HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S EVE: A TALE OF THE HUGUENOT WARS

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Содержание

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Preface

It is difficult, in these days of religious toleration, to understand why men should, three centuries ago, have flown at each others' throats in the name of the Almighty; still less how, in cold blood, they could have perpetrated hideous massacres of men, women, and children. The Huguenot wars were, however, as much political as religious. Philip of Spain, at that time the most powerful potentate of Europe, desired to add France to the countries where his influence was all powerful; and in the ambitious house of Guise he found ready instruments.

For a time the new faith, that had spread with such rapidity in Germany, England, and Holland, made great progress in France, also. But here the reigning family remained Catholic, and the vigorous measures they adopted, to check the growing tide, drove those of the new religion to take up arms in self defence. Although, under the circumstances, the Protestants can hardly be blamed for so doing, there can be little doubt that the first Huguenot war, though the revolt was successful, was the means of France remaining a Catholic country. It gave colour to the assertions of the Guises and their friends that the movement was a political one, and that the Protestants intended to grasp all power, and to overthrow the throne of France. It also afforded an excuse for the cruel persecutions which followed, and rallied to the Catholic cause numbers of those who were, at heart, indifferent to the question of religion, but were Royalists rather than Catholics.

The great organization of the Church of Rome laboured among all classes for the destruction of the growing heresy. Every pulpit in France resounded with denunciations of the Huguenots, and passionate appeals were made to the bigotry and fanaticism of the more ignorant classes; so that, while the power of the Huguenots lay in some of the country districts, the mobs of the great towns were everywhere the instruments of the priests.

I have not considered it necessary to devote any large portion of my story to details of the terrible massacres of the period, nor to the atrocious persecutions to which the Huguenots were subjected; but have, as usual, gone to the military events of the struggle for its chief interest. For the particulars of these, I have relied chiefly upon the collection of works of contemporary authors published by Monsieur Zeller, of Paris; the Memoirs of Francois de la Noue, and other French authorities.

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: Driven From Home

In the year 1567 there were few towns in the southern counties of England that did not contain a colony, more or less large, of French Protestants. For thirty years the Huguenots had been exposed to constant and cruel persecutions; many thousands had been massacred by the soldiery, burned at the stake, or put to death with dreadful tortures. Fifty thousand, it was calculated, had, in spite of the most stringent measures of prevention, left their homes and made their escape across the frontiers. These had settled for the most part in the Protestant cantons of Switzerland, in Holland, or England. As many of those who reached our shores were but poorly provided with money, they naturally settled in or near the ports of landing.

Canterbury was a place in which many of the unfortunate emigrants found a home. Here one Gaspard Vaillant, his wife, and her sister, who had landed in the year 1547, had established themselves. They were among the first comers, but the French colony had grown, gradually, until it numbered several hundreds. The Huguenots were well liked in the town, being pitied for their misfortunes, and admired for the courage with which they bore their losses; setting to work, each man at his trade if he had one, or if not, taking to the first work that came to hand. They were quiet and God-fearing folk; very good towards each other, and to their poor countrymen on their way from the coast to London, entertaining them to the best of their power, and sending them forward on their way with letters to the Huguenot committee in London, and with sufficient money in their pockets to pay their expenses on the journey, and to maintain them for a while until some employment could be found for them.

Gaspard Vaillant had been a landowner near Civray, in Poitou. He was connected by blood with several noble families in that district, and had been among the first to embrace the reformed religion. For some years he had not been interfered with, as it was upon the poorer and more defenceless classes that the first fury of the persecutors fell; but as the attempts of Francis to stamp out the new sect failed, and his anger rose more and more against them, persons of all ranks fell under the ban. The prisons were filled with Protestants who refused to confess their errors; soldiers were quartered in the towns and villages, where they committed terrible atrocities upon the Protestants; and Gaspard, seeing no hope of better times coming, or of being permitted to worship in peace and quietness, gathered together what money he could and made his way, with his wife and her sister, to La Rochelle, whence he took ship to London.

Disliking the bustle of a large town, he was recommended by some of his compatriots to go down to Canterbury, where three or four fugitives from his own part of the country had settled. One of these was a weaver by trade, but without money to manufacture looms or set up in his calling. Gaspard joined him as partner, embarking the little capital he had saved; and being a shrewd, clear-headed man he carried on the business part of the concern, while his partner Lequoc worked at the manufacture.

As the French colony in Canterbury increased, they had no difficulty in obtaining skilled hands from among them. The business grew in magnitude, and the profits were large, in spite of the fact that numbers of similar enterprises had been established by the Huguenot immigrants in London, and other places. They were, indeed, amply sufficient to enable Gaspard Vaillant to live in the condition of a substantial citizen, to aid his fellow countrymen, and to lay by a good deal of money.

His wife's sister had not remained very long with him. She had, upon their first arrival, given lessons in her own language to the daughters of burgesses, and of the gentry near the town; but, three years after the arrival of the family there, she had married a well-to-do young yeoman who farmed a hundred acres of his own land, two miles from the town. His relations and neighbours had shaken their heads over what they considered his folly, in marrying the pretty young Frenchwoman; but ere long they were obliged to own that his choice had been a good one.

Just after his first child was born he was, when returning home one evening from market, knocked down and run over by a drunken carter, and was so injured that for many months his life was in danger. Then he began to mend, but though he gained in strength he did not recover the use of his legs, being completely paralysed from the hips downward; and, as it soon appeared, was destined to remain a helpless invalid all his life. From the day of the accident Lucie had taken the management of affairs in her hands, and having been brought up in the country, and being possessed of a large share of the shrewdness and common sense for which Frenchwomen are often conspicuous, she succeeded admirably. The neatness and order of the house, since their marriage, had been a matter of surprise to her husband's friends; and it was not long before the farm showed the effects of her management. Gaspard Vaillant assisted her with his counsel and, as the French methods of agriculture were considerably in advance of those in England, instead of things going to rack and ruin, as John Fletcher's friends predicted, its returns were considerably augmented.

Naturally, she at first experienced considerable opposition. The labourers grumbled at what they called new-fangled French fashions; but when they left her, their places were supplied by her countrymen, who were frugal and industrious, accustomed to make the most out of small areas of ground, and to turn every foot to the best advantage. Gradually the raising of corn was abandoned, and a large portion of the farm devoted to the growing of vegetables; which, by dint of plentiful manuring and careful cultivation, were produced of a size and quality that were the surprise and admiration of the neighbourhood, and gave her almost a monopoly of the supply of Canterbury.

The carters were still English; partly because Lucie had the good sense to see that, if she employed French labourers only, she would excite feelings of jealousy and dislike among her neighbours; and partly because she saw that, in the management of horses and cattle, the Englishmen were equal, if not superior, to her countrymen.

Her life was a busy one. The management of the house and farm would, alone, have been a heavy burden to most people; but she found ample time for the tenderest care of the invalid, whom she nursed with untiring affection.

"It is hard upon a man of my size and inches, Lucie," he said one day, "to be lying here as helpless as a sick child; and yet I don't feel that I have any cause for discontent. I should like to be going about the farm, and yet I feel that I am happier here, lying watching you singing so contentedly over your work, and making everything so bright and comfortable. Who would have thought, when I married a little French lady, that she was going to turn out a notable farmer? All my friends tell me that there is not a farm like mine in all the country round, and that the crops are the wonder of the neighbourhood; and when I see the vegetables that are brought in here, I should like to go over the farm, if only for once, just to see them growing."

"I hope you will be able to do that, some day, dear. Not on foot, I am afraid; but when you get stronger and better, as I hope you will, we will take you round in a litter, and the bright sky and the fresh air will do you good."

Lucie spoke very fair English now, and her husband had come to speak a good deal of French; for the service of the house was all in that language, the three maids being daughters of French workmen in the town. The waste and disorder of those who were in the house when her husband first brought her there had appalled her; and the women so resented any attempt at teaching, on the part of the French madam, that after she had tried several sets with equally bad results, John Fletcher had consented to the introduction of French girls; bargaining only that he was to have good English fare, and not French kickshaws. The Huguenot customs had been kept up, and night and morning the house servants, with the French neighbours and their families, all assembled for prayer in the farmhouse.

To this John Fletcher had agreed without demur. His father had been a Protestant, when there was some danger in being so; and he himself had been brought up soberly and strictly. Up to the time of his accident there had been two congregations, he himself reading the prayers to his farm hands,

while Lucie afterwards read them in her own language to her maids; but as the French labourers took the place of the English hands, only one service was needed.

When John Fletcher first regained sufficient strength to take much interest in what was passing round, he was alarmed at the increase in the numbers of those who attended these gatherings. Hitherto four men had done the whole work of the farm; now there were twelve.

"Lucie, dear," he said uneasily one day, "I know that you are a capital manager; but it is impossible that a farm the size of ours can pay, with so many hands on it. I have never been able to do more than pay my way, and lay by a few pounds every year, with only four hands, and many would have thought three sufficient; but with twelve–and I counted them this morning–we must be on the highroad to ruin."

"I will not ruin you, John. Do you know how much money there was in your bag when you were hurt, just a year ago now?"

"Yes, I know there were thirty-three pounds."

His wife went out of the room and returned with a leather bag.

"Count them, John," she said.

There were forty-eight. Fifteen pounds represented a vastly greater sum, at that time, than they do at present; and John Fletcher looked up from the counting with amazement.

"This can't be all ours, Lucie. Your brother must have been helping us."

"Not with a penny, doubting man," she laughed. "The money is yours, all earned by the farm; perhaps not quite all, because we have not more than half as many animals as we had before. But, as I told you, we are growing vegetables, and for that we must have more men than for corn. But, as you see, it pays. Do not fear about it, John. If God should please to restore you to health and strength, most gladly will I lay down the reins; but till then I will manage as best I may and, with the help and advice of my brother and his friends, shall hope, by the blessing of God, to keep all straight."

The farm throve, but its master made but little progress towards recovery. He was able, however, occasionally to be carried round in a hand litter, made for him upon a plan devised by Gaspard Vaillant; in which he was supported in a half-sitting position, while four men bore him as if in a Sedan chair.

But it was only occasionally that he could bear the fatigue of such excursions. Ordinarily he lay on a couch in the farmhouse kitchen, where he could see all that was going on there; while in warm summer weather he was wheeled outside, and lay in the shade of the great elm, in front of the house.

The boy, Philip–for so he had been christened, after John Fletcher's father–grew apace and, as soon as he was old enough to receive instruction, his father taught him his letters out of a horn book, until he was big enough to go down every day to school in Canterbury. John himself was built upon a large scale, and at quarterstaff and wrestling could, before he married, hold his own with any of the lads of Kent; and Philip bade fair to take after him, in skill and courage. His mother would shake her head reprovingly when he returned, with his face bruised and his clothes torn, after encounters with his schoolfellows; but his father took his part.

"Nay, nay, wife," he said one day, "the boy is eleven years old now, and must not grow up a milksop. Teach him if you will to be honest and true, to love God, and to hold to the faith; but in these days it needs that men should be able to use their weapons, also. There are your countrymen in France, who ere long will be driven to take up arms, for the defence of their faith and lives from their cruel persecutors; and, as you have told me, many of the younger men, from here and elsewhere, will assuredly go back to aid their brethren.

"We may even have trials here. Our Queen is a Protestant, and happily at present we can worship God as we please, in peace; but it was not so in the time of Mary, and it may be that troubles may again fall upon the land, seeing that as yet the Queen is not married. Moreover, Philip of Spain has pretensions to rule here; and every Englishman may be called upon to take up bow, or bill, for his

faith and country. Our co-religionists in Holland and France are both being cruelly persecuted, and it may well be that the time will come when we shall send over armies to their assistance.

"I would that the boy should grow up both a good Christian and a stout soldier. He comes on both sides of a fighting stock. One of my ancestors fought at Agincourt, and another with the Black Prince at Cressy and Poitiers; while on your side his blood is noble and, as we know, the nobles of France are second to none in bravery.

"Before I met you I had thoughts of going out, myself, to fight among the English bands who have engaged on the side of the Hollanders. I had even spoken to my cousin James about taking charge of the farm, while I was away. I would not have sold it, for Fletchers held this land before the Normans set foot in England; but I had thoughts of borrowing money upon it, to take me out to the war, when your sweet face drove all such matters from my mind.

"Therefore, Lucie, while I would that you should teach the boy to be good and gentle in his manners, so that if he ever goes among your French kinsmen he shall be able to bear himself as befits his birth, on that side; I, for my part–though, alas, I can do nothing myself–will see that he is taught to use his arms, and to bear himself as stoutly as an English yeoman should, when there is need of it.

"So, wife, I would not have him chidden when he comes home with a bruised face, and his garments somewhat awry. A boy who can hold his own, among boys, will some day hold his own among men; and the fisticuffs, in which our English boys try their strength, are as good preparation as are the courtly sports; in which, as you tell me, young French nobles are trained. But I would not have him backward in these, either. We English, thank God, have not had much occasion to draw a sword since we broke the strength of Scotland on Flodden Field; and in spite of ordinances, we know less than we should do of the use of our weapons. Even the rules that every lad shall practise shooting at the butts are less strictly observed than they should be. But in this respect our deficiencies can be repaired, in his case; for here in Canterbury there are several of your countrymen of noble birth, and doubtless among these we shall be able to find an instructor for Phil. Many of them are driven to hard shifts to procure a living; and since that bag of yours is every day getting heavier, and we have but him to spend it upon, we will not grudge giving him the best instruction that can be procured."

Lucie did not dispute her husband's will; but she nevertheless tried to enlist Gaspard Vaillant–who was frequently up at the farm with his wife in the evening, for he had a sincere liking for John Fletcher–on her side; and to get him to dissuade her husband from putting thoughts into the boy's head that might lead him, some day, to be discontented with the quiet life on the farm. She found, however, that Gaspard highly approved of her husband's determination.

"Fie upon you, Lucie. You forget that you and Marie are both of noble blood, in that respect being of condition somewhat above myself, although I too am connected with many good families in Poitou. In other times I should have said it were better that the boy should grow up to till the land, which is assuredly an honourable profession, rather than to become a military adventurer, fighting only for vainglory. But in our days the sword is not drawn for glory, but for the right to worship God in peace.

"No one can doubt that, ere long, the men of the reformed religion will take up arms to defend their right to live, and worship God, in their own way. The cruel persecutions under Francis the First, Henry the Second, and Francis the Second have utterly failed in their object. When Merindol, Cabrieres, and twenty-two other towns and villages were destroyed, in 1547; and persons persecuted and forced to recant, or to fly as we did; it was thought that we were but a handful, whom it would be easy to exterminate. But in spite of edict after edict, of persecution, slaughterings, and burnings, in spite of the massacres of Amboise and others, the reformed religion has spread so greatly that even the Guises are forced to recognize it as a power. At Fontainebleau Admiral Coligny, Montmorency, the Chatillons, and others openly professed the reformed religion, and argued boldly for tolerance; while Conde and Navarre, although they declined to be present, were openly ranged on their side. Had it not been that Henry the Second and Francis were both carried off by the manifest hand of God,

the first by a spear thrust at a tournament, the second by an abscess in the ear, France would have been the scene of deadly strife; for both were, when so suddenly smitten, on the point of commencing a war of extermination.

"But it is only now that the full strength of those who hold the faith is manifested. Beza, the greatest of the reformers next to Calvin himself, and twelve of our most learned and eloquent pastors are at Poissy, disputing upon the faith with the Cardinal of Lorraine and the prelates of the Romish church, in the presence of the young king, the princes, and the court. It is evident that the prelates are unable to answer the arguments of our champions. The Guises, I hear, are furious; for the present Catharine, the queen mother, is anxious for peace and toleration, and it is probable that the end of this argument at Poissy will be an edict allowing freedom of worship.

"But this will only infuriate still more the Papists, urged on by Rome and Philip of Spain. Then there will be an appeal to arms, and the contest will be a dreadful one. Navarre, from all I hear, has been well-nigh won over by the Guises; but his noble wife will, all say, hold the faith to the end, and her kingdom will follow her. Conde is as good a general as Guise, and with him there is a host of nobles: Rochefoucauld, the Chatillons, Soubise, Gramont, Rohan, Genlis, and a score of others. It will be terrible, for in many cases father and son will be ranged on opposite sides, and brother will fight against brother."

"But surely, Gaspard, the war will not last for years?"

"It may last for generations," the weaver said gloomily, "though not without intermissions; for I believe that, after each success on one side or the other, there will be truces and concessions; to be followed by fresh persecutions and fresh wars, until either the reformed faith becomes the religion of all France, or is entirely stamped out.

"What is true of France is true of Holland. Philip will annihilate the reformers there, or they will shake off the yoke of Spain. England will be driven to join in one or both struggles; for if papacy is triumphant in France and Holland, Spain and France would unite against her.

"So you see, sister, that in my opinion we are at the commencement of a long and bloody struggle for freedom of worship; and at any rate it will be good that the boy should be trained as he would have been, had you married one of your own rank in France; in order that, when he comes to man's estate, he may be able to wield a sword worthily in the defence of the faith.

"Had I sons, I should train them as your husband intends to train Phil. It may be that he will never be called upon to draw a sword, but the time he has spent in acquiring its use will not be wasted. These exercises give firmness and suppleness to the figure, quickness to the eye, and briskness of decision to the mind. A man who knows that he can, at need, defend his life if attacked, whether against soldiers in the field or robbers in the street, has a sense of power and self reliance that a man, untrained in the use of the strength God has given him, can never feel. I was instructed in arms when a boy, and I am none the worse weaver for it.

"Do not forget, Lucie, that the boy has the blood of many good French families in his veins; and you should rejoice that your husband is willing that he shall be so trained that, if the need should ever come, he shall do no discredit to his ancestors on our side. These English have many virtues, which I freely recognize; but we cannot deny that many of them are somewhat rough and uncouth, being wondrous lacking in manners and coarse in speech. I am sure that you yourself would not wish your son to grow up like many of the young fellows who come into town on market day. Your son will make no worse a farmer for being trained as a gentleman. You yourself have the training of a French lady, and yet you manage the farm to admiration.

"No, no, Lucie, I trust that between us we shall make a true Christian and a true gentleman of him; and that, if needs be, he will show himself a good soldier, also."

