, and I know not what I can do if the hour strikes while we are in the streets."

It wanted nearly twenty minutes to midnight; ample time if we did not delay. But when once the hour had passed our lives would not be worth a minute's purchase.

"A man stands even now with his hand on the rope of the great bell in the palace, waiting for the Duke de Guise to give the word, and the moment it rings the soldiers will be on the move, with orders to kill in every house which is marked with a cross. Do not let us stay to talk!" De Baze went on, with increasing eagerness. "Put badges on your arms thus," he cried, pointing to his arm; "and here," pointing to his cap. "M. Gaston, if you have any valuables that are portable get them, and let us be gone."

He would say no more. He absolutely refused to answer any questions, but waited, going to my mother and tying on her arm a badge which he had drawn from within his doublet. He tossed one to Elizabeth, who

stood in a dazed condition at my side holding my hand. One for me, one for my father, one for Madame Grisart, one for Hody; he tossed a number on the table.

"I will go and rouse the servants," cried De Baze, when he saw us busy at the hurried task of fastening on the badges, and then he disappeared and we heard him tramping up the stairs.

The women were not in bed. An unaccountable terror—a presentiment of coming evil—had kept them awake, and De Baze found them all in one of the rooms, sitting together as if expectant of fearful tidings.

"Do not be alarmed," he said, when they turned and gazed at him, surprised at his unceremonious entrance. "Put these on your arms thus," and he threw three badges on the bed. "Now put on your cloaks, and bring the hoods well down over your faces, and come with me. It is a matter of life and death to-night," he said, with a gravity which impressed them, and yet with a strength which gave them confidence. "If you do as I tell you, I can save you," he continued. "If not, you will certainly die. Come downstairs when you are ready, and quickly. There is no time to lose."

He descended the staircase quickly, and entered the room where we were waiting in readiness, the women at his heels as if afraid to lose sight of him. My father had gone to the strong-box, from whence he took jewels and things of value that were portable, while I went to my room and brought the belongings of my darling and her mother. It was the work of moments. Much that was costly had to be left behind.

"Are you ready?" asked De Baze, turning to go.

We nodded, and with that we followed him to the door at the back of the house.

"We will go by the most secluded way," he said. "Go in absolute quietness. There must not be a word. If men accost you, use the watchword for the night, 'King and De Guise,' for the city is in charge of the Duke."

We shuddered, for there was no one, not even the King himself and the Queen-Mother, who had such unrelenting hate for Protestants as the Duke de Guise. It was he who counselled the massacre, and we heard later that he wished that even the King of Navarre and the Prince of Condé, who were guests in the palace at the time, should be assassinated. He went so far as to propose to kill the Montmorencys, who, although Catholics, were friendly to the Huguenots and advocated leniency. Going softly, my father and De Baze in front to show the way, Hody and I bringing up the rear, to keep an eye on the safety of the women if we should be attacked, we entered the garden and crossed the lawn. Presently we came to the postern door, which led into a lane, and, passing through, paused while my father locked it again. Fortunately the path we trod was so soft that we walked almost noiselessly, and my darling, dropping back, away from my mother and her own, took my hand and held it tightly. So we advanced in this flight, for it was surely nothing less.

Everywhere the houses were in darkness, and I thought of those who slept. Perhaps some would never awake, and many would do so only to die. It was a fearful thing to contemplate—to think that the passions of men, their religious hatreds and political

ambitions, should bring them to perpetrate such an unspeakable crime; that in the name of religion such foul murder should be done.

"Shall we traverse the streets?" I asked, when De Baze dropped back to speak to me for a moment.

"We dare not. Chains are placed across them, and picquets are posted in the open places. I am going to avoid the thoroughfares, and, thank God, 'tis possible."

Some distance down the lane we halted at a door, and De Baze, unlocking it, bade us pass in. We found ourselves in a garden, and when the door was locked again De Baze went forward, while we followed eagerly. We came to the house at the top of the garden, and when Odilon tapped on the door, and whispered the watchword through the keyhole, it was opened instantly.

"The women-servants must stay here, and will be safe," said De Baze. "Madame Duval is a Huguenot at heart, but none know it save myself, and in God's mercy she is able to help us. There is no cross on her door, and no thought of one being put there. If the way is clear the others will go with me. If not, all must remain here; but I prefer that you should come with me."

He left us for a few moments and looked into the street, which was at the front of the house; then, in a whisper, he called to us to come quickly.

