ELLIOT FRANCES DICKINSON

OLD COURT LIFE IN FRANCE, VOL. 1

Frances Elliot
Old Court Life in France, vol. 1

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24712817
Old Court Life in France, vol. 1/2:

Содержание

Frances Minto Dickinson Elliot Old Court Life in France, vol. 1/2

TO MY NIECE

THE COUNTESS OF MINTO

THIS WORK IS

INSCRIBED

PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

I CANNOT express the satisfaction I feel at finding myself once more addressing the great American public, which from the first has received my works with such flattering favour.

I have taken special pleasure in the production of this new edition of *Old Court Life in France*, which was first published in America some twenty years ago, and which is, I trust, now entering into a new lease of life.

That the same cordial welcome may follow the present edition, which was accorded to the first, is my anxious hope.

A new generation has appeared, which may, I trust, find itself interested in the stirring scenes I have delineated with so much care, that they might be strictly historical, as well as locally correct.

To write this book was, for me (with my knowledge of French history) a labour of love. It takes me back to the happiest period of my life, passed on the banks of the historic Loire: to Blois, Amboise, Chambord, and, a little further off, to the lovely *plaisances* of Chenonceaux and Azay le Rideau, the woods of magnificent Versailles, and Saint Cloud (now a desolation), on to the walls of the palatial Louvre, the house-tree of the great Kings and Queens of France – never can all these annals be fitly told! Never can they be exhausted!

To be the guide to these romantic events for the American

public is indeed an honour. To lead where they will follow, with, I trust, something of my own enthusiasm, is worth all the careful labour the work has cost me.

With these words I take my leave of the unknown friends across the sea, who have so kindly appreciated me for many years. Although I have never *visited* America, this sympathy bridges space, and draws me to them with inexpressible cordiality and confidence, in which sentiment I shall ever remain, leaving my work to speak to them for me.

Frances Elliot.

June, 1893.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION – IN REPLY TO CERTAIN CRITICS

TO relate the "Court life" of France – from Francis I. to Louis XIV. – it is necessary to relate, also, the history of the royal favourites. They ruled both court and state, if they did not preside at the council. The caprice of these ladies was, actually, "the Pivot on which French history turned."

Louis XIII. was an exception. Under him Cardinal Richelieu reigned. Richelieu's "*zeal*" for France led him unfortunately to butcher all his political and personal opponents. He ruled France, axe in hand. It was an easy way to absolute power.

Cardinal Mazarin found France in a state of anarchy. The throne was threatened with far more serious dangers than under Richelieu. To feudal chiefs were joined royal princes. The great Condé led the Spanish troops against his countrymen. Yet no political murder stains the name of the gentle Italian. He triumphed by statescraft, – and married the Infanta to Louis XIV.

Cardinal de Retz possessed much of the genius of Richelieu. No cruelty, however, attaches to his memory. But De Retz was on the wrong side, the side of rebellion. He was false to his king and to France. Great as were his gifts, he fell before the persevering loyalty of Mazarin.[Pg]

The personal morality of either of these statesmen ill bears investigation. Marion de l'Orme was the mistress and the spy of Richelieu; Mazarin – it is to be hoped – was privately married to the Queen Regent Anne of Austria. Cardinal de Retz had, as a contemporary remarks, "a bevy of mistresses."

We have the authority of Charlotte de Bavière, second wife of Phillippe Duc d'Orléans, brother of Louis XIV., in her *Autobiographical Fragments*, "that her predecessor, Henrietta of England, was poisoned." No legal investigation was ever made as to the cause of her sudden death. There is no proof "that Louis XIV. disbelieved she was poisoned."

The number of the victims of the St. Bartholomew-massacre is stated by Sully to have been 70,000. (*Memoirs*, book I., page 37.) Sully and other authorities state "that Charles IX., at his death, manifested by his transports and his tears the sorrow he felt for what he had done." Further, "that when dying he sent for Henry of Navarre, in whom *alone* he found faith and honour." (Sully, book I., page 42.)

That Sorbin, confessor to Charles IX., should have denied this is perfectly natural. Henry of Navarre would stink in the confessor's nostrils as a pestilent heretic. As to the credibility of Sorbin (a bigot and a controversialist), I would refer to the *Mémoires de l'état de France sous Charles IX.*, vol. 3, page 267.

According to the *Confession de Saucy*, Sorbin de St. Foy "was made a Bishop for having placed Charles IX. among the Martyrs."

Frances (Minto) Elliot.

August, 1873.

PREFACE

ALL my life I have been a student of French memoir-history. In this species of literature France is remarkably rich. There exist contemporary memoirs and chronicles, from a very early period down to the present time, in which are preserved not only admirable outlooks over general events, but details of language, character, dress, and manners, not to be found elsewhere. I was bold enough to fancy that somewhat yet remained to tell; – say – of the caprices and eccentricities of Louis XIII., of the homeliness of Henri Quatre, of the feminine tenderness of Gabrielle d'Estrées, of the lofty piety and unquestioning confidence of Louise de Lafayette, of the romantic vicissitudes of Mademoiselle de Montpensier; and that some pictures might be made of these old French personages for English readers in a way that should pourtray the substance and spirit of history, without affecting to maintain its form and dress.

In all I have written I have sought carefully to work into my dialogue each word and sentence recorded of the individual, every available trait or peculiarity of character to be found in contemporary memoirs, every tradition that has come down to us.

To be true to life has been my object. Keeping close to the background of history, I have endeavoured to group the figures of my foreground as they grouped themselves in actual life. I have

framed them in the frames in which they really lived.

Frances Elliot.

Farley Hill Court,
Christmas, 1872.

AUTHORITIES

Mémoires de Brantôme.

Mémoires de son Temps, Du Bellay.

Histoire de Henri Duc de Bouillon.

Mémoires de Condé.

Dictionnaire de Bayle, "*Duc de Guise*."

Histoire des Guerres Civiles de la France, par Davila.

Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de France, par Champollion.

Mémoires de Coligni.

Novaes, Storia dei Pontefici.

Mémoires de Marguerite de Valois.

Journal de Henri III.

Mémoires de Sully.

Histoire de Henri IV., par Mathieu.

Histoire des Amours de Henri IV.

L'Intrigue du Cabinet sous Henri IV. et Louis XIII.

Mémoires pour l'Histoire du Cardinal de Richelieu.

Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu.

Histoire de la Mère et du Fils, par Mezeray.

Mémoires du Maréchal de Bassompierre.

Observations de Bassompierre.

Mémoires de feu Monsieur (Gaston) Duc d'Orléans.

Mémoires de Cinq-Mars.

Mémoires de Montrésor.
La Cour de Marie de' Medici, par un Cadet de Gascogne.
Lettres de Madame de Sévigné.
Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier.
Mémoires du Duc de Lauzun.
Mémoires de Madame de Motteville.
Mémoires de M. d'Artagnan.
Mémoires du Cardinal de Retz.
Mémoires de La Porte.
Mémoires de Mazarin.
Œuvres Complètes de Saint-Simon.
Mémoires de la Duchesse de la Vallière.
Mémoires de la Marquise de Montespan.
Mémoires de la Marquise de Maintenon.
Amours des Rois de France.
Dulaure, Histoire de Paris.
Histoire de la Touraine, dans la Bibliothèque Publique à Tours.
Capefigue, Ouvrages Divers.

CHAPTER I.
FRANCIS I

WE are in the sixteenth century. Europe is young in artistic life. The minds of men are moved by the discussions, councils, protests, and contentions of the Reformation. The printing press is spreading knowledge into every corner of the globe.

At this period, three highly educated and unscrupulous young men divide the power of Europe. They are Henry VIII. of England, Charles V. of Austria, and Francis I. of France. Each is magnificent in taste; each is desirous of power and conquest. Each acts as a spur to the others both in peace and in war. They introduce the cultivated tastes, the refined habits, the freedom of thought of modern life, and from the period in which they flourish modern history dates.

Of these three monarchs Francis is the boldest, cleverest, and most profligate. The elegance, refinement, and luxury of his court are unrivalled; and this luxury strikes the senses from its contrast with the frugal habits of the ascetic Louis XI. and the homely Louis XII.

His reign educated Europe. If ambition led him towards Italy, it was as much to capture the arts of that classic land and to bear them back in triumph to France, as to acquire the actual territory. Francis introduced the French Renaissance, that subtle

union of elaborate ornamentation with purity of design which was the renovation of art. When and how he acquired such exact appreciation of the beautiful is unexplained. That he possessed judgment and taste is proved by the monuments he left behind, and by his patronage of the greatest masters of their several arts.

The wealth of beauty and colour, the flowing lines of almost divine expression in the works of the Italian painters of the Cinque-cento, delighted the sensuous soul of Francis. Wherever he lived he gathered treasures of their art around him. Such a nature as his had no sympathy with the meritorious but precise elaboration of the contemporary Dutch school, led by the Van Eycks and Holbein. It was Leonardo da Vinci, the head of the Milanese school, who blended power and tenderness, that Francis delighted to honour. He brought Cellini, Primaticcio, and Leonardo from Italy, and never wearied of their company. He established the aged Leonardo at the Château de Clos, near his own castle of Amboise, where the painter is said to have died in the arms of his royal patron.

As an architect, Francis left his mark beyond any other sovereign of Europe. He transformed the gloomy fortress-home – embattled, turreted, and moated – into the elaborately decorated, manorial château. The bare and foot-trodden space without, enclosed with walls of defence, was changed into green lawns and overarching bowers breaking the vista toward the royal forest, the flowing river, and the open *campagne*.

Francis had a mania for building. Like Louis XIV., who in the

century following built among the sandhills of Versailles, Francis insisted on creating a fairy palace amid the flat and dusty plains of Sologne. Here the Renaissance was to achieve its triumph. At Chambord, near Blois, were massed every device, decoration, and eccentricity of his favourite style. So identified is this place with its creator, that even his intriguing life peeps out in the double staircase under the central tower – representing a gigantic fleur-de-lys in stone – where those who ascend are invisible to those who descend; in the doors, concealed in sliding panels behind the arras; and in many double walls and secret stairs.

Azay le Rideau, built on a beautifully wooded island on the river Indre, though less known than Chambord, was and is an exquisite specimen of the Renaissance. It owes the fascination of its graceful outlines and peculiar ornamentation to the masterhand which has graven his crowned F and Salamander on its quaint façades. The Louvre and Fontainebleau are also signed by these monograms. He, and his son Henry II., made these piles the historic monuments we now behold.

Such was Francis, the artist. As a soldier, he followed in the steps of Bayard, "Sans peur et sans reproche." He perfected that poetic code of honour which reconciles the wildest courage with generosity towards an enemy. A knight-errant in love of danger and adventure, Francis comes to us as the perfect type of the chivalrous Frenchman; ready to do battle on any provocation either as king or gentleman, either at the head of his army, in the tournament, or in the duello. He loved all that was gay, bright, and

beautiful. He delighted in the repose of peace, yet no monarch ever plunged his country into more ruinous and causeless wars. Though capable of the tenderest and purest affection, no man was ever more heartless and cruel in principle and conduct.

Francis, Duc de Valois,[1] was educated at home by his mother, Madame Louise de Savoie, Duchesse d'Angoulême, Regent of France, together with his brilliant sister, Marguerite, "the pearl of the Valois," poetess, story-teller, artist, and politician. Each of these royal ladies was tenderly attached to the clever, handsome youth, and together formed what they chose to call "a trinity of love." The old Castle of Amboise, in Touraine, the favourite abode of Louis XII., continued to be their home after his death. Here, too, the hand of Francis is to be traced in sculptured windows and architectural façades, in noble halls and broad galleries, and in the stately terraced gardens overlooking the Loire which flows beneath its walls. Here, under the formal lime alleys and flowering groves, or in the shadow of the still fortified bastions, the brother and sister sat or wandered side by side, on many a summer day; read and talked of poetry and troubadours, of romance and chivalry, of Arthur, Roland, and Charlemagne, of spells and witcheries, and of Merlin the enchanter whose magic failed before a woman's glance.

Printing at that time having become general, literature of all kinds circulated in every direction, stirring men's minds with fresh tides of knowledge. Marguerite de Valois, who was called

[1] See Note 1.

"the tenth Muse," dwelt upon poetry and fiction, and already meditated her Boccaccio-like stories, afterwards to be published under the title of the *Heptameron*. Francis gloated over such adventures as were detailed in the roundelay of the "Four Sons of Aymon," a ballad of that day, devoured the history of *Amadis de Gaul*, and tried his hand in twisting many a love-rhyme, after the fashion of the "Romaunt of the Rose."