And so, between his French relatives and his sturdy English father, Philip Fletcher had an unusual training. Among the Huguenots he learned to be gentle and courteous; to bear himself among his elders respectfully, but without fear or shyness; to consider that, while all things were of minor

consequence in comparison to the right to worship God in freedom and purity, yet that a man should be fearless of death, ready to defend his rights, but with moderation and without pushing them to the injury of others; that he should be grave and decorous of speech, and yet of a gay and cheerful spirit. He strove hard so to deport himself that if, at any time, he should return to his mother's country, he could take his place among her relations without discredit. He learned to fence, and to dance.

Some of the stricter of the Huguenots were of opinion that the latter accomplishment was unnecessary, if not absolutely sinful; but Gaspard Vaillant was firm on this point.

"Dancing is a stately and graceful exercise," he said, "and like the use of arms, it greatly improves the carriage and poise of the figure. Queen Elizabeth loves dancing, and none can say that she is not a good Protestant. Every youth should be taught to dance, if only he may know how to walk. I am not one of those who think that, because a man is a good Christian, he should necessarily be awkward and ungainly in speech and manner, adverse to innocent gaieties, narrow in his ideas, ill dressed and ill mannered, as I see are many of those most extreme in religious matters, in this country."

Upon the other hand, in the school playground, under the shadow of the grand cathedral, Phil was as English as any; being foremost in their rough sports, and ready for any fun or mischief.

He fought many battles, principally because the difference of his manner from that of the others often caused him to be called "Frenchy." The epithet in itself was not displeasing to him; for he was passionately attached to his mother, and had learned from her to love her native country; but applied in derision it was regarded by him as an insult, and many a tough battle did he fight, until his prowess was so generally acknowledged that the name, though still used, was no longer one of disrespect.

In figure, he took after his French rather than his English ancestors. Of more than average height for his age, he was apparently slighter in build than his schoolfellows. It was not that he lacked width of chest, but that his bones were smaller and his frame less heavy. The English boys, among themselves, sometimes spoke of him as "skinny," a word considered specially appropriate to Frenchmen; but though he lacked their roundness and fulness of limb, and had not an ounce of superfluous flesh about him, he was all sinew and wire; and while in sheer strength he was fully their equal, he was incomparably quicker and more active.

Although in figure and carriage he took after his mother's countrymen, his features and expression were wholly English. His hair was light brown, his eyes a bluish gray, his complexion fair, and his mouth and eyes alive with fun and merriment. This, however, seldom found vent in laughter. His intercourse with the grave Huguenots, saddened by their exile, and quiet and restrained in manner, taught him to repress mirth, which would have appeared to them unseemly; and to remain a grave and silent listener to their talk of their unhappy country, and their discussions on religious matters.

To his schoolfellows he was somewhat of an enigma. There was no more good-tempered young fellow in the school, no one more ready to do a kindness; but they did not understand why, when he was pleased, he smiled while others roared with laughter; why when, in their sports, he exerted himself to the utmost, he did so silently while others shouted; why his words were always few and, when he differed from others, he expressed himself with a courtesy that puzzled them; why he never wrangled nor quarrelled; and why any trick played upon an old woman, or a defenceless person, roused him to fury.

As a rule, when boys do not quite understand one of their number they dislike him. Philip Fletcher was an exception. They did not understand him, but they consoled themselves under this by the explanation that he was half a Frenchman, and could not be expected to be like a regular English boy; and they recognized instinctively that he was their superior.

Much of Philip's time was spent at the house of his uncle, and among the Huguenot colony. Here also were many boys of his own age. These went to a school of their own, taught by the pastor of their own church, who held weekly services in the crypt of the cathedral, which had been granted to them for that purpose by the dean. While, with his English schoolfellows, he joined in sports and games;

among these French lads the talk was sober and quiet. Scarce a week passed but some fugitive, going through Canterbury, brought the latest news of the situation in France, and the sufferings of their co-religionist friends and relations there; and the political events were the chief topics of conversation.

The concessions made at the Conference of Poissy had infuriated the Catholics, and the war was brought on by the Duke of Guise who, passing with a large band of retainers through the town of Vassy in Champagne, found the Huguenots there worshipping in a barn. His retainers attacked them, slaying men, women, and children–some sixty being killed, and a hundred or more left terribly wounded.

The Protestant nobles demanded that Francis of Guise should be punished for this atrocious massacre, but in vain; and Guise, on entering Paris, in defiance of Catharine's prohibition, was received with royal honours by the populace. The Cardinal of Lorraine, the duke's brother, the duke himself, and their allies, the Constable Montmorency and Marshal Saint Andre, assumed so threatening an attitude that Catharine left Paris and went to Melun, her sympathies at this period being with the reformers; by whose aid, alone, she thought that she could maintain her influence in the state against that of the Guises.

Conde was forced to leave Paris with the Protestant nobles, and from all parts of France the Huguenots marched to assist him. Coligny, the greatest of the Huguenot leaders, hesitated; being, above all things, reluctant to plunge France into civil war. But the entreaties of his noble wife, of his brothers and friends, overpowered his reluctance. Conde left Meaux, with fifteen hundred horse, with the intention of seizing the person of the young king; but he had been forestalled by the Guises, and moved to Orleans, where he took up his headquarters. All over France the Huguenots rose in such numbers as astonished their enemies, and soon became possessed of a great many important cities.

Their leaders had endeavoured, in every way, to impress upon them the necessity of behaving as men who fought only for the right to worship God; and for the most part these injunctions were strictly obeyed. In one matter, alone, the Huguenots could not be restrained. For thirty years the people of their faith had been executed, tortured, and slain; and their hatred of the Romish church manifested itself by the destruction of images and pictures of all kinds, in the churches of the towns of which they obtained possession. Only in the southeast of France was there any exception to the general excellence of their conduct. Their persecution here had always been very severe, and in the town of Orange the papal troops committed a massacre almost without a parallel in its atrocity. The Baron of Adrets, on behalf of the Protestants, took revenge by massacres equally atrocious; but while the butchery at Orange was hailed with approbation and delight by the Catholic leaders, those promoted by Adrets excited such a storm of indignation, among the Huguenots of all classes, that he shortly afterwards went over to the other side, and was found fighting against the party he had disgraced.

At Toulouse three thousand Huguenots were massacred, and in other towns where the Catholics were in a majority terrible persecutions were carried out.

It was nearly a year after the massacre at Vassy before the two armies met in battle. The Huguenots had suffered greatly, by the delays caused by attempts at negotiations and compromise. Conde's army was formed entirely of volunteers, and the nobles and gentry, as their means became exhausted, were compelled to return home with their retainers; while many were forced to march to their native provinces, to assist their co-religionists there to defend themselves from their Catholic neighbours.

England had entered, to a certain extent, upon the war; Elizabeth, after long vacillation, having at length agreed to send six thousand men to hold the towns of Havre, Dieppe, and Rouen, providing these three towns were handed over to her; thus evincing the same calculating greed that marked her subsequent dealings with the Dutch, in their struggle for freedom.

In vain Conde and Coligny begged her not to impose conditions that Frenchmen would hold to be infamous to them. In vain Throgmorton, her ambassador at Paris, warned her that she would alienate the Protestants of France from her; while the possession of the cities would avail her but

little. In vain her minister, Cecil, urged her frankly to ally herself with the Protestants. From the first outbreak of the war for freedom of conscience in France, to the termination of the struggle in Holland, Elizabeth baffled both friends and enemies by her vacillation and duplicity, and her utter want of faith; doling out aid in the spirit of a huckster rather than a queen, so that she was, in the end, even more hated by the Protestants of Holland and France than by the Catholics of France and Spain.

To those who look only at the progress made by England, during the reign of Elizabeth–thanks to her great ministers, her valiant sailors and soldiers, long years of peace at home, and the spirit and energy of her people–Elizabeth may appear a great monarch. To those who study her character from her relations with the struggling Protestants of Holland and France, it will appear that she was, although intellectually great, morally one of the meanest, falsest, and most despicable of women.

Rouen, although stoutly defended by the inhabitants, supported by Montgomery with eight hundred soldiers, and five hundred Englishmen under Killegrew of Pendennis, was at last forced to surrender. The terms granted to the garrison were basely violated, and many of the Protestants put to death. The King of Navarre, who had, since he joined the Catholic party, shown the greatest zeal in their cause, commanded the besiegers. He was wounded in one of the attacks upon the town, and died shortly afterwards.

The two armies finally met, on the 19th of December, 1562. The Catholic party had sixteen thousand foot, two thousand horse, and twenty-two cannon; the Huguenots four thousand horse, but only eight thousand infantry and five cannon. Conde at first broke the Swiss pikemen of the Guises, while Coligny scattered the cavalry of Constable Montmorency, who was wounded and taken prisoner; but the infantry of the Catholics defeated those of the Huguenots, the troops sent by the German princes to aid the latter behaving with great cowardice. Conde's horse was killed under him, and he was made prisoner. Coligny drew off the Huguenot cavalry and the remains of the infantry in good order, and made his retreat unmolested.

The Huguenots had been worsted in the battle, and the loss of Conde was a serious blow; but on the other hand Marshal Saint Andre was killed, and the Constable Montmorency a prisoner. Coligny was speedily reinforced; and the assassination of the Duke of Guise, by an enthusiast of the name of Jean Poltrot, more than equalized matters.

Both parties being anxious to treat, terms of peace were arranged; on the condition that the Protestant lords should be reinstated in their honours and possessions; all nobles and gentlemen should be allowed to celebrate, in their own houses, the worship of the reformed religion; that in every bailiwick the Protestants should be allowed to hold their religious services, in the suburbs of one city, and should also be permitted to celebrate it, in one or two places, inside the walls of all the cities they held at the time of the signature of the truce. This agreement was known as the Treaty of Amboise, and sufficed to secure peace for France, until the latter end of 1567.

Chapter 2: An Important Decision

One day in June, 1567, Gaspard Vaillant and his wife went up to Fletcher's farm.

"I have come up to have a serious talk with you, John, about Philip. You see, in a few months he will be sixteen. He is already taller than I am. Rene and Gustave both tell me that they have taught him all they know with sword and dagger; and both have been stout men-at-arms in their time, and assure me that the lad could hold his own against any young French noble of his own age, and against not a few men. It is time that we came to some conclusion about his future."

"I have thought of it much, Gaspard. Lying here so helpless, my thoughts do naturally turn to him. The boy has grown almost beyond my power of understanding. Sometimes, when I hear him laughing and jesting with the men, or with some of his school friends whom he brings up here, it seems to me that I see myself again in him; and that he is a merry young fellow, full of life and fun, and able to hold his own at singlestick, or to foot it round the maypole with any lad in Kent of his age. Then again, when he is talking with his mother, or giving directions in her name to the French labourers, I see a different lad, altogether: grave and quiet, with a gentle, courteous way, fit for a young noble ten years his senior. I don't know but that between us, Gaspard, we have made a mess of it; and that it might have been better for him to have grown up altogether as I was, with no thought or care save the management of his farm, with a liking for sport and fun, when such came in his way."

"Not at all, not at all," Gaspard Vaillant broke in hastily, "we have made a fine man of him, John; and it seems to me that he possesses the best qualities of both our races. He is frank and hearty, full of life and spirits when, as you say, occasion offers; giving his whole heart either to work or play, with plenty of determination, and what you English call backbone. There is, in fact, a solid English foundation to his character. Then from our side he has gained the gravity of demeanour that belongs to us Huguenots; with the courtesy of manner, the carriage and bearing of a young Frenchman of good blood. Above all, John, he is a sober Christian, strong in the reformed faith, and with a burning hatred against its persecutors, be they French or Spanish.

"Well then, being what he is, what is to be done with him? In the first place, are you bent upon his remaining here? I think that, with his qualities and disposition, it would be well that for a while he had a wider scope. Lucie has managed the farm for the last fifteen years, and can well continue to do so for another ten, if God should spare her; and my own opinion is that, for that time, he might be left to try his strength, and to devote to the good cause the talents God has given him, and the skill and training that he has acquired through us; and that it would be for his good to make the acquaintance of his French kinsfolk, and to see something of the world."

"I know that is Lucie's wish, also, Gaspard; and I have frequently turned the matter over in my mind, and have concluded that, should it be your wish also, it would be well for me to throw no objections in the way. I shall miss the boy sorely; but young birds cannot be kept always in the nest, and I think that the lad has such good stuff in him that it were a pity to keep him shut up here."

"Now, John," his brother-in-law went on, "although I may never have said quite as much before, I have said enough for you to know what my intentions are. God has not been pleased to bestow children upon us; and Philip is our nearest relation, and stands to us almost in the light of a son. God has blest my work for the last twenty years, and though I have done, I hope, fully my share towards assisting my countrymen in distress, putting by always one-third of my income for that purpose, I am a rich man. The factory has grown larger and larger; not because we desired greater gains, but that I might give employment to more and more of my countrymen. Since the death of Lequoc, twelve years ago, it has been entirely in my hands and, living quietly as we have done, a greater portion of the profits have been laid by every year; therefore, putting out of account the money that my good sister has laid by, Philip will start in life not ill equipped.

"I know that the lad has said nothing of any wishes he may entertain–at his age it would not be becoming for him to do so, until his elders speak–but of late, when we have read to him letters from our friends in France, or when he has listened to the tales of those freshly arrived from their ruined homes, I have noted that his colour rose; that his fingers tightened, as if on a sword; and could see how passionately he was longing to join those who were struggling against their cruel oppressors. Not less interested has he been in the noble struggle that the Dutch are making against the Spaniards; a struggle in which many of our exiled countrymen are sharing.

"One of his mother's cousins, the Count de La Noue, is, as you know, prominent among the Huguenot leaders; and others of our relatives are ranged on the same side. At present there is a truce, but both parties feel that it is a hollow one; nevertheless it offers a good opportunity for him to visit his mother's family. Whether there is any prospect of our ever recovering the lands which were confiscated on our flight is uncertain. Should the Huguenots ever maintain their ground, and win freedom of worship in France, it may be that the confiscated estates will in many cases be restored; as to that, however, I am perfectly indifferent. Were I a younger man, I should close my factory, return to France, and bear my share in the defence of the faith. As it is, I should like to send Philip over as my substitute.

"It would, at any rate, be well that he should make the acquaintance of his kinsfolk in France; although even I should not wish that he should cease to regard England as his native country and home. Hundreds of young men, many no older than himself, are in Holland fighting against the persecutors; and risking their lives, though having no kinship with the Dutch, impelled simply by their love of the faith and their hatred of persecution.

"I have lately, John, though the matter has been kept quiet, purchased the farms of Blunt and Mardyke, your neighbours on either hand. Both are nearly twice the size of your own. I have arranged with the men that, for the present, they shall continue to work them as my tenants, as they were before the tenants of Sir James Holford; who, having wasted his money at court, has been forced to sell a portion of his estates. Thus, some day Phil will come into possession of land which will place him in a good position, and I am prepared to add to it considerably. Sir James Holford still gambles away his possessions; and I have explained, to his notary, my willingness to extend my purchases at any time, should he desire to sell. I should at once commence the building of a comfortable mansion, but it is scarce worth while to do so; for it is probable that, before many years, Sir James may be driven to part with his Hall, as well as his land. In the meantime I am ready to provide Philip with an income which will enable him to take his place with credit among our kinsfolk, and to raise a company of some fifty men to follow him in the field, should Conde and the Huguenots again be driven to struggle against the Guises.

"What do you think?"

"I think, in the first place, that Lucie and I should be indeed grateful to you, Gaspard, for your generous offer. As to his going to France, that I must talk over with his mother; whose wishes in this, as in all respects, are paramount with me. But I may say at once that, lying here as I do, thinking of the horrible cruelties and oppressions to which men and women are subjected for the faith's sake in France and Holland, I feel that we, who are happily able to worship in peace and quiet, ought to hesitate at no sacrifice on their behalf; and moreover, seeing that, owing to my affliction, he owes what he is rather to his mother and you than to me, I think your wish that he should make the acquaintance of his kinsfolk in France is a natural one. I have no wish for the lad to become a courtier, English or French; nor that he should, as Englishmen have done before now in foreign armies, gain great honour and reputation; but if it is his wish to fight on behalf of the persecuted people of God, whether in France or in Holland, he will do so with my heartiest goodwill; and if he die, he could not die in a more glorious cause.

"Let us talk of other matters now, Gaspard. This is one that needs thought before more words are spoken."

Two days later, John Fletcher had a long talk with Phil. The latter was delighted when he heard the project, which was greatly in accord with both sides of his character. As an English lad, he looked forward eagerly to adventure and peril; as French and of the reformed religion, he was rejoiced at the thought of fighting with the Huguenots against their persecutors, and of serving under the men with whose names and reputations he was so familiar.

"I do not know your uncle's plans for you, as yet, Phil," his father said. "He went not into such matters, leaving these to be talked over after it had been settled whether his offer should be accepted or not. He purposes well by you, and regards you as his heir. He has already bought Blunt and Mardyke's farms, and purposes to buy other parts of the estates of Sir James Holford, as they may slip through the knight's fingers at the gambling table. Therefore, in time, you will become a person of standing in the county; and although I care little for these things now, Phil, yet I should like you to be somewhat more than a mere squire; and if you serve for a while under such great captains as Coligny and Conde, it will give you reputation and weight.

"Your good uncle and his friends think little of such matters, but I own that I am not uninfluenced by them. Coligny, for example, is a man whom all honour; and that honour is not altogether because he is leader of the reformed faith, but because he is a great soldier. I do not think that honour and reputation are to be despised. Doubtless the first thing of all is that a man should be a good Christian. But that will in no way prevent him from being a great man; nay, it will add to his greatness.

"You have noble kinsfolk in France, to some of whom your uncle will doubtless commit you; and it may be that you will have opportunities of distinguishing yourself. Should such occur, I am sure you will avail yourself of them, as one should do who comes of good stock on both sides; for although we Fletchers have been but yeomen, from generation to generation, we have been ever ready to take and give our share of hard blows when they were going; and there have been few battles fought, since William the Norman came over, that a Fletcher has not fought in the English ranks; whether in France, in Scotland, or in our own troubles.

"Therefore it seems to me but natural that, for many reasons, you should desire at your age to take part in the fighting; as an Englishman, because Englishmen fought six years ago under the banner of Conde; as a Protestant, on behalf of our persecuted brethren; as a Frenchman by your mother's side, because you have kinsfolk engaged, and because it is the Pope and Philip of Spain, as well as the Guises, who are, in fact, battling to stamp out French liberty.