The street was dark and deserted. Not a man nor woman moved in it, not a light was in any of the houses, nor so much as a lantern hanging out. When the door closed behind us, and Madame Duval softly thrust in the bolt, there was scarcely a sound. It was always a dark

street; God favoured us that night, for it was darker than usual.

We crossed to the other side, and going along swiftly came to a house, up the steps of which De Baze went quickly. He placed his hand on the door and it opened. We followed him into the darkness unquestioningly, and when he whispered back to me to close the door and fasten it, the silence that followed was somewhat disconcerting. When we moved the sounds impressed one with a sense of emptiness. As for our feet, which fell on bare boards, we feared to move them, lest any who dwelt next-door might hear.

"Have no fear," exclaimed De Baze, who divined our trepidation. "The house is empty; so are those on either side. In a few minutes, please God, we shall be safe."

Going cautiously, never forgetting our need for carefulness, we went along the passage, one of Elizabeth's hands in mine, her dainty foot feeling for the floor, and any possible steps, and her free hand, like mine, passing along the wall. Presently we were in the garden, and walking swiftly we came within view of a great building which loomed up threateningly even in the already darkened sky.

"'Tis the Louvre, I think, Henri," whispered Elizabeth. "It is surely like going into the lion's jaws to approach so nearly."

"Perhaps it is our very safety to be daring," I answered. "De Baze must know what he is doing, for his own life is as much at stake as ours."

"God is our guardian," said my darling, holding my hand with a firm clasp. That thought of the Divine

guardianship had given her courage, and she was no longer timid, but reliant. "I think of all the other poor creatures, Henri, while we are safe," she said sadly, when we drew up at a doorway at the back of a house I knew so well—De Baze's home, which might be said to be within the precincts of the Louvre itself.

"Now we are safe," said De Baze, in a tone of great relief, turning to thrust the bolts into the door after we had entered. "The servants are all gone home, and none will know that you are here."

While he spoke a great bell began to ring.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NIGHT OF TERROR.

WE knew the tolling of that great bell so well—it was that of the Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, and as its clamorous tones rang across the silent city, they were answered from every church-tower in Paris. Bells that were in the houses of the principal Catholics joined in the horrible clangour which was to be the death-knell of tens of thousands of the detested Huguenots.

The noise aroused the sleepers everywhere, and when we gazed into the street, we saw that heads were being thrust out of the windows of the houses on the opposite side, while men and women were calling to one another to know the meaning of the night alarm.

"It must be some terrible fire," cried a woman who had come to her doorstep; but a voice answered harshly—

"No, madame. It is the signal for death to every Huguenot in Paris!"

The man who was walking down the street laughed, and even while we watched the woman screamed. We had seen him thrust his sword into her bosom, and she fell dead at her door.

I was glad Elizabeth had not seen this fearful thing,

but she heard the agonising scream and hid her face in her hands.

Fearful lest she would see or hear too much of what would transpire during the massacre, I took her, my mother, and hers, to another room at the back of the house, and bidding them rest in assurance that we were alert to guard against any harm that might come to them, I went to the front room once more to consult with De Baze. My father was at the window with Hody, but our host sat in a state of despair with his elbows on the table.

"I am thinking of Louise," he said when I bent over him. "I would give my right hand to know that she was safe," he moaned.

Now that the excitement of bringing us through the night to safety had passed, De Baze was the prey to horrible doubts, and the vision of my sister's peril was more than he could endure. The room had been in darkness, but now I saw him plainly, for the glare of hundreds of torches, throwing their red light on the black night sky, made things visible. I could even see the pictures on the walls, as the soldiers came sweeping through the great gates of the Louvre, near by. The men carried blazing torches with them to add to the fearful illumination.

Talking was soon impossible, what with the tramp of heavy feet in the street below, the noise of drums, the still more ominous and deadly sounds of shots, the cries of men in pain, and the screams of women and children in the fear or actual agony of death. Over all was the incessant cry, devilish and murderous, *A Mort les Huguenots!* shouted everywhere by the mob of the city

—the creatures who had suddenly sprung from the slums and cellars to taste human blood with the sanction, and encouragement, of the treacherous King.

It was marvellous that the massacre had developed so quickly, but it tended to show how well the work had been planned, and how thoroughly the dreadful secret had been kept. It had taken the Huguenots absolutely unawares, for they had trusted to the protestations and promises of the King. Once, while we stood gazing into the street, we heard a strong man's voice below. We could not see him, but his words came clear above the clamour—

“Great God, be the defence of the oppressed! Just Judge! avenge this perfidy!”