In such an idyllic life of love, of solitude, and of thought, full of the humanising courtesies of family life, was formed the paradoxical character of Francis, who above all men possessed what the French describe as "the reverse of his qualities." His fierce passions still slumbered, his imagination was filled with poetry, his heart beat high with the endearing love of a brother and a son. His reckless courage vented itself in the chase, among the royal forests of Amboise and of Chanteloup, that darkened the adjacent hills, or in a tustle with the boorish citizens, or travelling merchants, in the town below.

Thus he grew into manhood, his stately yet condescending manners, handsome person, and romantic courage gaining him devoted adherents. Yet when we remember that Francis served as the type for Hugo's play of *Le Roi s'amuse* we pause and – shudder.

CHAPTER II.
CHARLES DE BOURBON

THE Court is at Amboise. Francis is only twenty, and still solicits the advice of his mother, Louise de Savoie, regent during his minority. Marguerite, now married to the Duc d'Alençon, has also considerable influence over him. Both these princesses, who are with him at Amboise, insist on the claims of their kinsman, Charles de Montpensier, Duc de Bourbon, – in right of his wife, Suzanne, only daughter and heiress of Pierre, the last duke, – to be appointed Constable of France. It is an office next in power to the sovereign, and has not been revived since the treasonable conspiracy of the Comte de St. Pol, in the reign of Louis XI.

Bourbon is only twenty-six, but he is already a hero. He has braved death again and again in the battle-field with dauntless valour. In person he is tall and handsome. In manners, he is frank, bold, and prepossessing; but when offended, his proud nature easily turns to vindictive and almost savage revenge. Invested with the double dignity of General of the royal forces and Constable of France, he comes to Amboise to salute the King and the princesses, who are both strangely interested in his career, and to take the last commands from Francis, who does not now propose accompanying his army into Italy.

There is a restless, mobile expression on Bourbon's dark

yet comely face, that tells of strong passions ill suppressed. A man capable of ardent and devoted love, and of bitter hate; his marriage with his cousin Suzanne, lately dead, had been altogether a political alliance to bring him royal kindred, wealth, and power. Suzanne had failed to interest his heart. It is said that another passion has long engaged him. Francis may have some hint as to who the lady is, and may resent Bourbon's presumption. At all events, the Constable is no favourite with the King. He dislikes his *fanfaronnade* and haughty address. He loves not either to see a subject of his own age so powerful and so magnificent; it trenches too much on his own prerogatives of success. Besides, as lads, Bourbon and Francis had quarrelled at a game of *maille*. The King had challenged Bourbon but had never fought him, and Bourbon resented this refusal as an affront to his honour.

The Constable, mounted on a splendid charger, with housings of black velvet, and attended by a brilliant suite, gallops into the courtyard. His fine person is set off by a rich surcoat, worn over a suit of gilded armour. He wears a red and white *panache* in his helmet, and his sword and dagger are thickly incrusted with diamonds.

At the top of the grand staircase are posted one hundred archers, royal pages conduct the Constable through the range of state apartments.

The King receives Bourbon in the great gallery hung with tapestry. He is seated on a chair of state, ornamented with

elaborate carving, on which the arms of France are in high relief. This chair is placed on a raised floor, or dais, covered with a carpet. Beside him stands the grand master of the ceremonies, who introduces the Constable to the King. Francis, who inclines his head and raises his cap for an instant, is courteous but cold. Marguerite d'Alençon is present; like Bourbon, she is unhappily mated. The Duc d'Alençon is, physically and mentally, her inferior. When the Constable salutes the King, Marguerite stands apart. Conscious that her brother's eyes read her thoughts, she blushes deeply and averts her face. Bourbon advances to the spot where she is seated in the recess of an oriel window. He bows low before her; Marguerite rises, and offers him her hand. Their eyes meet. There is no disguise in the passionate glance of the Constable; Marguerite, confused and embarrassed, turns away.

"Has your highness no word of kindness for your kinsman?" says the Constable, in a low voice.

"You know, cousin, your interests are ever dear to me," replies she, in the same tone; then, curtseying deeply to the King, she takes the arm of her husband, M. d'Alençon, who was killing flies at the window, and leaves the gallery.

"*Diable!*" says Francis to his confidant, Claude de Guise, in an undertone; "My sister is scarcely civil to the Constable. Did you observe, she hardly answered him? All the better. It will teach Bourbon humility, and not to look too high for a mate."

"Yet her highness pleaded eagerly with your Majesty for his advancement."

"Yes, yes; that was to please our mother. Suzanne de Bourbon was her cousin, and the Regent promised her before her death to support her husband's claims."

Meanwhile, the Constable receives, with a somewhat reserved and haughty civility, the compliments of the Court. He is conscious of an antagonistic atmosphere. It is well known that the King loves him not; and whom the King loves not neither does the courtier.

A page then approaches, and invites the Constable, in the name of Queen Claude, to join her afternoon circle. Meanwhile, he is charged to conduct the Constable to an audience with the Regent-mother, who awaits him in her apartments.

The King had been cool and the Princess silent and reserved: not so the Regent Louise de Savoie, who advances to meet the Constable with unmistakable eagerness.

"I congratulate you, my cousin," she says, holding out both her hands to him, which he receives kneeling, "on the dignity with which my son has invested you. I may add, that I was not altogether idle in the matter."

"Your highness will, I hope, be justified in the favour you have shown me," replies the Constable, coldly.

"Be seated, my cousin," continues Louise. "I have desired to see you alone that I might fully explain with what grief I find myself obliged, by the express orders of my son, to dispute with a kinsman I so much esteem as yourself" – she pauses a moment, the Constable bows gravely – "the inheritance of my poor cousin,

your wife, Madame Suzanne de Bourbon. Suzanne was dear to me, and you also, Constable, have a high place in my regard."

Louise ceases. She looks significantly at the Constable, as if waiting for him to answer; but he does not reply, and again bows.

"I am placed," continues the Regent, the colour gathering on her cheek, "in a most painful alternative. The Chancellor has insisted on the legality of my claims – claims on the inheritance of your late wife, daughter of Pierre, Duc de Bourbon, my cousin. I will not trouble you with details. My son urges the suit. My own feelings plead strongly against proceeding any further in the matter." She hesitates and stops.

"Your highness is of course aware that the loss of this suit would be absolute ruin to me?" says Bourbon, looking hard at Louise.

"I fear it would be most disastrous to your fortunes. That they are dear to me, judge – you are by my interest made Constable of France, second only in power to my son."

"I have already expressed my gratitude, madame."

"But, Constable," continues Louise de Savoie, speaking with much animation, "why have you insisted on your claims – why not have trusted to the gratitude of the King towards a brave and zealous subject? Why not have counted on myself, who have both power and will, as I have shown, to protect you?"

"The generosity of the King and your highness's favour, which I accept with gratitude, have nothing to do with the legal rights of my late wife's inheritance. I desire not, madame, to be beholden

in such matters even to your highness or to his Majesty."

"Well, Constable, well, as you will; you are, I know, of a proud and noble nature. But I have desired earnestly," and the Regent rises and places herself on another chair nearer the Constable, "to ascertain from your own lips if this suit cannot be settled *à l'amiable*. There are many means of accommodating a lawsuit, Duke. Madame Anne, wife of two kings of France, saved Brittany from cruel wars in a manner worthy of imitation."

"Truly," replies Bourbon, with a sigh; "but I know not what princess of the blood would enable me to accommodate your highness's suit in so agreeable a manner."

"Have you not yourself formed some opinion on the subject?" asks Louise, looking at the Constable with undisguised tenderness.

"No, madame, I have not. Since the hand of your beautiful daughter, Madame Marguerite, is engaged, I know no one."

"But – " and she hesitates, and again turns her eyes upon him, which the Constable does not observe, as he is adjusting the hilt of his dagger – "but – you forget, Duke, that I am a widow."

As she speaks she places her hand upon that of the Constable, and gazes into his face. Bourbon starts violently and looks up. Louise de Savoie, still holding his hand, meets his gaze with an unmistakable expression. She is forty years old, but vain and intriguing. There is a pause. Then the Constable rises and drops the hand which had rested so softly upon his own. His handsome face darkens into a look of disgust. A flush of rage sends the

blood tingling to the cheeks of Louise.

"Your highness mistakes me," says Bourbon. "The respect I owe to his Majesty, the disparity of our years, my own feelings, all render such an union impossible. Your highness does me great honour, but I do not at present intend to contract any other alliance. If his Majesty goes to law with me, why I will fight him, madame, – that is all."

"Enough," answers Louise, in a hoarse voice, "I understand." The Constable makes a profound obeisance and retires.

This interview was the first act in that long and intricate drama by which the spite of a mortified woman drove the Duc de Bourbon – the greatest general of his age, under whom the arms of France never knew defeat – to become a traitor to his king and to France.

CHAPTER III.
BROTHER AND SISTER

YEARS have passed; Francis, with his wife, Queen Claude, daughter of Louis XII. and Anne of Brittany, is at Chambord, in the Touraine. Claude, but for the Salic law, would have been Queen of France. In her childhood, she was affianced to Charles, son of Philip the Fair, afterwards Charles V. of Germany, the great rival of Francis. Francis had never loved her, the union had been political; yet Claude is gentle and devoted, and he says of her, "that her soul is as a rose without a thorn." This queen – the darling of her parents – can neither bear the indifference nor the infidelity of her brilliant husband, and dies of her neglected love at the early age of twenty-five.

Marguerite d'Alençon, the Duke her husband, and the Court, are assembled for hunting in the forests of Sologne. Chambord, then but a gloomy mediæval fortress lying on low swampy lands on the banks of the river Casson, is barely large enough to accommodate the royal party. Already Francis meditates many changes; the course of the river Loire, some fifteen miles distant, is to be turned in order to bathe the walls of a sumptuous palace, not yet fully conceived in the brain of the royal architect.

It is spring; Francis is seated in the broad embrasure of an oriel window, in an oak-panelled saloon which looks towards

the surrounding forest. He eagerly watches the gathering clouds that veil the sun and threaten to prevent the boar-hunt projected for that morning. Beside him, in the window, sits his sister Marguerite. She wears a black velvet riding-habit, faced with gold; her luxuriant hair is gathered into a net under a plumed hat on which a diamond aigrette glistens. At the farther end of the room Queen Claude is seated on a high-backed chair, richly carved, in the midst of her ladies. She is embroidering an altar-cloth; her face is pale and very plaintive. She is young, and though not beautiful, there is an angelic expression in her large grey eyes, a dimpling sweetness about her mouth, that indicate a nature worthy to have won the love of any man, not such a libertine as Francis. Her dress is plain and rich, of grey satin trimmed with ermine; a jewelled coif is upon her head. She bends over her work, now and then raising her wistful eyes with an anxious look towards the King. The Queen's habits are sedentary, and the issue of the hunting party is of no personal interest to her; she always remains at home with her children and ladies. Many attendant lords, attired for hunting, are waiting his Majesty's pleasure in the adjoining gallery.

"Marguerite," says the King, turning to the Duchesse d'Alençon, as the sun reappears out of a bank of cloud, "the weather mends; in a quarter of an hour we shall start. Meanwhile, dear sister, sit beside me. *Morbleu*, how well that riding-dress becomes you! You are very handsome, and worthy to be called the Rose of the Valois. There are few royal ladies in our Court to

compare to you"; and Francis glances significantly at his gentle Queen, busy over her embroidery, as if to say – "Would that she resembled you!"

Marguerite, proud of her brother's praise, reddens with pleasure and reseats herself at his side. "By-and-by I shall knock down this sombre old fortress," continues Francis, looking out of the window at the gloomy façade, "and transform it into a hunting château. The situation pleases me, and the surrounding forest is full of game."

"My brother," says Marguerite, interrupting him and speaking in an earnest voice, for her eyes have not followed the direction of the King's, which are fixed on the prospect; she seems not to have heard his remarks, and her bright look has changed into an anxious expression; "my brother, tell me, have you decided upon the absolute ruin of Bourbon? Think how his haughty spirit must chafe under the repeated marks of your displeasure." They are both silent. Marguerite's eyes are riveted upon the King. Francis is embarrassed. He averts his face from the suppliant look cast upon him by his sister, and again turns to the window, as if to watch the rapidly passing clouds.

"My sister," he says at length, "Bourbon is not a loyal subject; he is unworthy of your regard."

"Sire, I cannot believe it. Bourbon is no traitor! But, my brother, if he were, have you not tried him sorely? Have you not driven him from you by an intolerable sense of injury? Oh, Francis, remember he is our kinsman, your most zealous servant;

– did he not save your life at Marignano? Who among your generals is cool, daring, valiant, wise as Bourbon? Has he not borne our flag triumphantly through Italy? Have the French troops under him ever known defeat? Yet, my brother, you have now publicly disgraced him." Her voice trembles with emotion; she is very pale, and her eyes fill with tears.

"By the mass, Marguerite, no living soul, save our mother, would dare to address me thus!" exclaims the King, turning towards her. He is much moved. Then, examining her countenance, he adds, "You are strangely agitated, my sister. What concern have you with the Constable? Believe me, I have made Bourbon too powerful."

