

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE IRON TREVET; OR,
JOCELYN THE
CHAMPION: A TALE OF
THE JACQUERIE

ЭЖЕН СЮ

**The Iron Trevet; or, Jocelyn the
Champion: A Tale of the Jacquerie**

«Public Domain»

Сю Э. Ж.

The Iron Trevet; or, Jocelyn the Champion: A Tale of the Jacquerie /
Э. Ж. Сю — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PART I.	6
CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	14
CHAPTER III.	18
CHAPTER IV.	21
CHAPTER V.	26
CHAPTER VI.	30
CHAPTER VII.	33
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

Eugène Sue

The Iron Trevet; or, Jocelyn the Champion: A Tale of the Jacquerie

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Etienne Marcel, John Maillart, William Caillet, Adam the Devil and Charles the Wicked, King of Navarre, are the five leading personages in this story. Their figures and actions, the virtues and foibles of the ones, the vices of the others, the errors of all, are drawn with strict historic accuracy, all the five being historic characters. Seeing the historic importance of the epoch in which they figured, and the types that these five men represent, the story of "The Iron Trevet; or, Jocelyn, the Champion" is more than an historic narrative, it is more than a treatise on the philosophy of history, it is a treatise on human nature, it is a compendium of lessons inestimable to whomsoever his or her good or evil genius throws into the clash of human currents, and to those who, though not themselves participants, still may wish to understand that which they are spectators of and which, some way or other, they are themselves affected by and, some way or other, are bound to either support or resist.

In a way, "The Iron Trevet; or, Jocelyn the Champion" is the unique of the series of brilliant stories that the genius of Eugene Sue has enriched the world with under the collective title of "The Mysteries of the People" – we can recall no other instance in which so much profound and practical instruction is so skillfully clad in the pleasing drapery of fiction, and one within so small a compass.

To America whose youthful years deprive her of historic perspective, this little story, or rather work, can not but be of service. To that vast English-speaking world at large, now throbbing with the pulse of awakening aspirations, this translation discloses another treasure trove, long and deliberately held closed to it in the wrappage of the foreign tongue in which the original appeared.

DANIEL DE LEON.

New York, April 13, 1904.

PART I. THE SEIGNIORY OF NOINTEL

CHAPTER I. THE TAVERN OF ALISON THE HUFFY

On a Sunday, towards the end of the month of October of 1356, a great stir was noticeable since early morning in the little town of Nointel, situated a few leagues from the city of Beauvais, in the department of Beauvoisis. The tavern of Alison the Huffy – so nicknamed from her hot temper, although she was a good woman – was rapidly filling with artisans, villeins and serfs who came to wait for the hour of mass at the tavern, where, due to the prevailing poverty, little was drunk and much talked. Alison never complained. As talkative as huffy, dame Alison preferred to see her tavern full with chatterers than empty of tipplers. Still fresh and buxom, though on the shady side of thirty, she wore a short skirt and low bodice – probably because her bust was well rounded and her limbs well shaped. Black of hair, bright of eyes, white of teeth, and quick of hands, more than once since her widowhood, had Alison broken a bumper over the head of some customer, whom liquor had rendered too expressive in his admiration for her charms. Accordingly, like a prudent housekeeper, she had taken the precaution of replacing her earthenware bumpers with pewter ones. That morning the dame seemed to be in a particular huffy mood, judging by her rumpling brows, her brusque motions, and her sharp and cross words.

Presently, the door of the tavern was darkened and in stepped a man of vigorous age, with an angular and sun-burnt face, whose only striking features were two little, piercing, crafty and savage eyes half hidden under his eyebrows thick and grizzly like his hair, that escaped in disorder from under his old woolen cap. He had traveled a long distance; his wooden shoes, shabby cloth leggings and patched smock-frock were covered with dust. He was noticeably tired; it was with difficulty that he moved his limbs with the support of a knotted stick. Hardly inside the tavern, the serf, whose name was William Caillet, let himself down heavily upon a bench, immediately placing his elbows on his knees and his head upon his hands. Alison the Huffy, already out of humor, as stated, called to him sharply:

"What do you want here? I do not know you. If you want to drink, pay; if not, off with you!"

"In order to drink, money is needed; I have none," answered William Caillet; "allow me to rest on this bench, good woman."

"My tavern is no lazarus-house," replied Alison; "be gone, you vagabond!"

"Come now, hostess, we have never seen you in such a bad humor," put in one of the customers; "let the poor man rest; we invite him to a bumper."

"Thank you," answered the serf with a somber gesture and shaking his head; "I'm not thirsty."

"If you do not drink you have no business here," the buxom tavern-keeper was saying when a voice, hailing from without, called: "Where is the hostess ... where is she ... a thousand bundles of demons! Is there no one here to take my horse? Our throats are dry and our tongues hanging out. Ho, there, hostess, attend to us!"

The arrival of a rider, always a good omen for a hostlery, drew Alison away from her anger. She called her maid servant while herself ran to the door to answer the impatient traveler, who, his horse's bridle in hand, continued finding fault, although good-naturedly. The new arrival was about twenty-four years of age; the visor of his somewhat rusty casque, wholly raised, exposed to view a pleasant face, the left cheek of which was furrowed with a deep scar. Thanks to his Herculean build, his heavy cuirass of tarnished iron, but still usable, seemed not to press him any more than a coat of

cloth. His coat of mail, newly patched in several places, fell half over his thigh-armor, made, like his greaves, of iron, the latter of which were hidden within the large traveling boots. From his shoulder-strap hung a long sword, from his belt a sharp dagger of the class called "mercy". His mace, which consisted of a thick cudgel an arm long, terminating in three little iron chains riveted to a ball seven or eight pounds heavy, hung from the pommel of the rider's saddle, together with his steel-studded and ribbed buckler. Three reserve wooden lance shafts, tied together, and the points of which rested in a sort of leather bonnet, adjusted to the strap of one of his stirrups, were held up straight along the saddle, behind which a sheep-skin satchel was attached. The horse was large and vigorous. Its head, neck, chest and part of its crupper were protected by an iron caparison – a heavy armor that the robust animal carried as easily as its master wore his.

Responding to the redoubled calls of the traveler, Alison the Huffy ran out with her maid and said in bitter-sweet voice: "Here I am, Sir. Hein! If ever you are canonized, it will not be, I very much fear, under the invocation of St. Patience!"

"By the bowels of the Pope, my fair hostess, your pretty black eyes and pink cheeks could never be seen too soon. As sure as your garter could serve you for a belt, the prettiest girl of Paris, where I come from, could not be compared to you. By Venus and Cupid, you are the pearl of hostesses."

"You come from Paris, Sir Knight!" said Alison with joyful surprise, being at once flattered by the compliments of the traveler, and proud of having a guest from Paris, the great city. "You really come from Paris?"

"Yes, truly. But tell me, am I rightly informed? Is there to be a passage of arms to-day, here in the valley of Nointel?"

"Yes, Sir; you arrive in time. The tourney is to begin soon; right after mass."

"Well, then, my pretty hostess, while I take my horse to the stable to have him well fed, you will prepare a good repast for myself, and, to the end that it may taste all the better, you will share it with me while we chat together. There is much information that I need from you;" and raising his coat of mail to enable him to reach his leather purse, the rider took from it a piece of silver. Giving it to Alison, he said gaily: "Here is payment in advance for my score. I am none of your strollers, so frequent in these days, who pay their host with sword thrusts and by plundering his house;" but noticing that Alison examined the piece before putting it in her pocket, he added laughing: "Accept that coin as I did, with eyes shut. The devil take it, only King John and his minter know what the piece is worth, and whether it contains more lead than it does silver!"

"Oh, Sir Knight, is it not terrible to think that our master, the King, is an inveterate false-coiner? What times these are! We are borne down with taxes, and we never know the value of what we have!"

"True. But I wager, my pretty hostess, that your lover is in no such annoying ignorance... Come, you will have overcome your modest blushes by the time your maid has shown me the way to the stable, after which you will make my breakfast ready. But you must share it with me; that's understood."

"As you please, Sir Knight," answered Alison, more and more charmed with the jolly temper of the stranger. Accordingly, she hastened to busy herself with the preparations for the meal, and in a short time spread upon one of the tables of the tavern a toothsome dish of bacon in green fennel, flanked with fried eggs, cheese and a mug of foaming beer.

The serf, William Caillet, now forgotten by the hostess, his forehead resting on both his hands, seemed lost to what went on around him, and kept his seat on a bench not far from the table at which presently Alison and the traveler took theirs. Back from the stable, the latter relieved himself of his casque, dagger and sword, laying them down near to himself, and proceeded to do honor to the repast.

"Sir Knight," said Alison, "you come from Paris? What fine stories you will have to tell!"

"Mercy, pretty hostess, do not call me 'Sir Knight.' I belong to the working class, not the nobility. My name is Jocelyn. My father is a book-seller, and I am a *champion*¹ as my battle-harness attests to you; – and here I am at your service."

"Can it be!" exclaimed Alison, joining her hands in glad astonishment, "you are a fighting champion?"

"Yes, and I have not yet lost a single case, as you may judge from my right hand not yet being cut off – a penalty reserved for all champions who are vanquished in a judicial duel. Although often wounded, I have at least always rendered a Roland for my adversary's Oliver. I learned in Paris that there was to be a tourney here and thinking that, as usual, it would be followed or preceded by some judicial combat, where I might represent the appellant or the appellee, I came to the place on a venture. Now, then, as a tavern-keeper, you are surely informed thereon."

"Oh, Sir champion! It is heaven that sends you. There will surely be need of you."

"Heaven, I am of the opinion, mixes but little in my concerns. Let us leave Gog and Magog to settle their affairs among themselves."

"You should know that, unfortunately, I have a process. I admit that I am in great trouble."

"You, my pretty hostess?"

"It is now three months ago that I lent twelve florins to Simon the Hirsute. When I asked him for the money, the mean thief denied the debt. We went before the seneschal. I maintained what I said; Simon maintained his side. There were no witnesses either for or against us, and as the amount involved was above five sous, the seneschal ordered a judicial battle. But who would take my part?"

"And you have found nobody to be your champion against Simon the Hirsute?"

"Alas, no! By reason of his strength and his wickedness the fellow is feared all over this country. No one would venture to fight with him."

"Well, my pretty hostess, you can count with me. I shall fight him as well for the sake of your pretty eyes as for the sake of your cause."

"Oh, my cause is good, Sir champion. It is as true that I lent Simon the Hirsute those twelve florins as... I'll tell you how it was –"

"You need say no more. A pretty mouth like yours would not fib. Moreover, I'm in the habit of placing confidence in what my clients tell me. What is wanted is, not solid reasons, but rude blows with the sword, the lance or the mace. Thus, so long as this right fist is not cut off, it will offer arguments more conclusive than the subtlest ones of the most famous jurists."

"I must not conceal from you the fact that that thief of a Simon has been an archer. He is a dangerous man. Everybody is afraid of him."

"Pretty hostess, there is another custom I have when I am to plead a case. I never inquire how my adversary fights. In that way I never form in advance a plan of attack, frequently frustrated in practice. I have a quick and correct eye. Once on the arena, I size up my man, fall to, and decide on the spot whether to thrust or to cut. I have ever congratulated myself on this manner of pleading. You may rely upon me. The tourney does not open till noon; my arms are in good condition and my horse is eating his provender. Let's drink a glass: Long live joy, my pretty hostess! and good luck to the good cause!"

"Oh, helpful champion! If you gain my process I shall give you three florins. It would not be paying too much for the pleasure of seeing the scamp of a Simon the Hirsute brought to grief!"

"Agreed! If I gain your process you will give me three florins and a smacking kiss for good measure, if you like!.. Agreed?"

"Oh, Sir, such things are not said."