"Of one thing I am sure, my boy–you will disgrace neither an honest English name, nor the French blood in your veins, nor your profession as a Christian and a Protestant. There are Englishmen gaining credit on the Spanish Main, under Drake and Hawkins; there are Englishmen fighting manfully by the side of the Dutch; there are others in the armies of the Protestant princes of Germany; and in none of these matters are they so deeply concerned as you are in the affairs of France and religion.

"I shall miss you, of course, Philip, and that sorely; but I have long seen that this would probably be the upshot of your training and, since I can myself take no share in adventure, beyond the walls of this house, I shall feel that I am living again in you. But, lad, never forget that you are English. You are Philip Fletcher, come of an old Kentish stock; and though you may be living with French kinsfolk and friends, always keep uppermost the fact that you are an Englishman who sympathizes with France, and not a Frenchman with some English blood in your veins. I have given you up greatly to your French relations here; but if you win credit and honour, I would have it won by my son, Philip Fletcher, born in England of an English father, and who will one day be a gentleman and landowner in the county of Kent."

"I sha'n't forget that, father," Philip said earnestly. "I have never regarded myself as in any way French; although speaking the tongue as well as English, and being so much among my mother's friends. But living here with you, where our people have lived so many years; hearing from you the

tales from our history; seeing these English fields around me; and being at an English school, among English boys, I have ever felt that I am English, though in no way regretting the Huguenot blood that I inherit from my mother. Believe me, that if I fight in France it will be as an Englishman who has drawn his sword in the quarrel, and rather as one who hates oppression and cruelty than because I have French kinsmen engaged in it."

"That is well, Philip. You may be away for some years, but I trust that, on your return, you will find me sitting here to welcome you back. A creaking wheel lasts long. I have everything to make my life happy and peaceful–the best of wives, a well-ordered farm, and no thought or care as to my worldly affairs–and since it has been God's will that such should be my life, my interest will be wholly centred in you; and I hope to see your children playing round me or, for ought I know, your grandchildren, for we are a long-lived race.

"And now, Philip, you had best go down and see your uncle, and thank him for his good intentions towards you. Tell him that I wholly agree with his plans, and that if he and your aunt will come up this evening, we will enter farther into them."

That evening John Fletcher learned that it was the intention of Gaspard that his wife should accompany Philip.

"Marie yearns to see her people again," he said, "and the present is a good time for her to do so; for when the war once breaks out again, none can say how long it will last or how it will terminate. Her sister and Lucie's, the Countess de Laville, has, as you know, frequently written urgently for Marie to go over and pay her a visit. Hitherto I have never been able to bring myself to spare her, but I feel that this is so good an opportunity that I must let her go for a few weeks.

"Philip could not be introduced under better auspices. He will escort Marie to his aunt's, remain there with her, and then see her on board ship again at La Rochelle; after which, doubtless, he will remain at his aunt's, and when the struggle begins will ride with his cousin Francois. I have hesitated whether I should go, also. But in the first place, my business would get on but badly without me; in the second, although Marie might travel safely enough, I might be arrested were I recognized as one who had left the kingdom contrary to the edicts; and lastly, I never was on very good terms with her family.

"Emilie, in marrying the Count de Laville, made a match somewhat above her own rank; for the Lavilles were a wealthier and more powerful family than that of Charles de Moulins, her father. On the other hand, I was, although of good birth, yet inferior in consideration to De Moulins, although my lands were broader than his. Consequently we saw little of Emilie, after our marriage. Therefore my being with Marie would, in no way, increase the warmth of the welcome that she and Philip will receive. I may say that the estrangement was, perhaps, more my fault than that of the Lavilles. I chose to fancy there was a coolness on their part, which probably existed only in my imagination. Moreover, shortly after my marriage the religious troubles grew serious; and we were all too much absorbed in our own perils, and those of our poorer neighbours, to think of travelling about, or of having family gatherings.

"At any rate, I feel that Philip could not enter into life more favourably than as cousin of Francois de Laville; who is but two years or so his senior, and who will, his mother wrote to Marie, ride behind that gallant gentleman, Francois de la Noue, if the war breaks out again. I am glad to feel confident that Philip will in no way bring discredit upon his relations.

"I shall at once order clothes for him, suitable for the occasion. They will be such as will befit an English gentleman; good in material but sober in colour, for the Huguenots eschew bright hues. I will take his measure, and send up to a friend in London for a helmet, breast, and back pieces, together with offensive arms, sword, dagger, and pistols. I have already written to correspondents, at Southampton and Plymouth, for news as to the sailing of a ship bound for La Rochelle. There he had better take four men into his service, for in these days it is by no means safe to ride through France unattended; especially when one is of the reformed religion. The roads abound with disbanded soldiers and robbers, while in the villages a fanatic might, at any time, bring on a religious tumult.

I have many correspondents at La Rochelle, and will write to one asking him to select four stout fellows, who showed their courage in the last war, and can be relied on for good and faithful service. I will also get him to buy horses, and make all arrangements for the journey.

"Marie will write to her sister. Lucie, perhaps, had better write under the same cover; for although she can remember but little of Emilie, seeing that she was fully six years her junior, it would be natural that she should take the opportunity to correspond with her.

"In one respect, Phil," he went on, turning to his nephew, "you will find yourself at some disadvantage, perhaps, among young Frenchmen. You can ride well, and I think can sit a horse with any of them; but of the menage, that is to say, the purely ornamental management of a horse, in which they are most carefully instructed, you know nothing. It is one of the tricks of fashion, of which plain men like myself know but little; and though I have often made inquiries, I have found no one who could instruct you. However, these delicacies are rather for courtly displays than for the rough work of war; though it must be owned that, in single combat between two swordsmen, he who has the most perfect control over his horse, and can make the animal wheel or turn, press upon his opponent, or give way by a mere touch of his leg or hand, possesses a considerable advantage over the man who is unversed in such matters. I hope you will not feel the want of it, and at any rate, it has not been my fault that you have had no opportunity of acquiring the art.

"The tendency is more and more to fight on foot. The duel has taken the place of the combat in the lists, and the pikeman counts for as much in the winning of a battle as the mounted man. You taught us that at Cressy and Agincourt; but we have been slow to learn the lesson, which was brought home to you in your battles with the Scots, and in your own civil struggles. It is the bow and the pike that have made the English soldier famous; while in France, where the feudal system still prevails, horsemen still form a large proportion of our armies; and the jousting lists, and the exercise of the menage, still occupy a large share in the training and amusements of the young men of noble families."

Six weeks later, Philip Fletcher landed at La Rochelle, with his aunt and her French serving maid. When the ship came into port, the clerk of a trader there came on board at once and, on the part of his employer, begged Madame Vaillant and her son to take up their abode at his house; he having been warned of their coming by his valued correspondent, Monsieur Vaillant. A porter was engaged to carry up their luggage to the house, whither the clerk at once conducted them.

From his having lived so long among the Huguenot colony, the scene was less strange to Philip than it would have been to most English lads. La Rochelle was a strongly Protestant city, and the sober-coloured costumes of the people differed but little from those to which he was accustomed in the streets of Canterbury. He himself and his aunt attracted no attention, whatever, from passersby; her costume being exactly similar to those worn by the wives of merchants, while Philip would have passed anywhere as a young Huguenot gentleman, in his doublet of dark puce cloth, slashed with gray, his trunks of the same colour, and long gray hose.

"A proper-looking young gentleman," a market woman said to her daughter, as he passed. "Another two or three years, and he will make a rare defender of the faith. He must be from Normandy, with his fair complexion and light eyes. There are not many of the true faith in the north."

They were met by the merchant at the door of his house.

"I am glad indeed to see you again, Madame Vaillant," he said. "It is some twenty years, now, since you and your good husband and your sister hid here, for three days, before we could smuggle you on board a ship. Ah! Those were bad times; though there have been worse since. But since our people showed that they did not intend, any longer, to be slaughtered unresistingly, things have gone better here, at least; and for the last four years the slaughterings and murders have ceased.

"You are but little changed, madame, since I saw you last."

"I have lived a quiet and happy life, my good Monsieur Bertram; free from all strife and care, save for anxiety about our people here. Why cannot Catholics and Protestants live quietly side by side here, as they do in England?"

"We should ask nothing better, madame."

At this moment, a girl came hurrying down the stairs.

"This is my daughter Jean, madame.

"Why were you not down before, Jean?" he asked sharply. "I told you to place Suzette at the casement, to warn you when our visitors were in sight, so that you should, as was proper, be at the door to meet them. I suppose, instead of that, you had the maid arranging your headgear, or some such worldly folly."

The girl coloured hotly, for her father had hit upon the truth.

"Young people will be young people, Monsieur Bertram," Madame Vaillant said, smiling, "and my husband and I are not of those who think that it is necessary to carry a prim face, and to attire one's self in ugly garments, as a proof of religion. Youth is the time for mirth and happiness, and nature teaches a maiden what is becoming to her; why then should we blame her for setting off the charms God has given her to their best advantage?"

By this time they had reached the upper storey, and the merchant's daughter hastened to relieve Madame Vaillant of her wraps.

"This is my nephew, of whom my husband wrote to you," the latter said to the merchant, when Philip entered the room–he having lingered at the door to pay the porters, and to see that the luggage, which had come up close behind them, was stored.

"He looks active and strong, madame. He has the figure of a fine swordsman."

"He has been well taught, and will do no discredit to our race, Monsieur Bertram. His father is a strong and powerful man, even for an Englishman; and though Philip does not follow his figure, he has something of his strength."

"They are wondrous strong, these Englishmen," the trader said. "I have seen, among their sailors, men who are taller by a head than most of us here, and who look strong enough to take a bull by the horns and hold him. But had it not been for your nephew's fair hair and gray eyes, his complexion, and the smile on his lips–we have almost forgotten how to smile, in France–I should hardly have taken him for an Englishman."

"There is nothing extraordinary in that, Monsieur Bertram, when his mother is French, and he has lived greatly in the society of my husband and myself, and among the Huguenot colony at Canterbury."

"Have you succeeded in getting the horses and the four men for us, Monsieur Bertram?" Philip asked.

"Yes, everything is in readiness for your departure tomorrow. Madame will, I suppose, ride behind you upon a pillion; and her maid behind one of the troopers.

"I have, in accordance with Monsieur Vaillant's instructions, bought a horse, which I think you will be pleased with; for Guise himself might ride upon it, without feeling that he was ill mounted. I was fortunate in lighting on such an animal. It was the property of a young noble, who rode hither from Navarre and was sailing for England. I imagine he bore despatches from the queen to her majesty of England. He had been set upon by robbers on the way. They took everything he possessed, and held him prisoner, doubtless meaning to get a ransom for him; but he managed to slip off while they slept, and to mount his horse, with which he easily left the varlets behind, although they chased him for some distance. So when he came here, he offered to sell his horse to obtain an outfit and money for his voyage; and the landlord of the inn, who is a friend of mine, knowing that I had been inquiring for a good animal, brought him to me, and we soon struck a bargain."

"It was hard on him to lose his horse in that fashion," Philip said; "and I am sorry for it, though I may be the gainer thereby."

"He did not seem to mind much," the merchant said. "Horses are good and abundant in Navarre, and when I said I did not like to take advantage of his strait, he only laughed and said he had three or four others as good at home. He did say, though, that he would like to know if it was to be in

good hands. I assured him that on that ground he need not fear; for that I had bought it for a young gentleman, nearly related to the Countess de Laville. He said that was well, and seemed glad, indeed, that it was not to be ridden by one of the brigands into whose hands he fell."

"And the men. Are they trustworthy fellows?"

"They are stout men-at-arms. They are Gascons all, and rode behind Coligny in the war, and according to their own account performed wonders; but as Gascons are given to boasting, I paid not much heed to that. However, they were recommended to me by a friend, a large wine grower, for whom they have been working for the last two years. He says they are honest and industrious, and they are leaving him only because they are anxious for a change and, deeming that troubles were again approaching, wanted to enter the service of some Huguenot lord who would be likely to take the field. He was lamenting the fact to me, when I said that it seemed to me they were just the men I was in search of; and I accordingly saw them, and engaged them on the understanding that, at the end of a month, you should be free to discharge them if you were not satisfied with them; and that equally they could leave your service, if they did not find it suit.

"They have arms, of course, and such armour as they need; and I have bought four serviceable horses for their use, together with a horse to carry your baggage, but which will serve for your body servant.

"I have not found a man for that office. I knew of no one who would, as I thought, suit you; and in such a business it seemed to me better that you should wait, and choose for yourself, for in the matter of servants everyone has his fancies. Some like a silent knave, while others prefer a merry one. Some like a tall proper fellow, who can fight if needs be; others a staid man, who will do his duty and hold his tongue, who can cook a good dinner and groom a horse well. It is certain you will never find all virtues combined. One man may be all that you wish, but he is a liar; another helps himself; a third is too fond of the bottle. In this matter, then, I did not care to take the responsibility, but have left it for you to choose for yourself."

"I shall be more likely to make a mistake than you will, Monsieur Bertram," Philip said with a laugh.

"Perhaps so, but then it will be your own mistake; and a man chafes less, at the shortcomings of one whom he has chosen himself, than at those of one who has, as it were, been forced upon him."

"Well, there will be no hurry in that matter," Philip said. "I can get on well enough without a servant, for a time. Up to the present, I have certainly never given a thought as to what kind of man I should want as a servant; and I should like time to think over a matter which is, from what you say, so important."

"Assuredly it is important, young sir. If you should take the field, you will find that your comfort greatly depends upon it. A sharp, active knave, who will ferret out good quarters for you, turn you out a good meal from anything he can get hold of, bring your horse up well groomed in the morning, and your armour brightly polished; who will not lie to you overmuch, or rob you overmuch, and who will only get drunk at times when you can spare his services. Ah! He would be a treasure to you. But assuredly such a man is not to be found every day."

"And of course," Marie put in, "in addition to what you have said, Monsieur Bertram, it would be necessary that he should be one of our religion, and fervent and strong in the faith."

"My dear lady, I was mentioning possibilities," the trader said. "It is of course advisable that he should be a Huguenot, it is certainly essential that he should not be a Papist; but beyond this we need not inquire too closely. You cannot expect the virtues of an archbishop, and the capacity of a horse boy. If he can find a man embracing the qualities of both, by all means let your son engage him; but as he will require him to be a good cook, and a good groom, and he will not require religious instruction from him, the former points are those on which I should advise him to lay most stress.

"And now, Madame Vaillant, will you let me lead you into the next room where, as my daughter has for some time been trying to make me understand, a meal is ready? And I doubt not that you are

also ready; for truly those who travel by sea are seldom able to enjoy food, save when they are much accustomed to voyaging. Though they tell me that, after a time, even those with the most delicate stomachs recover their appetites, and are able to enjoy the rough fare they get on board a ship."

After the meal was over, the merchant took Philip to the stables, where the new purchases had been put up. The men were not there, but the ostler brought out Philip's horse, with which he was delighted.

"He will not tire under his double load," the merchant said; "and with only your weight upon him, a foeman would be well mounted, indeed, to overtake you."

"I would rather that you put it, Monsieur Bertram, that a foeman needs be well mounted to escape me."

"Well, I hope it will be that way," his host replied, smiling. "But in fighting such as we have here, there are constant changes. The party that is pursued one day is the pursuer a week later; and of the two, you know, speed is of much more importance in flight than in pursuit. If you cannot overtake a foe, well, he gets away, and you may have better fortune next time; but if you can't get away from a foe, the chances are you may never have another opportunity of doing so."

"Perhaps you are right. In fact, now I think of it, I am sure you are; though I hope it will not often happen that we shall have to depend for safety on the speed of our horses. At any rate, I am delighted with him, Monsieur Bertram; and I thank you greatly for procuring so fine an animal for me. If the four men turn out to be as good, of their kind, as the horse, I shall be well set up, indeed."

Early the next morning the four men came round to the merchant's, and Philip went down with him into the entry hall where they were. He was well satisfied with their appearance. They were stout fellows, from twenty-six to thirty years old. All were soberly dressed, and wore steel caps and breast pieces, and carried long swords by their sides. In spite of the serious expression of their faces, Philip saw that all were in high, if restrained, spirits at again taking service.

"This is your employer, the Sieur Philip Fletcher. I have warranted that he shall find you good and true men, and I hope you will do justice to my recommendation."

"We will do our best," Roger, the eldest of the party, said. "We are all right glad to be moving again. It is not as if we had been bred on the soil here, and a man never takes to a strange place as to one he was born in."

"You are Gascons, Maitre Bertram tells me," Philip said.

"Yes, sir. We were driven out from there ten years ago, when the troubles were at their worst. Our fathers were both killed, and we travelled with our mothers and sisters by night, through the country, till we got to La Rochelle."

"You say both your fathers. How are you related to each other?"

"Jacques and I are brothers," Roger said, touching the youngest of the party on his shoulder. "Eustace and Henri are brothers, and are our cousins. Their father and ours were brothers. When the troubles broke out, we four took service with the Count de Luc, and followed him throughout the war. When it was over we came back here. Our mothers had married again. Some of our sisters had taken husbands, too. Others were in service. Therefore we remained here rather than return to Gascony, where our friends and relations had all been either killed or dispersed.

"We were lucky in getting employment together, but were right glad when we heard that there was an opening again for service. For the last two years we have been looking forward to it; for as everyone sees, it cannot be long before the matter must be fought out again. And in truth, we have been wearying for the time to come; for after having had a year of fighting, one does not settle down readily to tilling the soil.

"You will find that you can rely on us, sir, for faithful service. We all bore a good reputation as stout fighters and, during the time we were in harness before, we none of us got into trouble for being overfond of the wine pots."

"I think you will suit me very well," Philip said, "and I hope that my service will suit you. Although an Englishman by birth and name, my family have suffered persecution here as yours have done, and I am as warmly affected to the Huguenot cause as yourselves. If there is danger you will not find me lacking in leading you, and so far as I can I shall try to make my service a comfortable one, and to look after your welfare.

"We shall be ready to start in half an hour, therefore have the horses round at the door in that time. One of the pillions is to be placed on my own horse. You had better put the other for the maid behind your saddle, Roger; you being, I take it, the oldest of your party, had better take charge of her."