But the man died, for some soldiers, hearing him, came across the street, and he was slain after a desperate resistance. We knew later that he was one of the Huguenot nobles invited to the capital by the Queen-Mother.

Again and again I went into the back room to see my darling. Her hands were clasped, and her face was pale with the horror of the massacre; but even thus she was ready for action had I thought of anything that she could do.

“Could we not pray, mother,” she said presently, “while Henri and the other men keep watch? It will ease our own souls, and make it possible to bear up in such an hour.”

She went on her knees, and I left her thus, the others doing as she had done. It was a strengthening to one's courage to know that while we stood, ready, if danger threatened the house, to hold back death, if it were possible, the women were occupied in prayer.

Ah, that night! It was one of unspeakable horror, and those who dwelt in the street where De Baze's house was situated experienced it to the full. De Baze had done as I had. He had removed the chalk marks from the doors of such Huguenots as dwelt in the neighbourhood, but it merely served to delay the inevitable end. The crowd, made up of men and women who were lusting for blood—human tigers roused up for action—went by, and seeing no marks, sought elsewhere for victims; but later came soldiers and burgher-guards with the Duke de Guise in command. The young Prince called a halt immediately opposite the house which sheltered us.

"Where is the house of Quinet the money-lender?" he cried.

"There, my lord," answered one, pointing to the house.

"Then where's the cross on the door, knave?" came the sharp question.

"I chalked it on the door myself," replied the man; and I thought while I listened to this colloquy between the duke and his dependant that I recognised one of the men whom I had seen marking the doors in the Rue de Sèvres. "Some one must have rubbed off the chalk marks, my lord," the man added.

"Go in and do your work."

When half a dozen soldiers entered the house, we could see them tramping through the money-lender's rooms, for the torches they carried betrayed their movements. After a time they came out and reported that the place was empty.

"M. Quinet must have left his treasure behind," exclaimed the duke impatiently, slipping out of his saddle while he spoke.

Followed by three or four soldiers who carried torches, he entered the house with drawn sword, but when he emerged there was anger in his face. Mounting his horse without a word, he shook the reins, and rode away at the head of his band of superbly-appointed assassins.

"The waiting here is intolerable," exclaimed Odilon, when the street became empty, and nothing could be seen alive but a head here and there thrust out of a window, and a man who stood by a burning brazier at the distant end of the street. "If I do not move about I shall go mad, what with seeing so much brutality, and the thought of Louise, who may want my protection."

I could not see his face, but I imagined what it must be like.

"Dare I go with you?" I asked; but he answered instantly—"You must not. I am too well known to have anything to fear, and, God forgive me for my hypocrisy! they still deem me a faithful Catholic. My only consolation for the deception is that I have been able to save you all—all save Louise!"

He groaned and hid his face in his hands.

"God!" he cried, "lead me to her! Place me in the position of defending her, if she be within the walls of this accursed city!"

I had never heard a prayer into which so much entreaty was thrown. The man's whole being seemed to thrill, and he wrung his hands in the frenzy of eagerness.

"My son," said my father, going to his side and laying a hand upon the kneeling man's shoulder, "pray on. God must hear us. I have been praying all the days since my child was lost, and there comes the assurance that I shall see her again."

"I think she must be dead," moaned De Baze. "Yes, you will see her again, but you will see her dear face pale, and her body still and cold, and her hands stiff and helpless, so that I shall never feel their clasp again."

"Odilon," exclaimed my father staunchly, "you wrong God if that is the answer you think He will give to our prayers. I have prayed—and I shall see her again, and have my arms about her, and she will be safe and sound."

It was like the renewal of one's faith to hear my father speak with such confidence. My own faith had oozed away, and, like Odilon de Baze, I had thought of a prostrate form lying cold and still in some devastated room. Even if we found her we might be too late, for those murderers were doing their work in the city with fearful thoroughness. Ever since the thought of massacre had come to me, especially since it had become a real conviction, I had lost all hope, and I could only say what poor Odilon was saying. But now, for the first time since those signs of calamity had come, I began to recover my balance, and to feel that God would hear.

As for De Baze, he sat and listened, but was silent. I think he wept, and that was much for so strong a man to do.