"Not now, not now, Francis, when you have, at the request of a woman – of Madame de Châteaubriand too – taken from him the government of Milan; when he is superseded in his command; when our mother is pressing on him a ruinous suit, with your sanction."

At the name of Madame de Châteaubriand Marguerite's whole countenance darkens with anger, the King's face grows crimson.

"My sister, you plead Bourbon's cause warmly – too warmly, methinks," and Francis turns his head aside to conceal his confusion.

"Not only has your Majesty taken from him the government of Milan," continues Marguerite, bitterly, unheeding the King's interruption, "but he has been replaced by Lautrec, brother of

Madame de Châteaubriand, an inexperienced soldier, unfitted for such an important post. Oh, my brother, you are driving Bourbon to despair. So great a general cannot hang up his victorious sword."

"By my faith, sister, you press me hard," replies the King, recovering the gentle tone with which he always addressed her; "I will communicate with my council; what you have said shall be duly considered. Meanwhile, if Bourbon inspires you with such interest, as it seems he does, tell him to humble his pride and submit himself to us, his sovereign and his master. If he do, he shall be greater than ever, I promise you." As he speaks, he glances at Marguerite, whose eyes fall to the ground. "But see, my sister, the sun is shining; and there is some one already mounting in the courtyard. Give the signal for departure, Comte de Saint-Vallier," says the King in a louder voice, turning towards two gentlemen standing at an opposite window in the gallery. The King has to repeat his command before the Comte de Saint-Vallier hears him. "Saint-Vallier, you are in deep converse with De Pompérant. Is it love or war?"

"Neither, Sire," replies the Captain of the Royal Archers, looking embarrassed.

"M. de Pompérant, are you going with us to-day to hunt the boar?" says the King, advancing towards them.

"Sire," replies De Pompérant, bowing profoundly, "your Majesty does me great honour; but, with your leave, I will not accompany the hunt. Urgent business calls me from Chambord."

"Ah, *coquin*, it is an assignation; confess it," and a wicked gleam lights up the King's eyes.

"No, Sire," says De Pompérant. "I go to join the Constable de Bourbon, who is indisposed."

"Ah! to join the Constable!" Francis pauses and looks at him. "I know he is your friend," continues he, suddenly becoming very grave. "Where is he?"

"At his fortress of Chantelle, Sire."

"At Chantelle! a fortified place, and without my permission. Truly, Monsieur de Pompérant, your friend is a daring subject. What if I will not trust you in his company, and command your attendance on our person here at Chambord?"

"Then, Sire, I should obey," replies De Pompérant; "but let your gracious Majesty remember the Duc de Bourbon is ill; he is a broken and ruined man, deprived of your favour. Chantelle is more a château than a fortress."

"Go, De Pompérant; I did but jest. Tell Bourbon, on the word of a king, that he has warm friends near my person; that if the Regent-mother gains her suit against him, I will restore tenfold to him in money, lands, and honour. Adieu, Monsieur de Pompérant. You are dismissed. Bon voyage."

Now, the truth was that De Pompérant had come to Chambord upon a secret mission from Bourbon, who wished to assure himself of those gentlemen of the Court upon whom he could rely in case of rebellion. The Comte de Saint-Vallier had just, while standing at the window, pledged his word to stand by

Bourbon for life or death.

The King is now mounting his horse in the courtyard, a noble bay with glittering harness. He gives the signal of departure, which is echoed through the woodland recesses by the bugles of the huntsmen. A lovely lady attired in white has joined the royal retinue in the courtyard. She rides on in front beside the King, who, the better to converse with her, has placed his hand upon her horse's neck. This is Françoise, Comtesse de Châteaubriand, the favourite of the hour – at whose request Bourbon had been superseded in the government of Milan by her brother Lautrec.

Behind this pair rides Marguerite d'Alençon with her husband, the Comte de Guise, Montmorenci, Bonnivet, and other nobles. A large cavalcade of courtiers follows. Since her conversation with her brother, Marguerite looks thoughtful and anxious. She is so absent that she does not even hear the prattle of her husband, who is content to talk and cares not for reply. On reaching the dense thickets of the forest she suddenly reins up her horse, and, falling back a little, beckons the Comte de Saint-Vallier to her side.

"M. le Comte," she says in a loud voice, so as to be overheard by her husband and the other gentlemen riding in advance, "tell me when is the Court to be graced by the presence of your incomparable daughter, Madame Diane, Grande Seneschale of Normandy?"

"Madame," replies Saint-Vallier, "her husband, Monseigneur de Brèzè, is much occupied in his distant government. Diane is

young, much younger than her husband. The Court, madame, is dangerously full of temptations to the young."

"We lose a bright jewel by her absence," says Marguerite, abstractedly. "M. le Comte," she continues in a low voice, speaking quickly, and motioning to him with her hand to approach nearer, "I have something private to say to you. Ride close by my side. You are a friend of the Constable de Bourbon?" she asks eagerly.

"Yes, madame, I am."

"You are, perhaps, his confidant? Speak freely to me; I feel deeply the misfortunes of the Duke. I would aid him if I could. Is there any foundation for the suspicion with which my brother regards him? You will not deceive me, Monsieur de Poitiers?"

Saint-Vallier does not answer at once. "The Constable de Bourbon will never, I trust, betray his Majesty," replies he at last, with hesitation.

"Alas! my poor cousin! Is that all the assurance you can give me, Monsieur de Saint-Vallier? Oh! he is incapable of treason," exclaims Marguerite with enthusiasm; "I would venture my life he is incapable of treason!"

A courier passes them at this moment, riding with hot speed. He nears the King, who is now far on in front, and who, hearing the sound of the horse's hoofs, stops and listens. The messenger hands the King a despatch. Francis hastily breaks the seal. It is from Lautrec, the new governor of Milan. Bourbon is in open rebellion.

Bourbon in open rebellion! This intelligence necessitates the instant presence of the King at Paris.

CHAPTER IV.
THE QUALITY OF MERCY

FRANCIS is at the Louvre, surrounded by his most devoted friends and councillors, Chabannes, La Trémouille, Bonnivet, Montmorenci, Crequi, Cossé, De Guise, and the two Du Bellays. The Louvre is still the isolated stronghold, castle, palace, and prison, surrounded by moat, walls, and bastions, built by Philippe Auguste on the grassy margin of the Seine. In the centre of the inner court is a round tower, also moated, and defended by ramparts, ill-famed in feudal annals for its oubliettes and dungeons, under which the river flows. Four gates, with posterns and towers, open from the Louvre; that one opposite the Seine is the strongest. The southern gate – which is low and narrow, with statues on either hand of Charles V. and his wife, Jeanne de Bourbon – faces the Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois.[2] Beyond are gardens and orchards, and a house called Fromenteau, where lions are kept for the King's amusement.

These are the days of stately manners, intellectual culture, and increasing knowledge. Personal honour, as from man to man, is a religion, of which Bayard is the high priest; treachery to woman, a virtue inculcated by the King. The idle, vapid life of later courts

[2] See Note 2.

is unknown under a monarch who, however addicted to pleasure, cultivates all kinds of knowledge, whose inquiring intellect seeks to master all science, to whom indolence is impossible. His very meals are chosen moments in which he converses with authors, poets, and artists, or dictates letters to Erasmus and the learned Greek Lascaris. Such industry and dignity, such grace and condescension, gather around him the great spirits of the age. He delights in their company.

It is the King's boast that he has introduced into France the study of the Greek language, Botany, and Natural History. He buys, at enormous prices, pictures, pottery, enamels, statues, and manuscripts. As in his fervid youth at Amboise, he loves poetry and poets. Clément Marot is his chosen guest, and polishes the King's rhymes, of which some delicate and touching stanzas (those on Agnes Sorel,[3] especially) have come down to us.

Even that witty heretic, Rabelais, found both an appreciative protector and intelligent friend in a sovereign superior to the prejudices of his age. With learning, poetry, wit, and intellect, come luxury and boundless extravagance. Brantôme speaks as with bated breath of the royal expenditure. These are the days of broad sombrero hats fringed with gold and looped up with priceless jewels and feathers; of embroidered cloaks in costly stuffs – heavy with gold or silver embroidery – hung over the shoulder; of slashed hose and richly chased rapiers; of garments of cloth-of-gold, embroidered with armorial bearings in jewels;

[3] See Note 3.

of satin justaucorps covered with rivières of diamonds, emeralds, and oriental pearls; of torsades and collars wherein gold is but the foil to priceless gems. The ladies wear Eastern silks and golden tissues, with trimmings of rare furs; wide sleeves and Spanish fardingales, sparkling coifs and jewelled nets, with glittering veils. They ride in ponderous coaches covered with carving and gilding, or on horses whose pedigrees are as undoubted as their own, covered with velvet housings and with silken nets woven with jewels, their manes plaited with gold and precious stones. But these illustrious ladies consider gloves a royal luxury, and are weak in respect of stockings.

Foremost in every gorgeous mode is Francis. He wears rich Genoa velvets, and affects bright colours – rose and sky-blue. A Spanish hat is on his head, turned up with a white plume, fastened to an aigrette of rubies, with a golden salamander his device, signifying, "I am nourished and I die in fire" ("Je me nourris et je meurs dans le feu").

How well we know his dissipated though distinguished features, as portrayed by Titian! His long nose, small eyes, broad cheeks, and cynical mouth. He moves with careless grace, as one who would say, "*Que m'importe?* I am King of France; nought comes amiss to me."

Now he walks up and down the council-room in the Louvre which looks towards the river. His step is quick and agitated, his face wears an unusual frown. He calls Bonnivet to him and addresses him in a low voice, while the other nobles stand back.

"Am I to believe that Bourbon has not merely rebelled against me, but that the traitor has fled into Spain and made terms with Charles?"

"Your Majesty's information is precise."

"What was the manner of his flight?"

"The Duke, Sire, waited at his fortress of Chantelle until the arrival of Monsieur de Pompérant from your Majesty's Court at Chambord, feigning sickness and remaining shut up within his apartments. After Monsieur de Pompérant's arrival, a litter was ordered to await his pleasure, and De Pompérant, dressed in the clothes of the Duke and with his face concealed by a hood, was carried into the litter, which started for Moulins, travelling slowly. Meanwhile Bourbon, accompanied by a band of gentlemen, was galloping on the road to the frontier. He was last seen at Saint-Jean de Luz, in the Pyrenees."

"By our Lady!" exclaims Francis, "such treason is a blot upon knighthood. Bourbon, a man whom we had made as great as ourselves!"

"The Duke, Sire, left a message for your Majesty."

"A message! Where? and who bore it?"

"De Pompérant, Sire, who has already been arrested at Moulins. The Duke begged your Majesty to take back the sword which you had given him, and prayed you to send for the badge which he left hanging at the head of his bed at Chantelle."

"*Diable!* does the villain dare to point his jests at his sovereign?" and Francis flushes to the roots of his hair with

passion. “I wish I had him face to face in a fair field” – and he lays his hand on the hilt of his sword; – “but no,” he adds in a calmer voice, “a traitor’s blood would but soil my weapon. Let him carry his perfidy into Spain – ’twill suit the Emperor; I am well rid of him. Are there many accomplices, Bonnivet?”

“About two hundred, Sire.”

“Is it possible! Do we know them?”

“The Comte de Saint-Vallier, Sire, is the principal accomplice.”

“What! Saint-Vallier, the Captain of our Archers! That strikes us nearly. This conspiracy, my lords,” says Francis, advancing to where Guise, La Trémouille, Montmorenci, and the others stand somewhat apart during his conversation with Bonnivet, “is much more serious than I imagined. I must remain in France to wait the issue of events. You, Bonnivet, must take command of the Italian campaign.”

Bonnivet kneels and kisses the hand of Francis.

“I am sorry for Jean de Poitiers,” continues Francis, turning to Guise. “Are the proofs against him certain?”

“Sire, Saint-Vallier accompanied the Constable to the frontier.”

“I am sorry,” repeats the King, and he passes his hand thoughtfully over his brow and muses.

“Jean de Poitiers, my *ci-devant* Captain of the Guards, is the father of a charming lady; Madame Diane, the Seneschale of Normandy, is an angel, though her husband, De Brèzè – hum –

why, he is a monster. Vulcan and Venus – the old story, eh, my lords?"

There is a general laugh.

A page enters and announces a lady humbly craving to speak with his Majesty. The King smiles, his wicked eyes glisten. "Who? what? Do I know her?"

"Sire, the lady is deeply veiled; she desires to speak with your Majesty alone."

"But, by St. Denis – do I know her?"

"I think, Sire, it is the wife of the Grand Seneschal of Normandy – Madame Diane de Brèzè."