The men saluted and went out.

"I like their looks much," Philip said to the merchant. "Stout fellows and cheerful, I should say. Like my aunt, I don't see why we should carry long faces, Monsieur Bertram, because we have reformed our religion; and I believe that a light heart and good spirits will stand wear and tear better than a sad visage."

The four men were no less pleased with their new employer.

"That is a lad after my own heart," Roger said, as they went out. "Quick and alert, pleasant of face; and yet, I will be bound, not easily turned from what he has set his mind to. He bears himself well, and I doubt not can use his weapons. I don't know what stock he comes from, on this side, but I warrant it is a good one.

"He will make a good master, lads. I think that, as he says, he will be thoughtful as to our comforts, and be pleasant and cheerful with us; but mind you, he will expect the work to be done, and you will find that there is no trifling with him."

Chapter 3: In A French Chateau

The three days' ride to the chateau of the Countess de Laville was marked by no incident. To Philip it was an exceedingly pleasant one. Everything was new to him; the architecture of the churches and villages, the dress of the people, their modes of agriculture, all differing widely from those to which he was accustomed. In some villages the Catholics predominated, and here the passage of the little party was regarded with frowning brows and muttered threats; by the Huguenots they were saluted respectfully, and if they halted, many questions were asked their followers as to news about the intentions of the court, the last rumours as to the attitude of Conde, and the prospects of a continuance of peace.

Here, too, great respect was paid to Marie and Philip when it was known they were relatives of the Countess de Laville, and belonged to the family of the De Moulins. Emilie had for some time been a widow–the count, her husband, having fallen at the battle of Dreux, at the end of the year 1562–but being an active and capable woman, she had taken into her hands the entire management of the estates, and was one of the most influential among the Huguenot nobles of that part of the country.

From their last halting place, Marie Vaillant sent on a letter by one of the men to her sister, announcing their coming. She had written on her landing at La Rochelle, and they had been met on their way by a messenger from the countess, expressing her delight that her sister had at last carried out her promise to visit her, and saying that Francois was looking eagerly for the coming of his cousin.

The chateau was a semi-fortified building, capable of making a stout resistance against any sudden attack. It stood on the slope of a hill, and Philip felt a little awed at its stately aspect as they approached it. When they were still a mile away, a party of horsemen rode out from the gateway, and in a few minutes their leader reined up his horse in front of them and, springing from it, advanced towards Philip, who also alighted and helped his aunt to dismount.

"My dear aunt," the young fellow said, doffing his cap, "I am come in the name of my mother to greet you, and to tell you how joyful she is that you have, at last, come back to us.

"This is my Cousin Philip, of course; though you are not what I expected to see. My mother told me that you were two years' my junior, and I had looked to find you still a boy; but, by my faith, you seem to be as old as I am. Why, you are taller by two inches, and broader and stronger too, I should say. Can it be true that you are but sixteen?"

"That is my age, Cousin Francois; and I am, as you expected, but a boy yet and, I can assure you, no taller or broader than many of my English schoolfellows of the same age."

"But we must not delay, aunt," Francois said, turning again to her. "My mother's commands were urgent, that I was not to delay a moment in private talk with you, but to bring you speedily on to her; therefore I pray you to mount again and ride on with me, for doubtless she is watching impatiently now, and will chide me rarely, if we linger."

Accordingly the party remounted at once, and rode forward to the chateau. A dozen men-at-arms were drawn up at the gate and, on the steps of the entrance from the courtyard into the chateau itself, the countess was standing. Francois leapt from his horse, and was by the side of his aunt as Philip reined in his horse. Taking his hand, she sprang lightly from the saddle, and in a moment the two sisters fell into each others' arms.

It was more than twenty years since they last met, but time had dealt gently with them both. The countess had changed least. She was two or three years older than Marie, was tall, and had been somewhat stately even as a girl. She had had many cares, but her position had always been assured; as the wife of a powerful noble she had been accustomed to be treated with deference and respect, and although the troubles of the times and the loss of her husband had left their marks, she was still a fair and stately woman at the age of forty-three. Marie, upon the other hand, had lived an untroubled life for the past twenty years. She had married a man who was considered beneath her, but the match

had been in every way a happy one. Her husband was devoted to her, and the expression of her face showed that she was a thoroughly contented and happy woman.

"You are just what I fancied you would be, Marie, a quiet little home bird, living in your nest beyond the sea, and free from all the troubles and anxieties of our unhappy country. You have been good to write so often, far better than I have been; and I seem to know all about your quiet, well-ordered home, and your good husband and his business that flourishes so. I thought you were a little foolish in your choice, and that our father was wrong in mating you as he did; but it has turned out well, and you have been living in quiet waters, while we have been encountering a sea of troubles.

"And this tall youth is our nephew, Philip? I wish you could have brought over Lucie with you. It would have been pleasant, indeed, for us three sisters to be reunited again, if only for a time. Why, your Philip is taller than Francois, and yet he is two years younger. I congratulate you and Lucie upon him.

"Salute me, nephew. I had not looked to see so proper a youth. You show the blood of the De Moulins plainly, Philip. I suppose you get your height and your strength from your English father?"

"They are big men, these English, Emilie; and his father is big, even among them. But, as you say, save in size Philip takes after our side rather than his father's; and of course he has mixed so much with our colony at Canterbury that, in spite of his being English bred, we have preserved in him something of the French manner, and I think his heart is fairly divided between the two countries."

"Let us go in," the countess said. "You need rest and refreshment after your journey, and I long to have a quiet talk with you.

"Francois, do you take charge of your cousin. I have told the serving men to let you have a meal in your own apartments, and then you can show him over the chateau and the stables."

Francois and Philip bowed to the two ladies, and then went off together.

"That is good," the young count said, laying his hand on Philip's shoulder; "now we shall get to know each other. You will not be angry, I hope, when I tell you that, though I have looked forward to seeing my aunt and you, I have yet been a little anxious in my mind. I do not know why, but I have always pictured the English as somewhat rough and uncouth–as doughty fighters, for so they have shown themselves to our cost, but as somewhat deficient in the graces of manner–and when I heard that my aunt was bringing you over, to leave you for a time with us, since you longed to fight in the good cause, I have thought–pray, do not be angry with me, for I feel ashamed of myself now–" and he hesitated.

"That I should be a rough cub, whom you would be somewhat ashamed of introducing to your friends as your cousin," Philip laughed. "I am not surprised. English boys have ideas just as erroneous about the French, and it was a perpetual wonder to my schoolfellows that, being half French, I was yet as strong and as tough as they were. Doubtless I should have been somewhat different, had I not lived so much with my uncle and aunt and the Huguenot community at Canterbury. Monsieur Vaillant and my aunt have always impressed upon me that I belong to a noble French family, and might some day come over here to stay with my relations; and have taken much pains with my deportment and manners, and have so far succeeded that I am always called 'Frenchy' among my English companions, though in their own games and sports I could hold my own with any of them."

"And can you ride, Philip?"

"I can sit on any horse, but I have had no opportunity of learning the menage."

"That matters little, after all," Francois said; "though it is an advantage to be able to manage your horse with a touch of the heel, or the slightest pressure of the rein, and to make him wheel and turn at will, while leaving both arms free to use your weapons. You have learned to fence?"

"Yes. There were some good masters among the colony, and many a lesson have I had from old soldiers passing through, who paid for a week's hospitality by putting me up to a few tricks with the sword."

"I thought you could fence," Francois said. "You would hardly have that figure and carriage, unless you had practised with the sword. And you dance, I suppose. Many of our religion regard such amusement as frivolous, if not sinful; but my mother, although as staunch a Huguenot as breathes, insists upon my learning it, not as an amusement but as an exercise. There was no reason, she said, why the Catholics should monopolize all the graces."

"Yes, I learned to dance, and for the same reason. I think my uncle rather scandalized the people of our religion in Canterbury. He maintained that it was necessary, as part of the education of a gentleman; and that in the English Protestant court, dancing was as highly thought of as in that of France, the queen herself being noted for her dancing, and none can throw doubts upon her Protestantism. My mother and aunt were both against it, but as my father supported my uncle, he had his own way."

"Well I see, Philip, that we shall be good comrades. There are many among us younger Huguenots who, though as staunch in the religion as our fathers, and as ready to fight and die for it if need be, yet do not see that it is needful to go about always with grave faces, and to be cut off from all innocent amusements. It is our natural disposition to be gay, and I see not why, because we hold the Mass in detestation, and have revolted against the authority of the Pope and the abuses of the church, we should go through life as if we were attending a perpetual funeral. Unless I am mistaken, such is your disposition also; for although your face is grave, your eyes laugh."

"I have been taught to bear myself gravely, in the presence of my elders," Philip replied with a smile; "and truly at Canterbury the French colony was a grave one, being strangers in a strange land; but among my English friends, I think I was as much disposed for a bit of fun or mischief as any of them."

"But I thought the English were a grave race."

"I think not, Francois. We call England 'Merry England.' I think we are an earnest people, but not a grave one. English boys play with all their might. The French boys of the colony never used to join in our sports, regarding them as rude and violent beyond all reason; but it is all in good humour, and it is rare, indeed, for anyone to lose his temper, however rough the play and hard the knocks. Then they are fond of dancing and singing, save among the strictest sects; and the court is as gay as any in Europe. I do not think that the English can be called a grave people."

"Well, I am glad that it is so, Philip, especially that you yourself are not grave. Now, as we have finished our meal, let us visit the stables. I have a horse already set aside for you; but I saw, as we rode hither, that you are already excellently mounted. Still, Victor, that is his name, shall be at your disposal. A second horse is always useful, for shot and arrows no more spare a horse than his rider."

The stables were large and well ordered for, during the past two months, there had been large additions made by the countess, in view of the expected troubles.

"This is my charger. I call him Rollo. He was bred on the estate and, when I am upon him, I feel that the king is not better mounted."

"He is a splendid animal, indeed," Philip said, as Rollo tossed his head, and whinnied with pleasure at his master's approach.

"He can do anything but talk," Francois said, as he patted him. "He will lie down when I tell him, will come to my whistle and, with the reins lying loose on his neck, will obey my voice as readily as he would my hand.

"This is my second horse, Pluto. He is the equal of Rollo in strength and speed, but not so docile and obedient, and he has a temper of his own."

"He looks it," Philip agreed. "I should keep well out of reach of his heels and jaws."

"He is quiet enough when I am on his back," Francois laughed; "but I own that he is the terror of the stable boys.

"This is Victor. He is not quite as handsome as Rollo, but he has speed and courage and good manners."

"He is a beautiful creature," Philip said enthusiastically. "I was very well satisfied with my purchase, but he will not show to advantage by the side of Victor."

"Ah, I see they have put him in the next stall," Francois said.

"He is a fine animal, too," he went on, after examining the horse closely. "He comes from Gascony, I should say. He has signs of Spanish blood."

"Yes, from Gascony or Navarre. I was very fortunate in getting him," and he related how the animal had been left at La Rochelle.

"You got him for less than half his value, Philip. What are you going to call him?"

"I shall call him Robin. That was the name of my favourite horse, at home.

"I see you have got some stout animals in the other stalls, though of course they are of a very different quality to your own."

"Yes; many of them are new purchases. We have taken on thirty men-at-arms; stout fellows, old soldiers all, whom my mother will send into the field if we come to blows. Besides these there will be some twenty of our tenants. We could have raised the whole number among them, had we chosen; for if we called up the full strength of the estate, and put all bound to service in the field in war time, we could turn out fully three hundred; but of these well-nigh a third are Catholics, and could not in any way be relied on, nor would it be just to call upon them to fight against their co-religionists. Again, it would not do to call out all our Huguenot tenants; for this would leave their wives and families and homes and property, to say nothing of the chateau, at the mercy of the Catholics while they were away. I do not think that our Catholic tenants would interfere with them, still less with the chateau; for our family have ever been good masters, and my mother is loved by men of both parties. Still, bands might come from other districts, or from the towns, to pillage or slay were the estate left without fighting men. Therefore, we have taken these men-at-arms into our service, with twenty of our own tenants, all young men belonging to large families; while the rest will remain behind, as a guard for the estate and chateau; and as in all they could muster some two hundred and fifty strong, and would be joined by the other Huguenots of the district, they would not likely be molested, unless one of the Catholic armies happened to come in this direction.

"Directly I start with the troop, the younger sons of the tenants will be called in to form a garrison here. We have five-and-thirty names down, and there are twenty men capable of bearing arms among the household, many of whom have seen service. Jacques Parold, our seneschal, has been a valiant soldier in his time, and would make the best of them; and my mother would assuredly keep our flag flying till the last.

"I shall go away in comfort for, unless the Guises march this way, there is little fear of trouble in our absence. We are fortunate in this province. The parties are pretty evenly divided, and have a mutual respect for each other. In districts where we are greatly outnumbered, it is hard for fighting men to march away with the possibility that, on their return, they will find their families murdered and their homes levelled.

"Now we will take a turn round the grounds. Their beauty has been sadly destroyed. You see, before the troubles seven years ago broke out, there was a view from the windows on this side of the house over the park and shrubberies; but at that time my father thought it necessary to provide against sudden attacks, and therefore, before he went away to the war, he had this wall with its flanking towers erected. All the tenants came in and helped, and it was built in five weeks time. It has, as you see, made the place safe from a sudden attack, for on the other three sides the old defences remain unaltered. It was on this side, only, that my grandfather had the house modernized, believing that the days of civil war were at an end.

"You see, this new wall forms a large quadrangle. We call it the countess's garden, and my mother has done her best, by planting it with shrubs and fast-growing trees, to make up for the loss of the view she formerly had from the windows.

"Along one side you see there are storehouses, which are screened from view by that bank of turf. They are all full, now, of grain. There is a gate, as you see, opposite. In case of trouble cattle will be driven in there, and the garden turned into a stockyard, so that there is no fear of our being starved out."

"Fifty-five men are a small garrison for so large a place, Francois."

"Yes, but that is only against a sudden surprise. In case of alarm, the Protestant tenants would all come in with their wives and families, and the best of their horses and cattle, and then there will be force enough to defend the place against anything short of a siege by an army. You see there is a moat runs all round. It is full now on three sides, and there is a little stream runs down from behind, which would fill the fourth side in a few hours.

"Tomorrow we will take a ride through the park, which lies beyond that wall."

Entering the house, they passed through several stately apartments, and then entered a large hall completely hung with arms and armour.

"This is the grand hall, and you see it serves also the purpose of a salle d'armes. Here we have arms and armour for a hundred men, for although all the tenants are bound, by the terms of their holding, to appear when called upon fully armed and accoutred, each with so many men according to the size of his farm, there may well be deficiencies; especially as, until the religious troubles began, it was a great number of years since they had been called upon to take the field. For the last eight years, however, they have been trained and drilled; fifty at a time coming up, once a week. That began two years before the last war, as my father always held that it was absurd to take a number of men, wholly unaccustomed to the use of arms, into the field. Agincourt taught that lesson to our nobles, though it has been forgotten by most of them.

"We have two officers accustomed to drill and marshal men, and these act as teachers here in the hall. The footmen practise with pike and sword. They are exercised with arquebus and crossbow in the park, and the mounted men are taught to manoeuvre and charge, so that, in case of need, we can show a good face against any body of troops of equal numbers. It is here I practise with my maitre d'armes, and with Montpace and Bourdon, our two officers.

"Ah! Here is Charles, my maitre d'armes.

"Charles, this is my cousin Philip, who will also be a pupil of yours while he remains here.

"What do you say, Philip? Will we try a bout with blunted swords just now?"

"With pleasure," Philip said.

The art of fencing had not, at that time, reached the perfection it afterwards attained. The swords used were long and straight, and sharpened at both edges; and were used as much for cutting as thrusting. In single combat on foot, long daggers were generally held in the left hand, and were used for the purpose both of guarding and of striking at close quarters.

They put on thick quilted doublets, and light helmets with visors.

"Do you use a dagger, Philip?"

"No, I have never seen one used in England. We are taught to guard with our swords, as well as to strike with them."

"Monsieur has learned from English teachers?" the maitre d'armes asked.

"I have had English teachers as well as French," Philip said. "We all learn the use of the sword in England; but my uncle, Monsieur Vaillant, has taken great pains in having me taught also by such French professors of arms as lived in Canterbury, or happened to pass through it; but I own that I prefer the English style of fighting. We generally stand upright to our work, equally poised on the two feet for advance or retreat; while you lean with the body far forward and the arm outstretched, which seems to me to cripple the movements."

"Yes, but it puts the body out of harm's way," Francois said.

"It is the arm's business to guard the body, Francois, and it is impossible to strike a downright blow when leaning so far forward."

"We strike but little, nowadays, in single combat," the maitre d'armes said. "The point is more effective."

"That is doubtless so, Maitre Charles," Philip agreed; "but I have not learned fencing for the sake of fighting duels, but to be able to take my part on a field of battle. The Spaniards are said to be masters of the straight sword, and yet they have been roughly used in the western seas by our sailors; who, methinks, always use the edge."

The two now took up their position facing each other. Their attitude was strikingly different. Francois stood on bent knees, leaning far forward; while Philip stood erect, with his knees but slightly bent, ready to spring either forwards or backwards, with his arm but half extended. For a time both fought cautiously. Francois had been well taught, having had the benefit, whenever he was in Paris, of the best masters there. He was extremely active and, as they warmed to their work, Philip had difficulty in standing his ground against his impetuous rushes. Some minutes passed without either of them succeeding in touching the other. At length the maitre d'armes called upon them to lower their swords.

"That is enough," he said. "You are equally matched.

"I congratulate you, Monsieur Philip. You have been well taught; and indeed, there are not many youths of his age who could hold their own with my pupil.

"Take off your helmets. Enough has been done for one day."

"Peste, Philip!" Francois said, as he removed his helmet. "I was not wrong when I said that, from your figure, I was sure that you had learned fencing. Maitre Charles interfered on my behalf, and to save me the mortification of defeat. I had nearly shot my bolt, and you had scarcely begun.

"I own myself a convert. Your attitude is better than ours–that is, when the hand is skilful enough to defend the body. The fatigue of holding the arm extended, as I do, is much greater than it is as you stand; and in the long run you must get the better of anyone who is not sufficiently skilful to slay you before his arm becomes fatigued.