The street was still quiet; but presently at intervals there was the sound of frightened women and the cries of viragoes who were pursuing them. Some had evidently sprung from their beds, and then, half naked, succeeded in getting away from their homes and hoped to escape. More than one fell, and the fall meant death, because it meant being overtaken; but to our relief three in succession, as they passed the open door where the

money-lender had been living, halted, and none who were in pursuit seeing them, they ran into the dark house to wait until their screaming pursuers had passed.

"I will have them in here, poor creatures," exclaimed De Baze, who had come to the window and had seen what was transpiring.

He went downstairs, and I followed. Then he went to the front door, and opening it, looked down the street and up the street, saw that it was empty; saw, too, that the heads at the windows had disappeared, and thought that he could venture.

"It is not safe, Odilon," I exclaimed. "See!"

I pointed to a house next to that in which M. Quinet had lived, and we saw a man come out of it with something dark across his arm. He made his way to the money-lender's door stealthily, and entered. Wondering, waiting, indeed, to hear some sound in token of his doing the women deadly harm, we witnessed a strange thing. The man came to the door, and with him was a woman, no longer in white, but covered with a long, dark cloak. He went with her to the door of his own house, pulled away the cloak, and a woman in white disappeared in the passage. He did the same a second time, and a third, and then, looking up and down the street, to see whether any had watched, he entered his house, and the door closed behind him.

"Was he not afraid of being seen?" I asked.

"He knew that only some one in my house could see him from this side of the street, for next to this comes the blank and windowless wall of the Louvre. It is M. Bertrand, supposed like me to be a Catholic, but he has spoken fiercely against the abominable scheme, the in-

famous treachery, and in a burst of confidence he declared to me that if he could do anything to frustrate it he would. That is one way in which he carries out his word. I wonder how many others have been warned, and are sheltering within his home? Poor Quinet for one, and his daughter?"

Finding that the street was quiet once more, we turned to re-enter the house to assure those who were upstairs by our presence. The cries were not so many now. The shouting of the mob grew less and less distinct, and we were convinced that the work of massacre was going on in another and more distant part of the city.

We glanced down the street again, to see whether any one was in flight who might be succoured.

"Look," said Odilon, for at the moment a gentleman passed the burning brazier. The man in charge had deserted it, doubtless to join in some work of murder or of pillage, which was more to his taste. There was something familiar about this new-comer. He had the badge on his arm and in his hat, but he came slowly, as if in pain, using his sword as a staff. He came on, reeling at times, and holding his left hand to his side. As he drew level he staggered and groaned, and I thought I knew the voice when an exclamation came from his lips.

Regardless of risks from any who might see me, I stepped forth and caught him as he was falling.

"Bring him here," said De Baze, and carrying him into the house I placed him in a chair. De Baze closed the door and made it secure; then bringing a lamp, we saw that the man was none other than Marc Arbey!

"Do you mean to kill me?" he asked, pulling himself

together, as if ready to defend himself rather than die tamely.

“To kill you, Marc?” I cried. “You are with friends. I am Henri Gaston!”

“Thank God!” cried Arbey faintly. “But are you not also in danger?”

“No. Odilon de Baze has brought us here, and is gone to get you some wine. How is Coligny faring?”

“Dead!” exclaimed Arbey. “De Guise and a number of soldiers burst into the house, and although we fought fiercely to save him, we were beaten down, one by one. I got this wound in my side when I had slain three men, and they left me for dead. When I recovered consciousness, I saw Coligny on his bed, dead, and taking the badges of one of those who had been his murderers, but had been killed, I crawled away, thinking to get to the house of a Catholic friend who would not betray me. How strange that I should be saved!” he said after a pause. “’Tis true to-night that one is taken and the other left.”

We helped him up the stairs, a painful process, for he was severely wounded, and to move was little short of agony to Arbey. Elizabeth and the others tended him, and bound up his wounds, which were many and serious. It was a wonder that he had been able to come so far.

We went away to the other room when he fell asleep, and De Baze, going to the window, gazed into the street. Suddenly an exclamation of surprise escaped his lips.

“What is it?” we asked, fearful lest some further outburst of cruelty was to be witnessed.

“I have just seen Antony Barrot go into the house next to M. Quinet’s,” he answered.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LOUISE.

“ I WILL go to him and ask whether he knows anything of Louise,” cried Odilon, who had begun to pace the floor in great excitement. “ If he should know, or if I have reason to think he knows, and will not tell me, I will kill him ! ”

He did not wait to hear whether we made any comment on what he said, for putting on his cap, and pulling his sword round, in case it should be needed, he left the room and tramped down the stairs.