¹ In the judicial combats of the Middle Ages, it was allowed to women, children and old men, except in cases of high treason or of parricide, to appear in the lists by a representative. Such a hired combatant was called a champion.

"Well, then, I shall give you the smacking kiss, seeing the other plan embarrasses you. But by all the devils, your forehead remains troubled. Why so? You needed a champion, and heaven – as you said – sends you one who is impatient to sail into the thief, and yet your pretty forehead keeps its wrinkles!"

"I should be satisfied, and yet my heart is heavy. I want to tell you all about it."

"Have you, perchance, some other process, or some unfaithful lover? You may speak freely to me."

Alison remained for a moment sad and silent, whereupon she resumed with painful voice.

"Sir champion, you come from Paris; you must be very learned. Perhaps you may render a service to a poor lad who is much to be pitied, and who also must himself do battle to-day in a judicial duel, but under very sad circumstances."

"Explain yourself. What is the matter?"

"In this country of Nointel, when a female serf or bourgeois marries, the seigneur, if it please him, is entitled to ... the first night of his female vassal. They call it the 'right of first fruits.' ... At least do not laugh!"

"Laugh! Not by the devil!" answered Jocelyn, whose face suddenly overspread with somberness. "Oh, you recall to my mind a melancholy affair. A short while ago I had to plead a case on the arena near Amiens. Crossing a village, I saw a gathering of serfs. Upon inquiry I learned that one of the peasants of the group, a butcher attached to the fief of the bishopric, had married that very morning a handsome girl of the parish. The bishop, in the exercise of his right, sent for the bride to take her to his bed. The serf answered the episcopal bailiff, charged with the mission: 'My wife is in my hut, I shall bring her out to you'; and coming back a few instants later said to him: 'My wife is a little bashful, she does not like to come out, go in and bring her out yourself.' The bailiff went into the hut, and what does he find? The unhappy girl lying in a pool of blood; she was dead."

"Good God! What a shocking story!"

"In order to ransom her from dishonor, her husband had killed her with a blow of his axe."

At these words, William Caillet, who until then had remained indifferent to the conversation between Alison and Jocelyn, shook convulsively, raised his savage face and listened, while, tears streaming from her eyes, Alison cried: "Oh, poor woman! To be thus killed! What a terrible resolution must not have seized her husband to resort to such a frightful extreme!"

"Resolute men are rare."

"Alas, Sir champion. Those who, degraded by serfdom, remain indifferent to such ignominy are perhaps less to be pitied than those who resent it."

"But most of them do resent it," cried Jocelyn. "In vain do the seigneurs seek to reduce these ill-starred beings to the state of brutes. Are not even among wild beasts the males seen to defend their females unto death? Does not man, however coarse, however brutified, however craven he may be, fire up with jealousy the moment he loves? Is not love the only possession left to the serfs, the only solace in their misery? Blood and death! I grow savage at the mere thought of the rage and despair of a serf at the sight of the humble companion of his cheerless days sullied forever by a seigneur! By the navel of Satan, by the horns of Moses, the thought of it exasperates me!"

"Oh, Sir," said Alison with tears in her eyes, "your words tell the story of that poor Mazurec, the young man I was about to tell you of."

William Caillet again shook convulsively at the sound of the name of Mazurec, and leaped up, but controlling himself by dint of a violent effort, he resumed his seat, and lent increased attention to what was said by Alison and Jocelyn, who himself seemed greatly struck by the name of Mazurec, that his hostess had just pronounced.

"The serf's name is Mazurec?" he inquired, visibly affected.

"Yes, Sir. Why does the name surprise you?"

"It is one of my own father's given names. Do you know the age of the young fellow?"

"He can be no more than twenty years; his mother, who has long been dead, was not of this neighborhood."

"Whence came she?"

"I could not tell you that. She arrived here shortly before the birth of Mazurec. She begged her bread. Our neighbor the miller of the Gallion mill, took pity upon her. His own wife had died in childbed about two months before. The name of Mazurec's mother was Gervaise."

"Gervaise?" repeated Jocelyn, seeming to interrogate his memory, "was her name Gervaise?"

"Yes, Sir champion. She was so pleasing and sweet to the eyes of the miller that he said to himself: 'She must soon be brought to bed; if she is willing, she shall be nurse to both my child and her own.' And so it was. Gervaise brought up the two boys. She was so industrious and of so good a character that the miller kept her as a servant. Then a misfortune happened. The Count of Beaumont declared war to the Sire of Nointel. That is now five years ago. The miller was compelled to follow his seigneur to war. During that time the men of Beaumont raided the place, burning and sacking. They set fire to the mill where Gervaise was left with the two children. She perished in the flames, together with the miller's child. Mazurec alone escaped miraculously. Out of pity my husband and I took him in."

"You are a worthy woman, my hostess. I shall have to cut the throat of Simon the Hirsute."

"Do not praise me too much, Sir champion. The hardest heart would have taken an interest in Mazurec. He was the sweetest and best child in the world. His goodness and mildness won for him the name of Mazurec the Lambkin."

"And did he make good the promise of his name?"

"He was a real lamb. All night long he cried for his mother and his foster brother. By day he helped us, according to his strength, in whatever work we had in hand. When the war closed our neighbor the miller did not come back. He had been killed. The Sire of Nointel had the burnt-down mill rebuilt. God only knows what taxes he imposed upon us, his vassals, to indemnify himself for the expenses of his campaign against the seigneur of Beaumont. Mazurec took service under the new miller. Every Sunday, on his way to church, Mazurec stopped here to thank us for our kindness towards him. There is no more grateful heart than his. And now I'll tell you how his misfortune came about. Occasionally he was sent by the miller with bags of flour to the village of Cramoisy, about three leagues from here, where the Sire of Nointel has established a fortified post. In that village – poor Mazurec has made me his confidante – he often saw, seated at the door of her hut, a beautiful young girl, spinning at her wheel; other times he met her pasturing her cow along the green borders of the road. This young girl was known as Aveline-who-never-lied. She had a heart of gold."

"And these two folks loved each other?"

"Indeed! They loved each other passionately. And they were well matched."

William Caillet listened to Alison's narrative with redoubled attention. Unable, to keep back a tear that rolled down his emaciated cheeks, he wiped it off with the back of his hand. The tavern-keeper proceeded:

"Mazurec was a serf of the same seigniorship with Aveline and her father. The latter consented to the marriage. The bailiff of the Sire of Nointel in the absence of his master, also gave his consent. Everything was moving smoothly along, and often did Mazurec say to me: 'Dame Alison, what a pity that my mother cannot witness our happiness!'"

"But how came these happy hopes to be destroyed, my pretty hostess?"

"You know, Sir, that, if the seigneur is willing, the vassals can ransom themselves of the infamous right that we spoke of a few minutes ago. So did my deceased husband, without which I would have remained single all my life. Aveline's father had a cow for only earthly possession. He sold that, preferring to forfeit the animal that furnished him with food, rather than to see his adored daughter dishonored by the Sire of Nointel. The day of the betrothal Mazurec went to the castle to deliver to the bailiff the price of the bride's redemption. Unfortunately, the bailiff happened to be

away. The bridegroom returned to Aveline, and her father decided that they should be married the next morning, and that immediately after the mass Mazurec should return to the castle to ransom his wife. The marriage took place, and, according to custom, the bride remained locked up at the vicarage until the husband could show his letter of redemption."

"Yes," observed Jocelyn. "And it therefore often happens that, to escape the disgrace, brides yield themselves to their intended husbands before marriage. No more than just, under the circumstances."

"But too true; and often also the men thereupon leave the poor girl and do not marry her. But neither Mazurec nor Aveline entertained such evil thoughts. In possession of the needed sum for the ransom, he only asked to acquit himself honestly. After the mass, Mazurec returned to the castle, carrying the money in a purse suspended from his belt. On the road he met a knight who inquired for the way to Nointel; and, would you believe it, Sir? while Mazurec was giving him the directions, the scamp of a knight stooped down in the saddle as if to adjust the strap of his stirrup, snatched the purse from poor Mazurec, and, spurring his horse, galloped off."

"There are hundreds of such thefts committed. The knights look upon them as mere feats of knighthood. But they are infamous acts!"

"Mazurec, left behind distracted, vainly ran after the thief. He lost sight of him. An hour later he arrived breathless at the castle, threw himself at the feet of the bailiff, told him of his mishap, and with tears in his eyes demanded justice against the thief. The Sire of Nointel, who had arrived at his manor that very morning from Paris, accompanied by several friends, happened to cross the corridor at the very time that Mazurec was imploring the bailiff's help. The Sire of Nointel, informed of the occurrence, asked, laughing, whether the bride was pretty. 'There is none prettier in your domain, Sire', answered the bailiff. Suddenly, his eyes falling upon one of the knights of the Sire's suite, Mazurec cried: 'It is he who robbed me of my purse, only an hour ago!' 'Miserable serf', thundered the seigneur, 'dare you charge one of my guests with robbery? You lie!'"

"Without a doubt the thievish knight denied the robbery."

"Yes, Sir, and Mazurec, on his side, still insisted. Thereupon, after a whispered conversation with the bailiff and the knight who was accused of the robbery, the Sire of Nointel gave this decision: 'One of my equerries, escorted by several men-at-arms, shall forthwith proceed to the vicarage and conduct the bride here. According to my right, I shall spend the night with her. To-morrow morning she may be returned to that vassal. As to the charge of robbery, that he has the effrontery to prefer against a noble knight, the knight demands the trial of arms, and if, although defeated, this vile varlet survives the battle, he shall be tied up in a bag and cast into the river as the defamer of a knight. Let justice take its course.'"

"Oh!" cried Jocelyn, "the unhappy lad is lost. The knight is the appellant, as such he has the right to fight on horseback and in full armor, against the serf in a smock-frock and with a stick for only weapon."

"Alas, Sir! As you see I had good reasons for being heavy at heart. Poor Mazurec thought less on the battle than on his bride. He threw himself sobbing at the feet of his seigneur, and beseeched him not to dishonor Aveline. And do you know what answer the Sire of Nointel made to him? 'Jacques Bonhomme'²— that's the title of derision that the nobles give their serfs — 'Jacques Bonhomme, my friend, I have two reasons for spending this night with your wife: first, because, as they say, she is quite comely; and second, because that will be the punishment for your insolence to charge one of my guests with larceny.' At these words Mazurec the Lambkin became Mazurec the Wolf. He threw himself furiously upon his seigneur, meaning to strangle him. But the knights who stood by felled the poor serf to the floor, pinioned him and thrust him into a dungeon. Can anything exceed such

² Jack Drudge.

cruelty? Add to that that the Sire of Nointel is himself betrothed to be married; his bride, the noble damosel Gloriande of Chivry, is to be the queen of the tourney about to take place."

"Shame!" cried Jocelyn, his cheeks aflame with indignation, and furiously striking the table with his Herculean fist. "An end must be put to these horrors! They cry for vengeance! They cry for blood!"

"Oh! There will be blood!" whispered a hollow voice in the ear of Jocelyn. "Floods of blood! The torch and the axe will do their office"; and feeling a strange hand pressing on his shoulder, the champion turned quickly around. Before him stood William Caillet.

"What do you want?" asked the young man, struck by the sinister and desperate looks of the peasant. "What do you want of me? Who are you?"

"I am the father of Mazurec's wife."

"You, poor man?" cried the hostess with pity. "Oh! I regret to have been rude to you. Pardon me, poor father. Alas, what have you come here for?"

"For my daughter," answered William; and he added with a frightful smile: "She will be now returned to me; the night is over; the infamous dues are paid."