"What do you think, Maitre Charles? My cousin is two years younger than I am, and yet his wrist and arm are stronger than mine, as I could feel every time he put aside my attacks."

"Is that so?" the maitre d'armes said, in surprise. "I had taken him for your senior. He will be a famous man-at-arms, when he attains his full age. His defence is wonderfully strong and, although I do not admit that he is superior to you with the point, he would be a formidable opponent to any of our best swordsmen in a melee. If, as he says, he is more accustomed to use the edge than the point, I will myself try him tomorrow, if he will permit me. I have always understood that the English are more used to strike than to thrust, and although in the duel the edge has little chance against the point, I own that it is altogether different in a melee on horseback; especially as the point cannot penetrate armour, while a stout blow, well delivered with a strong arm, can break it in.

"Are you skilled in the exercises of the ring, Monsieur Philip?"

"Not at all. I have had no practise, whatever, in them. Except in some of the great houses, the tourney has gone quite out of fashion in England; and though I can ride a horse across country, I know nothing whatever of knightly exercises. My father is but a small proprietor and, up to the time I left England, I have been but a schoolboy."

"If all your schoolboys understand the use of their arms as you do," Maitre Charles said courteously, "it is no wonder that the English are terrible fighters."

"I do not say that," Philip said, smiling. "I have had the advantage of the best teaching, both English and French, to be had at Canterbury; and it would be a shame for me, indeed, if I had not learnt to defend myself."

A servant now entered, and said that the countess desired their presence, and they at once went to the apartment where the sisters were talking.

"What do you think, mother?" Francois said. "This cousin of mine, whom I had intended to patronize, turns out to be already a better swordsman than I am."

"Not better, madame," Philip said hastily. "We were a fair match, neither having touched the other."

"Philip is too modest, mother," Francois laughed. "Maitre Charles stopped us in time to save me from defeat. Why, he has a wrist like iron, this cousin of mine."

"We have done our best to have him well taught," Madame Vaillant said. "There were some good swordsmen among our Huguenot friends, and he has also had the best English teachers we could get for him. My husband always wished, particularly, that if he ever came over to visit our friends here, he should not be deficient in such matters."

"I feel a little crestfallen," the countess said. "I have been rather proud of Francois' skill as a swordsman, and I own that it is a little mortifying to find that Philip, who is two years younger, is already his match. Still, I am glad that it is so; for if they ride together into battle, I should wish that Philip should do honour to our race.

"Now, Philip, I have been hearing all about your mother's life, as well as that of your uncle and aunt. Now let us hear about your own, which must needs differ widely from that to which Francois has been accustomed. Your aunt says that your English schools differ altogether from ours. With us our sons are generally brought up at home, and are instructed by the chaplain, in Huguenot families; or by the priest in Catholic families; or else they go to religious seminaries, where they are taught what is necessary of books and Latin, being under strict supervision, and learning all other matters such as the use of arms after leaving school, or when at home with their families."

Philip gave an account of his school life, and its rough games and sports.

"But is it possible, Philip," the countess said in tones of horror, "that you used to wrestle and to fight? Fight with your arms and fists against rough boys, the sons of all sorts of common people?"

"Certainly I did, aunt, and it did me a great deal of good, and no harm so far as I know. All these rough sports strengthen the frame and give quickness and vigour, just the same as exercises with the sword do. I should never have been so tall and strong as I am now if, instead of going to an English school, I had been either, as you say, educated at home by a chaplain, or sent to be taught and looked after by priests. My mother did not like it at first, but she came to see that it was good for me. Besides, there is not the same difference between classes in England as there is in France. There is more independence in the lower and middle classes, and less haughtiness and pride in the upper, and I think that it is better so."

"It is the English custom, Emilie," her sister said; "and I can assure you that my husband and I have got very English, in some things. We do not love our country less, but we see that, in many respects, the English ways are better than ours; and we admire the independence of the people, every man respecting himself, though giving honour, but not lavishly, to those higher placed."

The countess shrugged her shoulders.

"We will not argue, Marie. At any rate, whatever the process, it has succeeded well with Philip."

The days passed quietly at the chateau. Before breakfast Philip spent an hour on horseback, learning to manage his horse by the pressure of knee or hand. This was the more easy, as both his horses had been thoroughly trained in the menage, and under the instruction of Captain Montpace, who had been Francois' teacher, he made rapid progress.

"It is much easier to teach the man than the horse," his instructor said, "although a horse learns readily enough, when its rider is a master of the art; but with horse and rider alike ignorant, it is a long business to get them to work together as if they were one, which is what should be. As both your horses know their work, they obey your motions, however slight; and you will soon be able to pass muster on their backs. But it would take months of patient teaching for you so to acquire the art of horsemanship as to be able to train an animal, yourself."

After the lesson was over, Francois and Philip would tilt at rings and go through other exercises in the courtyard. Breakfast over, they went hawking or hunting. Of the former sport Philip was entirely ignorant, and was surprised to learn how highly a knowledge of it was prized in France, and how

necessary it was considered as part of the education of a gentleman. Upon the other hand, his shooting with the bow and arrow astonished Francois; for the bow had never been a French weapon, and the crossbow was fast giving way to the arquebus; but few gentlemen troubled themselves to learn the use of either one or the other. The pistol, however, was becoming a recognized portion of the outfit of a cavalier in the field and, following Francois' advice, Philip practised with one steadily, until he became a fair shot.

"They are cowardly weapons," Francois said, "but for all that they are useful in battle. When you are surrounded by three or four pikemen, thrusting at you, it is a good thing to be able to disembarrass yourself of one or two of them. Besides, these German horsemen, of whom the Guises employ so many, all carry firearms; and the contest would be too uneven if we were armed only with the sword; though for my part I wish that all the governments of Europe would agree to do away with firearms of every description. They place the meanest footman upon the level of the bravest knight, and in the end will, it seems to me, reduce armies to the level of machines."

In the afternoons there were generally gatherings of Huguenot gentry, who came to discuss the situation, to exchange news, or to listen to the last rumours from Paris. No good had arisen from the Conference of Bayonne, and one by one the privileges of the Huguenots were being diminished.

The uprising of the Protestants of Holland was watched with the greatest interest by the Huguenots of France. It was known that several of the most influential Huguenot nobles had met, at Valery and at Chatillon, to discuss with the Prince of Conde and Admiral Coligny the question of again taking up arms in defence of their liberties. It was rumoured that the opinion of the majority was that the Huguenot standard should be again unfurled, and that this time there should be no laying down of their arms until freedom of worship was guaranteed to all; but that the admiral had used all his powers to persuade them that the time had not yet come, and that it was better to bear trials and persecutions, for a time, in order that the world might see they had not appealed to arms until driven to it by the failure of all other hope of redress of their grievances.

The elder men among the visitors at the chateau were of the admiral's opinion. The younger chafed at the delay. The position had indeed become intolerable. Protestant worship was absolutely forbidden, except in a few specified buildings near some of the large towns; and all Protestants, save those dwelling in these localities, were forced to meet secretly, and at the risk of their lives, for the purpose of worship. Those caught transgressing the law were thrown into prison, subjected to crushing fines, and even punished with torture and death.

"Better a thousand times to die with swords in our hands, in the open field, than thus tamely to see our brethren ill-treated and persecuted!" was the cry of the young men; and Philip, who from daily hearing tales of persecution and cruelty had become more and more zealous in the Huguenot cause, fully shared their feeling.

In the presence of the elders, however, the more ardent spirits were silent. At all times grave and sober in manner and word, the knowledge that a desperate struggle could not long be deferred, and the ever-increasing encroachments of the Catholics, added to the gravity of their demeanour. Sometimes those present broke up into groups, talking in an undertone. Sometimes the gathering took the form of a general council. Occasionally some fugitive minister, or a noble from some district where the persecution was particularly fierce, would be present; and their narratives would be listened to with stern faces by the elders, and with passionate indignation by the younger men.

In spite of the decrees, the countess still retained her chaplain and, before the meetings broke up, prayers were offered by him for their persecuted brethren, and for a speedy deliverance of those of the reformed religion from the cruel disabilities under which they laboured.

Services were held night and morning in the chateau. These were attended not only by all the residents, but by many of the farmers and their families. The countess had already received several warnings from the Catholic authorities of the province; but to these she paid no attention, and there were no forces available to enforce the decree in her case, as it would require nothing short of an army

to overcome the opposition that might be expected, joined as she would be by the other Huguenot gentry of the district.

Chapter 4: An Experiment

Marie Vaillant, after remaining six weeks at the chateau, returned to England; and Philip, with a party of twelve men, escorted her to La Rochelle. Her visit was cut short somewhat, at the end, by the imminence of the outbreak of hostilities, in which case she might have found a difficulty in traversing the country. Moreover, La Rochelle would probably be besieged, soon after the war began; for being both an important town and port, the Catholics would be anxious to obtain possession of it, and so cut off the Huguenots from escape to England, besides rendering it difficult for Elizabeth to send a force to their assistance.

"It has been a pleasant time," the countess said, on the morning of her departure; "and your presence has taken me back five-and-twenty years, Marie. I hope that when these troubles are past you will again come over, and spend a happier time with me. I was going to say that I will look well after Philip, but that I cannot do. He has cast his lot in with us, and must share our perils. I am greatly pleased with him, and I am glad that Francois will have him as a companion in arms. Francois is somewhat impulsive, and liable to be carried away by his ardour; and Philip, although the younger, is, it seems to me, the more thoughtful of the two. He is one I feel I can have confidence in. He is grave, yet merry; light hearted in a way, and yet, I think, prudent and cautious. It seems strange, but I shall part with Francois with the more comfort, in the thought that he has Philip with him.

"Don't come back more English than you are now, Marie; for truly you seem to me to have fallen in love with the ways of these islanders."

"I will try not to, Emilie; but I should not like the customs, did it not seem to me that they are better than my own. In England Protestants and Catholics live side by side in friendship, and there is no persecution of anyone for his religion; the Catholics who have suffered during the present reign have done so, not because they are Catholics, but because they plotted against the queen. Would that in France men would agree to worship, each in his own way, without rancour or animosity."

"Tell Lucie that I am very sorry she did not come over with you and Philip, and that it is only because you tell me how occupied she is that I am not furiously angry with her.

"Tell her, too," she went on earnestly, "that I feel she is one of us; still a Huguenot, a Frenchwoman, and one of our race, or she would never have allowed her only son to come over, to risk his life in our cause. I consider her a heroine, Marie. It is all very well for me, whose religion is endangered, whose friends are in peril, whose people are persecuted, to throw myself into the strife and to send Francois into the battle; but with her, working there with an invalid husband, and her heart, as it must be, wrapped up in her boy, it is splendid to let him come out here, to fight side by side with us for the faith. Whose idea was it first?"

"My husband's. Gaspard regards Philip almost in the light of a son. He is a rich man now, as I told you, and Philip will become his heir. Though he has no desire that he should settle in France, he wished him to take his place in our family here, to show himself worthy of his race, to become a brave soldier, to win credit and honour, and to take his place perhaps, some day, in the front rank of the gentry of Kent."

"They were worldly motives, Marie, and our ministers would denounce them as sinful; but I cannot do so. I am a Huguenot, but I am a countess of France, a member of one noble family and married into another; and though, I believe, as staunch a Huguenot, and as ready to lay down my life for our religion as any man or woman in France, yet I cannot give up all the traditions of my rank, and hold that fame and honour and reputation and courage are mere snares. But such were not Lucie's feelings in letting him go, I will be bound; nor yours."

"Mine partly," Marie said. "I am the wife now of a trader, though one honoured in his class; but have still a little of your feelings, Emilie, and remember that the blood of the De Moulins runs in Philip's veins, and hope that he will do credit to it. I don't think that Lucie has any such feelings. She is

wrapt up in duty–first her duty to God, secondly her duty to her crippled husband, whom she adores; and I think she regarded the desire of Philip to come out to fight in the Huguenot ranks as a call that she ought not to oppose. I know she was heartbroken at parting with him, and yet she never showed it.

"Lucie is a noble character. Everyone who knows her loves her. I believe the very farm labourers would give their lives for her, and a more utterly unselfish creature never lived."

"Well, she must take a holiday and come over with you, next time you come, Marie. I hope that these troubles may soon be over, though that is a thing one cannot foretell."

After seeing his aunt safely on board a ship at La Rochelle, Philip prepared to return to the chateau. He and his aunt had stayed two nights at the house of Maitre Bertram, and on his returning there the latter asked:

"Have you yet found a suitable servant, Monsieur Philip?"

"No; my cousin has been inquiring among the tenantry, but the young men are all bent on fighting, and indeed there are none of them who would make the sort of servant one wants in a campaign–a man who can not only groom horses and clean arms, but who knows something of war, can forage for provisions, cook, wait on table, and has intelligence. One wants an old soldier; one who has served in the same capacity, if possible."

"I only asked because I have had a man pestering me to speak to you about him. He happened to see you ride off, when you were here last, and apparently became impressed with the idea that you would be a good master. He is a cousin of one of my men, and heard I suppose from him that you were likely to return. He has been to me three or four times. I have told him again and again that he was not the sort of man I could recommend, but he persisted in begging me to let him see you himself."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Well, to tell you the truth he is a sort of ne'er-do-well," the merchant laughed. "I grant that he has not had much chance. His father died when he was a child, and his mother soon married again. There is no doubt that he was badly treated at home, and when he was twelve he ran away. He was taken back and beaten, time after time; but in a few hours he was always off again, and at last they let him go his own way. There is nothing he hasn't turned his hand to. First he lived in the woods, I fancy; and they say he was the most arrant young poacher in the district, though he was so cunning that he was never caught. At last he had to give that up. Then he fished for a bit, but he couldn't stick to it. He has been always doing odd jobs, turning his hand to whatever turned up. He worked in a shipyard for a bit, then I took him as a sort of errand boy and porter. He didn't stop long, and the next I heard of him he was servant at a priest's. He has been a dozen other things, and for the last three or four months he has been in the stables where your horse was standing. I fancy you saw him there. Some people think he is half a fool, but I don't agree with them; he is as sharp as a needle, to my mind. But, as I say, he has never had a fair chance. A fellow like that, without friends, is sure to get roughly treated."

"Is he a young man of about one or two and twenty?" Philip asked. "I remember a fellow of about that age brought out the horse, and as he seemed to me a shrewd fellow, and had evidently taken great pains in grooming Robin, I gave him a crown. I thought he needed it, for his clothes were old and tattered, and he looked as if he hadn't had a hearty meal for a week.

"Well, Maitre Bertram, can you tell me if, among his other occupations, he has ever been charged with theft?"

"No, I have never heard that brought against him."

"Why did he leave you?"

"It was from no complaint as to his honesty. Indeed, he left of his own accord, after a quarrel with one of the men, who was, as far as I could learn, in the wrong. I did not even hear that he had left until a week after, and it was too late then to go thoroughly into the matter. Boys are always troublesome and, as everyone had warned me that Pierre would turn out badly, I gave the matter but little thought at the time. Of course, you will not think of taking the luckless rascal as your servant."

"I don't know. I will have a talk with him, anyhow. A fellow like that would certainly be handy; but whether he could be relied upon to behave discreetly and soberly, and not to bring me into discredit, is a different matter. Is he here now?"

"He is below. Shall I send him up here to you?"

"No, I will go down and see him in the courtyard. If he comes up here he would be, perhaps, awkward and unnatural, and would not speak so freely as he would in the open air."

The merchant shook his head.

"If you take the vagabond, remember, Monsieur Philip, that it is altogether against my advice. I would never have spoken to you about him, if I had imagined for a moment that you would think of taking him. A fellow who has never kept any employment for two months, how could he be fit for a post of confidence, and be able to mix as your body servant with the households of honourable families?"

"But you said yourself, Maitre Bertram, that he has never had a fair chance. Well, I will see him, anyhow."

He descended into the courtyard, and could not help smiling as his eye fell upon a figure seated on the horse block. He was looking out through the gateway, and did not at first see Philip. The expression of his face was dull and almost melancholy, but as Philip's eye fell on him his attention was attracted by some passing object in the street. His face lit up with amusement. His lips twitched and his eyes twinkled. A moment later and the transient humour passed, and the dull, listless expression again stole over his face.

"Pierre!" Philip said sharply.

The young fellow started to his feet, as if shot upwards by a spring; and as he turned and saw who had addressed him, took off his cap and, bowing, stood twisting it round in his fingers.

"Monsieur Bertram tells me you want to come with me as a servant, Pierre; but when I asked him about you, he does not give you such a character as one would naturally require in a confidential servant. Is there anyone who will speak for you?"

"Not a soul," the young man said doggedly; "and yet, monsieur, I am not a bad fellow. What can a man do, when he has not a friend in the world? He picks up a living as he can, but everybody looks at him with suspicion. There is no friend to take his part, and so people vent their ill humours upon him, till the time comes when he revolts at the injustice and strikes back; and then he has to begin it all over again, somewhere else.

"And yet, sir, I know that I could be faithful and true to anyone who would not treat me like a dog. You spoke kindly to me in the stable, and gave me a crown. No one had ever given me a crown before. But I cared less for that than for the way you spoke. Then I saw you start, and you spoke pleasantly to your men; and I said to myself, 'that is the master I would serve, if he would let me.'

"Try me, sir, and if you do not find me faithful, honest, and true to you, tell your men to string me up to a bough. I do not drink, and have been in so many services that, ragged as you see me, I can yet behave so as not to do discredit to you."

Philip hesitated. There was no mistaking the earnestness with which the youth spoke.

"Are you a Catholic or a Huguenot?" he asked.

"I know nothing of the difference between them," Pierre replied. "How should I? No one has ever troubled about me, one way or the other. When my mother lived I went to Mass with her; since then I have gone nowhere. I have had no Sunday clothes. I know that the bon Dieu has taken care of me, or I should have died of hunger, long ago. The priest I was with used to tell me that the Huguenots were worse than heathen; but if that were so, why should they let themselves be thrown into prison, and even be put to death, rather than stay away from their churches? As for me, I know nothing about it. They say monsieur is a Huguenot, and if he were good enough to take me into his service, of course I should be a Huguenot."

"That is a poor reason, Pierre," Philip said smiling. "Still, you may find better reasons, in time. However, you are not a Catholic, which is the principal thing, at present.