“ Go with him, Henri,” said my father. “ Let there be no bloodshed if it be possible, but aid Odilon in whatever way is possible to bring back our darling.”

I needed no urging. The only thing that hindered me was leaving my dear one at such a crisis ; but she added her word to my father’s, and I followed quickly. It had taken De Baze some little time to draw the bolts and bars, but when I came to him he was just opening the door.

“ Why are you here ? ” he asked.

“ To bear you company.”

“ But there is your wife—she needs you. Suffer me to go alone, for I mean to kill Barrot if he will not give up my Louise to me,” said De Baze.

"He may know nothing of her whereabouts," I suggested, in justice to Barrot, who might be as ignorant as we were.

"I have a conviction that he knows full well. It has come to me—call it an inspiration if you will."

I could not see Odilon's face, but it must have been very grim. There was something in his voice which convinced me that there would be death in that house next to M. Quinet's, although there was no chalked cross upon the door. The howling mob might be deceived and excluded, but love, made frantic with deprivation, and the terrors of that awful Eve of St. Bartholomew, would forget all tenderness and render due retribution.

"My father and Hody are with the women, and if we know they are in need we can return. I must go with you," I added.

"As you will," said De Baze.

We had scarcely opened the door when we heard the sounds of an approaching mob. Standing on the doorstep and gazing down the street we saw people coming at a run, with torches blazing, and screaming out that incessant cry, *A bas les Huguenots!* the cry that rang with added thrill and terror because the creatures who were shouting had lost all humanity, and were now little more than beasts who thirsted for blood.

They were chasing three women who were without the protection of the white scarf, and, fear lending them speed, they were running they knew not whither. Had not their pursuers been so near to their heels we should have called them in, but, much as we pitied them, it would have been madness now, for we should have brought the mob about the house, and all within as well as these

would have died. Never before, not even in that night of terror, did I feel such helplessness as when those women, pale, breathless, holding their hands to their bosoms as they ran, passed by, calling for mercy that could never be given. I had not realised until then the absolute pitilessness of a mob that had the blood-thirst on them.

At last the screaming creatures had gone by, save a few stragglers, all disappearing in the direction of the Louvre. These came in ones and twos, panting out the fearful cry, stumbling in breathlessness, but getting up to follow in the hope of finding other victims somewhere.

Then the last went by.

"See!" cried De Baze, pointing through the window, for we had stepped back into the house, and were in a room which looked out on the street.

I gazed in the direction indicated, and saw Antony Barrot leaving the door of the house he had entered. He was walking quickly in the direction taken by the mob.

"Let us follow," said De Baze, going to the front door and opening it.

I was at his heels, and when we were in the street I had some difficulty in keeping pace with my companion. It seemed to me that everywhere scenes of horror and crime were evident. The gutters, when we drew near to the Louvre, ran with blood. At one window stood the King, with an arquebus in his hand. The torches lit up the street, and it was so light that I saw the expression on his face. Men said afterwards that he had shuddered, and pleaded with those who were slaughtering the Protestants to have pity. From what I saw of him I do not believe it, for I heard him cry out loudly, when De Baze and I halted at the gate,

“Kill! Kill!” As for his face, it was that of a man who ravened for blood, and when a young girl ran screaming by, he aimed at her and shot her down, laughing as she fell.

The scene at the gate of the Louvre was as revolting as anywhere in Paris. There was a heap of corpses outside, and the blazing torches enabled us to see some of the faces. They were those of Huguenots of rank; men and women of high degree who had come to the capital at the pressing invitation of the Queen-Mother and his Majesty, and were guests within the palace. Among them I saw Francourt, the Marquis de Renel, the Count de la Rochefoucault, and others whom I knew so well.

Our desire was not to witness the massacre, but to follow Antony Barrot, who was going past the walls quickly. One challenged him, and, halting, he pointed to his badge and moved onward.

“Your badges, messieurs,” cried one who was evidently a stranger to Paris; otherwise he must have known us, and in such a case my badge would not have served me. He suffered us to pass, and we hastened to make up for lost time, since the halt had given Barrot opportunity for turning the corner and passing out of sight.

When it was safe we ran, and once more saw him. He was going at a great pace, sometimes at a run, but love, frenzy, a desire for revenge lent speed to our feet. The street was empty, and none would challenge us or wonder at our pace.