"My God! My God!" rejoined Alison, unable to repress her tears. "And when we think that poor Mazurec is a prisoner at the castle, and that this morning, before mass, he is to make the 'amende honorable' on his knees before the Sire of Nointel –"

"He! Is he to be subjected to that further indignity?" cried Jocelyn, interrupting his hostess. "And what is he to apologize for?"

"Alas, Sir champion!" answered Alison, "I have not yet told you the end of the adventure. While Mazurec was being taken to prison, the bailiff went for Aveline at the vicarage and brought her to the castle. She resisted her seigneur with all her strength. He then laughed in her face and said: 'Ho! you resist me! Very well. I shall now have the pleasure of exercising my right by judicial decree. It will be a good lesson to Jacques Bonhomme.' He thereupon had the bride taken to a cell, and lodged a complaint against her in the court of the seneschal at Beauvais. Seeing that the law recognizes the right of a seigneur over his female vassals, the court gave its decree accordingly. It is in the name of justice that the wretched Aveline was violated last night by our seigneur; it is in the name of justice that Mazurec is sentenced to beg the pardon of his seigneur for having intended to oppose him in the exercise of his seigniorial right; it is in the name of justice that, after this public expiation, Mazurec is to fight the thief of a knight."

"Aye," put in William Caillet, clenching his fists; "Mazurec is to fight on foot and armed with a stick against his robber, covered with iron ... Mazurec will be vanquished and killed, or, if he survive, will be drowned. I shall try to fish out his body and bury him in some hole ... Then I shall take away my daughter ... She is to be returned to me this morning, and who knows but in nine months I may be the grandfather of a noble brat!" After a short pause the peasant resumed with a sinister and chilling smile: "Oh! If that child should live ... if it should live..." But he did not finish his sentence. For a moment he remained silent; then, laying his horny right hand upon the shoulder of Jocelyn, he approached the young man's ear and added in a low voice: "Shortly ago you said an end must be put to these horrors, they call for blood!"

"Yes, and I say so again. These horrors cry for vengeance! They cry for the death and destruction of our oppressors!"

"He who says that aloud is a man who will act," replied the serf fastening his small, savage and piercing eyes upon the champion. "If the time for action arrives, remember William Caillet ... of the village of Cramoisy, near Clermont."

"I shall not forget your name," Jocelyn returned in a low voice to Caillet, and clasped his hand. "The hour of justice and vengeance may sound sooner than you think, especially if there are many serfs like you!"

"There are," rejoined the peasant in the same low voice. "Jacques Bonhomme is on his feet. We are preparing a general uprising."

"It was to assure myself regarding that that I rode into this region," whispered Jocelyn in the ear of Caillet, without being heard by Alison. "Silence and courage! The day of reprisal is at hand."

More and more agreeably surprised at meeting in Jocelyn an unexpected ally, the peasant did not remove his penetrating eyes from the young man. Habituated by servitude to mistrust, he feared to be deceived by the promises of an unknown person. Suddenly the chimes of the church of Nointel fell upon their ears. Alison shivered. "Oh!" said she, "I shall not have the courage to witness the ceremony!"

"What do you mean?" asked Jocelyn, while the men who had gathered in the tavern trooped out precipitately, saying: "Let us hasten to the parvise of the church... One should see everything there is to be seen..."

"They are going to witness the 'amende honorable' of poor Mazurec," answered Alison.

"I shall have more courage than you, my good hostess," said Jocelyn taking up his sword and casque, and looking for William Caillet, who, however, had disappeared. "I shall witness that sad ceremony because, for more reasons than one, the fate of Mazurec interests me. The tourney will not begin until after mass; I shall have time to return for my horse so as to have myself forthwith entered by the judge-at-arms as your defender against Simon the Hirsute."

"My God, Sir! Is there, then, no way to prevent the judicial duel of poor Mazurec?.. It means death to him!"

"If he declines the battle he will be drowned; such is the law of our feudal lords. But I hope I may be able to give Mazurec some good advice. I shall try and speak to him. Wait for me here, my pretty hostess, and do not lose hope."

Saying this, Jocelyn wended his steps towards the parvise of the church.

CHAPTER II. THE "AMENDE HONORABLE"

The church of Nointel rose at one end of a spacious square, into which two tortuous streets ran out. The houses, most of which were constructed of wood, sculptured with no little art, were topped with slated roofs, pointed and deeply inclined. Some of these domiciles were ornamented with balconies, where on this morning numerous spectators stood crowded. Thanks to his athletic physique, Jocelyn succeeded without much trouble to reach the edge of the parvise, where, among a number of knights, stood the Sire of Nointel, a tall young man of haughty and scoffing mien, whose reddish blonde hair was curled like a woman's. He wore, according to the fashion of the time, a richly embroidered short velvet tunic, and silk hose of two different colors. The left side of his clothing was red, the other yellow. His shoes, made of tender cordwain, tapered upward like a gilded ram's horn. From his half red, half yellow velvet bonnet, ornamented with a chain of precious stones, waved a tuft of ostrich feathers – altogether a head-gear of exorbitant value. The friends of the Sire of Nointel were, like himself, dressed in parti-colored garb. Behind this brilliant company, stood the pages and equerries of the seigneur carrying his colors. One of them held his banner, emblazoned with three eagle's talons on a red background. At the sight of that device, the designation of the house of Neroweg, the hereditary enemy of his own family, Jocelyn shuddered, astonishment seized him, he became profoundly pensive. The rasping voice of a royal notary drew Jocelyn from his reverie. Stepping forward to the front of the parvise, the notary three times called for silence, and then, amidst the profound stillness of the crowd, he proceeded to read:

"Whereas the charter and statute on the right of first fruits vests in the seigneur of the lands and seigniorship of Nointel, Loury, Berteville, Cramoisy, Saint-Leu and other places the privilege of demanding the first wedded day of all the maids *who are not noble*, and who shall marry in said seigniorship, after which the said seigneur shall no longer touch the said married woman, and shall leave her to her husband;

"And whereas, on the eleventh day of this month, Aveline-who-never-lied, a female serf of the parish of Cramoisy, was married to Mazurec the Lambkin, a miller serf at the Gallion mill;

"And whereas, our young, high, noble and puissant seigneur, Conrad Neroweg, knight and seigneur of the said seigniorship herein above mentioned, having wished to exercise his right of first fruits on the said Aveline-who-never-lied, and the said Mazurec the Lambkin, her husband, having sought to oppose himself thereto by using unseemly words towards the said seigneur, and the said married woman having been required to submit to the said right and having obstinately refused, the said seigneur, by reason of the disobedience of the said married couple and their unseemly words, caused them both to be separately imprisoned and filed a criminal bill with his worship the seneschal of Beauvoisis notifying him of the above occurrences;

"And whereas, an inquest was made in writing and by the summoning of witnesses upon the ancient right and custom in order to ascertain and establish that the said seigneur of Nointel has the said right to the first fruits; and the information being gathered and inquest made, a sentence was rendered by the court of the seneschal of Beauvoisis, as follows, word by word:"

Clenching his fists with rage, Jocelyn observed to himself: "Can law, can justice consecrate such infamy! To what human power can these wretched vassals appeal in their despair? Oh, the martyrs of so many centuries can not fail to demand heavy reprisals!"

The royal notary proceeded to read:

"The case of the young, high, noble and puissant Conrad Neroweg, seigneur of Nointel and other seigniorships, reclamer of the right of first fruits upon all maids, not noble, who marry in the said seigniorship, the party of the one part, and Aveline-who-never-lied, recently married to Mazurec the Lambkin, refuser of the said right, the party of the other part; and the said seigneur of Nointel,

also claimant in reparation and chastisement for the unseemly words pronounced by the said Mazurec the Lambkin. The court of the seneschal of Beauvoisis, in view of the criminal charges of the said seigneur and the information and inquests taken, rendering justice to the parties concerned, says and declares that *the said seigneur is well grounded in law and in reason in claiming the first fruits from all maids, not noble, married in his seignory*; and by reason of that which is declared herein above, the said court has sentenced and now condemns the said Aveline-who-never-lied and the said Mazurec the Lambkin *to render obedience to the said seigneur in what concerns his right of the first fruits*; and concerning the unseemly words that the said Mazurec the Lambkin pronounced against his seigneur, *the said court has sentenced and now sentences him to apologise to said seigneur and, with one knee on the ground, his head bare, and his hands crossed over his breast, to pray his mercy in the presence of all who were assembled at his wedding*. And, furthermore, the said court orders that the present sentence shall be announced by a royal notary or beadle in front of the church of the said seignory."

The decree, which confirmed and consecrated through the organs of law and justice the most execrable of all the feudal laws, produced different emotions in the surrounding crowd. Some, stupefied with terror, misery and ignorance, cowardly resigned to a disgrace that their fathers had been subjected to and was reserved for their own children, seemed amazed at the resistance that Mazurec had offered; others, who, due to a sentiment, if not of love, yet of dignity, prized themselves happy that, thanks to their money, the ugliness of their wives, or the accidental absence of the seigneur, they had been able to escape the ignominy, imagined themselves in the place of the condemned man and were somewhat moved with pity for him; finally, the larger number, married or not, serfs, villeins or townsmen, felt violent indignation, hardly repressed by fear. Hollow murmurs ran through the crowd at the last words of the notary. But all these sentiments soon made place for those of anguish and compassion when, led by the seigneur's men-at-arms, the condemned man appeared at the portico of the church. Mazurec was about twenty years of age, and the benignity of his face and the mildness of his nature had earned him the name of Lambkin. On that day, however, he seemed transfigured by misfortune and despair. His physiognomy was savage and pinched, his clothes in tatters, his face livid, his eyes fixed and red with tears and sleeplessness, his hair tumbling – all imparted to him a frightful appearance. Two men-at-arms unbound the prisoner, and pressing heavily upon his shoulders forced him to drop upon his knees before the Sire of Nointel, who together with his friends, laughed outright at the abject submission of Jacques Bonhomme. Presently the royal notary said in a loud voice:

"The reparation and amende honorable of the condemned man to his seigneur must have for witness those who assisted at the marriage of Mazurec. Let them come forward."

At these words, Jocelyn the Champion saw William Caillet and another robust serf, called Adam the Devil, step from the front ranks of the crowd. To judge by the perspiration that bathed his bony and tired face, the latter had just run a long distance. Struck, at first, by the determined mien of Adam the Devil, Jocelyn saw him, as well as his friend William Caillet, suddenly metamorphose himself, so to speak. Affecting dullness and humble timidity, dropping their eyes, doubling their backs, and dragging their legs, both doffed their caps with a pitiful air as they approached the royal notary. Caillet saluted him by twice bowing to the earth with his arms across his breast and saying in a trembling voice:

"Pardon ... excuse ... Sir, if we, I and my companion, come alone. The other witnesses of the wedding, Michael-kill-bread and Big Peter, they have just been laid up with the fever which they caught draining the swamp of our good seigneur. Their teeth are clattering and they are shaking on the straw. That's why they have not been able to come to town. I am William, the father of the bride; this is my companion, Adam, who witnessed the wedding."

"These witnesses will suffice, I think, for the amende honorable, will they not, seigneur?" said the notary to the Sire of Nointel. The latter answered with an affirmative nod of the head, while continuing to laugh aloud with his friends at the stupid and timorous appearance of the two boors. All the while, on his knees a few paces from his seigneur, Mazurec could not repress his tears at the

sight of Aveline's father; they rolled down slowly from his inflamed eyes while the notary addressed him, saying: "Cross your hands over your chest, and raise your eyes to heaven."

The condemned man clenched his fists with rage and did not follow the notary's orders.

"Ho! pshaw!" cried William Caillet, addressing Mazurec in a reproachful tone. "Don't you hear what this kind gentleman says? He told you to cross your two hands, in this way ... look ... this way ... look at me ..."