"Well, I will try you, I think. Perhaps, as you say, you have never had a fair chance yet, and I will give you one. I believe what you say, that you will be faithful."

The young fellow's face lit up with pleasure.

"I will be faithful, sir. If I were otherwise, I should deserve to be cut in pieces."

"As for wages," Philip said, "I will pay you what you deserve. We will settle that when we see how we get on together. Now follow me, and I will get some suitable clothes for you."

There was no difficulty about this. Clothes were not made to fit closely in those days, and Philip soon procured a couple of suits suitable for the serving man of a gentleman of condition. One was a riding suit; with high boots, doublet, and trunks of sober colour and of a strong tough material; a leather sword belt and sword; and a low hat thickly lined and quilted, and capable of resisting a heavy blow. The other suit was for wear in the house. It was of dark green cloth of a much finer texture than the riding suit; with cloth stockings of the same colour, coming up above the knee, and then meeting the trunks or puffed breeches. A small cap with turned up brim, furnished with a few of the tail feathers of a black cock, completed the costume; a dagger being worn in the belt instead of the sword. Four woollen shirts, a pair of shoes, and a cloak were added to the purchases; which were placed in a valise, to be carried behind the saddle.

"Is there any house where you can change your clothes, Pierre? Of course you could do so at Monsieur Bertram's, but some of the men I brought with me will be there, and it would be just as well that they did not see you in your present attire."

"I can change at the stables, sir, if you will trust me with the clothes."

"Certainly, I will trust you. If I trust you sufficiently to take you as my servant, I can surely trust you in a matter like this. Do you know of anyone who has a stout nag for sale?"

Pierre knew of several and, giving Philip an address, the latter was not long in purchasing one, with saddle and bridle complete. He ordered this to be sent, at once, to the stables where Pierre had been employed, with directions that it was to be handed over to his servant.

It was one o'clock in the day when Madame Vaillant embarked, and it was late in the afternoon before Philip returned to Monsieur Bertram's house.

"What have you done about that vagabond Pierre?"

"I have hired him," Philip said.

"You don't say that you have taken him, after what I have told you about him!" the merchant exclaimed.

"I have, indeed. He pleaded hard for a trial, and I am going to give him one. I believe that he will turn out a useful fellow. I am sure that he is shrewd, and he ought to be full of expedients. As to his appearance, good food and decent clothes will make him another man. I think he will turn out a merry fellow, when he is well fed and happy; and I must say, Maitre Bertram, that I am not fond of long faces. Lastly, I believe that he will be faithful."

"Well, well, well, I wash my hands of it altogether, Monsieur Philip. I am sorry I spoke to you about him, but I never for a moment thought you would take him. If harm comes of it, don't blame me."

"I will hold you fully acquitted," Philip laughed. "I own that I have taken quite a fancy to him, and believe that he will turn out well."

An hour later one of the domestics came in, with word that Monsieur Philip's servant was below, and wished to know if he had any commands for him.

"Tell him to come up," Philip said, and a minute later Pierre entered.

He was dressed in his dark green costume. He had had his hair cut, and presented an appearance so changed that Philip would hardly have known him.

"By my faith!" the merchant said, "you have indeed transformed him. He is not a bad-looking varlet, now that he has got rid of that tangled crop of hair."

Pierre bowed low at the compliment.

"Fine feathers make fine birds, Monsieur Bertram," replied Pierre. "It is the first time I have had the opportunity of proving the truth of the proverb. I am greatly indebted to monsieur, for recommending me to my master."

"It is not much recommendation you got from me, Pierre," the merchant said bluntly; "for a more troublesome young scamp I never had in my warehouse. Still, as I told Monsieur Philip, I think everything has been against you; and I do hope, now that this English gentleman has given you a chance, that you will take advantage of it."

"I mean to, sir," the young fellow said earnestly, and without a trace of the mocking smile with which he had first spoken. "If I do not give my master satisfaction, it will not be for want of trying. I shall make mistakes at first–it will all be strange to me, but I feel sure that he will make allowances. I can at least promise that he will find me faithful and devoted."

"Has your horse arrived, Pierre?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him watered and fed before I came out. Is it your wish that I should go round to the stables where your horse and those of your troop are, and take charge of your horse at once?"

"No, Pierre; the men will look after him, as usual. We will start at six in the morning. Be at the door, on horseback, at that hour."

Pierre bowed and withdrew.

"I do not feel so sure as I did that you have made a bad bargain, Monsieur Philip. As far as appearances go, at any rate, he would pass muster. Except that his cheeks want filling out a bit, he is a nimble, active-looking young fellow; and with that little moustache of his, and his hair cut short, he is by no means ill looking. I really should not have known him. I think at present he means what he says, though whether he will stick to it is another matter, altogether."

"I think he will stick to it," Philip said quietly. "Putting aside what he says about being faithful to me, he is shrewd enough to see that it is a better chance than he is ever likely to have, again, of making a start in life. He has been leading a dog's life, ever since he was a child; and to be well fed, and well clothed, and fairly treated will be a wonderful change for him.

"My only fear is that he may get into some scrape at the chateau. I believe that he is naturally full of fun, and fun is a thing that the Huguenots, with all their virtues, hardly appreciate."

"A good thrashing will tame him of that," the merchant said.

Philip laughed.

"I don't think I shall be driven to try that. I don't say that servants are never thrashed in England, but I have not been brought up among the class who beat their servants. I think I shall be able to manage him without that. If I can't, we must part.

"I suppose there is no doubt, Monsieur Bertram, how La Rochelle will go when the troubles begin?"

"I think not. All preparations are made on our part and, as soon as the news comes that Conde and the Admiral have thrown their flags to the wind, we shall seize the gates, turn out all who oppose us, and declare for the cause. I do not think it can be much longer delayed. I sent a trusty servant yesterday to fetch back my daughter; who, as I told you, has been staying with a sister of mine, five or six leagues away. I want to have her here before the troubles break out. It will be no time for damsels to be wandering about the country, when swords are once out of their scabbards."

The next morning the little troop started early from La Rochelle, Pierre riding gravely behind Philip. The latter presently called him up to his side.

"I suppose you know the country round here well?"

"Every foot of it. I don't think that there is a pond in which I have not laid my lines, not a streamlet of which I do not know every pool, not a wood that I have not slept in, nor a hedge where I

have not laid snares for rabbits. I could find my way about as well by night as by day; and you know, sir, that may be of use, if you ever want to send a message into the town when the Guises have got their troops lying outside."

Philip looked sharply at him.

"Oh, you think it likely that the Guises will soon be besieging La Rochelle?"

"Anyone who keeps his ears open can learn that," Pierre said quietly. "I haven't troubled myself about these matters. It made no difference to me whether the Huguenots or the Catholics were in the saddle; still, one doesn't keep one's ears closed, and people talk freely enough before me.

"'Pierre does not concern himself with these things. The lad is half a fool; he pays no attention to what is being said.'

"So they would go on talking, and I would go on rubbing down a horse, or eating my black bread with a bit of cheese or an onion, or whatever I might be about, and looking as if I did not even know they were there. But I gathered that the Catholics think that the Guises, and Queen Catherine, and Philip of Spain, and the Pope are going to put an end to the Huguenots altogether. From those on the other side, I learned that the Huguenots will take the first step in La Rochelle, and that one fine morning the Catholics are likely to find themselves bundled out of it. Then it doesn't need much sense to see that, ere long, we shall be having a Catholic army down here to retake the place; that is, if the Huguenot lords are not strong enough to stop them on their way."

"And you think the Catholics are not on their guard at all?"

"Not they," Pierre said contemptuously. "They have been strengthening the walls and building fresh ones, thinking that an attack might come from without from the Huguenots; and all the time the people of that religion in the town have been laughing in their sleeves, and pretending to protest against being obliged to help at the new works, but really paying and working willingly. Why, they even let the magistrates arrest and throw into prison a number of their party, without saying a word, so that the priests and the commissioners should think they have got it entirely their own way. It has been fun watching it all, and I had made up my mind to take to the woods again, directly it began. I had no part in the play, and did not wish to run any risk of getting a ball through my head; whether from a Catholic or a Huguenot arquebus.

"Now, of course, it is all different. Monsieur is a Huguenot, and therefore so am I. It is the Catholic bullets that will be shot at me and, as no one likes to be shot at, I shall soon hate the Catholics cordially, and shall be ready to do them any ill turn that you may desire."

"And you think that if necessary, Pierre, you could carry a message into the town, even though the Catholics were camped round it."

Pierre nodded.

"I have never seen a siege, master, and don't know how close the soldiers might stand round a town; but I think that if a rabbit could get through I could and, if I could not get in by land, I could manage somehow to get in by water."

"But such matters as this do not come within your service, Pierre. Your duties are to wait on me when not in the field, to stand behind my chair at meals, and to see that my horses are well attended to by the stable varlets. When we take the field you will not be wanted to fight, but will look after my things; will buy food and cook it, get dry clothes ready for me to put on if I come back soaked with rain, and keep an eye upon my horses. Two of the men-at-arms will have special charge of them. They will groom and feed them. But if they are away with me, they cannot see after getting forage for them; and it will be for you to get hold of that, either by buying it from the villagers or employing a man to cut it. At any rate, to see that there is food for them, as well as for me, when the day's work is over."

"I understand that, master; but there are times when a lad who can look like a fool, but is not altogether one, can carry messages and make himself very useful, if he does not place over much value on his life. When you want anything done, no matter what it is, you have only to tell me, and it will be done, if it is possible."

In the afternoon of the second day after starting, they approached the chateau. The old sergeant of the band who, with two of his men, was riding a hundred yards ahead, checked his horse and rode back to Philip.

"There is something of importance doing, Monsieur Philip. The flag is flying over the chateau. I have not seen it hoisted before since my lord's death, and I can make out horsemen galloping to and from the gates."

"We will gallop on then," Philip said, and in ten minutes they arrived.

Francois ran down the steps as Philip alighted in the courtyard.

"I am glad you have come, Philip. I had already given orders for a horseman to ride to meet you, and tell you to hurry on. The die is cast, at last. There was a meeting yesterday at the Admiral's. A messenger came to my mother from my cousin, Francois de la Noue. The Admiral and Conde had received news, from a friend at court, that there had been a secret meeting of the Royal Council; and that it had been settled that the Prince should be thrown into prison, and Coligny executed. The Swiss troops were to be divided between Paris, Orleans, and Poitiers. The edict of toleration was to be annulled, and instant steps taken to suppress Huguenot worship by the sternest measures.

"In spite of this news the Admiral still urged patience; but his brother, D'Andelot, took the lead among the party of action; and pointed out that if they waited until they, the leaders, were all dragged away to prison, resistance by the Huguenots would be hopeless. Since the last war over three thousand Huguenots had been put to violent deaths. Was this number to be added to indefinitely? Were they to wait until their wives and children were in the hands of the executioners, before they moved? His party were in the majority, and the Admiral reluctantly yielded.

"Then there was a discussion as to the steps to be taken. Some proposed the seizure of Orleans and other large towns; and that, with these in their hands, they should negotiate with the court for the dismissal of the Swiss troops; as neither toleration nor peace could be hoped for, as long as this force was at the disposal of the Cardinal of Lorraine and his brothers.

"This council, however, was overruled. It was pointed out that, at the beginning of the last war, the Huguenots held fully a hundred towns, but nearly all were wrested from their hands before its termination. It was finally resolved that all shall be prepared for striking a heavy blow, and that the rising shall be arranged to take place, throughout France, on the 29th of September. That an army shall take the field, disperse the Swiss, seize if possible the Cardinal of Lorraine; and at any rate petition the king for a redress of grievances, for a removal of the Cardinal from his councils, and for sending all foreign troops out of the kingdom.

"We have, you see, a fortnight to prepare. We have just sent out messengers to all our Huguenot friends, warning them that the day is fixed, that their preparations are to be made quietly, and that we will notify them when the hour arrives. All are exhorted to maintain an absolute silence upon the subject, while seeing that their tenants and retainers are, in all respects, ready to take the field."

"Why have you hoisted your flag, Francois? That will only excite attention."

"It is my birthday, Philip, and the flag is supposed to be raised in my honour. This will serve as an excuse for the assemblage of our friends, and the gathering of the tenants. It has been arranged, as you know, that I, and of course you, are to ride with De la Noue, who is a most gallant gentleman; and that our contingent is to form part of his command.

"I am heartily glad this long suspense is over, and that at last we are going to meet the treachery of the court by force. Too long have we remained passive, while thousands of our friends have, in defiance of the edicts, been dragged to prison and put to death. Fortunately the court is, as it was before the last war, besotted with the belief that we are absolutely powerless; and we have every hope of taking them by surprise."

"I also am glad that war has been determined upon," Philip said. "Since I have arrived here, I have heard nothing but tales of persecution and cruelty. I quite agree with you that the time has

come when the Huguenots must either fight for their rights; abandon the country altogether and go into exile, as so many have already done; or renounce their religion."

"I see you have a new servant, Philip. He is an active, likely-looking lad, but rather young. He can know nothing of campaigning."

"I believe he is a very handy fellow, with plenty of sense and shrewdness; and if he can do the work, I would rather have a man of that age than an older one. It is different with you. You are Francois, Count de Laville; and your servant, whatever his age, would hold you in respect. I am younger and of far less consequence, and an old servant might want to take me under his tuition. Moreover, if there is hard work to be done for me, I would rather have a young fellow like this doing it than an older man."

"You are always making out that you are a boy, Philip. You don't look it, and you are going to play a man's part."

"I mean to play it as far as I can, Francois; but that does not really make me a day older."

"Well, mind, not a word to a soul as to the day fixed on."

For the next fortnight the scene at the chateau was a busy one. Huguenot gentlemen came and went. The fifty men-at-arms who were to accompany Francois were inspected, and their arms and armour served out to them. The tenantry came up in small parties, and were also provided with weapons, offensive and defensive, from the armoury; so that they might be in readiness to assemble for the defence of the chateau, at the shortest notice. All were kept in ignorance as to what was really going on; but it was felt that a crisis was approaching, and there was an expression of grim satisfaction on the stern faces of the men, that showed they rejoiced at the prospect of a termination to the long passive suffering, which they had borne at the hands of the persecutors of their faith. Hitherto they themselves had suffered but little, for the Huguenots were strong in the south of Poitou; while in Niort–the nearest town to the chateau–the Huguenots, if not in an absolute majority, were far too strong to be molested by the opposite party. Nevertheless here, and in all other towns, public worship was suspended; and it was only in the chateaux and castles of the nobles that the Huguenots could gather to worship without fear of interruption or outrage.

There was considerable debate as to whether Francois' troop should march to join the Admiral, at Chatillon-sur-Loing; or should proceed to the southeast, where parties were nearly equally balanced; but the former course was decided upon. The march itself would be more perilous; but as Conde, the Admiral, and his brother D'Andelot would be with the force gathered there, it was the most important point; and moreover Francois de la Noue would be there.

So well was the secret of the intended movement kept that the French court, which was at Meaux, had no idea of the danger that threatened; and when a report of the intentions of the Huguenots came from the Netherlands, it was received with incredulity. A spy was, however, sent to Chatillon to report upon what the Admiral was doing; and he returned with the news that he was at home, and was busily occupied in superintending his vintage.

On the evening of the 26th the troop, fifty strong, mustered in the courtyard of the chateau. All were armed with breast and back pieces, and steel caps, and carried lances as well as swords. In addition to this troop were Philip's four men-at-arms; and four picked men who were to form Francois' bodyguard, one of them carrying his banner. He took as his body servant a man who had served his father in that capacity. He and Pierre wore lighter armour than the others, and carried no lances.

Francois and Philip were both in complete armour; Philip donning, for the first time, that given to him by his uncle. Neither of them carried lances, but were armed with swords, light battle-axes, and pistols.

Before mounting, service was held. The pastor offered up prayers for the blessing of God upon their arms, and for his protection over each and all of them in the field. The countess herself made them a stirring address, exhorting them to remember that they fought for the right to worship God

unmolested, and for the lives of those dear to them. Then she tenderly embraced her son and Philip, the trumpets sounded to horse, and the party rode out from the gates of the chateau.

As soon as they were away, the two young leaders took off their helmets and handed them to their attendants, who rode behind them. Next to these came their eight bodyguards, who were followed by the captain and his troop.

"It may be that this armour will be useful, on the day of battle," Philip said; "but at present it seems to me, Francois, that I would much rather be without it."

"I quite agree with you, Philip. If we had only to fight with gentlemen armed with swords, I would gladly go into battle unprotected; but against men with lances, one needs a defence. However, I do not care so much, now that I have got rid of the helmet; which, in truth, is a heavy burden."

"Methinks, Francois, that armour will ere long be abandoned, now that arquebuses and cannon are coming more and more into use. Against them they give no protection; and it were better, methinks, to have lightness and freedom of action, than to have the trouble of wearing all this iron stuff merely as a protection against lances. You have been trained to wear armour, and therefore feel less inconvenience; but I have never had as much as a breast plate on before, and I feel at present as if I had almost lost the use of my arms. I think that, at any rate, I shall speedily get rid of these arm pieces. The body armour I don't so much mind, now that I am fairly in the saddle.

"The leg pieces are not as bad as those on the arms. I was scarcely able to walk in them; still, now that I am mounted, I do not feel them much. But if I am to be of any use in a melee, I must have my arms free, and trust to my sword to protect them."

"I believe that some have already given them up, Philip; and if you have your sleeves well wadded and quilted, I think you might, if you like, give up the armour. The men-at-arms are not so protected, and it is only when you meet a noble, in full armour, that you would be at a disadvantage."

"I don't think it would be a disadvantage; for I could strike twice, with my arms free, to once with them so confined."

"There is one thing, you will soon become accustomed to the armour."

"Not very soon, I fancy, Francois. You know, you have been practising in it almost since you were a child; and yet you admit that you feel a great difference. Still, I daresay as the novelty wears off I shall get accustomed to it, to some extent."

Chapter 5: Taking The Field

A guide thoroughly acquainted with the country rode ahead of the party, carrying a lantern fixed at the back of his saddle. They had, after leaving the chateau, begun to mount the lofty range of hills behind. The road crossing these was a mere track, and they were glad when they began to descend on the other side. They crossed the Clain river some ten miles above Poitiers, a few miles farther forded the Vienne, crossed the Gartempe at a bridge at the village of Montmorillon and, an hour later, halted in a wood, just as daylight was breaking, having ridden nearly fifty miles since leaving the chateau.