Whether Barrot heard us coming it was impossible to tell, but it seemed to me that he increased his speed. Presently he halted at a door and disappeared. We noted the place, and coming to it saw that the door

was shut. We heard the bolts being driven into the sockets and the chain put up; but when we knocked for admission no answer came, although we beat on the door with the handles of our swords so loudly that many must have heard in the neighbouring houses.

We stood and consulted together. It was impossible to force our way in, for the doors of the houses of the wealthy were made to resist forcible entry, seeing that the days were so lawless, and that authority often found it impossible to maintain order without calling in the aid of the soldiery.

The house on the right-hand side was empty, and going to it we found that the window which looked on the street was unfastened.

"Give me a lift," said De Baze, and with my assistance he got in. Then he gave me a hand, and in a short time we stood in a room altogether devoid of furniture; but that did not interest us. Here was a means towards the achievement of an entrance into Barrot's house.

Going quietly, so that no one in the next house should hear our movements, we found our way into the garden. Climbing the wall, we dropped down into Barrot's back premises, and, still going softly, tried the door. It was securely fastened. We went to the windows, but these were shuttered, so that entrance by them was impossible.

With so much at stake we were determined not to be frustrated. There was a heavy baulk of timber leaning against the wall, as much as we could lift, and it was our intention to use it as a battering-ram, and thus burst in the door, but happily I saw an open window which could be reached by climbing the waterpipe.

In a few minutes we were standing in a furnished room, and whispering as to the course we should next pursue.

Groping about cautiously, I felt a door, and finding that it opened at my touch, we passed through and stood on the landing of the staircase, in the darkness. There was a line of light beneath a door, and going towards it quickly, De Baze threw it open and stood, with me behind him, in the entrance of a handsomely furnished room.

Barrot was standing with his back to the window, and on the table was a lamp. His sword was in his hand, having just left its scabbard; indeed, we heard the sound of the steel while he drew it.

At first there appeared to be no one else in the room, for our attention was taken up by the man we had followed at such infinite risk, and now stood, pale, but determined, facing us.

“De Baze!” he cried. “Was it you who beat so loudly on my door?”

“It was,” came the laconic answer.

“Why are you here?”

“To know what you have done with Mademoiselle Gaston.”

Before any answer could be given there was a movement on my left, and then a cry of gladness and surprise. Turning quickly I saw two women. One I knew to be Barrot's sister; the other was Louise.

“Henri!” she cried, coming forward with outstretched hands. “Oh, thank God you have come! And you, Odilon!”

Her arms were about me for a few moments, but love left her time only for one fond kiss. She turned away and threw herself into her lover's arms, kissed him as he

took her into his embrace, murmuring again and again, while he kissed her in return: "My Odilon! You have come to save me in this terrible hour!"

Barrot gazed at us in semi-stupefaction. Our coming had taken him altogether by surprise, and it bewildered him when he noted how we both ignored him and his sister, who looked on in wonder, and centred our attention on her whom we had sought for so anxiously. Doubtless, when they saw strangers enter the room, they thought that some of the mob had come to the house to discover whether any Huguenot was sheltering there: and to see De Baze and me! All thought of resistance in such a startling moment died away.

Odilon de Baze apparently had but one thought—to hold Louise in his arms, to realise the joy of having found her. He seemed to have no thought of danger from the presence of Antony Barrot. It was sufficient for him that the despair and disheartenment of the last few days had gone, and that there had come instead this delightful consummation. Possibly he forgot the horror in the city, the sounds of massacre, the shouts of the murderous mobs on all hands, north, south, east, and west, and the peril which even yet threatened his beloved, since she was a Huguenot.

"What does this mean, M. Barrot?" I asked sternly, for De Baze was oblivious of everything. Had he met Louise in the street, with a howling mob surging round, I almost think he would have done as he was doing now.

"How comes my sister here?" I asked, again speaking, for Barrot was silent. He was standing like a man who had been stricken dumb, and compelled to look on the ruin of his scheme without being able to interfere.



DE BAZE THREW OPEN THE DOOR, AND STOOD WITH ME
BEHIND HIM IN THE DOORWAY.—*Page 287.*

"Why did you decoy her from her home? Why did you bring so much sorrow to us who loved her?"

Then Barrot found his speech, for my questions seemed to sting him into activity.

"I have told your sister," he answered. "I knew of the coming massacre, and loving her so truly, although she would have none of my love, I resolved to get her away, so that in my home, with my sister to bear her company, she should be safe from the murderers who were to sweep the city. That is the meaning of it all. I expected the massacre to take place sooner, and therefore got her away earlier than was necessary. She implored me to send her home, but I did not dare to do so. Nor would I tell her, before the bell sounded the signal for the massacre to begin, why I brought her here, more than to assure her that it was for her good, and for her safety."