These last words, "look at me," were pronounced by the peasant with such force that Mazurec raised his head, and understood the meaning of the rapid glance that Caillet darted at him. Quickly obeying the orders of the notary, the condemned man crossed his arms on his breast.

"Now," proceeded the scribe, "raise your head towards our seigneur and repeat my words: 'Seigneur, I humbly repent having had the audacity of using unseemly words towards you.'"

The serf hesitated a moment, and then, overcoming his aversion with a violent effort, he repeated in a hollow voice: "Seigneur, I humbly repent having had the audacity of ... using ... unseemly words ... towards you."

"Further," pursued the notary, "I repent no less humbly, my seigneur, of having wickedly wished to oppose your exercise of your right of the first fruits upon one of your female vassals, whom I took for my wife."

Mazurec's resignation had reached the end of its tether. The notary's last words, recalled to the unhappy man's mind the infamous violence that the sweet maid whom he tenderly loved had been made a victim of; he uttered a heart-rending cry, hid his face in his hands and, convulsed with sobs, fell forward with his face on the ground. At that spectacle, Jocelyn, whose indignation threatened to overpower his prudence, was about to leap forward, when he again heard the cry of William Caillet. Stooping down to Mazurec as if to help him rise, he said two words in his ears so as to be heard by none others, and continued aloud: "Ho! Pshaw!.. What ails you?.. Why do you weep, my boy?.. You are told that our good seigneur will pardon your fault when you shall have repeated the words that you are ordered to... Go ahead... Fling them out quickly, those words!"

With his face bathed in tears and a smile of the damned, Mazurec repeated these words after the notary had told them over again: "I repent no less humbly, my seigneur, having wickedly wished to oppose your exercise of your right of the first fruits upon one of your female vassals, whom I took for my wife."

"In repentance of which, my seigneur," pursued the notary, "I humbly place myself at your mercy."

"In repentance of which, my seigneur," stammered Mazurec in a fainting voice, "I humbly place myself at your mercy."

"Be it so," responded the Sire of Nointel with a haughty and flippant air. "I grant you mercy. But you shall not be set free until after having rendered satisfaction in a judicial duel, to which you are summoned by my guest Gerard of Chaumontel, a nobleman, whom you have outrageously defamed by accusing him of larceny." Turning thereupon to one of his equerries: "Let the peasant be guarded until the hour of the tourney, and let the daughter be delivered to her father;" and stepping away with his friends towards the door of the church, the young seigneur said to them, laughing: "The lesson will do Jacques Bonhomme good. Do you know, gentlemen, that that stupid pack has of late been pricking up its ears and commenced to bridle up against our rights? Although she was a comely lassie, I cared little for that peasant's wife; but it was necessary to prove to the vile rustic plebs that we own it body and soul; therefore, gentlemen, let us never forget the proverb: 'Smite a villein and he'll bless you; bless a villein and he'll smite you.'³ Now, let us hear the sacred mass; you will tell me whether Gloriande de Chivry, my betrothed, whom you will see in my seigniorial pew, is not a superb beauty."

³ "Poignez villain, il vous oindra; oignez villain, il vous poindra."

"Happy Conrad!" said Gerard of Chaumontel, the robber knight, "for bride, a handsome and radiant beauty, who, besides, is the richest heiress of this region, seeing that after the death of the Count of Chivry, his seigniory, in default of male heirs, will fall from the lance to the distaff! Oh, Conrad! What beautiful days of gold and silk will you not spin, thanks to the opulent distaff of Gloriande of Chivry!"

At the moment when thus chatting the noblemen entered the church, Mazurec, who was still kept a prisoner, vanished under the vault, and a man of the suite of the Sire of Nointel led out Aveline. She was not quite eighteen. Despite the pallor of her face and her deeply disturbed features, the girl preserved her surpassing beauty. She moved with faltering steps, still clad in her humble bride's apparel, of coarse white cloth. Her loose hair fell upon and half covered her shoulders. Her lacerated arms still bore the traces of tight hands, seeing that, in order to triumph over the desperate resistance of his victim, the Sire of Nointel had her bound fast. Crushed with shame at the thought of being thus exposed to the gaze of the crowd, the moment she stepped upon the parvis Aveline closed her eyes with an involuntary movement, and did not at first see Mazurec who was being taken back to prison. However, at the heart-rending cry that he uttered, a shudder went over her frame, she trembled at every limb, and her eyes met the gaze of her husband, a gaze of desolation, in which passionate love and yet painful repulsion mixed with ferocious jealousy, raised within his breast by the thought of the outrage that his wife had been subject to, were all depicted at once. The last of these feelings was betrayed by an involuntary movement, made by the wretched young man, who, avoiding the beseeching looks of Aveline, made a gesture of horror, covered his face with his hands, and rushed under the vault like one demented, followed by the men-at-arms who had him in charge.

"He despises me," murmured the girl with fainting voice and following her husband with haggard eyes. "He now no longer loves me." Saying this, Aveline became livid, her knees yielded under her, she lost consciousness and would have rolled upon the ground without Caillet, who, hastening to meet her, received her in his arms, saying: "Your father remains to you." Then, helped by Adam the Devil, he raised her up, and both, carrying the swooning young bride in their arms, disappeared in the crowd.

Jocelyn the Champion, a witness to this distressing scene, rushed into the vault that opened upon the parvis, overtook the keepers of Mazurec and said to one of them:

"The serf they are taking away yonder has been summoned to a judicial combat, is it so comrade?"

"Yes," answered the man-at-arms, "he is to combat with the knight Gerard of Chaumontel. Such is the sentence."

"I must speak to that serf."

"He is to communicate with nobody."

"I am his judicial second in this combat, will you venture to keep me from seeing and speaking with my client? By Satan! I know the law. If you refuse – "

"There is no need of bawling so loud. If you are Jacques Bonhomme's judicial second, come ... you have a sorry principal!"

CHAPTER III. THE TOURNAMENT

The tourney, a ruinous spectacle offered to the nobility of the neighborhood by the Sire of Nointel in celebration of his betrothal, was held on a large meadow that stretched before the gates of the town. The lists were according to the royal ordinance of the year 1306, twenty-four paces long by forty wide, and surrounded by a double row of fences four feet apart. In this latter space the horn and clarion blowers were posted; likewise the valets of the combatting knights were allowed in this latter enclosure, ready to carry their masters from the *mêlée*, or to run to their assistance when unhorsed, seeing that these valiant jousts were covered with such heavy and thick armor that they could move only with difficulty. Within these barriers were also seen the heralds and sergeants-at-arms, charged with preserving order at the tourney, and passing upon foul blows.

The plebs of the town and neighboring fields, having hastened to witness the spectacle at the close of the mass, crowded on the outside. A more ragged, wan, miserable and worn-out mass could hardly be imagined than that presented by the crowd whose crushing labors supplied the prodigalities of their seigneurs. The only satisfaction enjoyed by these cowed and brutified people was that of being allowed to assist from a distance, as on this day, at the sumptuous displays that they paid for with their sweat and their marrow. The vassals, leaving their mud-huts, where, exhausted with hunger and broken by toil – at night they huddled pell-mell on the marshy ground like animals in their pens – contemplated with an astonishment that was sometimes mixed with savage hatred, the brilliant assemblage covered with silks and velvets, embroideries and precious stones, seated on a spacious amphitheater, that, decked with tapestries and rich hangings, rose along one of the sides of the lists, and was reserved for the noble dames, the seigneurs and the prelates of the vicinage. On either side of the amphitheater, which was sheltered by tent-cloths from the rays of the sun and from the rain, were two tents intended for the knights who participated in the jousts. There they don their heavy armors before the combat, and thither are they transported when hurt or unhorsed. Numerous banners emblazoned with the arms of the Sire of Nointel floated from the top of poles that surround the lists. The queen of the tournament is Gloriande, a noble young lady, the daughter of Raoul, count and seigneur of Chivry, and betrothed since the previous month to Conrad of Nointel. Magnificently bedizened in a scarlet robe embroidered with gold, her black hair braided with pearls, tall and of remarkable beauty but of a haughty and bold type, with disdainful lips and imperious mien, Gloriande was throned superbly under a species of canopy contrived in the center of the platform, whence she could command a view of the arena. Her father, proud of his daughter's beauty, stood behind her. The noblemen and ladies of all ages, were seated on benches flanking either side of the canopy where the young queen of the tournament paraded her wealth and her charms. Suddenly the clarions sound the opening of the passage of arms; and a herald, clad in red and yellow, the colors of Nointel, advances to the center of the arena and cries the formula:

"Hear ye, hear ye, seigneurs and knights, and people of all estates: – our sovereign seigneur and master, by the grace of God, John, King of the French, forbids under penalty of life and of forfeiture of goods, all speaking, crying out, coughing, expectorating or uttering and giving of any signs during the combat."

The profoundest silence ensues. One of the bars is lowered, and the Sire of Nointel, cased in a brilliant steel armor tipped with gold ornaments, rides into the arena. Mounted on a richly caparisoned charger that he causes to prance and caracole with ease, he reins in before the canopy of Gloriande, and the damosel, taking from her own neck the necklace of gold strands, ties it to the iron of the lance that her betrothed lowers before her. By that act he is accepted by the lady as her knight of honor, a quality by which he is to exercise sovereign surveillance over the combatants, and if the point of the weapon from which hangs the necklace touch any of the jousts, he must immediately

withdraw from the combat. In giving her necklace to her knight, Gloriande's shoulders and bosom remain naked, and she receives without blushing the testimonies of admiration showered upon her by the knights in her vicinity, whose libertine praises savor strongly of the obscene crudities peculiar to the language of those days. After having made the tour of the field, during which he displays anew his skill in horsemanship, the Sire of Nointel returns to the foot of the platform where the queen of the tournament is seated, and raises his lance. The clarions forthwith resound, the bars are let down at the opposite sides of the arena, and each gives passage to a troop of knights armed cap-a-pie, visors down, recognizable only by their emblems or the color of their shields and the banners of their lances. The two sets, mounted on horses covered with iron, remain for an instant motionless like equestrian statues, at the extremities of the arena. The lances of these gallants, six feet long and stripped of their iron, are, in the parlance of tourneys, "courteous"; their thrust, no wise dangerous, can have for its only effect to roll the ill-mounted combatant off his horse. The Sire of Nointel consults the radiant Gloriande with the eye. With a majestic air she waves her embroidered handkerchief, and immediately her knight of honor utters three times the consecrated formula: "Let them go! Let them go! Let them go!"

The two sets break loose; the horses are put to a gallop; and, lances in rest, they rush to the center of the lists, where they dash against one another, horses and riders, with an incredible clatter of hardware. In the shock the larger number of lances fly into splinters. The disarmed tilters thus declare themselves vanquished, and their armor and mounting belong by right to the vanquisher. Accordingly, these tourneys are as much a game of hazard as is a game of dice. Not a few renowned tilters, hankering after florins more than after a puerile glory, derive large revenues from their skill in these ridiculous jousts; almost always do the adversaries whom they have overcome ransom their arms and horses with considerable sums. At a signal of the Sire of Nointel, a few minutes' truce followed upon the disarming of two of the knights who rolled down upon the thick bed of sand that the ground is prudently covered with. There is nothing so pitifully grotesque as the appearance of these disarmed gallants. Their valets raise them up in almost one lump within their thick iron shell that impedes their movements, and with legs stiff and apart, they reach the barrier steaming in perspiration, seeing that, in order to soften the pressure, these noble combatants wear under their armor a skin shirt and hose thickly padded with horse's hair. The vanquished abandon the lists in disgrace, while the vanquishers, after prancing over the arena, approach the platform where the queen of the tournament is enthroned. There they lower their lances to her in token of gallant homage. The charmed Gloriande answers them with a condescending smile and they leave the lists in triumph. The remaining knights now continue the struggle on foot and with swords – swords no less "courteous" than their lances, without either point or edge, so that these valiant champions skirmish with steel bars three feet and a half long, and they carry themselves heroically in a combat that is all the less perilous, seeing that they are protected against all possible danger by their padded undergarments laid over by an impenetrable armor.