So far they had kept to the south of the direct course, in order to cross the rivers near their sources. Every man carried provisions for himself and his horse and, as soon as they had partaken of a hearty meal, the armour was unstrapped, and all threw themselves down for a long sleep; sentries being first placed, with orders to seize any peasants who might enter the wood to gather fuel. With the exception of the sentries, who were changed every hour, the rest slept until late in the afternoon; then the horses were again fed and groomed, and another meal was eaten.

At sunset the armour was buckled on again, and they started. They crossed the Creuse at the bridge of Argenton about midnight and, riding through La Chatre, halted before morning in a wood two miles from Saint Amand. Here the day was passed as the previous one had been.

"Tell me, Francois," Philip said, as they were waiting for the sun to go down, "something about your cousin De la Noue. As we are to ride with him, it is as well to know something about him. How old is he?"

"He is thirty-six, and there is no braver gentleman in France. As you know, he is of a Breton family, one of the most illustrious of the province. He is connected with the great houses of Chateau-Briant and Matignon. As a boy he was famous for the vigour and strength that he showed in warlike exercises; but was in other respects, I have heard, of an indolent disposition, and showed no taste for reading or books of any kind. As usual among the sons of noble families, he went up to the court of Henry the Second as a page; and when there became seized with an ardour for study, especially that of ancient and modern writers who treated on military subjects. As soon as he reached manhood he joined the army in Piedmont, under Marshal de Brissac, that being the best military school of the time.

"On his return he showed the singular and affectionate kindness of his nature. His mother, unfortunately, while he was away, had become infected with the spirit of gambling; and the king, who had noted the talent and kind disposition of the young page, thought to do him a service by preventing his mother squandering the estates in play. He therefore took the management of her affairs entirely out of her hands, appointing a royal officer to look after them. Now most young men would have rejoiced at becoming masters of their estates; but the first thing that Francois did, on his return, was to go to the king and solicit, as a personal favour, that his mother should be reinstated in the management of her estates. This was granted, but a short time afterwards she died. De La Noue retired from court, and settled in Brittany upon his estates, which were extensive.

"Shortly afterwards D'Andelot, Coligny's brother, who was about to espouse Mademoiselle De Rieux, the richest heiress in Brittany, paid a visit there. He had lately embraced our faith, and was bent upon bringing over others to it; and he brought down with him to Brittany a famous preacher named Cormel. His preaching in the chateau attracted large numbers of people, and although Brittany is perhaps the most Catholic province in France, he made many converts. Among these was De La Noue, then twenty-seven years old. Recognizing his talent and influence, D'Andelot had made special efforts to induce him to join the ranks of the Huguenots, and succeeded.

"My cousin, who previous to that had, I believe, no special religious views, became a firm Huguenot. As you might expect with such a man, he is in no way a fanatic, and does not hold the

extreme views that we have learned from the preachers of Geneva. He is a staunch Huguenot, but he is gentle, courtly, and polished; and has, I believe, the regard of men of both parties. He is a personal friend of the Guises, and was appointed by them as one of the group of nobles who accompanied Marie Stuart to Scotland.

"When the war broke out in 1562, after the massacre of Vassy, he joined the standard of Conde. He fought at Dreux, and distinguished himself by assisting the Admiral to draw off our beaten army in good order. The assassination of Francois de Guise, as you know, put an end to that war. De la Noue bitterly regretted the death of Guise and, after peace was made, retired to his estates in Brittany, where he has lived quietly for the last four years.

"I have seen him several times, because he has other estates in Poitou, within a day's ride of us. I have never seen a man I admire so much. He is all for peace, though he is a distinguished soldier. While deeply religious, he has yet the manners of a noble of the court party. He has no pride, and he is loved by the poor as well as by the rich. He would have done anything to have avoided war; but you will see that, now the war has begun, he will be one of our foremost leaders. I can tell you, Philip, I consider myself fortunate indeed that I am going to ride in the train of so brave and accomplished a gentleman."

During the day they learned, from a peasant, of a ford crossing the Cher, two or three miles below Saint Amand. Entering a village near the crossing place, they found a peasant who was willing, for a reward, to guide them across the country to Briare, on the Loire–their first guide had returned from their first halting place–and the peasant, being placed on a horse behind a man-at-arms, took the lead. Their pace was much slower than it had been the night before, and it was almost daybreak when they passed the bridge at Briare, having ridden over forty miles. They rode two or three miles into the mountains after crossing the Loire, and then halted.

"We must give the horses twenty-four hours here," Francois said. "I don't think it is above twenty miles on to Chatillon-sur-Loing; but it is all through the hills, and it is of no use arriving there with the horses so knocked up as to be useless for service. We have done three tremendous marches, and anyhow, we shall be there long before the majority of the parties from the west and south can arrive. The Admiral and Conde will no doubt be able to gather sufficient strength, from Champagne and the north of Burgundy, for his purpose of taking the court by surprise.

"I am afraid there is but little chance of their succeeding. It is hardly possible that so many parties of Huguenots can have been crossing the country in all directions to the Admiral's, without an alarm being given. Meaux is some sixty miles from Chatillon, and if the court get the news only three or four hours before Conde arrives there, they will be able to get to Paris before he can cut them off."

In fact, even while they were speaking, the court was in safety. The Huguenots of Champagne had their rendezvous at Rosoy, a little more than twenty miles from Meaux, and they began to arrive there in the afternoon of the 28th. The Prince of Conde, who was awaiting them, feeling sure that the news of the movement must, in a few hours at any rate, be known at Meaux, marched for Lagny on the Mane, established himself there late in the evening, and seized the bridge. The news however had, as he feared, already reached the court; and messages had been despatched in all haste to order up six thousand Swiss troops, who were stationed at Chateau-Thierry, thirty miles higher up the Maine.

During the hours that elapsed before their arrival, the court was in a state of abject alarm, but at one o'clock the Swiss arrived; and two hours later the court set out, under their protection, for Paris. The Prince of Conde, who had with him but some four hundred gentlemen, for the most part armed only with swords, met the force as it passed by Lagny. He engaged in a slight skirmish with it; but being unable, with his lightly-armed followers, to effect anything against the solid body of the Swiss mountaineers, armed with their long pikes, he fell back to await reinforcements; and the court reached Paris in safety.

A messenger had arrived at Chatillon with the news when Francois and Philip rode in. The castle gate stood open. Numbers of Huguenot gentlemen were standing in excited groups, discussing the news.

"There is my cousin De la Noue!" Francois exclaimed, as he alighted from his horse. "This is good fortune. I was wondering what we should do, if we did not find him here;" and he made his way to where a singularly handsome gentleman was talking with several others.

"Ah, Francois, is that you? Well arrived, indeed!

"Gentlemen, this is my cousin and namesake, Francois de Laville. He has ridden across France to join us. Is that your troop, Francois, entering the gate now? Ah, yes, I see your banner.

"By my faith, it is the best accoutred body we have seen yet. They make a brave show with their armour and lances. The countess has indeed shown her goodwill right worthily, and it is no small credit to you that you should have brought them across from the other side of Poitou, and yet have arrived here before many who live within a few leagues of the castle.

"And who is this young gentleman with you?"

"It is my cousin, Philip Fletcher, son of my mother's sister Lucie. I spoke to you of his coming to us, when you were at Laville three months since. He has come over in order that he may venture his life on behalf of our religion and family."

"I am glad to welcome you, young sir. We are, you see, connections; I being Philip's first cousin on his father's side, and you on that of his mother. Your spirit in coming over here shows that you inherit the bravery of your mother's race, and I doubt not that we shall find that the mixture with the sturdy stock of England will have added to its qualities. Would that your queen would but take her proper place, as head of a league of the Protestants of Europe. Our cause would then be well-nigh won, without the need of striking a blow."

"Is it true, cousin, that the court has escaped to Paris?"

"Yes. I would that Conde had had but a few hours longer, before they took the alarm. Another day, and he would have had such a gathering as it would have puzzled the Swiss to have got through. His forces were doubled yesterday, and eight hundred have ridden forth from here this morning to join him.

"I myself, though I made all speed, arrived but two hours since; and shall, with all who come in this evening, ride forward tomorrow. The Admiral and his brother, the Cardinal of Chatillon, will go with us. D'Andelot is already with Conde.

"Now, as your troop is to ride with mine, I will see that they are disposed for the night together, and that their wants are attended to. My men have picketed their horses just outside the castle moat; for, as you see, we are crowded here with gentlemen and their personal followers, and it would be impossible to make room for all. I will take your officer to the seneschal, who will see that your men are provided with bread, meat, and wine.

"Ah, Captain Montpace, you are in command of the troop, I see. I thought the countess would send so experienced a soldier with them, and I am proud to have such a well-appointed troop behind me. None so well armed and orderly have yet arrived. My own at present are forty strong, and have, like you, made their way across France from Poitou.

"I could not bring my Bretons," he said, turning to Francois. "The Huguenots there are but a handful among the Catholics. Happily on my estates they are good friends together, but I could not call away men from their homes, at a time like this.

"Now, Captain Montpace, I will show you where your men are to bivouac, next to my own. Then, if you will come with me to the seneschal, rations shall be served out to them. Are your horses fit for another journey?"

"They will be by tomorrow morning, Count. They have only come from this side of Briare this morning, but though the journey is not long the road is heavy. They had twenty-four hours' rest before that, which they needed sorely, having travelled from Laville in three days."

"Draw a good supply of forage for them from the magazines," De la Noue said. "See that the saddlebags are well filled in the morning. There is another heavy day's work before them, and then they can take a good rest."

Francois and Philip accompanied the troop, and waited until they saw that they were supplied with provisions and forage, and with straw for lying down on; then they re-entered the castle. De la Noue presented them to many of his friends, and then took them in to the Admiral.

He quite fulfilled the anticipations that Philip had formed of him. He was of tall figure, with a grave but kindly face. He was dressed entirely in black, with puffed trunks, doublet to match, and a large turned-down collar. As was usual, he wore over his shoulders a loose jacket with a very high collar, the empty sleeves hanging down on either side. When riding, the arms were thrust into these. He wore a low soft cap with a narrow brim all round.

The expression of his face, with its short pointed beard, moustache, and closely trimmed whiskers, was melancholy. The greatest captain of his age, he was more reluctant than any of his followers to enter upon civil war; and the fact that he felt that it was absolutely necessary, to save Protestantism from being extinguished in blood, in no way reconciled him to it.

He received Francois and his cousin kindly.

"I am glad," he said to the former, "to see the representative of the Lavilles here. Your father was a dear friend of mine, and fell fighting bravely by my side. I should have been glad to have had you riding among my friends; but it is better still for you to be with your cousin, De la Noue, who is far more suitable as a leader and guide for youth than I am. You can follow no better example.

"I am glad also," he said, turning to Philip, "to have another representative of the old family of the De Moulins here; and to find that, though transplanted to England, it still retains its affection for France. I trust that, ere long, I may have many of your countrymen fighting by my side. We have the same interests and, if the Protestant nations would unite, the demand for the right of all men, Catholic and Protestant, to worship according to their consciences could no longer be denied. I regret that your queen does not permit free and open worship to her Catholic subjects, since her not doing so affords some sort of excuse to Catholic kings and princes. Still, I know that this law is not put rigidly into force, and that the Catholics do, in fact, exercise the rights of their religion without hindrance or persecution; and above all, that there is no violent ill will between the people of the two religions. Would it were so here.

"Were it not that you are going to ride with my good friend here, I would have said a few words to you; praying you to remember that you are fighting, not for worldly credit and honour, but for a holy cause, and it behoves you to bear yourselves gravely and seriously. But no such advice is needed to those who come under his influence."

Leaving the Count de la Noue in conversation with the Admiral, Francois and Philip made their way to the hall; where the tables were laid, so that all who came, at whatever hour, could at once obtain food. Their own servants, who were established in the castle, waited upon them.

"I think that lackey of yours will turn out a very useful fellow, Philip," Francois said, as they left the hall. "He is quick and willing, and he turned out our dinner yesterday in good fashion. It was certainly far better cooked than it had been, by Charles, the day before."

"I fancy Pierre has done a good deal of cooking in the open air," Philip said, "and we shall find that he is capable of turning out toothsome dishes from very scanty materials."

"I am glad to hear it for, though I am ready to eat horseflesh, if necessary, I see not why, because we happen to be at war, one should have to spoil one's teeth by gnawing at meat as hard as leather. Soldiers are generally bad cooks. They are in too much haste to get their food, at the end of a long day's work, to waste much time with the cooking.

"Here comes La Noue again."

"Will you order your troop to be again in the saddle at five o'clock in the morning, De Laville?" the Count said. "I start with a party of two hundred at that hour. There will be my own men and yours. The rest will be gentlemen and their personal retainers."

"I would that it had been three hours later," Francois said, as the Count left them and moved away, giving similar orders to the other gentlemen. "I own I hate moving before it is light. There is nothing ruffles the temper so much as getting up in the dark, fumbling with your buckles and straps, and finding everyone else just as surly and cross as you feel yourself. It was considered a necessary part of my training that I should turn out and arm myself at all times of the night. It was the part of my exercises that I hated the most."

Philip laughed.

"It will not make much difference here, Francois. I don't like getting out of a warm bed, myself, on a dark winter's morning; but as there will be certainly no undressing tonight, and we shall merely have to get up and shake the straw off us, it will not matter much. By half-past five it will be beginning to get light. At any rate, we should not mind it tomorrow, as it will be really our first day of military service."

Up to a late hour fresh arrivals continued to pour in, and the cooks and servants of the castle were kept hard at work, administering to the wants of the hungry and tired men. There was no regular set meal, each man feeding as he was disposed. After it became dark, all the gentlemen of family gathered in the upper part of the great hall, and there sat talking by the light of torches until nine. Then the Admiral, with a few of the nobles who had been in consultation with him, joined them and, a quarter of an hour later, a pastor entered and prayers were read. Then a number of retainers came in with trusses of straw, which were shaken down thickly beside the walls; and as soon as this was done, all present prepared to lie down.

"The trumpet will sound, gentleman," Francois de la Noue said in a loud voice, "at half-past four; but this will only concern those who, as it has already been arranged, will ride with me–the rest will set out with the Admiral, at seven. I pray each of you who go with me to bid his servant cut off a goodly portion of bread and meat, to take along with him, and to place a flask or two of wine in his saddlebags; for our ride will be a long one, and we are not likely to be able to obtain refreshment on our way."

"I should have thought," Francois said, as he lay down on the straw by Philip's side, "that we should have passed through plenty of places where we could obtain food. Whether we go direct to Paris, or by the road by Lagny, we pass through Nemours and Melun."

"These places may not open their gates to us, Francois; and in that case probably we should go through Montereau and Rosoy, and it may be considered that those who have already gone through to join Conde may have pretty well stripped both places of provisions."

The trumpet sounded at half-past four. The torches were at once relighted by the servants, and the gentlemen belonging to La Noue's party rose, and their servants assisted them to buckle on their armour. They gave them instructions as to taking some food with them, and prepared for their journey by an attack on some cold joints, that had been placed on a table at the lower end of the hall.

There was a scene of bustle and confusion in the courtyard, as the horses were brought up by the retainers. The Admiral himself was there to see the party off and, as they mounted, each issued out and joined the men drawn up outside. Before starting the minister, according to Huguenot custom, held a short service; and then, with a salute to the Admiral, La Noue took his place at their head and rode away.

With him went some twenty or thirty gentlemen, behind whom rode their body servants. After these followed some fifty men-at-arms, and the troops of La Noue and Laville. As soon as they were off, La Noue reined in his horse so as to ride in the midst of his friends, and chatted gaily with them as they went along.

An hour and a half's brisk riding took them to Montargis. Instead of keeping straight on, as most of those present expected, the two men who were riding a short distance in advance of the column turned sharp off to the left, in the middle of the town.

"I am going to give you a surprise, gentlemen," De la Noue said, with a smile. "I will tell you what it is when we are once outside the place."

"I suppose," one of the gentlemen from the province, who was riding next to Philip, said, "we are going to strike the main road from Orleans north; to ride through Etampes, and take post between Versailles and Paris on the south side of the river; while the Prince and his following beleaguer the place on the north. It is a bold plan thus to divide our forces, but I suppose the Admiral's party will follow us and, by taking post on the south side of the river, we shall straiten Paris for provisions."

"Gentlemen," the Count said, when they had issued from the streets of Montargis, "I can now tell you the mission which the Admiral has done me the honour to confide to me. It was thought best to keep the matter an absolute secret, until we were thus fairly on our way; because, although we hope and believe that there is not a man at Chatillon who is not to be trusted, there may possibly be a spy of the Guises there, and it would have been wrong to run the risk of betrayal.

"Well, my friends, our object is the capture of Orleans."

An exclamation of surprise broke from many of his hearers.

"It seems a bold enterprise to undertake, with but little over two hundred men," La Noue went on with a smile; "but we have friends there. D'Andelot has been, for the last ten days, in communication with one of them. We may, of course, expect to meet with a stout resistance but, with the advantage of a surprise, and with so many gallant gentlemen with me, I have no shadow of fear as to the result. I need not point out to you how important its possession will be to us. It will keep open a road to the south; will afford a rallying place for all our friends, in this part of France; and the news of its capture will give immense encouragement to our co-religionists throughout the country. Besides, it will counterbalance the failure to seize the court, and will serve as an example, to others, to attempt to obtain possession of strong places.

"We shall ride at an easy pace today, for the distance is long and the country hilly. We could not hope to arrive there until too late to finish our work before dark. Moreover, most of our horses have already had very hard work during the past few days. We have started early, in order that we may have a halt of four hours in the middle of the day. We are to be met tonight by our friend, the Master of Grelot, five miles this side of the city. He will tell us what arrangements have been made for facilitating our entrance."

"This is a glorious undertaking, Philip, is it not?" Francois said. "Until now I have been thinking how unfortunate we were, in being too late to ride with Conde. Now I see that what I thought was a loss has turned out a gain."

"You do not think Conde will be able to do anything against Paris?" Philip asked.