"Was it so, Louise?" asked Odilon, who, holding her in his arms, listened to what Barrot had to say.

"Yes, Odilon. It is all as he declares. I thought him cruel, and he knows of many harsh and angry words I have spoken. But I see now that he meant it in kindness."

She looked up into our faces with gleaming eyes.

There was silence for a while. De Baze held his sword in his right hand all the while till then, but when he had this assurance from Louise, he sheathed it, and extended the empty hand to Barrot.

"M. Barrot, I meant to kill you if I discovered that you had carried Louise Gaston away. I attributed the abduction to the most unworthy motives; but now that I know that you did it for her safety's sake, will you not take my hand? May not the past go by, and this be counted as a real service?"

Antony Barrot laid his sword on the table, and leaning across it, one hand resting on the costly cloth, he gripped Odilon by the hand. His voice trembled with emotion when he spoke.

"I did it all for love, M. de Baze, and I am glad to know that you bear no malice. It is Mademoiselle Louise's word that I must needs consider most. If she bears malice——"

"I do not!" cried Louise, not waiting to hear what he would say. "M. Barrot, I could never have been your wife. You would not have a wife who could not love you because her heart was given to another—would you? Yet, since in so strange a manner you have placed me under lasting obligation, may we not be friends in the coming days?"

Barrot took her outstretched hand, and bending, kissed it. When he raised his head again I saw that his face was wet with tears. He had done a dastardly thing, we thought, and it was in my heart to kill the man who had done it, while we were searching high and low; but now I softened. My anger died when I saw that love alone had been the prompter of this strange course. Could I do other than Louise and De Baze had done? I held out my hand to him, and he took it; but he dropped it after one warm grip, and turning away, sat down. Burying his face in his hands, he wept as a man might well do who had had to renounce his dearest hope and desire.

"I did it all for love!" he cried. "I would not have harmed a hair of her head!"

Just then the street began to fill with the mob, and with the old piercing cry the people swept past to look for new victims.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DECISION OF DE BAZE.

M. BARROT came with us as an additional precaution for the guarding of my sister in our passage along the streets.

We saw well to it before we left the house that she was wearing the badge so conspicuously, that if we met any who were hunting for fugitives, they should not deem her one of the Huguenots. She went with De Baze, holding him by the hand, and together they followed Barrot, who served as guide, while I brought up the rear to guard against surprise. De Baze knew Paris well, but Barrot took the lead, since there were ways of which he knew that must be avoided, and quiet lanes where no Huguenots lived, and where, in consequence, the mobs would not come.

He went forward with infinite caution, and I marked with wonder what a man of ready resource he was. He appeared to divine mischief where we thought safety lay, since everything was quiet; but later we understood that the devious way he took was the way of least danger. He even led us through a postern gate into the garden of the Louvre, and after a time brought us to a dead wall.

"Are you trifling?" I asked, half angrily, when he halted there.

"Could you suppose it, M. Gaston? If M. de Baze would look, he would tell you where we are."

Odilon was apparently lost to everything save the fact that he held the hand of the woman he loved, and was alert for surprise if, out of any of the bushes, some one should come, to do within the garden what the King and his courtiers were doing inside the palace. Appealed to thus directly, he looked about him, and exclaimed—

"I had no idea. We are at my home. There is a door close by."

Advancing, still holding Louise by the hand, De Baze halted at a gateway. Drawing forth a key he soon threw the gate open, and in a short time we were within his own garden.

"Will you not come in, M. Barrot?" he asked; but the other shook his head, and, doffing his cap, passed out into the darkness.

I do not stay to tell of the delight of the reunion. The wonder was as to what De Baze would do. We had found Louise—would he now put aside his scruples and marry her?

The question came bluntly from my father, when he had heard the story of her finding.

"You would always believe that I changed my religion because I was determined to marry your daughter," came the response.

"I should never have such a thought of you, my dear Odilon," cried my father, putting his arm about the young man's shoulders, and gazing at him affec-

tionately. "The question is, are you in all reality a believer in the Protestant faith, and are you still willing to embrace it, notwithstanding the obloquy and peril which such a course involves?"

"I have done so already, M. Gaston. If I desired further conviction of the wrongfulness of the policy pursued by the Catholic party, I have it in what is taking place in Paris to-night. I told you long ago that I was no more a Catholic. You believe that?"