At a fresh signal from the Sire of Nointel, a furious conflict is engaged in by the remaining combatants. One of them slips and falls over backward and remains motionless, as little able to rise as a tortoise laid on its back. Another of the Cæsars has his sword broken in two in his own hands. Only two combatants now remain, and continue the struggle with rage. The one carries a green buckler emblazoned with an argent lion, the other a red buckler emblazoned with a gold dolphin. The knight of the argent lion deals with his sword such a hard blow upon his adversary's casque, that, dazed by the shock, the latter falls heavily upon his haunches on the sand. The great conqueror superbly enjoyed his triumph by proudly contemplating his vanquished adversary, ridiculously seated at his feet; and, responding to the enthusiastic acclamations of the assembled nobility, he approached the throne of the queen of the tourney, bent one knee, and raised his visor. After placing a rich collar around the conqueror's neck in token of his prowess, Gloriande stooped down, and, following the custom of the time, deposited a loud and long kiss upon his lips. This duty, attached to her distinguished office, Gloriande fulfilled without blushing, and with an off-handedness that denoted ample experience.

Thanks to her beauty, the young lady of Chivry had been often before chosen queen of tournaments. The clarions announced the victory of the knight of the argent lion, who, strutting proudly with the trophy around his neck, placed his right hand on his hip, walked around the arena, and marched out at the barriers.

These first passages of arms were followed by an interval during which the valets of the Sire of Nointel, carrying cups, plates, and flagons of gold and silver, that glistened in the dazzled eyes of the peasants, served the noble company on the platform with spiced wines, refreshments and choice pastries, ample honor being done by all to the munificence of the Sire of Nointel.

CHAPTER IV. THE JUDICIAL COMBAT

The seigneurs, their wives and daughters on the platforms had just enjoyed the refection, while commenting upon the incidents of the tourney, when a shudder ran through the crowd of peasants and bourgeois massed outside of the barriers. Until then and while witnessing the jousts and the passages of arms they had been animated with curiosity only. In the combat, which it was murmured among them was to follow these harmless struggles, the populace felt themselves concerned. It was to be a combat to the death between a vassal and a knight, the latter on horseback and in full armor, the vassal on foot, dressed in his blouse and armed with a stick. Even the more timid and brutalized ones among the vassals revolted at the thought of so crassly unequal a conflict, in which one of their class was inevitably destined to death. It was, accordingly, amidst a silence laden with anxiety and suppressed anger that one of the heralds uttered three times from the center of the arena the consecrated formula: "Let the appellant enter!"

The knight Gerard of Chaumontel, now summoned to the trial of a judicial combat against the accusation of theft made by Mazurec, issued from one of the contiguous tents and entered the arena on horseback, in full armor. His buckler hangs from his neck; his visor is up; in his hand he carries a little image of St. James, for whom the pious knight seemed to entertain a peculiar devotion. His two seconds, on horseback like himself, ride beside him. With him they make the round of the arena while the fair Gloriande says to her father disdainfully: "What a shame for the nobility to see a knight reduced, in order to prove his innocence, to do combat with a varlet!"

"Oh, my daughter! What evil days these are that we live in!" answered the aged seigneur with a growl. "Those accursed king's jurists are crossing their pencils over all our rights under the impertinent pretext of legalizing them. Was not a decree of the court of the seneschal of Beauvoisis requisite in order to authorize our friend Conrad to exercise his seigniorial right over a miserable female serf in revolt?" Remembering, however, that his daughter was the betrothed of the Sire of Nointel, the Count of Chivry stopped short. Gloriande surmised the cause of her father's reticence and said to him with a haughtiness that verged on anger: "Do you think that I am jealous of such as her? Can I look upon these female serfs as rivals?"

"No, no; I am not placing such an insult upon you, my daughter ... but after all, the rebellion of that female vassal is as novel as it is monstrous. Oh, the spirit of revolt among the populace, although partly broken to-day, has spread into our domains and has infested our peasants also; and that is taken by the crown for a pretext to add to our troubles by encroaching upon our rights, claiming that they must be first sanctioned by the jurists. A curse upon all reform kings!"

"But, father, our rights remain."

"Blood and thunder, my daughter! Do our privileges stand in need of confirmation by the men of the gown? Does not our class hold its rights by the right of our ancestors' swords? No, no, the crown aims at monopolizing all rights, and to be the sole exploiter of the plebs."

"Have not the kings," observed another knight, "taken from us one of our best sources of revenue, the minting of money in our seignories, under the pretext that we coined false money? The devil take kings who hold up law! May hell consume the gentry of the pen!"

"Blood and thunder! It is enough to make one's blood boil in his veins," cried the Count of Chivry. "Is there in the whole world any worse money than the king's. False coiners have been quartered who are less thievish than our King John and his predecessors."

"Let that good prince look elsewhere than here for support," put in another knight. "The truce with England will soon expire. If war breaks out anew, King John will see neither a man nor a gold piece out of my domain. He may, for all I care, leave his carcass on the field of battle."

"Oh, gentlemen," said Gloriande gulping down a yawn, "how uninteresting is your conversation! Let us rather talk about the Court of Love that is soon to hold its sessions in Clermont, and for which I shall order the most skillful hairdressers from Paris. I am also expecting a Lombard who is to bring me magnificent silks, woven with gold and silver, and which I shall wear during the solemnity."

"And what do you expect to pay all those fine things with?" cried the Count of Chivry. "How are we to meet the expenses of brilliant tourneys and the sumptuous displays of the Court of Love if, on the one side, the King ruins us, and, on the other, Jacques Bonhomme refuses to work?"

"Oh! Oh! Dear father!" replied the fair Gloriande, laughing aloud. "Jacques Bonhomme will meekly bend the neck. At the first crack of the whip of one of our hunters you will see those varlets lie down flat upon their faces. And mind you," added the young lady, redoubling her laughter, "just turn your eyes to that bugaboo of a Jacques Bonhomme, does he not look redoubtable?" and she pointed with her finger at Mazurec the Lambkin, who, at the second call of the herald, had stepped into the arena accompanied by his two seconds, Jocelyn the Champion and Adam the Devil. Mazurec, dressed in his "blaude," the ancient Gallic blouse, made of coarse cloth and of the same fabric as his hose, wore on his head a woolen cap while his wooden shoes partly hid his bare feet. Jocelyn, his second, held in his hand a stout stick of sorb, four feet long, and freshly cut by himself in a neighboring thicket, with an eye to the fact that, when fresh, the sorb wood is heavy and does not easily break. The appellee, as well as the appellant, in the judicial battle were required to make the round of the arena before engaging in combat. The serf filled the formality in slow and measured steps, accompanied by his two seconds.

"My brave fellow," Jocelyn said to Mazurec, "do not forget my advice, and you stand a chance of worsting your noble robber, for all that he may be on horseback and armed cap-a-pie."

"I'd as lief die," answered the serf, marching dejectedly between his two seconds with his head down and his eyes fixed: "When I saw Aveline this morning it was as if a knife had entered my heart," he added sobbing. "Oh, I am a lost man!"

"By the navel of the Pope! No feebleness," replied Jocelyn with emphasis and alarmed at the despondent voice of his principal. "Where is your courage? This morning from a lambkin you became a wolf."

"To now live with my poor wife would be a daily torture to me," murmured the serf. "I would rather the knight killed me outright."

Thus conversing, half the field had been covered by Mazurec in company with his seconds. The latter, more and more alarmed at the unhappy young man's despondency, were at that moment passing at the foot of the amphitheater where the nobility of the neighborhood were seated with the fair Gloriande in their midst. Casting an expressive look at the champion, Adam the Devil nudged Mazurec with his elbow and said to him in a low voice: "Take a look at the betrothed of our seigneur... I swear she's handsome!.. That will make a pretty wedding! Hm!.. Won't the two lovers be happy?" At these words, which fell like molten lead upon the bleeding wound in his heart, the vassal shook convulsively. "Take a good look at the handsome young lady," proceeded Adam the Devil. "See how happy she is in her rich clothes. Do you hear her laugh?.. Go to! No doubt she's laughing at you and at your wife, who was violated last night by our seigneur... But do take a look at the beauty! I wager she is jeering at you."

Drawn from his dejection, and rage mounting to his heart, Mazurec brusquely raised his head. For an instant his eyes fiery and red with weeping, fastened on the betrothed of his seigneur, the haughty damosel, resplendent in attire and personal beauty, radiant with happiness, and surrounded by brilliant knights, who, courting her smiles, crowded near her.

"At this hour," the caustic voice of Adam the Devil whispered to the ear of Mazurec, "your own bride is drinking her shame and her tears. What! In order to avenge Aveline and yourself would you not make an attempt to kill the nobleman who robbed you!.. That thief is the cause of all your misfortune."

"My stick!" cried the vassal leaping forward, transported with rage, at the same instant that one of the sergeants-at-arms hurried by to notify him that it was not allowed to stop on the arena and look at the ladies, but that he was to betake himself to one of the tents in order, before the combat, to take the customary oaths with the vicar of Nointel. Now inflamed with hatred and rage, Mazurec quickly followed the sergeant-at-arms, while, walking more slowly, Jocelyn said to Adam the Devil:

"You must have suffered a great deal in your lifetime ... I overheard you a minute ago. You know how to fire hatred – "

"Three years ago," broke in the serf with a wild look, "I killed my wife with an axe, and yet I loved her to distraction – "

"Was that at Bourcy – near Senlis?"

"Who told you of it? How come you to know it?"

"I happened to ride through the village on the day of the murder. You preferred to see your wife dead rather than disgraced by your episcopal seigneur."

"Exactly. That's the way I felt on the subject."

"But how did you become a serf of this seigniory?"

"After I killed my wife, I kept in hiding for a month in the forest of Senlis, where I lived on roots; thereupon I came to this country. Caillet gave me shelter. I offered my services as a butcher to the superintendent of the seigniory of Nointel. After the lapse of a year I was numbered among the vassals of the domain. I remained here out of friendship for Caillet."

During this conversation between his two seconds Mazurec had arrived near the tent where he, as well as the Knight of Chaumontel, was to take the customary oath. Clad in his sacerdotal robes and holding a crucifix in his hands, the vicar addressed the serf and the knight.

"Appellant and appellee, do not ye shut your eyes to the danger to which you expose your souls in combating for a bad cause. If either of you wishes to withdraw and place himself at the mercy of his seigneur and the King, it is still time. It will soon be too late. One of you is about to cross the gates of the other world. You will there find seated a God who is merciless to the perjurer. Appellant and appellee, think of that. All men are equally weak before the tribunal of divine justice. The eternal kingdom is not entered in armor. Is either of you willing to recede?"

"I shall maintain unto death that this knight has robbed me; he has caused my misfortunes; if God is just, I shall kill this man," answered Mazurec in a voice of concentrated rage.

"And I," cried the knight of Chaumontel, "swear to God that that vassal lies in his throat, and outrageously slanders me. I shall prove his imposture with the intercession of our Lord and all his saints, especially with the good help of St. James, my blessed patron."

"Aye," put in Jocelyn, "and above all with the good help of your armor, your lance and your sword. Infamous man! To battle on horseback, helmet on head, cuirass on body, sword at your side, lance in your hand, against a poor man on foot and armed only with a stick. Aye, you behave like a coward. Cowards are thieves; consequently, you stole the purse of my principal!"

"How dare you address me in such words!" cried the knight of Chaumontel. "Such a common fellow as you! Miserable vagabond! Intolerable criminal!"