There is a pause, some whispering, and a low laugh is heard. The King looks around displeased. "I am not surprised," says he. "When I heard of the father's danger I expected the daughter's intercession. Let the lady enter."

With a wave of his hand he dismisses the Court, and seats himself on a chair of state under a rich canopy embroidered in gold with the arms of France.

Diane enters. She is dressed in long black robes which sweep the floor. Her head is covered with a thick lace veil which she raises as she approaches the King. She weeps, but her tears do not mar her beauty, which is absolutely radiant. She is exquisitely fair and wonderfully fresh, with golden hair and dark eyebrows – a most winsome lady.

She throws herself at the King's feet. She clasps her hands. Her sobs drown her voice.

"Pardon, Sire, pardon my father!" she at length falters. The King stoops forward, and raises her to the estrade on which he stands. He looks tenderly into her soft blue eyes, his hands are locked in hers.

"Your father, madame, my old and trusted servant, is guilty of treason."

"Alas! Sire, I fear so; but he is old, too old for punishment. He has been hitherto a true subject of your Majesty."

"He is blessed, madame, with a most surpassing daughter." Francis pauses and looks steadfastly at her with eyes of ardent admiration. "But I fear I must confirm the sentence of my judges, madame; your father is certain to be found guilty of treason."

"Oh! Sire, mercy, mercy! grant me my father's life, I implore you"; and again Diane falls prostrate at the King's feet, and looks supplicatingly into his face. Again the King raises her.

"Well, madame, you are aware that you desire the pardon of a traitor; on what ground do you ask for his life?"

"Sire, I ask it for the sake of mercy; mercy is the privilege of kings," and her soft eyes seek those of Francis and rest upon them. "I have come so far, too, from Normandy, to invoke it – my poor father!" and she sobs again. "Your Majesty will not send me back refused, broken-hearted?" Still her eyes are fixed upon the King.

"Mercy, Madame Diane, is, doubtless, a royal prerogative. I am an anointed king," and he lets go her hands, and draws himself up proudly, "and I may use it; but the prerogative of a

woman is beauty. Beauty, Madame Diane," adds Francis, with a glance at the lovely woman still kneeling at his feet, "is more potent than a king's word."

There is silence for a few moments. Diane's eyes are now bent upon the ground, her bosom heaves. Francis contemplates her with delight.

"Will you, fair lady, deign to exercise your prerogative?"

"Truly, Sire, I know not what your Majesty would say," replies Diane, looking down and blushing.

Something in his eyes gives her hope, for she starts violently, rises, and clasping her hands together exclaims, "How, Sire! do I read your meaning aright? can I, by my humble service to your Majesty – "

"Yes, fair lady, you can. Your presence at my Court, where your adorable beauty shall receive due homage, will be my hostage for your father's loyalty. Madame Diane, I declare that the Comte de Saint-Vallier is PARDONED. Though he had rent the crown from off our head, your father is pardoned. And I add, madame, that it was the charm of his daughter that rendered a refusal impossible."

Madame Diane's face shines like April sunshine through raindrops; a smile parts her lips, and her glistening eyes dance with joy; she is more lovely than ever.

"Thanks, thanks, Sire!" And again she would have knelt, but the King again takes her hands, and looks into her face so earnestly that she again blushes.

Did that look of the King fascinate her? or did the sudden joy of saving her father move her heart with love? Who can tell? It is certain, however, that from this time Diane left Normandy, and became one of the brightest ornaments of that beauty-loving Court. Diane was a woman of masculine understanding, concealed under the gentlest and most fascinating manners; but she was also mercenary, intriguing, and domineering. Of her beauty we may judge for ourselves, as many portraits of her are extant, especially one of great excellence by Leonardo da Vinci, in the long gallery at Chenonceau.

Diane was soon forsaken, but the ready-witted lady consoled herself by laying siege to the heart of the son of Francis, Prince Henry, afterwards Henry II.

Henry surrendered at discretion. Nothing can more mark the freedom of the times than this *liaison*. Yet both these ladies – Diane de Poitiers and her successor in the favour of the King, the Duchesse d'Étampes – were constantly in the society of two most virtuous queens Claude, and Elinor of Spain, the successive wives of Francis.

CHAPTER V.
ALL LOST SAVE HONOUR

THE next scene is in Italy. The French army lies encamped on the broad plains of Lombardy, backed by snowy lines of Alpine fastnesses.

Bonnivet, in command of the French, presumptuous and inexperienced, has been hitherto defeated in every battle. Bourbon, fighting on the side of Spain, is, as before, victorious.

Francis, stung by the repeated defeat of his troops, has now joined the army, and commands in person. Milan, where the plague rages, has opened its gates to him; but Pavia, distant about twenty miles, is occupied by the Spaniards in force. Antonio de Leyva is governor. Thither the French advance in order to besiege the city.

The open country is defended by the Spanish forces under Bourbon. Francis, maddened by the presence of his cousin, rushes onward. Montmorenci and Bonnivet, flatterers both, assure him that victory is certain by means of a *coup de main*.

It is night; the days are short, for it is February. The winter moon lights up the rich meadow lands divided by the broad Ticino and broken by the deep ditches and sluggish streams which surround the city. Tower, campanile, dome, and turret, with here and there the grim façade of a mediæval palace, stand

out in the darkness.

Yonder among the meadows are the French, darkening the surrounding plain. Francis knows that the Constable is advancing to support the garrison of Pavia, and he desires to carry the city by assault before his arrival. Ever too rash, and now excited by a passionate sense of injury, Francis, with D'Alençon, De la Trémouille, De Foix, and Bonnivet, leads the attack at the head of his cavalry. Now he is under the very walls. Despite the dim moonlight, no one can mistake him. He wears a suit of steel armour inlaid with gold; a crimson surcoat, embroidered with gilt "F's"; a helmet encircled by a jewelled crown, out of which rises a yellow plume and golden salamander. For an instant success seems certain; the scaling-ladders thick with soldiers are already planted against the lowest walls, and the garrison retreats under cover of the bastions. A sudden panic seizes the troops beneath, who are to support the assault. In the treacherous moonlight they have fallen into confusion among the deep, slimy ditches; many are drifted away in the current of the great river. A murderous cannonade from the city walls now opens on the assailants and on the cavalry. Francis falls back. The older generals conjure him to retreat and raise the siege before the arrival of Bourbon, but, backed by Bonnivet and Montmorenci, he will not hear of it. The battle rages during the night. The morning light discovers the Spaniards commanded by Bourbon and Pescara, with the whole strength of their army, close under the walls. Again the King leads a fresh assault – a forlorn hope, rather. He fights

desperately; the yellow plumes of his helmet wave hither and thither as his horse dashes wildly from side to side amidst the smoke, in the thickest of the battle. See, for an instant he falters, – he is wounded and bleeding. He recovers, however, and again clapping spurs to his horse, scatters his surrounding foes; six have already fallen by his hand. Look! his charger is pierced by a ball and falls with his rider. After a desperate struggle the King extricates himself; now on foot, he still fights furiously. Alas! it is in vain. Every moment his enemies thicken around him, pressing closer and closer. His gallant followers drop one by one under the unerring aim of the Basque marksmen. La Trémouille has fallen. De Foix lies a corpse at his feet. Bonnivet in despair expiates his evil counsel by death.[4] Every shot takes from him one of the pillars of his throne. Francis flings himself wildly on the points of the Spanish pikes. The Royal Guards fall like summer grass before the sickle; but where the King stands, still dealing desperate blows, the bodies of the slain form a rampart of protection around him. His very enemies stand back amazed at such furious courage. While he struggles for his life hand to hand with D'Avila and D'Ovietta, plumeless, soiled, and bloody, a loud cry rises from a thousand voices – "It is the King – LET HIM SURRENDER —*Capture the King!*" There is a dead silence; the Spanish troops fall back. A circle is formed round the now almost fainting Francis, who lies upon the blood-stained earth. De Pompérant advances. He kneels before the master whom he

[4] See Note 4.

has betrayed, he implores him to yield to Bourbon.

At that hated name the King starts into fresh fury; he grasps his sword, he struggles to his feet. “Never,” cries he in a hoarse voice; “never will I surrender to that traitor! Rather let me die by the hand of a common marksman. Go back, Monsieur de Pompérant, and call to me the Vice-King of Naples.”

Lannoy advances, kneels, and kisses his hand. “Your Majesty is my prisoner,” he cries aloud, and a ringing shout is echoed from the Spanish troops.

Francis gives him his sword. Lannoy receives it kneeling, and replaces it by his own. The King’s helmet is then removed; a velvet cap is given to him, which he places on his head. The Spanish and Italian troopers and the deadly musketeers silently creep round him where he lies on the grass, supported by cushions, one to tear a feather from his broken plume, another to cut a morsel from his surcoat as a relic. This involuntary homage from his enemies is evidently agreeable to Francis. As his surcoat rapidly disappears under the knives of his opponents, he smiles, and graciously acknowledges the rough advances of those same soldiers who a moment before thirsted for his blood. Other generals with Pescara advance and surround him. He courteously acknowledges their respectful salutations.

“Spare my poor soldiers, spare my Frenchmen, generals,” says he.

These unselfish words bring tears into Pescara’s eyes.

“Your Majesty shall be obeyed,” replies he.

"I thank you," replies Francis with a faltering voice.

A pony is now brought to bear him into Pavia. Francis becomes greatly agitated. As they raise him up and assist him to mount, he turns to his escort of generals —

"Marquis," says he, turning to Pescara, "and you, my lord governor, if my calamity touches your hearts, as it would seem to do, I beseech you not to lead me into Pavia. I would not be exposed to the affront of entering as a prisoner a city I should have taken by assault. Carry me, I pray you, to some shelter without the walls."

"Your Majesty's wishes are our law," replies Pescara, saluting him. "We will bear you to the monastery of Saint-Paul, without the gate towards Milan."

To Saint-Paul the King was carried. It was from thence he wrote the historic letter to his mother, Louise de Savoie, Regent of France, in which he tells her, "*all is lost save honour*."

CHAPTER VI.
BROKEN FAITH

WE are at Madrid. Francis has been lured hither by incredible treachery, under the idea that he will meet Charles V., and be at once set at liberty.

He is confined in one of the rooms of the Alcazar, then used as a state prison. A massive oaken door, clamped and barred with iron, opens from the court from whence a flight of steps leads into two small chambers which occupy one of the towers. The inner room has narrow windows, closely barred. The light is dim. There is just room for a table, two chairs, and a bed. It is a cage rather than a prison.

On a chair, near an open window, sits the King. He is emaciated and pale; his cheeks are hollow, his lips are white, his eyes are sunk in his head, his dress is neglected. His glossy hair, plentifully streaked with grey, covers the hand upon which he wearily leans his head. He gazes vacantly at the setting sun opposite – a globe of fire rapidly sinking below the low dark plain which bounds his view.

There are boundless plains in front of him, and on his left a range of tawny hills. A roadway runs beneath the tower, where the Imperial Guards are encamped. The gay fanfare of the trumpets sounding the retreat, the waving banners, the prancing

horses, the brilliant accoutrements, the glancing armour of the imperial troops, mock him where he sits. Around him is Madrid. Palace, tower, and garden rise out of a sea of buildings burnt by southern sunshine. The church-bells ring out the *Ave Maria*. The fading light darkens into night. Still the King sits beside the open window, lost in thought. No one comes to disturb him. Now and then some broken words escape his lips: – "Save France – my poor soldiers – brave De Foix – noble Bonnivet – see, he is tossed on the Spanish pikes. Alas! would I were dead. My sister – my little lads – the Dauphin – Henry – Orléans – I shall never see you more. Oh, God! I am bound in chains of iron – France – liberty – Glory – gone – gone for ever!" His head sinks on his breast; tears stream from his eyes. He falls back fainting in his chair, and is borne to his bed.

Francis has never seen Charles, who is at his capital, Toledo. The Emperor does not even excuse his absence. This cold and cautious policy, this death in life, is agony to the ardent temperament of Francis. His health breaks down. A settled melancholy, a morbid listlessness overwhelms him. He is seized with fever; he rapidly becomes delirious. His royal gaoler, Charles, will not believe in his danger; he still refuses to see him. False himself, he believes Francis to be shamming. The Spanish ministers are distracted by their master's obstinacy, for if the French King dies at Madrid of broken heart, all is lost, and a bloody war with France inevitable.