"I do, my son, with all my heart."

"I am a worshipper in the House of Rimmon, and you surely despise me for that."

My father looked at De Baze.

"My dear Odilon, be candid. This is no time for word juggling. Tell us plainly why you elected to stay in what you call the House of Rimmon. Was it because you thought, by so doing, to be of service to us during this fearful night?"

De Baze stood with downcast eyes, and made no answer.

"Speak," said my father imperatively.

"It was."

There was silence in the room. Far away were the sounds we had been listening to the long night through. Louise was gazing at her lover, but no one spoke. She took his hand in hers.

"Odilon," she said, "do you love me?"

"Could you doubt it?" he cried.

"I could almost do so, if you use such a pretext and do not marry me."

He gazed at her; then threw his arms round her.

"This is my answer, my beloved," he exclaimed.

* * * * *

Ten long days and as many anxious nights passed, and during that time none but Odilon de Baze left the house. He went out occasionally, since it was necessary for him to go on duty in the palace, lest suspicion should be aroused by his absence. News was brought to us on his return from time to time, and among the many things we heard was that which told of the King's recoil from his base treachery.

De Baze was in close attendance on him one day—it was Odilon's turn for duty.

Going into his Majesty's presence, he saw the monarch seated at the table reading some letters. He looked haggard, the picture of a man who carried an intolerable burden of guilt. When De Baze entered, he turned and gazed at him with a startled air.

"Ha! What was that?" he cried, springing to his feet and listening. His breath came in gasps, his hands trembled, and the letter he held slipped from his fingers to the floor.

"De Baze," he cried, gripping Odilon's arm so tightly that it pained him, "do you hear it?"

"I hear nothing, your Majesty."

"You hear nothing? You must be deaf, De Baze," the King cried in something like a frenzy. "There was a woman's scream. Ah! I hear it again. And a child's wailing. Can you not hear the clamour?"

"Your Majesty, I hear nothing," said Odilon, speaking decisively. "The city at last is silent. The murderous work is done," De Baze added boldly; yet he would not withhold the words in spite of the infinite risk of death for daring to speak thus to the King.

"Murderous work! You speak truly, De Baze. O

God! what shall I do? I am accursed for ever. I am branded eternally for my treachery. Would to God I had kept my hands from the blood of these people, and had never yielded to the urging of those who would not let me rest!"

Great sweat-drops came on the King's forehead, and when De Baze left the chamber, to tell King Henry of Navarre that his Majesty desired to see him, he was on his knees, his arms flung hopelessly and despairingly across the table, declaring that he could still hear Coligny's upbraiding voice.

De Baze came into the house one morning, and throwing a paper on the table bade us look at it. It was a safe-conduct from the King. We had decided, when it should be possible, to quit Paris, and take our journey to England, at all events for a time, since only in that land could we have freedom to worship God according to Huguenot custom.

"When may we start?" my father asked.

"At once, if you will," said Odilon.

An hour later horses were at the door, and we set forth. It was noon when we rode out at the city gate, and anxious to lose no time, lest the King should change his mind and recall the pass, we rode to such purpose that many a mile of country lay between us and the unhappy capital when night came on.

Even then we did not rest, but, hiring fresh horses, rode on to Rochelle. When we came to that city Louise and Odilon were married. A week later we were in England, looking for a home in London. It is in that populous city, and in my own home, down by the broad river which sweeps on to the sea, with

my darling moving about the house, that I am writing this story.

POSTSCRIPT.

I had thought that my story ended here, but when I was about to write the closing words "THE END," a messenger came, bringing me a letter from Leyden. It was written by Maartens, who was acting as Secretary to the Prince of Orange, since he dared not return to Antwerp after that startling experience on the night of our escape from the armourer's house. It told me much concerning the doings of the Prince in the Netherlands, but there was one point which was of special interest.

With me there was always that haunting vision of six Familiars shut up, bound and helpless, in the secret chamber of Ernst Meyer's house. I knew that if they were not relieved they would starve and die a slow death, unknown to any but ourselves, who had bestowed them there. Merciless and vindictive though they had been, I had not wished them so terrible a death.

The Prince had some such thought. Maartens told, in the letter, how, capturing a Spanish soldier soon after Hody and I had left the ship in the river, his Highness had sent the man with a letter to the Holy House in Antwerp, telling the Inquisitors where the Familiars were imprisoned. As a result, they were liberated without delay.