"Heavens be praised! He utters insults!" exclaimed Jocelyn with delight. "Oh, Sir thief, if you are not the most cowardly of two-legged hares, you will follow me on the spot behind yonder pavillion, or else I shall slap your ignoble scamp's face with the scabbard of my sword."

Livid with rage, Gerard of Chaumontel was, to the extreme joy of Jocelyn, about to accept the latter's challenge, when one of his seconds said to him:

"That bandit is trying to save his principal by provoking you to a fight. Fall not into the trap. Do not mind him, mind the vassal."

Taking this prudent advice, Gerard of Chaumontel contemptuously answered Jocelyn: "When arms in hand I shall have convicted this other varlet of imposture, I shall then consider whether you deserve that I accept your insolent challenge."

"You evidently desire to taste the scabbard of my sword," cried Jocelyn. "By heaven, I shall not deprive you of the dish; and if your hang-dog face does not redden with shame, it will redden under my slaps. Coward and felon – "

"Not another word, or I shall order one of my men to expel you from the arena," said the herald-at-arms to Jocelyn; "a second has no right to insult the adversary of his own principal."

Jocelyn realized that he would be compelled to yield to force, held his tongue, and cast a distracted look at Mazurec. The vicar of Nointel raised the crucifix and resumed in his nasal voice: "Appellant and appellee, do you and each of you still insist that your cause is just? Do you swear on the image of the Saviour of mankind?" and the vicar presented the crucifix to the knight, who took off his iron gauntlet and placing his hand upon the image of Christ, declared:

"My cause is just, I swear to God!"

"My cause is just," said in turn Mazurec; "and I take God for my witness; but let us combat quickly; oh, quickly!"

"Do you swear," proceeded the vicar, "that neither of you carries about his person either stone, or herb, or any other magic charm, amulet or incantation of the enemy of man?"

"I swear," said the knight.

"I swear," said Mazurec panting with rage. "Oh, how much time is lost!"

"And now, appellant and appellee," cried the herald-at-arms, "the lists are open to you. Do your duty."

The knight of Chaumontel seized his long lance and jumped upon his horse, which one of his seconds held for him, while Jocelyn, pale and deeply moved, said to Mazurec, while giving him his stick: "Courage!.. Follow my advice ... I expect you will kill that coward ... But one last word... It regards your mother ... Did she never tell you the name of your father?"

"Never ... as I told you this morning in prison. My mother always avoided speaking to me of my father."

"And her name was Gervaise?" asked Jocelyn pensively. "What was the color of her hair and eyes?"

"Her hair was blonde, her eyes black. Poor mother."

"And had she no other mark?"

"She had a small scar above her right eye-brow – "

The clarions sounded at this point. It was the signal for the judicial duel. Unable to restrain his tears, Jocelyn pressed Mazurec in his arms and said to him: "I may not at a moment like this reveal to you the cause of the double interest that you inspire me ... My suspicions and hopes, perhaps, deceive me ... But courage ... Hit your enemy on the head."

"Courage!" put in Adam the Devil in an undertone. "In order to keep your blood boiling, think of your wife ... remember the betrothed of your seigneur laughed at you... Kill the thief, and patience... It will some day be our turn to laugh at the noble damosel... Think above all of your wife ... of her last nights shame and of your own... Remember that you have both been made forever unhappy, and fall to bravely upon that nobleman! Be brave... You have a cane, nails and teeth!"

Mazurec the Lambkin uttered a cry of rage and rushed into the lists at the moment when, in answer to a motion from the Sire of Nointel, the marshal of the tourney gave the signal for the combat to the appellant and appellee by calling three times the consecrated words: "Let them go!"

The noble spectators on the platform laughed in advance at the sorry discomfiture of Jacques Bonhomme; but among the plebeian crowd all hearts stopped beating with anxiety at this decisive moment. The knight of Chaumontel, a vigorous man, armed in full panoply, mounted on a tall charger covered with iron, and his long lance in rest, occupied the center of the arena, while Mazurec dashed to the spot barefoot, clad in his blouse and holding his stick in his hands. At sight of the serf, the knight, who, out of contempt for such an adversary, had disdained to lower his visor, put the spurs to his horse, and lowering his pointed iron-headed lance, charged upon the serf certain of transfixing

him then and there, and then trampling over him with his horse. But Mazurec, mindful of Jocelyn's recommendations, avoided the lance thrust by suddenly letting himself down flat upon his face; and then, partly rising up at the moment when the horse was about to grind him under its hoofs, he dealt the animal two such heavy blows with his stick on its forelegs that the courser, stung with pain, reared, slipped its footing and almost fell over, while its rider was shaken out of position on the saddle.

"Felony!" cried the Sire of Nointel with indignation. "It is forbidden to strike a horse!"

"Well done, my brave woolen cap!" cried the populace on the outside, palpitating with suspense and clapping their hands, despite the strictness and severity of the royal ordinances which commanded profound silence to the spectators at a tourney.

"Fall to, Mazurec!" simultaneously cried Jocelyn and Adam the Devil. "Courage! Kill the nobleman! Kill him! Death to the thief!"

Mazurec rose, and seeing the knight out of poise and holding to the bow of his saddle, dropped his stick, picked up a fistful of sand, leaped upon the horse behind Gerard of Chaumontel, while the latter was seeking to regain his equilibrium, lost no time in clutching the knight around the neck with one hand, turned him half over backward, and with the other rubbed his eyes with the sand he had just picked up. Almost half-blinded, the noble robber dropped his lance and reins and sought to carry his hands to his eyes. Mazurec seeing the movement, put his arms around the knight, and, after a short struggle, succeeded in making him wholly lose his balance and tumble down to the ground, where both fell rolling on the arena, while the crowd of serfs, now considering the serf the victor over the knight, clapped their hands, stamped on the ground with joy and cried: "Victory for the woolen cap!"

Gerard of Chaumontel, however, although blinded by the sand and dazed by the fall, gathered fresh strength from the rage that took possession of him at finding himself unhorsed by a peasant, and with little difficulty regained the upper hand over his unskilled adversary. In the unequal struggle against the man clad in iron, the tight clasp of the virtually naked serf was in vain; his nails broke off against, or glided harmlessly over the polished armor of his adversary, while the latter, finally succeeding in planting his two knees upon the serf's chest, bruised his head and face with a shower of hammer blows dealt with his iron gauntlet. His face beaten to pulp and bleeding, Mazurec pronounced once more the name of Aveline and remained motionless. Gerard of Chaumontel, who was gradually regaining his sight, not satisfied with having almost beaten the serf's face out of shape, then drew his dagger to finish his victim. But quickly recalling himself, and animated by a feeling of refined cruelty, he replaced the dagger in his belt, rose upright, and placing one of his iron shod feet upon the chest of the prostrate and moaning Mazurec, cried in a stentorian voice: "Let this vile impostor be bound up, put in a bag and thrown into the river as he deserves. It is the law of the duel; let it be carried out!"

CHAPTER V. SHEET LIGHTNINGS

An oppressive silence followed the close of the judicial combat, as Gerard of Chaumontel, leaving the outstretched body of the serf on the sand, rejoined his seconds while rubbing his irritated eyelids, and jointly they quitted the arena. The sergeant-at-arms had proceeded to pick up the prostrate body of the vassal in order to carry it to the bridge that spanned the near-by river; and the vicar of Nointel had followed on the tracks of the mournful train, in order to administer the last sacraments to the condemned man so soon as he should recover consciousness, and before he was bundled into a bag, agreeable to the ordinance, and cast into the river. For a moment struck dumb with terror by the issue of the judicial combat, the plebs crowd was slowly recovering its voice, and, despite its habit of respect towards the seigneurs, had begun to murmur with rising indignation. Several voices were heard to say that the knight having been unhorsed by the vassal, the latter was to be considered the victor and should not be killed. The turmoil was on the increase, when an unexpected event suddenly drew to itself the attention of the crowd and cut short its criminations. A large troop of men-at-arms, covered with dust and one of whom bore a white flag emblazoned with the fleur-de-lis,⁴ hove in sight at a distance over the field and rapidly approached the fenced-in arena. Mazurec was forgotten. Sharing the astonishment of the assembled nobility at the sight of the armed troop that had now reached the barriers, the Sire of Nointel applied both spurs to his horse, rode rapidly forward, and addressing himself to one of the new arrivals, a herald with the fleur-de-lis jacket, saluted him courteously and inquired:

"Sir herald, what brings you hither?"

"An order of the King, my master. I am charged with a message to all the seigneurs and noblemen of Beauvoisis. Having learned that a large number of them were gathered at this place, I came hither. Listen to the envoy of King John."

"Enter the lists and read your message aloud," answered Conrad of Nointel to the herald, who, producing a parchment from a richly embroidered bag, rode to the center of the arena and prepared to read.

"This extraordinary message augurs nothing good," said the seigneur of Chivry to his daughter Gloriande. "King John is going to demand some levy of men of us for his war against the English, unless it be some new edict on coinage, some fresh royal pillage."

"Oh, father! If, like so many other seigneurs, you had only chosen to go to the court at Paris ... you would then have shared in the largesses of King John, who, we hear, is so magnificently prodigal towards the courtiers. You would then have gained on the one side what you lost on the other. And then also ... they say the court is such a charming place ... continuous royal feasts and dances, enhanced by choicest gallantry. After our marriage Conrad must take me to Paris. I wish to shine at the royal court."

"You are a giddy-headed girl," observed the aged seigneur shrugging his shoulders, and half closing his fist, which he applied to his ear for a trumpet, so as to be better able to hear the royal herald, he remarked to himself: "What devil of a song is he going to sing to us?"

"John, by the grace of God, King of the French," said the herald reading from his parchment, "to his dear, beloved and faithful seigneurs of Beauvoisis; Greeting!"

"Proceed, proceed; we can do very well without your politeness and greetings," grumbled the aged seigneur of Chivry. "They are gilding the pill for us to swallow."

⁴ The three lilies, the device of French royalty.

"Pray, father, let me hear the messenger," said Gloriande impatiently. "The royal language has a court perfume that ravishes me."

The herald proceeded: "The mortal enemy of the French, the Prince of Wales, son of the King of England, has perfidiously broken the truce that was not to expire for some time longer. He is advancing at the head of a strong army."

"There we are," cried the Count of Chivry, angrily stamping with his feet. "It is a levy of men that we are going to be asked for. Blood and massacre! To the devil with the King!"

The herald continued reading: "After having set fire to everything on their route, the English are marching towards the heart of the country. In order to arrest this disastrous invasion, and in view of this great public danger, we impose upon our peoples and our beloved nobility a double tax for this year. Furthermore, we enjoin, order and command all our dear, beloved and faithful seigneurs of Beauvoisis to take up arms themselves, levy their men, and join us within eight days at Bourg, whence we shall take the field against the English, whom we shall vanquish with the aid of God and our valiant nobility. Let everyone be at his post of battle. Such is my will. JOHN."

This appeal from the King of the French to his valiant nobility of Beauvoisis was received by the noble assemblage with a mute stupor, that speedily made place for murmurs of anger and rebellion.

"We refuse to give men and money. To the devil with King John!" cried the Count of Chivry. "Already has he imposed subsidies upon us for the maintenance of his troops. Let him take them to war! We propose to remain at our manors!"

"Well said!" exclaimed another seigneur. "The King evidently kept up no army. All our moneys have been squandered in pleasures and festivities. The court at Paris is an insatiable maw!"

"What!" interjected a third; "we are to wear ourselves out making Jacques Bonhomme sweat all the wealth he can, and the cream thereof is to go into the King's coffers? Not by all the devils! Already have we given too much."

"Let the King defend himself. His domains are more exposed than our own. Let him protect them!"