At the moment when the Angel of Death hovers over the

Alcazar, a sound of wheels is heard below. A litter, drawn by reeking mules and covered with mud, dashes into the street. The leather curtains are drawn aside, and Marguerite d'Alençon, pale and shrunk with anxiety and fatigue, attended by two ladies, having travelled from Paris day and night, descends. Breathless with excitement, she passes quickly up the narrow stairs, through the anteroom, and enters the King's chamber. Alas! what a sight awaits her. Francis lies insensible on his bed. The room is darkened, save where a temporary altar has been erected, opposite his bed, on which lights are burning. A Bishop officiates. The low voices of priests, chanting as they move about the altar, alone break a death-like silence. Marguerite, overcome by emotion, clasps her hands and sinks on her knees beside her brother. Her sobs and cries disturb the solemn ordinance. She is led almost fainting away. Then the Bishop approaches the King, bearing the bread of life, and, at that moment, Francis becomes suddenly conscious. He opens his eyes, and in a feeble voice prays that he may be permitted to receive it. So humbly, yet so joyfully, does he communicate that all present are deeply moved.

In spite, however, of the presence of Marguerite in Madrid, the King relapses. He again falls into a death-like trance. Then, and then only, does the Emperor yield to the reproaches of the Duchesse d'Alençon and the entreaties of his ministers. He takes horse from Toledo and rides to Madrid almost without drawing rein, until he stops at the heavy door in the Alcazar. He mounts the stairs and enters the chamber. Francis, now restored

to consciousness, prompted by a too generous nature, opens his arms to embrace him.

"Your Majesty has come to see your prisoner die," says he in a feeble voice, faintly smiling.

"No," replies Charles, with characteristic caution and Spanish courtesy, bowing profoundly and kissing him on either cheek; "no, your Majesty will not die, you are no longer my prisoner; you are my friend and brother. I come to set you free."

"Ah, Sire," murmurs Francis in a voice scarcely audible, "death will accomplish that before your Majesty; but if I live – and indeed I do not believe I shall, I am so overcome by weakness – let me implore you to allow me to treat for my release in person with your Majesty; for this end I came hither to Madrid."

At this moment the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of a page, who announces to the Emperor that the Duchesse d'Alençon has arrived and awaits his Majesty's pleasure. Glad of an excuse to terminate a most embarrassing interview with his too confiding prisoner, Charles, who has been seated on the bed, rises hastily —

"Permit me, my brother," says he, "to leave you, in order to descend and receive your august sister in person. In the meantime recover your health. Reckon upon my willingness to serve you. Some other time we will meet; then we can treat more in detail of these matters, when your Majesty is stronger and better able to converse."

Charles takes an affectionate leave of Francis, descends the

narrow stairs, and with much ceremony receives the Duchess.

"I rejoice, madame," says he, "to offer you in person the homage of all Spain, and my own hearty thanks for the courage and devotion you have shown in the service of the King, my brother. He is a prisoner no longer. The conditions of release shall forthwith be prepared by my ministers."

"Is the King fully aware what those conditions are, Sire?" Marguerite coldly asks.

Charles was silent.

"I fear our mother, Madame Louise, Regent of France," continues the Duchesse d'Alençon, "may find it difficult to accept your conditions, even though it be to liberate the Sovereign of France, her own beloved son."

"Madame," replies Charles evasively, "I will not permit this occasion, when I have the happiness of first saluting you within my realm, to be occupied with state affairs. Rely on my desire to set my brother free. Meanwhile the King will, I hope, recover his strength. Pressing business now calls me back to Toledo. Adieu! most illustrious princess, to whom I offer all that Madrid contains for your service. Permit me to kiss your hands. Salute my brother, the King, from me. Once more, royal lady, adieu!"

Marguerite curtseys to the ground. The Emperor, with his head uncovered, mounts his horse, again salutes her, and attended by his retinue puts spurs to his steed and rides from the Alcazar on his return to Toledo. Marguerite fully understands the treachery of his words. Her heart swelling with indignation, she

slowly ascends to the King's chamber.

"Has the Emperor departed already?" Francis eagerly asks her.

"Yes, my brother; pressing business, he says, calls him back to Toledo," replies Marguerite bitterly, speaking very slowly.

"What! gone so soon, before giving me an opportunity of discussing with him the terms of my freedom. Surely, my sister, this is strange," says Francis, turning eagerly towards the Duchess, and then sinking back pale and exhausted on his pillows.

Marguerite seats herself beside him, takes his hand tenderly within both her own, and gazes at him in silence.

"But, my sister, did my brother, the Emperor, say *nothing* to you of his speedy return?"

"Nothing," answers Marguerite, drily.

"Yet he assured me, with his own lips, that I was already free, and that the conditions of release would be prepared immediately."

"Dear brother," says the Duchess, "has your imprisonment at Madrid, and the conduct of the Emperor to you this long time past, inclined you to believe what he says?"

"I, a king myself, should be grieved to doubt a brother sovereign's word."

"Francis," says Marguerite, speaking with great earnestness and fixing her eyes on him, "what you say convinces me that you are weakened by illness. Your naturally acute intellect is dulled

by the confusion of recent delirium. If you were in full possession of your senses you would not speak as you do. My brother, take heed of my words – you will never be free."

"How," exclaims the King, starting up, "never be free? What do you mean?"

"Calm yourself, my brother. You are, I fear, too weak to hear what I have to say."

"No, no! my sister; suspense to me is worse than death. Speak to me, Marguerite; speak to me, my sister."

"Then, Sire, let me ask you, when you speak of release, when the Emperor tells you you are free, are you aware of the conditions he imposes on you?"

"Not accurately," replies Francis. "Certain terms were proposed, before my illness, that I should surrender whole provinces in France, renounce my rights in the Milanese, pay an enormous ransom, leave my sons hostages at Madrid; but these were the proposals of the Spanish council. The Emperor, speaking personally to a brother sovereign, would never press anything on me unbecoming my royal condition; therefore it is that I desire to treat with himself alone."

"Alas! my brother, you are too generous; you are deceived. Much negotiation has passed during your illness, and since my arrival. Conditions have been proposed by Spain to the Regent, that she – your mother – supported by the parliament of your country, devoted to your person, has refused. Listen to me, Francis. Charles seeks to dismember France. As long

as it remains a kingdom, he intends that you shall never leave Madrid."

"Marguerite, my sister, proceed, I entreat you!" breaks in Francis, trembling with excitement.

"Burgundy is to be ceded; you are to renounce all interest in Flanders and in the Milanese. You are to pay a ransom that will beggar the kingdom. You are to marry Elinor, Queen Dowager of Portugal, sister to Charles, and you are to leave your sons, the Dauphin and the Duc d'Orléans, hostages in Spain for the fulfilment of these demands."

Francis turns very white, and sinks back speechless on the pillows that support him. He stretches out his arm to his sister and fondly clasps her neck. "Marguerite, if it is so, you say well, – I shall never leave Madrid. My sister, let me die ten thousand deaths rather than betray the honour of France."

"Speak not of death, dearest brother!" exclaims Marguerite, her face suddenly flushing with excitement. "I have come to make you live. I, Marguerite d'Alençon, your sister, am come to lead you back to your army and to France; to the France that mourns for you; to the army that is now dispersed and insubordinate; to the mother who weeps for her beloved son." Marguerite's voice falters; she sobs aloud, and rising from her chair, she presses her brother in her arms. Francis feebly returns her embrace, tenderly kisses her, and signs to her to proceed. "Think you," continues Marguerite more calmly, and reseating herself, but still holding the King's hand – "think you that

councils in which *Bourbon* has a voice – " At this name the King shudders and clenches his fist upon the bed-clothes. "Think you that a sovereign who has treacherously lured you to Madrid will have any mercy on you? No, my brother; unless you agree to unworthy conditions, imposed by a treacherous monarch who abuses his power over you, here you will languish until you die! Now mark my words, dear brother. Treaties made under *duresse*, by *force majeure*, are legally void. You will dissemble, my generous King – for the sake of France, you will dissemble. You must fight this crafty emperor with his own weapons."

"What! my sister, be false to my word – I, a belted knight, invested by the hands of Bayard on the field of Marignano, stoop to a lie? Marguerite, you are mad!"

"Oh, Francis, hear me!" cries Marguerite passionately, "hear me; on my knees I conjure you to live, for yourself, for us, for France." She casts herself on the floor beside him. She wrings his hands, she kisses his feet, her tears falling thickly. "Francis, you must, you shall consent. By-and-by you will bless me for this tender violence. You are not fit to meddle in this matter. Leave to me the care of your honour; is it not my own? I come from the Regent, from the council, from all France. Believe me, brother, if you are perjured, all Europe will applaud the perjury."

Marguerite, whose whole frame quivers with agitation, speaks no more. There is a lengthened pause. The flush of fever is on the King's face.

"My sister," murmurs Francis, struggling with a broken voice

to express himself, “you have conquered. Into your hands I commit my honour and the future of France. Leave me a while to rest, for I am faint.”

Treaties made under *duresse* by *force majeure* are legally void. The Emperor must be decoyed into the belief that terms are accepted by Francis, which are to be broken the instant his foot touches French soil. It is with the utmost difficulty that the chivalrous monarch can be brought to lend himself to this deceit. But the prayers of his sister, the deplorable condition of his kingdom deprived of his presence for nearly five years, the terror of returning illness, and the thorough conviction that Charles is as perfidious as he is ambitious, at length prevail. Francis ostensibly accepts the Emperor’s terms, and Queen Claude being dead, he affiances himself to Charles’s sister, Elinor, Queen Dowager of Portugal.

Francis was perjured, but France was saved.

CHAPTER VII.
LA DUCHESSE D'ÉTAMPES

RIDING with all speed from Madrid – for he fears the Emperor's perfidy – Francis has reached the frontier of Spain, on the banks of the river Bidassoa. His boys – the Dauphin and the Duc d'Orléans, who are to replace him at Madrid as hostages – await him there. They rush into their father's arms and fondly cling to him, weeping bitterly at this cruel meeting for a moment after years of separation. Francis, with ready sympathy, mingles his tears with theirs. He embraces and blesses them. But, wild with the excitement of liberty and insecure while on Spanish soil, he cannot spare time for details. He hands the poor lads over to the Spanish commissioners. Too impatient to await the arrival of the ferry-boat, which is pulling across the river, he steps into the waters of the Bidassoa to meet it. On the opposite bank, among the low scrub wood, a splendid retinue awaits him. He springs into the saddle, waves his cap in the air, and with a joyous shout exclaims, "Now I am a king! Now I am free!"

The political vicissitudes of Francis's reign are as nothing to the chaos of his private life; only as a lover he was never defeated. No humiliating Pavia arrests his successful course. At Bayonne he finds a brilliant Court; his mother the Regent, and his sister Marguerite, await his arrival. After "Les embrasseurs d'usage,"

as Du Bellay quaintly expresses it, the King's eye wanders over the parterre of young beauties assembled in their suite, "la petite bande des dames de la Cour." Then Francis first beholds Anne de Pisselieu, afterwards Duchesse d'Étampes. No one can compare to her in the tyranny of youth, beauty, and talent. A mere girl, she already knows everything, and is moreover astute, witty, and false. In spite of the efforts of Diane de Poitiers to attract the King (she having come to Bayonne in attendance on the Regent-mother), Anne de Pisselieu prevails. The King is hers. He delights in her joyous sallies. Anne laughs at every one and everything, specially at the pretensions of Madame Diane, whom she calls "an old hag." She declares that she herself was born on Diane's wedding-day!

Who can resist so bewitching a creature? Not Francis certainly. So the Court divides itself into two factions in love, politics, and religion. One party, headed by the Duchesse d'Étampes – a Protestant, and mistress of the reigning monarch; a second by Madame Diane de Poitiers – a Catholic, who, after many efforts, finding the King inaccessible, devotes herself to his son, Prince Henry, a mere boy, at least twenty years younger than herself, and waits his reign. Oddly enough, it is the older woman who waits, and the younger one who rules.

The Regent-mother looks on approvingly. Morals, especially royal morals, do not exist. Madame Louise de Savoie is ambitious. She would not see the new Spanish Queen – a comely princess, as she hears from her daughter Marguerite – possess

too much influence over the King. It might injure her own power. The poor Spanish Queen! No fear that her influence will injure any one! The King never loves her, and never forgives her being forced upon him as a clause in the ignominious treaty of Madrid. Besides, she is thirty-two years old and a widow; grave, dignified, and learned, but withal a lady of agreeable person, though of mature and well-developed charms. Elinor admired and loved Francis when she saw him at Madrid, and all the world thought that the days were numbered in which Madame d'Étampes would be seen at Court. "But," says Du Bellay, either with perfect naiveté or profound irony – "it was impossible for the King to offer to the virtuous Spanish princess any other sentiments than respect and gratitude, the Duchesse d'Étampes being sole mistress of his heart!" So the royal lady fares no better than Queen Claude, "with the roses in her soul," and only receives, like her, courtesy and indifference.

The King returns to the Spanish frontier to receive Queen Elinor and to embrace the sons, now released, to whom she has been a true mother during the time they have been hostages at Madrid.

By-and-by the Queen's brother – that mighty and perfidious sovereign, Charles V., Emperor of Germany – passing to his estates in the Netherlands, "craves leave of his beloved brother, Francis, King of France, to traverse his kingdom on his way," so great is his dread of the sea voyage on account of sickness.