"Certainly not at present. What can some fifteen hundred horsemen and as many infantry (and he will have no more force than that, for another three or four days) do against Paris with its walls and its armed population, and the Guises and their friends and retainers, to say nothing of the six thousand Swiss? If our leaders thought they were going to fight at once, they would hardly have sent two hundred good troops off in another direction. I expect we shall have plenty of time to get through this and other expeditions, and then to join the Prince in front of Paris before any serious fighting takes place."

"Do you know how far it is across the hills to Orleans?" Philip asked the gentlemen next to him on the other side.

"It is over fifty miles, but how much more I do not know. I am a native of the province, but I have never travelled along this road, which can be but little used. East of Montargis the traffic goes by the great road through Melun to Paris; while the traffic of Orleans, of course, goes north through Etampes."

They rode on until noon, and then dismounted by a stream, watered and fed the horses, partook of a meal from the contents of their saddlebags, and then rested for four hours to recruit the strength of their horses. The soldiers mostly stretched themselves on the sward and slept. A few of the gentlemen did the same, but most of them sat chatting in groups, discussing the enterprise upon which they were engaged.

Francois and Philip went among their men with Captain Montpace, inspected the horses, examined their shoes, saw that fresh nails were put in where required, chatting with the men as they did so.

"I felt sure we should not be long before we were engaged on some stirring business," the Captain said. "The Count de la Noue is not one to let the grass grow under his feet. I saw much of him in the last campaign; and the count, your father, had a very high opinion of his military abilities. At first he was looked upon somewhat doubtfully in our camp, seeing that he did not keep a long face, but was ready with a jest and a laugh with high and low, and that he did not affect the soberness of costume favoured by our party; but that soon passed off, when it was seen how zealous he was in the cause, how ready to share in any dangerous business; while he set an example to all, by the cheerfulness with which he bore fatigue and hardship. Next to the Admiral himself, and his brother D'Andelot, there was no officer more highly thought of by the troops.

"This is certainly a bold enterprise that he has undertaken now, if it be true what I have heard, since we halted, that we are going to make a dash at Orleans. It is a big city for two hundred men to capture; even though, no doubt, we have numbers of friends within the walls."

"All the more glory and credit to us, Montpace," Francois said gaily. "Why, the news that Orleans is captured will send a thrill through France, and will everywhere encourage our friends to rise against our oppressors. We are sure to take them by surprise, for they will believe that all the Huguenots in this part of France are hastening to join the Prince before Paris."

At four o'clock the party got in motion again and, an hour after dark, entered a little village among the hills, about five miles north of the town. De la Noue at once placed a cordon of sentries, with orders that neither man, woman, nor child was to be allowed to leave it. Orders were issued, to the startled peasants, that all were to keep within their doors, at the peril of their lives. The horses were picketed in the street, and the soldiers stowed in barns; trusses of straw were strewn round a fire for La Noue, and the gentlemen who followed him.

At eight o'clock two videttes, thrown forward some distance along the road, rode in with a horseman. It was the Master of Grelot who, as he rode up to the fire, was heartily greeted by the Count.

"I am glad to find you here, Count," he said. "I knew you to be a man of your word, but in warfare things often occur to upset the best calculations."

"Is everything going on well at Orleans?" De la Noue asked.

"Everything. I have made all my arrangements. A party of five-and-twenty men I can depend on will, tomorrow morning at seven o'clock, gather near the gate this side of the town. They will come up in twos and threes and, just as the guard are occupied in unbarring the gate, they will fall upon them. The guard is fifteen strong and, as they will be taken by surprise, they will be able to offer but a faint resistance.

"Of course, you with your troop will be lying in readiness near. As soon as they have taken possession of the gateway, the party will issue out and wave a white flag, as a signal to you that all is clear; and you will be in before the news that the gateway has been seized can spread. After that you will know what to do. In addition to the men who are to carry out the enterprise, you will shortly be joined by many others. Word has been sent round to our partisans that they may speedily expect deliverance; and bidding them be prepared, whenever they are called upon, to take up their arms and join those who come to free them.

"A large number of the town folk are secretly either wholly with us or well disposed towards us; and, although some will doubtless take up arms on the other side, I think that, with the advantage of the surprise, and with such assistance as our party can give you, there is every chance of bringing the enterprise to a successful issue.

"One of our friends, who has a residence within a bow shot of the gates, has arranged with me that your troop, arriving there before daylight, shall at once enter his grounds, where they will be concealed from the sight of any country people going towards the city. From the upper windows the signal can be seen and, if you are mounted and ready, you can be there in three or four minutes; and it will take longer than that before the alarm can spread, and the Catholics muster strongly enough to recapture the gate."

"Admirably arranged," the Count said warmly. "With a plan so well laid, our scheme can hardly fail of success. If we only do our part as well as you have done yours, Orleans is as good as won.

"Now, gentlemen, I advise you to toss off one more goblet of wine, and then to wrap yourselves up in your cloaks for a few hours' sleep. We must be in the saddle soon after four, so as to be off the road by five."

At that hour the troop, led by the Master of Grelot, turned in at the gate of the chateau. The owner was awaiting them, and gave them a cordial welcome. The men were ordered to dismount and stand by their horses, while the leaders followed their host into the house, where a repast had been laid out for them; while some servitors took out baskets of bread and flagons of wine to the troopers.

At half-past six groups of countrymen were seen, making their way along the road towards the gate and, a quarter of an hour later, the troop mounted and formed up, in readiness to issue out as soon as the signal was given; their host placing himself at an upper window, whence he could obtain a view of the city gate.

It was just seven when he called out "The gate is opening!" and immediately afterwards, "They have begun the work. The country people outside are running away in a panic.

"Ah! there is the white flag."

Two servitors at the gate of the chateau threw it open and, headed by La Noue and the gentlemen of the party, they issued out and galloped down the road at full speed. As they approached the gate some men ran out, waving their caps and swords.

"Well done!" La Noue exclaimed, as he rode up. "Now, scatter and call out all our friends to aid us in the capture."

The troop had been already divided into four parties, each led by gentlemen familiar with the town. Francois and Philip, with the men from Laville, formed the party led by the Count himself. The news of the tumult at the gate had spread and, just as they reached the marketplace, a body of horsemen, equal in strength to their own, rode towards them.

"For God and the religion!" La Noue shouted, as he led the charge.

Ignorant of the strength of their assailants, and having mounted in haste at the first alarm, the opposing band hesitated; and before they could set their horses into a gallop, the Huguenots were upon them. The impetus of the charge was irresistible. Men and horses rolled over, while those in the rear turned and rode away; and the combat was over before scarce a blow had been struck.

A party of infantry, hastening up, were next encountered. These offered a more stubborn resistance, but threw down their arms and surrendered, when another of the Huguenot parties rode into the square.

At the sound of the conflict the upper windows of the houses were opened, and the citizens looked out in alarm at the struggle. But the Catholics, having neither orders nor plan, dared not venture out; while the Huguenots mustered rapidly, with arms in their hands; and rendered valuable assistance to the horsemen, in attacking and putting to flight the parties of Catholic horse and foot, as they came hurriedly up.

In an hour all resistance had ceased and Orleans was taken. The Count at once issued a proclamation to the citizens, assuring all peaceable persons of protection; and guaranteeing to the citizens immunity from all interference with personal property, and the right of full exercise of their religion. The charge of the gates was given over to the Huguenot citizens. Parties of horse were told off to patrol the streets, to see that order was preserved, and to arrest any using threats or violence to the citizens; and in a very few hours the town resumed its usual appearance.

Now that all fear of persecution was at an end, large numbers of the citizens, who had hitherto concealed their leanings towards the new religion, openly avowed them; and La Noue saw with satisfaction that the town could be safely left to the keeping of the Huguenot adherents, with the assistance only of a few men to act as leaders. These he selected from the gentlemen of the province who had come with him and, as soon as these had entered upon their duties, he felt free to turn his attention elsewhere.

Two days were spent in appointing a council of the leading citizens, the Huguenots of course being in the majority. To them was intrusted the management of the affairs of the town, and the maintenance of order. The young nobleman appointed as governor was to have entire charge of military matters. All Huguenots capable of bearing arms were to be formed up in companies, each of which was to appoint its own officers. They were to practise military exercises, to have charge of the gates and walls, and to be prepared to defend them, in case a hostile force should lay siege to the city.

Three of the nobles were appointed to see to the victualling of the town; and all citizens were called upon to contribute a sum, according to their means, for this purpose. A few old soldiers were left to drill the new levies, to see that the walls were placed in a thorough condition of defence, and above all to aid the leaders in suppressing any attempt at the ill-treatment of Catholics, or the desecration of their churches, by the Huguenot portion of the population.

When all arrangements were made for the peace and safety of the town, De la Noue despatched most of the gentlemen with him, and their followers, to join the Prince of Conde before Paris; retaining only his Cousin Francois, Philip, the troop from Laville, and his own band of forty men-at-arms.

Chapter 6: The Battle Of Saint Denis

Francois de Laville and Philip had fought by the side of La Noue, in the engagement in the streets of Orleans; but had seen little of the Count afterwards, his time being fully employed in completing the various arrangements to ensure the safety of the town. They had been lodged in the house of one of the Huguenot citizens, and had spent their time walking about the town, or in the society of some of the younger gentlemen of their party.

"Are you both ready for service again?" the Count de la Noue, who had sent for them to come to his lodgings, asked on the evening of the third day after the capture of Orleans.

"Quite ready," Francois replied. "The horses have all recovered from their fatigue, and are in condition for a fresh start. Are we bound for Paris, may I ask?"

"No, Francois, we are going on a recruiting tour: partly because we want men, but more to encourage our people by the sight of an armed party, and to show the Catholics that they had best stay their hands, and leave us alone for the present.

"I take a hundred men with me, including your troop and my own, which I hope largely to increase. Sometimes we shall keep in a body, sometimes break up into two or three parties. Always we shall move rapidly, so as to appear where least expected, and so spread uneasiness as to where we may next appear.

"In the south we are, as I hear, holding our own. I shall therefore go first to Brittany and, if all is quiet, there raise another fifty men. We shall travel through Touraine and Anjou as we go, and then sweep round by Normandy and La Perche, and so up to Paris.

"So you see, we shall put a good many miles of ground under our feet, before we join the Prince. In that way not only shall we swell our numbers and encourage our friends, but we shall deter many of the Catholic gentry from sending their retainers to join the army of the Guises."

"It will be a pleasant ride, cousin," Francois said, "and I hope that we shall have an opportunity of doing some good work, before we reach Paris; and especially that we shall not arrive there too late to join in the coming battle."

"I do not think that there is much fear of that," the Count replied. "The Prince has not sufficient strength to attack Paris. And for my part, I think that it would have been far better, when it was found that his plan of seizing the court had failed, to have drawn off at once. He can do nothing against Paris, and his presence before it will only incite the inhabitants against us, and increase their animosity. It would have been better to have applied the force in reducing several strong towns where, as at Orleans, the bulk of the inhabitants are favourable to us. In this way we should weaken the enemy, strengthen ourselves, and provide places of refuge for our people in case of need. However, it is too late for such regrets. The Prince is there, and we must take him what succour we can.

"I was pleased with you both, in the fights upon the day we entered. You both behaved like brave gentlemen and good swordsmen. I expected no less from you, Francois; but I was surprised to find your English cousin so skilled with his weapon."

"He is a better swordsman than I am," Francois said; "which is a shame to me, since he is two years my junior."

"Is he indeed!" the Count said in surprise. "I had taken him to be at least your equal in years. Let me think, you are but eighteen and some months?"

"But a month over eighteen," Francois said, "and Philip has but just passed sixteen."

"You will make a doughty warrior when you attain your full strength, Philip. I saw you put aside a thrust from an officer in the melee, and strike him from his horse with a backhanded cut with your sword, dealt with a vigour that left nothing to be desired."

"I know that I am too fond of using the edge, sir," Philip said, modestly. "My English masters taught me to do so and, although my French instructors at home were always impressing upon me that the point was more deadly than the edge, I cannot break myself altogether from the habit."

"There is no need to do so," the Count said. "Of late the point has come into fashion among us, and doubtless it has advantages; but often a downright blow will fetch a man from his saddle, when you would in vain try to find, with the point, a joint in his armour. But you must have been well taught, indeed, if you are a better swordsman than my cousin; whose powers I have tried at Laville, and found him to be an excellent swordsman, for his age."

"I have had many masters," Philip said. "Both my French and English teachers were good swordsmen; and it was seldom a Frenchman who had been in the wars passed through Canterbury, that my uncle did not engage him to give me a few lessons. Thus, being myself very anxious to become a good swordsman, and being fond of exercises, I naturally picked up a great many tricks with the sword."

"You could not have spent your time better, if you had an intention of coming over to take part in our troubles here. Your grandfather, De Moulins, was said to be one of the best swordsmen in France; and you may have inherited some of his skill. I own that I felt rather uneasy at the charge of two such young cockerels, though I could not refuse when the countess, my aunt, begged me to let you ride with me; but in future I shall feel easy about you, seeing that you can both take your own parts stoutly.

"Well, order your men to be ready and mounted, in the marketplace, at half-past five. The west gate will be opened for us to ride forth at six."

Philip had every reason to be satisfied with the conduct of his new servant. In the town, as at Laville, Pierre behaved circumspectly and quietly; assuming a grave countenance in accordance with his surroundings, keeping his arms and armour brightly polished, and waiting at table as orderly as if he had been used to nothing else all his life.

"I am glad to hear it, sir," Pierre said, when Philip informed him that they would start on the following morning. "I love not towns; and here, where there is nought to do but to polish your armour, and stand behind your chair at dinner, the time goes mighty heavily."

"You will have no cause to grumble on that account, Pierre, I fancy, for your ride will be a long one. I do not expect we shall often have a roof over our heads."

"All the better, sir, so long as the ride finishes before the cold weather sets in. Fond as I am of sleeping with the stars over me; I own that, when the snow is on the ground, I prefer a roof over my head."

At six o'clock the party started. Only two other gentlemen rode with it, both of whom were, like the Count, from Brittany. The little group chatted gaily as they rode along. Unless they happened to encounter parties of Catholics going north, to join the royal army, there was, so far as they knew, no chance of their meeting any body of the enemy on their westward ride.

The towns of Vendome, Le Mans, and Laval were all strongly Catholic, and devoted to the Guises. These must be skirted. Rennes in Brittany must also be avoided, for all these towns were strongly garrisoned, and could turn out a force far too strong for La Noue to cope with.

Upon the march, Pierre was not only an invaluable servant but the life of the troop; he being full of fun and frolic, and making even the gravest soldier smile at his sallies. When they halted, he was indefatigable in seeing after Philip's comforts. He cut boughs of the trees best suited for the purpose of making a couch, and surprised his master and Francois by his ingenuity in turning out excellent dishes from the scantiest materials. He would steal away in the night to procure fowls and eggs from neighbouring farmhouses and, although Philip's orders were that he was to pay the full price for everything he required, Philip found, when he gave an account a fortnight later of how he had spent the money he had given him, that there was no mention of any payment for these articles. When he rated Pierre for this, the latter replied:

"I did not pay for them, sir. Not in order to save you money, but for the sake of the farmers and their families. It would have been worse than cruelty to have aroused them from sleep. The loss of a fowl or two, and of a dozen eggs, were nothing to them. If they missed them at all, they would say that a fox had been there, and they would think no more of it. If, on the other hand, I had waked them up in the middle of the night to pay for these trifles, they would have been scared out of their life; thinking, when I knocked, that some band of robbers was at the door. In their anger at being thus disturbed they would have been capable of shooting me; and it is well nigh certain that, at any rate, they would have refused to sell their chickens and eggs at that time of the night.

"So you see, sir, I acted for the best for all parties. Two chickens out of scores was a loss not worth thinking of, while the women escaped the panic and terror that my waking them up would have caused them. When I can pay I will assuredly do so, since that is your desire; but I am sure you will see that, under such circumstances, it would be a crime to wake people from their sleep for the sake of a few sous."

Philip laughed.

"Besides, sir," Pierre went on, "these people were either Huguenots or Catholics. If they were Huguenots, they would be right glad to minister to those who are fighting on their behalf. If they were Catholics, they would rob and murder us without mercy. Therefore they may think themselves fortunate, indeed, to escape at so trifling a cost from the punishment they deserve."

"That is all very well, Pierre; but the orders are strict against plundering and, if the Admiral were to catch you, you would get a sound thrashing with a stirrup leather."

"I have risked worse than that, sir, many times in my life; and if I am caught, I will give them leave to use the strap. But you will see, Monsieur Philip, that if the war goes on these niceties will soon become out of fashion. At present the Huguenot lords and gentlemen have money in their pockets to pay for what they want, but after a time money will become scarce. They will see that the armies of the king live on plunder, as armies generally do; and when cash runs short, they will have to shut their eyes and let the men provide themselves as best they can."

"I hope the war won't last long enough for that, Pierre. But at any rate, we have money in our pockets at present, and can pay for what we require; though I do not pretend that it is a serious matter to take a hen out of a coop, especially when you can't get it otherwise, without, as you say, alarming a whole family. However, remember my orders are that everything we want is to be paid for."

"I understand, sir, and you will see that the next time we reckon up accounts every item shall be charged for, so that there will be nothing on your conscience."

Philip laughed again.

"I shall be content if that is the case, Pierre; and I hope that your conscience will be as clear as mine will be."

On the third of November, just a month after leaving Orleans, De La Noue, with his troop augmented to three hundred, joined the Prince of Conde before Paris. During the interval, he had traversed the west of France by the route he had marked out for himself, had raised fifty more men among the Huguenots of Brittany, and had been joined on the route by many gentlemen with parties of their retainers.

Several bodies of Catholics had been met and dispersed. Two or three small towns, where the Huguenots had been ill treated and massacred, were entered. The ringleaders in the persecutions had been hung, and the authorities had been compelled to pay a heavy fine, under threat of the whole town being committed to the flames. Everywhere he passed La Noue had caused proclamations to be scattered far and wide, to the effect that any ill treatment of Huguenots would be followed by his return, and by the heaviest punishment being inflicted upon all who molested them.

And so, having given great encouragement to the Huguenots, and scattered terror among their persecutors; having ridden great distances, and astonished the people of the western provinces by his

energy and activity; La Noue joined the Prince of Conde, with three hundred men. He was heartily welcomed on his arrival at the Huguenot camp at Saint Denis.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.