"It is all we can do, we and our own armed forces, to protect our castles against the bands of marauders, of Navarrais and of the hired soldiery that ravages our lands! And are we to abandon our homes in order to march against the English? By the saints! Fine goslings would we be!"

"And in our absence, Jacques Bonhomme, who seems to indulge in dreams of revolt, will put in fine strokes!"

"By heavens, messieurs!" cried a young knight, "We, nevertheless, may not, to the shame of knighthood, remain barracked on our own manors while battles are being fought on the frontier."

"Well! And who keeps you back, my dear fire-eater?" cried the Count of Chivry. "Are you curious to make acquaintance with war? Very well; depart quickly, and soon... Each one disposes at his will of his own person and men."

"As to me," loudly put in the radiant Gloriande with fiery indignation, "I shall not bestow my hand on Conrad of Nointel if he does not depart for the war, and return crowned with the laurels of victory, leading to my feet ten Englishmen in chains. Shame and disgrace! Gallant knights to stay at home when their King calls them to arms! I shall not acknowledge for my lord and husband any but a valiant knight!"

Despite Gloriande's heroic words and a few other rare protests against the selfish and ignominious cowardice of the larger number of seigneurs, a general murmur of approval received the words of the aged seigneur of Chivry, who, encouraged by the almost unanimous support of the assembly, stepped upon his bench and answered the herald in a stentorian voice:

"Sir, in the name of the nobility of Beauvoisis, I now answer you that we have our hands so full on our own domains, that it would be disastrous for us to take the field in distant regions. For the rest, the request of the King will be considered when the deputies of the nobility and the clergy shall be assembled in the States General of the Kingdom. Until then we shall remain at home."

A sudden outburst of hisses from the crowd of peasants and bourgeois answered the words of the seigneur of Chivry; and Adam the Devil, leaving Jocelyn the Champion for a moment alone with Mazurec, who, having regained consciousness, was resignedly expecting the hour of his death, thrust himself among several groups of serfs saying:

"Do you hear them? Fine seigneurs they are!.. What are they good for?.. Only to combat in tourneys with pointless lances and edgeless swords, or to indulge in bravados in combats, where they are fully armed, against Jacques Bonhomme, armed only with a stick!"

"That's so!" answered several angry voices. "To the devil with the nobility!"

"Poor Mazurec the Lambkin! It is enough to make one's heart ache to see his face bleeding under the iron gauntlet of the Knight."

"And now they are to put him in a bag and throw him into the water!.. I declare... That's what they call justice..."

"Ah! When, thanks to the cowardice of our seigneurs, the English will have penetrated to this region," resumed Adam the Devil, "what with our masters on one side and the English on the other, we shall be like iron beaten on the anvil by the hammer. Oppressed by these, pillaged and sacked by the others, our lot will be twice as hard. Woe is us!"

"That's what happens now when bands of marauders descend upon our villages. We flee for safety to the woods, and when we return, we find our homes in flames or in ashes!"

"O, God! What a lot is ours!"

"And yet our vicar says that secures our salvation ... in heaven! Another fraud upon us!"

"Woe is us if on top of all our ills we are to be ravaged and tortured by the English. That means our end."

"Yes, and we are all to go down through the cowardice of our seigneurs," put in Adam the Devil, "themselves, their families and retainers safely entrenched and provisioned in their fortified castles, they will allow us to be pillaged and massacred by the English! Oh! What a fate is in store for us!"

"And when everything we have will have been devastated," replied another serf in despair, "our seigneur will then tell us, as he told us when the last gang of marauders passed over the region like a hurricane: 'Pay your taxes, Jacques Bonhomme,' 'But, Sire, the marauders have carried away everything; they have left us only our eyes to weep with, and we weep!' 'Oh, you rebel, Jacques Bonhomme! Give him quick a beating and put him to the torture!' Oh, it is too much ... too much!.. That must end. Death to the nobles and their helpers, the clergy!"

The murmurs among the rustic plebs, at first low and rumbling, presently broke out into loud hisses and imprecations, and these were so menacing and direct against the nobles, that the seigneurs, for a moment taken aback by the incredible audacity of Jacques Bonhomme, bridled up furiously, drew their swords, and, in the midst of alarmed cries of the elder and younger ladies, precipitately descended the steps of the platform to chastise the varlets at the head of the sergeants of the tourney, their own men-at-arms and also of those of the royal herald, who promptly sided with the noblemen against the plebs.

"Friends," cried Adam the Devil, rushing from one group of the serfs to another to inflame their courage, "if the seigneurs are a hundred, we are a thousand. Have you not a minute ago seen Mazurec unhorse a knight all alone, with his stick and only a handful of sand? Let's prove those nobles that we are not afraid of them. Pick up stones and sticks! Let's deliver Mazurec the Lambkin! Death to the nobles!"

"Yes! Take up stones and sticks! Let's deliver Mazurec!" responded the more daring ones. "The devil take the seigneurs who wish to leave us at the mercy of the English!"

Under the pressure of this furious mob a portion of the barrier around the lists was soon torn up and a large number of vassals, arming themselves with the debris of the fence, redoubled their threats and imprecations against the seigneurs. Attracted by the tumult and catching a glimpse of Adam the Devil, who with glistening eyes was brandishing one of the posts of the barrier, Jocelyn left Mazurec

and ran towards the serf to whom he cried out: "Those wretches will be mowed down ... you will lose everything... The right time has not yet come!"

"It is always in time to kill noblemen," answered Adam the Devil, grinding his teeth, saying which he redoubled his vociferations: "Stones and sticks! Let's deliver Mazurec!"

"But you lose him by that!" cried Jocelyn in despair. "You will lose him! I hoped to save him!" and turning to the surrounding serfs he said: "Do not attack the seigneurs; you are in the open field, they on horseback; you will be trampled under foot. Come, now! Disperse!"

The voice of Jocelyn was lost in the tumult, and his efforts remained fruitless in the midst of the exasperation of the mob. A reflux of the crowd separated him from Adam the Devil, and soon the foresight of the champion was but too well verified. For a moment taken by surprise and even frightened at the aggressive attitude of Jacques Bonhomme, a spectacle they had never before witnessed, the seigneurs presently recovered their composure. Headed by the Sire of Nointel and supported by about fifty men-at-arms, sergeants and knights who speedily mounted their horses, the armed nobility now advanced in good order, and charged upon the revolted serfs with swords and lances. The women and children who happened to be in the crowd, were thrown down and trampled over by the horses, and filled the air with their heart-rending cries. The peasants, without order and without leadership, and already frightened at their own audacity whose consequences they now dreaded, fled in all directions over the meadow. Some few of the more valorous and determined stood their ground and were either cut down by the knights or severely wounded and taken prisoners. In the heat of the fray, Adam the Devil, who had been thrown down by a sabre cut, was seeking to rise when he felt a Herculean hand seize him by the collar, raise him and despite his resistance, drag him far away from the field of carnage. The serf recognized Jocelyn who said to him while dragging him along: "You will be a precious man on the day of uprising ... but to allow yourself to be killed to-day is an act of folly... Come, let us preserve ourselves for a later day."

"Mazurec is lost!" cried the serf in the agony of despair and struggling against Jocelyn; but the latter, without making answer, compelled Adam the Devil, who was greatly enfeebled by the loss of blood, to take shelter behind a heap of lumber that had been brought thither for the construction of the barrier around the lists, but had been found unnecessary. Both lay themselves down flat upon the grass.

CHAPTER VI. PROPHECIES AND PREMONITIONS

The sun has gone down; night is drawing nigh. The noble dames, frightened by the recent popular commotion, have left the platform of the tourney and returned to their manors either on their palfreys or on the cruppers of their cavaliers' horses. At a short distance from the lists where lay the corpses of a considerable number of serfs, killed in their futile attempt at revolt, flows the Orville River. On one side its banks are precipitous, but on the other they slope gently, covered with reeds. The river is crossed by a wooden bridge. To the right of the bridge are a few old willows. Their branches have almost all been freshly lopped off with axes. The few remaining ones, strongly supported and spreading out, have been turned into gibbets. From them now hang the bodies of four of the vassals who had been captured in the revolt. The pendent bodies resemble shadows cast upon the clear sky of the dusk. Night approaches rapidly. Standing on the middle of the bridge surrounded by his friends, among whom is Gerard of Chaumontel, the Sire of Nointel makes a sign, and the last of the revolted and captured serfs is, despite his cries and entreaties, hanged like his companions from a branch of a willow on the bank of the river. A man then brings to the bridge a large bag of coarse grey material, of the kind used by the millers. A strong cord inserted at its mouth like a purse-string enables its being tied closely. Mazurec the Lambkin is led forward tightly pinioned. Up to then he had been seated at one end of the bridge near the vicar. The latter after having placed the crucifix to the mouths of the serfs that had been hanged, returned to the victim about to be drowned. Mazurec is no longer recognizable. His bruised face covered with clotted blood is hideous to behold. One of his eyes has been knocked out and his nose crushed under the fierce blows dealt him by the knight of Chaumontel with his iron gauntlet. The executioner opens the mouth of the bag while the bailiff of the seigniorie approaches Mazurec and says: "Vassal, your felony is notorious; you have dared to charge Gerard, a nobleman of Chaumontel, with robbery; he appealed to a judicial duel where you were vanquished and convicted of calumny and defamation; in obedience to the royal ordinance, you are to be submerged until death does ensue. Such is the supreme and irrevocable sentence."

Mazurec steps forward, and as he is about to be seized and thrust into the bag, he raises his head, and addressing the Sire of Nointel and Gerard, says to them as if inspired with prophetic exaltation:

"It is said among our people that those about to perish become seers. Now, this is what I foretell: Gerard of Chaumontel, you robbed me and now you have me drowned ... you will die drowned. Sire of Nointel, you have done violence to my wife ... your wife will be done violence to. Mayhap my wife may bring to the world the child of a noble; ... your wife may bring to the world the child of a serf. May God take charge of my vengeance. The day of reprisals will come!"

Mazurec the Lambkin had barely uttered these words when the executioner proceeded to tie him up in the bag. Conrad grew pale and shivered at the sinister prophecy of his vassal, and was unable to utter a word. Gerard, however, addressing the serf who was being "bagged" burst out laughing and pointed to the five hanged serfs who rocked in the evening breeze, and whose outlines were dimly perceptible like spectres in the twilight, said:

"Look at the corpses of those villeins who dared to rebel against their seigneurs! Look at the water that runs under the bridge and that is about to swallow you up ... should Jacques Bonhomme still dare to kick, there are our long lances to pierce him through, wide branched trees to hang, and rivers to drown him."

Mazurec was the while tied in the bag, and at the moment when the executioner was about to hurl him into the river, the vassal's voice was heard for the last time from within the canvas. "Gerard of Chaumontel, you will be drowned; Sire of Nointel, your wife will be violated..."

A peal of contemptuous laughter from the knight answered the serf's prediction, and amidst the silence of night the splash was heard of Mazurec's body dropping into the deep waters of the river.

"Come away, come away," said the Sire of Nointel to Gerard in a faltering voice; "let's return to the castle; this place frightens me. The prophecy of that miserable villein makes me shudder despite myself... He mentioned reprisals."

"What feebleness! Conrad, are you becoming weak-minded?"

"Everything that happened to-day is of ill-omen. I tremble at the future."

"What do you mean?" replied Gerard, following his friend who was walking away at a rapid pace. "What is that you said about ill-omen? Come, explain the cause of your terror."

"This evening, before returning to Chivry, Gloriande said to me: 'Conrad, to-morrow my father celebrates our betrothal in the chapel of his castle; I desire that you depart that same evening to join the forces of the King; and even then I shall not be your wife unless you lead back from battle and place at my feet, as a pledge of your bravery, ten Englishmen in chains and captured by yourself.'"