Some days before the Emperor's arrival Francis is at the

Louvre. He has repaired and embellished it in honour of his guest, and has pulled down the central tower, or donjon, called "Philippine," which encumbered the inner court. By-and-by he will pull down all the mediæval fortress, and, assisted by Lescot, begin the palace known as the "Old Louvre."

Francis is seated *tête-à-tête* with the Duchesse d'Étampes. The room is small – a species of boudoir or closet. It is hung with rare tapestry, representing in glowing colours the Labours of Hercules. Venetian mirrors, in richly carved frames, fling back the light of a central chandelier, also of Venetian workmanship, cunningly wrought into gaudy flowers, diamonded pendants, and true lovers' knots. It is a blaze of brightness and colour. Rich velvet hangings, heavy with gold embroidery, cover the narrow windows and hang over the low doors. The King and the Duchess sit beside a table of inlaid marble, supported on a pedestal, marvellously gilt, of Italian workmanship, on which are laid fruits, wines, and *confitures*, served in golden vessels worked in the Cinque-cento style, after Cellini's patterns. Beside themselves, Triboulet,[5] the king's fool, alone is present. As Francis holds out his cup time after time to Triboulet, who replenishes it with Malvoisie, the scene composes itself into a perfect picture, such as Victor Hugo has imagined in *Le Roi s'amuse*; so perfect, indeed, that Francis might have sung, "La donna è mobile," as he now does in Verdi's opera of *Rigoletto*.

"Sire," says the Duchess, her voice dropping into a most

[5] See Note 5.

delicious softness, "do you leave us to-morrow?"

The King bows his head and kisses her jewelled fingers.

"So you persist in going to meet your brother, the Emperor Charles, your loving brother of Spain, whom I hate because he was so cruel to you at Madrid." The Duchess looks up and smiles. Her eyes are beautiful, but hard and cruel. She wears an ermine mantle, for it is winter; her dress is of the richest green satin, embroidered with gold. On her head is a golden net, the meshes sprinkled with diamonds, from which her dark tresses escape in long ringlets over her shoulders.

Francis turns towards her and pledges her in a cup of Malvoisie. The corners of his mouth are drawn up into a cynical smile, almost to his nostrils. He has now reached middle life, and his face at that time would have made no man's fortune.

"Duchess," says he, "I must tear myself from you. I go to-morrow to Touraine. Before returning to Paris, I shall attend my brother the Emperor Charles at Loches, then at Amboise on the Loire. You will soon follow me with the Queen."

"And, surely, when you have this heartless king, this cruel gaoler in your power, you will punish him and revenge yourself? If he, like a fool, comes into Touraine, make him revoke the treaty of Madrid, or shut him up in one of Louis XI.'s *oubliettes* at Amboise or Loches."

"I will *persuade* him, if I can, to liberate me from all the remaining conditions of the treaty," said the King, "but I will never *force* him." As he speaks Triboulet, who has been shaking

the silver bells on his parti-coloured dress with suppressed laughter, pulls out some ivory tablets to add something to a list he keeps of those whom he considers greater fools than himself. He calls it "his journal."

The King looks at the tablets and sees the name of Charles V.

"Ha! ha! by the mass! – how long has my brother of Spain figured there?" asks he.

"The day, Sire, that I heard he had put his foot on the French frontier."

"What will you do when I let him depart freely?"

"I shall," said Triboulet, "rub out his name and put yours in its place, Sire."

"See, your Majesty, there is some one else who agrees with me," said the Duchess, laughing.

"I know," replies Francis, "that my interests would almost force me to do as you desire, madame, but my honour is dearer to me than my interests. I am now at liberty, – I had rather the treaty of Madrid should stand for ever than countenance an act unworthy of 'un roi chevalier.' "

Francis receives Charles V. at Amboise with ostentatious splendour. Aware of the repugnance of his royal guest to mount steps (the Spanish Emperor was early troubled by those attacks of gout that caused him at length to abdicate and to die of premature old age, at the monastery of San Juste), Francis caused an inclined plane or slope to be constructed in place of stairs within one of the round towers by which the Castle of Amboise,

standing on a precipitous pile of rocks, is approached. Up this slope, which remains in excellent preservation, Charles ascends to the plateau on which the castle stands, seated in his ponderous coach, drawn by heavy horses, attended by guards and outriders. Elinor, his sister, the neglected Queen, as well as the favourite, Madame d'Étampes, are present at the fêtes given in honour of the Emperor. There are no secrets at Court, and Charles soon comes to know that the *maîtresse en titre* is his enemy. One evening, after a dance executed by Anne d'Étampes along with the ladies of the Court, in which she displayed the graces of her person, the Emperor approaches her.

"Madame," he says, "it is only in France that I have seen such perfection of elegance and beauty. My brother, the King, would be the envy of all the sovereigns of Europe could they have witnessed what I have just seen. There is no ransom that I would accept for such a captive, had I the power of retaining her at Madrid."

The Emperor's eyes melt with admiration as he gazes on her.

The Duchess's countenance beams with delight at the Emperor's high-flown compliment.

The King approaches the spot where they stand.

"Know, my brother," says the King with a slight touch of irony in his tone, for he is displeased at the tender glances Charles is casting on his favourite, "know that this fair Duchess would have had me detain you here a prisoner until you had revoked the treaty of Madrid."

The Emperor starts visibly and frowns. “If you consider the advice good, your Majesty had better follow it,” he replies haughtily, turning away to address some nobles standing near.

Some few days afterwards the Duchess gives a supper in her apartments, to which the Emperor and the Court are invited. After the reception, sinking on her knees, she presents his Majesty with rose-water in a gold embossed basin in which to wash his hands. Charles adroitly drops a large diamond ring into the basin. The Duchess stoops and places the vessel on the ground in order to pick up the jewel.

“This ring, madame,” he says, and he speaks low, and leans forward in order to catch her ear, “is too becoming to that fair hand for me to remove it. It has itself sought a new possessor,” and he kisses her hand. “Keep it as a pledge of my admiration and my friendship.”

The Duchess rises and makes a deep obeisance. Not only did she keep the ring, but she became so decided a partisan of this “*gaoler*,” that she is popularly accused of having betrayed Francis to the Emperor; specially in the subsequent wars between England, France, and Spain.

CHAPTER VIII.
LAST DAYS

RAMBOUILLET is now a station on the railway between Versailles, Chartres, and Le Mans. It is a sunny little town, sloping to the south, in a sheltered hollow, over which the slanting roofs and conical turrets of the palace rise out of stately elms and spiked poplars. The principal façade of the château – which consists of two wings at right angles to each other, having at each corner a circular turret, surmounted by a spire – faces the mid-day sun. The ground lies low, and canals, extending in three directions, bordered by terraced walks and avenues, intersect the grassy lawns which lengthen into the tangled woodland of the surrounding forest. Opposite the château, on an islet, is a grotto called "La Marmite de Rabelais." To the right, the three canals flow into a river, spanned by a low bridge, known as "the accursed bridge," from some now obscure tradition foreboding evil to those who pass over it. On every other side, the trunks of venerable trees, their overarching branches closing above like a cloister – pillars of oak, elm, and ash – wind away into grassy meads and shady dingles, intersected by long rides cut straight through the forest, proper for the stag-hunts which have been held in this ancient manor since the Middle Ages.

The château itself has now been modernised, save where one

ivy-crowned round tower (the donjon of the mediæval fortress), in deep shadow, frowns an angry defiance to the stucco and whitewash of the flimsy modern façade.

It is the month of March, in the year 1547. Francis, attended by a small retinue, has arrived at the foot of this round tower. Coming from the south, he has crossed the river by "the accursed bridge."

During the whole past year he has wandered from place to place, revisiting all his favourite haunts as though conscious that he is bidding them farewell. The restlessness of mortal disease is upon him. Though he flies from city to hamlet, from castle to palace, vainly seeking respite from pain, death haunts and follows him. His life is agony. He is greatly changed – an internal fever consumes him. His eyes are haggard; his face is thin, and his body emaciated. Only fifty-two years old, like his great rival the Emperor Charles, he is prematurely aged. Now he is half lifted from his coach and slowly led up a winding staircase to his apartments on the second floor by his friend James d'Angennes, to whose ancestors Rambouillet belonged. Francis comes from Chambord, where Marguerite, now Queen of Navarre by her second marriage, met him. Marguerite and her brother still cling to each other, but they are both aged and full of care. Her beauty is faded and her health is broken. Even she, though devoted as ever, cannot amuse Francis or dissipate the weight that oppresses his spirit. The old topics that were wont to delight him are irritably dismissed. He no longer cares for poetry, is wearied of

politics, shrinks from society, and abuses women. It is at this time he writes with the point of a diamond, on the window of his closet at Chambord, these significant lines: —

> "Souvent femme varie;
> Mal habile qui s'y fie!"

He can only talk to his sister on sorrowful subjects: of the death by plague of his favourite son Charles, who caught the infection when sleeping at Abbeville; or of his old friend, Henry VIII. of England, who has also recently died.

The death of the latter seems to affect Francis terribly. "Our lives," he says, "were very similar – he was slightly older, but I shall not long survive him." Vainly does Marguerite combat these dismal forebodings. She laments in secret the sad change. Ever sympathetic with her brother, she, too, throws aside romance and poetry and composes "The Mirror of a Sinful Soul," to suit his altered humour. Alas! what would Marguerite say if she knew what is carefully concealed from her? That the great surgeon Paré – Paré, who was afterwards to draw the spear-point from the cheek of the Balafré – has pronounced that the King's malady is hopeless!

After a short sojourn together at Chambord, the brother and sister part never to meet again.

Francis was to have passed the carnival at Limours, says Du Bellay; now he commands the masked balls and the court ballets

to be held at Saint-Germain en Laye. The King's fancy changes; he will rouse himself; he will shake off the horrible lethargy that is creeping over him; he will dismiss sinister presentiments. Disguised himself, he will dance among the maskers – the excitement will revive him.

But strong as is his will, high as is his courage, the mortal disease within him is stronger still. Suddenly he countermands all his orders. He will rather go to Rambouillet to visit his old friend, D'Angennes; to meet Rabelais perhaps, who loves the old castle, and to hunt in the great woods.

The quiet old manor, half hunting-lodge, half fortress, buried in secluded woods just bursting into leaf, where the wild boar and the stag are plentiful, will suit him better than banquets, balls, games, and boisterous revelry. The once dauntless Francis is grown nervous and querulous, and is painfully conscious of the slightest noise. After a rapid journey he crosses the ill-omened bridge and arrives at Rambouillet. No sooner has he been laid in his bed than again his mind changes. He must rise and go to Saint-Germain, more suitable than Rambouillet in accommodation for his present condition. But the intense anguish he suffers renders his project impossible. Well, he will remain. He will rest one night here; then, he will depart. In the morning, says the same historian, he awakes at daylight, feeling somewhat better. He commands a royal hunt for stags and boars. Once more he hears the bugle of the huntsmen, the baying of the hounds, the tramp of the impatient steeds. The fresh morning

air gives him fictitious strength. He rises from his bed, dresses himself, descends, forces himself on horseback and rides forth, defying disease and pain. Alas! he is soon brought back to the donjon tower and carried up the stairs speechless and in mortal agony to his bed. Fever and delirium ensue, but as the death shadows gather round him weakness clears his brain.

"I am dying," says he, faintly, addressing D'Angennes, who never leaves him for an instant; "send for my son Henry."

"Sire," replies the Count, "his highness is already here."

"Let him come to me at once; my breath fails me fast."

The Prince enters and kneels beside the dying King. He weeps bitterly, takes his father's already cold hand in his own and kisses it. Francis feebly returns the pressure. He turns his sunken eyes towards his son and signs that he would speak. Henry, the better to catch his words, rises and bends over him.

"My son, I have been a great sinner," falters the dying King, "my passions led me astray; avoid this, Henry. If I have done well, follow that, not the evil."

"Sire," replies the Prince, "we all love and honour your Majesty."

"Cherish France, my son," continues the King; "it is a noble nation. They refused me nothing in my adversity, nor will they you, if you rule them rightly. Lighten the taxes, my son, – be good to my people."

His voice grows fainter and less distinct, his face more ashen.

The Prince, seeing his lips move, but hearing no sound, lays

his ear close to his father's mouth.

"Commend me to Catherine, your wife; beware of the Guises; they will strip you; they are all traitors[6]; cherish my people." He spoke no more.

The Prince motions to D'Angennes, and the parish priest with his acolytes enters, bearing the Host. Speechless, but conscious, with a look of infinite devotion, Francis receives the sacraments. Then, turning his dying eyes towards his son, he feebly raises his hands to bless him.

Henry, overcome by the sight of his dying father, sinks prostrate beside the bed. D'Angennes stands at the head, supporting his dying master in his arms; while he wipes the moisture from his forehead, Francis expires.

[6] See Note 6.

CHAPTER IX.
CATHERINE DE' MEDICI

CATHERINE DE' MEDICI, widow of Henry II., and mother of three kings regnant, rules France in their name. Her father, Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, second tyrant of Florence, died before she was born; her mother, Madaleine de la Tour d'Auvergne (for Catherine had French blood in her veins), died when she was born; so fatal was this Medici, even at her birth.

The *Duchessina*, as Catherine was called, was reared by her aunt Clarice Sforza, within the mediæval stronghold of the Medici at Florence – now known as the Riccardi Palace. Although bereft of palisade and towers of defence, it is still a stately pile of Italian Gothic architecture, with pillared cortile, ornate front, and sculptured cornice, bidding a mute defiance to the encroachments of the modern buildings of the Via Cavour, the Corso of the City of Flowers.

Catherine was educated by the nuns of the "Murate" (walled up), in their convent near the Porta Santa Croce. The teaching of these lonely enthusiasts strangely contrasted with the life she afterwards led in the Florentine Court – a very hot-bed of vice, intrigue, and ambition. There did this Medea of the Cinque-cento learn how to dissimulate and to betray. At fifteen she became, by the favour of her uncle, Pope Clement VII., the richest heiress

in Europe. She was tall and finely formed, of a clear olive complexion (inherited from her French mother), with well-cut features, and large, prominent eyes, like all the Medici. Her manners were gracious, her countenance expressive, but there was, even in extreme youth, a fixed and cold expression on the statuesque face that belied these pleasant attributes. Many suitors sought her hand, but Clement VII., outraged at the brutality of the Spanish coalition against him under Charles V., which had resulted in the sack of Rome and his own imprisonment in the Castle of St. Angelo, was glad to spite his enemies by bestowing his wealthy niece on the Duc d'Orléans, son of Francis I. As the heiress of the Medici came of a republican race of merchant princes, mere mushrooms beside the lofty antiquity of the Valois line, the Pope, to give greater lustre to the espousals, announced that he would himself conduct his niece to her future husband. At Leghorn, Catherine embarked with her uncle in a sumptuous papal galley, attended by his tonsured Court. A flotilla of boats accompanied the vice-regent of God upon earth, and his niece, the sparkling *Duchessina*. Fair winds and smooth seas soon wafted them to the French shore, where Francis and his sons awaited their arrival at Marseilles.

Francis, says Brantôme, was so charmed with the Medici bride, her intelligence and lively manners, that he romped with her the entire evening after her arrival. When Francis found that she danced admirably, that she shot with an arquebuse like a trooper, played at *maille* like a boy, and rode boldly and

gracefully, his partiality to his new daughter-in-law knew no bounds. What was the opinion of the bridegroom Orléans, and what comparison he made between a bride of fifteen and a mistress of thirty-five, is not recorded. There was nearly twenty years difference in age between Prince Henry, Duc d'Orléans, a mere boy, and Diane de Poitiers, yet her influence over him was still absolute. To the day of his death he wore her colours – white and black – upon his shield. Diane, secure in power, was rather proud of her age. She boasted to the new Duchess that she was never ill, that she rose at six o'clock in the morning, bathed in the coldest water, and rode two hours before breakfast.

When Catherine first appeared at the Louvre as the bride of Prince Henry, she *seemed* but a clever, facile girl, ready to accept her humiliating position as subordinate in power, influence, and beauty to her husband's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, as well as to the Duchesse d'Étampes, the favourite of Francis. Placed among these two women and the lonely Spanish Queen, Elinor of Portugal, for fourteen years she acquitted herself with the most perfect temper and discretion. Indeed, with strange self-command in one so young, she endeavoured to flatter both the favourites, but failing to propitiate either Diane or the Duchess, and not being able to attract her husband or to interest the sedate Spaniard, she devoted herself wholly to charm her father-in-law, Francis. She became the constant and beloved companion of his various progresses and hunting-parties to Fontainebleau, Amboise, Chenonceau, and Loches. No court pageants these,

on ambling pads over smooth lawns, among limber trees, with retinue of velvet-liveried menials on the watch for any possible casualty; but hard and dangerous riding in search of boars, and wolves, and stags, over a rough country, among thick underwood, rocky hills, and precipitous uplands.

Thus Catherine *seemed*; but in her heart she despised the Duchess, abhorred Diane, and suffered all the mortification of a neglected wife. Diane did not moreover spare her feelings, but insolently and ostentatiously paraded her superior influence, especially after Prince Henry came to the throne and created her Duchesse de Valentinois.

Catherine, however, with marvellous self-command bore all meekly, brought the King ten children, and for fourteen years bided her time. And that time came sooner than either the wife or the mistress expected.

CHAPTER X.
A FATAL JOUST

IT is the wedding-day of the two princesses, Elizabeth and Marguerite; the first a daughter, the latter a sister, of Henry II. A tournament is to be held in the Rue Saint-Antoine, near the Palace des Tournelles, so called from its many towers.[7]

King Henry and the elder princes, his sons, are to ride in the lists and to break a lance freely with all comers. Queen Catherine and the brides – Elizabeth, the very youthful wife of the morose Philip II. of Spain, lately husband of Mary Tudor, known as Bloody Mary, now deceased; Marguerite, wife of the Duke of Savoy, and Marguerite de Valois, second daughter of Catherine, then but a child – are seated in the centre of an open dais covered with damascened silk, and ornamented with feathers, tassels and gaudy streamers, which flutter in the summer breeze. Behind them are ranged the greatest ladies of the Court, among whom Diane de Poitiers, now Duchesse de Valentinois, occupies the place of honour. The ladies in waiting on the Queen and the great officers of state are ranged at the back.

It is a lovely morning in the month of July. The summer sun lights up the gay dresses and fair faces of the Court into a glowing parterre of bright colours. At a signal from Queen

[7] See Note 7.

Catherine bands of wind instruments burst into martial music; the combatants enter the arena and divide themselves into different squadrons. First rides the King at the head of his knights. His appearance is the signal for all to rise, as much out of respect to him as the better to observe his chivalrous bearing and magnificent accoutrements. He wears a suit of armour in which gold is the chief metal. His sword-handle and dagger are set with jewels, and from his shield and lance fly streamers of black and white – the colours of Diane de Poitiers. He rides a Spanish barb, caparisoned with crimson velvet, that tosses his head and curvets proudly, as if conscious of its royal burden. Three times the King passes round the list within the barriers, preceded by pages and esquires bearing shields bound with ribbons, on which are engraven, in letters of gold or of gems, the initials of their masters' ladye-loves. The King is followed by squadrons of knights. All range themselves near the open dais occupied by the queens and the princesses.

A herald in a parti-coloured dress advances into the centre of the open space, and to the sound of trumpet proclaims that the lists are open. The barriers are then lowered by the pages and the esquires, and the tilting begins.

Catherine looks on with a troubled countenance. Her eyes incessantly follow the King and watch his every movement. As knight after knight is unhorsed and rolls in the dust, and loud cries and shouts of laughter rise at each discomfiture above the tumult of the fight, the anxious expression on her face never

changes. Now and then, when the King, excited by the mimic warfare, deals and receives hard blows and vigorous lance thrusts, Catherine visibly trembles. Like the wife of Pilate, "she has suffered much because of a dream concerning him" – a dream that has shown him to her, disfigured and dabbled with blood, lying dead in a strange chamber.

In the early morning she had implored the King not to enter the lists, but Henry had laughed and had ridden forth wearing the colours of her rival.

Now the long day is drawing to a close; the sun is low on the horizon and the tournament is over. The King, who has fought like the son of Francis I., and broken the lances of the Ducs de Ferrara, Guise, and Nemours, has retired from the lists into his tent to unarm. The young princes have dismounted and ascended into the dais beside their mother and the brides. Catherine breathes again; the King is safe – her dream but the coinage of her brain! But hark! the faint sound of a trumpet is heard, proceeding from the extremity of the long street of Saint-Antoine. The Queen grows pale and bends her ear to listen. The sound comes nearer; it becomes more distinct at each fresh blast. Now it is at hand, and as the shrill and ill-omened notes strike her ear, a herald advances preceded by a trumpeter, and announces that a masked knight has arrived and challenges his Majesty to break a lance with him in honour of his lady.

The masked knight, habited entirely in black armour, rides into the arena. Certain of the fatal event, the Queen rises abruptly

from her seat. Her countenance expresses absolute terror. She beckons hastily to the Comte d'O, who is in attendance. "Go," says she in a low voice, speaking rapidly; "go at once to the King. Tell him if he fights with this stranger he will die! – tell him so from me. Haste! for the love of the Virgin, haste!"

No sooner has the Comte d'O left her, than, leaning over the dais, Catherine, with clasped hands and eager eyes, watches him as he crosses the enclosure. She sees him parley with the King, who is replacing his casque and arranging his armour. Henry laughs. The Queen turns to the young Comte de la Molle, who is near – "Call up hither his Majesty to me instantly. Tell him he must come up to me here before he enters the lists. It is for life or death – the life of the King. Go! fly!"

This second messenger crosses to where Henry is just mounting on horseback. "Alas! alas! he does not heed my messenger. Let me go," cries the Queen in the most violent agitation; "I will myself descend and speak with his Majesty." She rushes forward through the astonished courtiers to where a flight of steps leads below into the enclosure. As her foot is on the topmost stair, she sees the King gallop forth, fully equipped, in face of the masked knight. The Queen is ashy pale, her large eyes are fixed on the King, her white lips tremble. She stands motionless, supported by the balustrade. Her daughters, the brides, and her ladies gather round her, full of wonder. By a great effort she masters her agitation, and slowly turns back into a retiring-room behind the dais, and seats herself on her chair

of state. Then with solemn gesture she addresses herself to the princesses —

"Elizabeth, my daughter, and you, Marguerite, come hither. My sons, Francis and Charles, come to me all of you quickly." At her invitation they assemble around her in astonishment. "Alas! my children, you are all orphans and I am a widow. I have seen it. It is true. Now, while I speak, the lance is pointed that will pierce the King. Your father must die, my children. I know it and I cannot save him."

While they all press with pitying looks around her, trying to console yet unable to comprehend her meaning, she slowly rises. "Let us, my children," says she in a hollow voice, "pray for the King's soul." She casts herself on the ground and folds her hands in silent prayer. Her children kneel around her. There is a great silence. Then a loud cry is heard from below – "The King is wounded; the King is unhorsed; the King bleeds; *en avant* to the King!" Catherine rises. She is calm now and perfectly composed. She approaches the wooden steps leading into the arena below. There she sees, stretched on the ground, the King insensible, his face bathed in blood, pierced in the eye by the lance of the masked knight, who has fled. Henry is mortally wounded, and is borne, as the Queen saw in her dream, into a strange chamber in the Palace des Tournelles, hard by. After some days of horrible agony he expires, aged forty-one. The masked knight struck but a random blow, and was held innocent of all malice. He was the Sieur de Montgomeri, ancestor of the present Earls of Eglinton.

CHAPTER XI.
THE WIDOWED QUEEN

EVEN while the King lay dying, Catherine gave a taste of her vindictive character by ordering Diane de Poitiers instantly to quit the Louvre; to deliver up the crown jewels; and to make over the possession of the Château of Chenonceau, in Touraine, to herself. Chenonceau was Catherine's "Naboth's vineyard." From a girl, when she had often visited it in company with her father-in-law, Francis, she had longed to possess this lovely woodland palace, beside the clear waters of the river Cher. To her inexpressible disgust, her husband, when he became King, presented it to "the old hag," Diane, Duchesse de Valentinois.

When Diane, sitting lonely at the Louvre, for Henry II. was dying at the Palace des Tournelles received the Queen's message, she turned indignantly to the messenger and angrily asked, "Is the King then dead?" "No, madame, but his wound is pronounced mortal; he cannot last out the day."

"Tell the Queen," said Diane haughtily, "that her reign has not yet begun. I am mistress over her and the kingdom as long as the King lives. If he dies I care little how much she insults me. I shall be too wretched even to heed her."

As Regent, Catherine's real character appeared. She revelled in power. Gifted with a masculine understanding and a thorough

aptitude for state business, she was also inscrutable, stern, and cruel. She believed in no one, and had faith in nothing save the prediction of astrologers and the course of the stars, to which she gave unquestioning belief. As in the days of her girlhood, Catherine (always armed with a concealed dagger, its blade dipped in poison) traded on the weaknesses of those around her. She intrigued when she could not command, and fascinated the victim she dared not attack. All who stood in the way of her ambition were "*removed*." None can tell how many she hurried to an untimely grave. The direful traditions of her race, the philters, the perfumes, the powders, swift and deadly poisons, were imported by her into France. Her cunning hands could infuse death into the fairest and the freshest flowers. She had poisons for gloves and handkerchiefs, for the folds of royal robes, for the edge of gemmed drinking cups, for rich and savory dishes. She stands accused of having poisoned the Queen of Navarre, mother of Henry IV.,[8] in a pair of gloves; and, spite of the trial and execution of Sebastian Montecucolli, she was held guilty of having compassed the death of her brother-in-law, the Dauphin, in a cup of water, thus opening the throne for her husband and herself.

Within her brain, fertile in evil, was conceived the massacre of St. Bartholomew – to exceed the horrors of the Sicilian Vespers under John of Procida – the plan of which she discussed years before the event with Philip II. and his minister, the Duke of

[8] See Note 8.

Alva, whom she met at Bayonne, when she visited there her daughter, Elizabeth of Spain. Catherine was true to no party and faithful to no creed. During her long government she cajoled alike Catholics and Protestants. She balanced Guise against Coligni, and Condé against Navarre, as suited her immediate purpose. Provided the end she proposed was attained, she cared nothing for the means. Although attached to her children in infancy, before supreme power had come within her grasp, she did not hesitate to sacrifice them later to her political intrigues.

For her youngest daughter – the bewitching Marguerite, frail Queen of Navarre – she cared not at all. Her autobiography is filled with details of her mother's falseness and unkindness. As to her sons, all – save Francis, who died at eighteen – were initiated early into vice. Their hands were soon red with blood. Long before they reached manhood they were steeped in debauchery and left the cares of government entirely to their mother. Her Court – an oasis of delight and artistic repose, in an age of bloodshed (for Catherine was a true Medici, and loved artists and the art, splendour and expenditure) – was as fatal as the gardens of Armida to virtue, truth, and honour. She surrounded herself with dissipated nobles, subservient courtiers, venal nymphs, and impure enchantresses, all ready to barter their souls and bodies in the service of their Queen. The names of the forty noble demoiselles by whom Catherine was always attended, are duly recorded by Brantôme.

"Know, my cousin," said the Queen, speaking to the Duc de

Guise, “that my maids of honour are the best allies of the royal cause.”

She imported ready-witted Italians, actors and singers, who played at a theatre within the Hôtel Bourbon at Paris; *saltimbanques* and rope-dancers, who paraded the streets; astrologers, like Ruggiero; jewellers, like Zametti; and bankers, like Gondi. These men were ready to sell themselves for any infamy; to call on the stars for confirmation of their prophesies; to tempt spendthrift princes with ample supply of ready cash; to insinuate themselves into the confidence of unwary nobles; all to serve their royal mistress as spies.

A woman of such powerful mind, infinite resource, and unscrupulous will, overawed and oppressed her children. During the three successive reigns of her sons, Francis II., Charles IX., and Henry III., Catherine ruled with the iron hand of a mediæval despot. Yet her cruelty, perfidy, and statescraft, were worse than useless. She lived to see the chivalric race of Valois degraded; her favourite child Anjou, Henry III., driven like a dog from Paris, by Henri de Guise; and son after son go down childless to a dishonoured grave.

CHAPTER XII.
MARY STUART
AND HER HUSBAND

FRANCIS II., aged sixteen, eldest son of Henry II., is nominally King of France. He is gentle and affectionate (strange qualities for a son of Catherine), well principled, and not without understanding. Born with a feeble constitution and badly educated, he lacks vigour both of mind and body to grasp the reigns of government in a period so stormy – a period when Guise is at variance with Condé, and the nation is distracted between Catholic and Protestant intrigues. Though yet a boy, Francis is married to Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, daughter of James V. and Mary of Lorraine, and niece to the Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine.

Francis and Mary have known each other from earliest childhood. At the age of five the little Scottish Princess was sent to the Louvre to be educated with her royal cousins. Even at that tender age she was the delight and wonder of the Court – a little northern rosebud, transplanted into a southern climate, by-and-by to expand into a perfect flower. Her sweet temper, beauty, and winning manners gained all hearts. She was, moreover, says Brantôme, quiet, discreet, and accomplished. Accomplished, indeed, as well as learned, for, at fourteen, the fascinating girl

recited a Latin oration of her own composition in the great gallery of the Louvre, before her future father-in-law, King Henry, and the whole Court, to the effect "that women ought to rival, if not to excel, men in learning." She spoke with such composure, her voice was so melodious, her gesture so graceful, and her person so lovely, that the King publicly embraced her, and swore a great oath that she alone was fit to marry with the Dauphin. Forthwith he betrothed her to his son Francis. This marriage between a youth and a girl yet in their teens was a dream of love, short, but without alloy.

Catherine rules, and Francis and Mary Stuart, too young and careless to desire any life but a perpetual holiday in each others company, tremble at her frown and implicitly obey her.

Now and then Mary's maternal uncles, the princes of Lorraine, Francis, the great Duc de Guise (the same who took Calais and broke the English Queen's heart), and the Cardinal de Lorraine, the proudest and falsest prelate in the sacred college,[9] endeavour to traverse the designs of Catherine, and to inspire their beautiful niece with a taste for intrigue – under their guidance, be it well understood. But all such attempts are useless. Mary loves poetry and music, revels in banquets and masques, hunts and games, and toys with her boy-husband, of whose society she never wearies.

Nevertheless, the Queen-mother hates her, accuses her of acting the part of a spy for her uncles, the Guises, and, sneering,

[9] See Note 9.

speaks of her as “une petite reinette qui fait tourner toutes les tétes.”

The Court is at Amboise, that majestic castle planted on a pile of sombre rocks that cast gloomy shadows across the waters of the Loire, widened at this spot into the magnitude of a lake, the river being divided by an island and crossed by two bridges.

Over these bridges they come, a glittering procession, preceded by archers and attended by pages and men-at-arms. Francis rides in front; he is tall, slight, and elegantly formed, and sits his horse with elegant grace. His grey, almond-shaped eyes sparkle as he turns them upon the young Queen riding at his side. Mary is seated on a dark palfrey. She is dressed in a white robe, fastened from the neck downwards with jewelled buttons. The robe itself is studded with gold embroidery and trimmed with ermine. A ruff of fine lace, and a chain of gold, from which hangs a medallion, are round her slender throat. Her hair is drawn back from her forehead, and a little pointed cap, set with jewels, to which is attached a thin white veil falling behind, sets off the chiselled features, the matchless eyes, and exquisite complexion of her fair young face.

Catherine and the Duc de Guise, the Cardinal de Lorraine and the Duc de Nemours follow. Behind them the gay multitude of a luxurious Court fills up the causeway. Francis has a prepossessing face, but looks pale and ill. As they ride, side by side, Mary watches him with tender anxiety. Her sweet eyes rest on him as she speaks, and she caressingly places her hand upon

his saddle-bow as they ascend the rocky steep leading to the castle.

When they dismount, the Queen-mother – her hard face set into a frown – passes, without speaking a word, into her own apartments. The Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine also retire with gloomy looks. Not a single word do either of them address to Francis or to Mary. The young sovereigns enter the royal chambers, a stately suite of apartments, the lofty windows of which, reaching from ceiling to floor, overlook the river. Folding doors open into a gallery wainscoted with oak richly gilt, with a carved ceiling richly emblazoned with coats-of-arms. The walls are covered with crimson brocade set in heavy frames of carved gold; chandeliers of glittering pendants hang from open rafters formed of various-coloured wood arranged in mosaic patterns. Beyond is a retiring room, hung with choice tapestry of flowers and fruit on a violet ground, let into arabesque borders of white and gold. Inlaid tables of marble bear statues and tazzas of alabaster and enamel. Clustered candelabra of coloured Venetian glass hold perfumed candles, and the flowers of the spring are placed in cups and vases of rarest pottery.

Mary, with a wave of her hand, dismisses her attendants. Francis sinks into a chair beside an open window, utterly exhausted. He sighs, leans back his head, and closes his eyes.

"*Mon amour*," says Mary, throwing her arms round him, and kissing his white lips, "you are very weary. Tell me – why is the Queen-mother so grave and silent? When I spoke she did not

answer me. My uncles, too, frighten me with their black looks. Tell me, Francis, what have I done?"

"Done, sweetest? – nothing," answered Francis, unclosing his eyes, and looking at her. "Our mother is busied with affairs of state, as are also your uncles. There is much to disquiet them." Francis draws her closer to him, laying his head upon her shoulder wearily, and again closing his eyes. "It is some conspiracy against her and your uncles – the Guises —*mignonne*," added he, whispering into her ear.

"Conspiracy! Holy Virgin, how dreadful! Why did you not tell me this before we left Blois?"

"I feared to frighten you, dear love, ere we were safe within the thick walls of this old fortress."

Mary starts up and seizes his hand.

"Tell me, tell me," she says, in an unsteady voice, "what is this conspiracy?"

"A plot of the Huguenots, in which Condé and the Coligni are concerned," replies Francis, roused by her vehemence into attention. "Did you not mark how suddenly our uncle, Francis of Guise, appeared at Blois, and that he was closeted with her Majesty for hours?" Mary, her eyes extended to their utmost limit and fixed on his, bows her head in assent. "Did we not leave immediately after the interview for Amboise? Did not that make you suspicious?"

"No, Francis; for you said that we came here to hold a joust and to hunt in the forest of Chanteloup. How could I doubt your

word? Oh! this is horrible!"

"We came to Amboise, *ma mie*, because it is a stronghold, and Blois is an open town."

"Do you know no more? or will you still deceive me?" asks Mary eagerly, looking at him with tearful eyes.

"My mother told me that the Duc de Guise was informed by the Catholics of England (which tidings have been since confirmed), that the Huguenots are arming in force, that they are headed by Condé, that they are plotting to imprison the Queen-mother and your uncles, and to carry you and me to Paris by force."

"By force? Would they lay hands on us? Oh, Francis, are we safe in this castle?" exclaims Mary, clasping her hands. "Will our guards defend us? Are the walls manned? Is the town faithful? Are there plenty of troops to guard the bridges?"

As she speaks, Mary trembles so violently that she has slid from her chair and sinks upon the ground, clinging to Francis in an agony of fear.

"Courage, my *reinette*! rise up, and sit beside me," and Francis raises her in his arms and replaces her on her chair. "Here we are safe. This conspiracy is not directed against us, Mary. The people say my mother and the Guises rule, not I, the anointed King. The Huguenots want to carry us off to Paris for our good. *Pardieu!* I know little of the plot myself as yet; my mother refused to tell me. Anyhow, we are secure here at Amboise from Turk, Jew, or Huguenot, so cheer up, my lovely queen!"

As Mary looks up again further to question him, he stops her mouth with kisses.

"Let us leave all to the Queen-mother. She is wise, and governs for us while we are young. She loves not to be questioned. Sweetest, I am weary, give me a cup of wine; let me lie in your closet, and you shall sing me to sleep with your lute."

"But, Francis," still urges Mary, gently disengaging herself from his arms as he leads her away, "surely my uncles must be in great danger; a conspiracy perhaps means an assassination. I beseech you let me go and question them myself."

"*Nenni*," answers Francis, drawing her to him. "You shall come with me. I will not part with you for a single instant. Ah! *mignonne*, if you knew how my head aches, you would ask me no more questions, or I shall faint."

Mary's expressive face changes as the April sunshine. Her eyes fill with tears of tenderness as she leads Francis to a small closet in a turret exclusively her own, – a *chinoiserie*, quaint and bright as the plumage of a bird, – and seats him, supported by a pile of pillows, on a couch – luxurious for that period of stiff-backed chairs and wooden benches.

"Talk to me," says Francis, smoothing her abundant hair, which hung in dark masses on her shoulders as she knelt at his feet, "or, better still, sing to me, I love to hear your soft voice; only, no more politics – not a word of affairs of state, Mary. Sing to me those verses you showed to Ronsard, about the knight who leapt into a deep stream to pluck a flower for his love and was

drowned by the spell of a jealous mermaid who watched him from among the flags."

Mary rises and fetches her lute. All expression of fear has left her face. Reassured by Francis and occupied alone by him, she forgets not only the Huguenots and the conspiracy, but the whole world, beside the boy-husband, who bends lovingly over her as she tries the strings of her instrument. So let us leave them as they sit, two happy children, side by side, bathed in the brief sunshine of a changeful day in March, now singing, now talking of country fêtes, especially of a *carrousel* to take place on the morrow in the courtyard of the castle, in which the Grand Prieur is to ride disguised as a gipsy woman and carry a monkey on his back for a child!

CHAPTER XIII.
A TRAITOR

THE Queen-mother sits alone; a look of care overshadows her face; her prominent eyes are fixed and glassy. From her window she can gaze at an old familiar scene, the terrace and parterre bordered by lime walks, planted by Francis I., where she has romped in many a game of *cache-cache* with him.

Presently she rises and summons an attendant from the antechamber.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.