"The devil take such folly!" cried Gerard. "The romances of knighthood have turned her head!"

"'I wish,' added Gloriande, 'that my husband be illustrious by his prowesses. Therefore, Conrad, to-morrow I shall take the oath at the altar to finish my days in a monastery, if you are killed in battle, or if you fail in the promises that I have demanded of you!'"

"By the saints! That girl is gone daft on her Englishmen in chains. There are only blows to be fetched in war, and your betrothed runs the chances of seeing you return without an eye, a leg or an arm ... if you do return... The devil take her whims!"

"I am bound to yield to Gloriande's wishes. There is no more stubborn head than hers. Besides, she loves me as I do her. Her wealth is considerable. I have dissipated a good part of my fortune at the court of King John. I cannot renounce the marriage. Whatever it may cost me, I must join the army with my men. Sad it is, but there is no choice!"

"Be it so! But then fight ... prudently and moderately."

"I am anxious to live so that I may marry Gloriande ... provided during my absence the prediction of that miserable vassal – "

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" broke in the knight of Chaumontel, laughing out aloud. "You surely are not troubled with the fear that during your absence Jacques Bonhomme will violate your wife?"

"These villeins, an unheard of thing, have dared to insult, to menace and to throw themselves upon us like the wild beasts that they are."

"And you saw that rag-tag flee before our horses like a set of hares. The executions of this evening will complete the lesson, and Jacques Bonhomme will remain the Jacques Bonhomme of ever. Come! Make your mind easy! While I prefer a hundred times the hunt, the tourneys, wine, game and love to the stupid and dangerous feats of war, I shall accompany you to the army, so as to bring you back soon to the beautiful Gloriande. As to the English prisoners that you are to lead in chains to her feet as a pledge of your valor, we shall scrape together a few leagues from our lady's manor the first varlets that we can lay our hands on. We shall bind them and threaten them with hanging if they utter a single word; and they will do well enough for the ten English prisoners. Is not the idea a jolly one? But, Conrad, what are you brooding over?"

"Perhaps I was wrong in exercising my right over that vassal's wife," replied the Sire of Nointel with a somber and pensive mien. "It was a mere libertine caprice, because I love Gloriande. But the resistance of the scamp, who, besides, charged you with theft, irritated me." And resuming after a moment of silence, the Sire of Nointel addressed his friend: "Tell me the truth; here among ourselves; did you really rob the villein? It would have been an amusing trick... I only would like to know if you really did it?"

"Conrad, the suspicion is insulting – "

"Oh, it is not in the interest of the dead serf that I put the question, but it is in my own."

"How? Explain yourself more clearly."

"If that vassal has been unjustly drowned ... his prophecy would have more weight."

"By heavens! Are you quite losing your wits, Conrad? Do you see me saddened because Jacques Bonhomme has predicted to me that I was to be drowned?.. The devil! It is I who mean to drown your sadness in a cup of good Burgundy wine... Come, Conrad, to horse ... to horse!.. Supper waits, and after the feast pretty female serfs! Long live joy and love! Let's reach the manor in a canter – "

"Perhaps I did wrong in forcing the serf's wife," the Sire of Nointel repeated to himself. "I know not why, but a tradition, handed down from the elder branch of my family, located at Auvergne, comes back to me at this moment. The tradition has it that the hatred of the serfs has often been fatal to the Nerowegs!"

"Hallo, Conrad, to horse! Your valet has been holding your stirrup for the last hour," broke in the cheerful voice of Gerard. "What are you thinking about?"

"I should not have violated the vassal's wife," the Sire of Nointel still mumbled while swinging himself on his horse's back, and taking the route to his manor accompanied by Gerard of Chaumontel.

CHAPTER VII. WRECKED HEARTS

The ground floor of the house of Alison the Huffy is closed. A lamp burns inside, but the door and windows are bolted within. Aveline-who-never-lied lies half stretched out upon a bench. Her hands lie across her breast, her head reclines on the knees of Alison. She would be thought asleep were it not for the tremors that periodically convulse her frame. Her discolored visage bears the traces of the tears, which, rarer now, still occasionally escape from her swollen eyelids. The tavern-keeper contemplates the unfortunate girl with an expression of profound pity. William Caillet, seated near by, with his elbows on his knees, his forehead in his hands, takes not his eyes from his daughter. He remembered Alison, and relying on her kind-heartedness, had taken Aveline to the tavern with the aid of Adam the Devil, who immediately had gone out again to the tourney to meet Jocelyn the Champion, by whom he was later snatched from the fray.

Suddenly sitting up affrighted, Aveline cried semi-delirious: "They are drowning him... I see it... He is drowned!.. Did you not hear the splash of his body dropping into the water?.. My bridegroom is dead..."

"Dear daughter," said Alison, breaking into tears, "calm yourself... Have confidence in God... They may have had mercy upon him – "

"She is right... This is the hour," said William Caillet in a low hollow voice. "Mazurec was to be drowned at nightfall. Patience! Every night has its morn. The unfortunate man will be avenged."

Hearing a rap at the door, Alison, who was holding Aveline in her arms, turned to William: "Who can it be at this hour?"

The old peasant rose, approached the door and asked: "Who's that?"

"I, Jocelyn the Champion," a voice answered.

"Oh!" murmured Aveline's father, "he comes from the river"; saying which he opened.

Jocelyn entered with quick steps. At the sight, however, of Mazurec's wife, held in a swooning condition in the arms of Alison, he stopped short, turned to Caillet, and whispered to him: "He is saved!"

"He?" cried the serf stupefied. "Saved?"

"Silence!" said Jocelyn, pointing to Aveline. "Such news may prove fatal if too suddenly conveyed."

"Where is he? Where did he take refuge?"

"Adam is bringing him hither... He can hardly stand... I came ahead of them... He is weeping incessantly... We came across the field... The curfew has sounded. We met nobody. Poor Mazurec is saved – "

"I shall go out to meet him," said Caillet, panting with emotion. "Poor Mazurec! Dear son! Dear child!"

Jocelyn approached Aveline, who, with her arms around Alison's neck was sobbing bitterly. "Aveline," said Jocelyn to her, "listen to me, please. Have courage and confidence – "

"He is dead," murmured Aveline moaning and not heeding Jocelyn. "They have drowned him."

"No ... he is not dead," Jocelyn went on saying. "There is hope of saving him."

"Good God!" cried Alison, now weeping with joy and embracing Aveline in a transport of happiness. "Do you hear, dear little one? He is not dead."

Aveline joined her hands and essayed to speak, but the words died away on her lips that trembled convulsively.

"This is what happened," explained Jocelyn. "Mazurec was put into a bag and he was thrown into the water. Fortunately, however," Jocelyn hastened to add, seeing Aveline utter a smothered cry, "Adam the Devil and myself, profiting by the darkness, had hidden ourselves among the reeds that

border the bank of the river about a hundred paces from the bridge. The current was toward us. With the aid of a long pole we sought to drag towards us the bag in which Mazurec was tied up, and to pull him out in time."

"Oh!" stammered the young girl. "Help came too late."

"No, no! Calm yourself. We succeeded in drawing the bag to the bank. Adam cut it open with one rip of his knife, and we took Mazurec out of the canvas still breathing."

"He lives!" exclaimed the girl in a delirium of joy. Her first movement was to precipitate herself towards the door, and there she fell in the arms of her father, who, having just returned, stood on the threshold.

"Yes, he lives!" said Caillet to his daughter, closing her to his breast. "He lives ... and he is here!"

That same instant Mazurec appeared at the threshold, pale, faint, dripping water, his face unrecognizable, and supported by Adam the Devil. Instead of running to the encounter of her husband, Aveline staggered back frightened and cried: "It is not he!"

She did not recognize Mazurec. His crushed eye, encircled with black and blue concussions, his crushed nose, his lips split and swollen, so completely changed his once sweet and attractive features, that the hesitation of the vassal's wife lasted several seconds; but soon recovered from her painful surprise, she threw herself at the neck of Mazurec, and kissed his wounds with frantic excitement.

Mazurec returned the embrace of his wife and murmured sadly: "Oh, poor wife ... although I still live, yet you are a widow."

These words, reminding as they did the young couple that they were forever separated by the infamous outrage that Aveline had been the victim of and that might mean maternity to her, caused them both to break forth into a flood of tears that flowed while they remained closely locked in a gloomy and mute embrace.

"Oh!" exclaimed William Caillet, even whose harsh features were now moistened with tears at the sight of the ill-starred couple, "to avenge them... How much blood... Oh! how much blood... What conflagrations ... what massacres ... the reprisals must be terrible."

"That seigniorial race must be strangled out of existence," put in Adam the Devil, biting his nails with suppressed rage. "They must be extirpated ... they must be killed off ... all of them ... even the whelps in the cradle ... not a vestige of the seigniorial race must be left in existence." And turning to Jocelyn, the peasant added with savage reproach: "And you, you tell us to be patient – "

"Yes," answered Jocelyn, interrupting him; "yes, patience, if you wish on one day to avenge the millions of slaves, serfs and villeins of our race, who for centuries have been dying, crushed down, tortured and massacred by the seigneurs. Yes, patience, if you desire that your vengeance be fruitful and accomplish the deliverance of your brothers! To that end I conjure you, and you, Caillet, also – no partial revolts! Let all the serfs of Gaul rise simultaneously, on one day, at the same signal. The seigniorial race will not see the morrow of that day."

"To wait," replied Adam the Devil, scowling with impatience; "always to wait!"

"And when will the signal of revolt come?" asked Caillet. "Whence is it to come? Answer me that!"

"It will come from Paris, the city of revolts and of popular uprisings," answered Jocelyn; "and that will be within shortly."

"From Paris," exclaimed the two peasants in a voice expressive of astonishment and doubt. "What! Those Parisians ... will they be ready to revolt?"

"Like you, the Parisians are tired of the outrages and exactions of the seigneurs; like you, the Parisians are tired of the thieveries of King John and his court, both of whom ruin and starve the country; like you, they are tired of the cowardice of the nobility, the only armed force in the country, and that, nevertheless, allows Gaul to be ravaged by the English; finally, the Parisians are tired of praying and remonstrating with the King to obtain from him the reform of execrable abuses. The

Parisians are, therefore, decided to appeal to arms against the royalty. The rupture of the truce with the English, just announced by the royal messenger, will undoubtedly hasten the hour of revolt. However, until that solemn hour shall sound, patience, or all is lost."

"And these Parisians," replied Caillet with redoubled attention, "who directs them? Have they a leader?"

"Yes," answered Jocelyn with enthusiasm, "a most courageous, wise and good man. He is an honor to our country!"

"And his name?"

"Etienne Marcel, a bourgeois, a draper, and provost of the councilmen of Paris. The whole people are with him because he aims at the welfare and the enfranchisement of the people. A large number of the bourgeois of the communal towns, that have fallen back into the royal power and who are ready to rise, are in touch with Marcel. But he realizes that the bourgeois and artisans would be guilty of a wicked act if they did not offer their advice and help to the serfs of the country and aid them also to break the yoke of the seigneurs. By acting in concert – serfs, artisans and bourgeois – we could easily prevail over the seigneurs and the royal house. Count ourselves; count our oppressors. How many are they? A few thousand at the most, while we are millions!"

"That's true," said Caillet, exchanging looks of approval with Adam. "The towns and the country combined, that's the world! The seigneurs and their clergy are insignificant."

"I came to this place," proceeded Jocelyn, "by the advice of Etienne Marcel, calculating that, as a rule, tourneys attract a large number of vassals. I was to ascertain whether the sentiment of rebellion existed in this province as it did in others. I have no longer any doubt on the subject. I have met you, William and Adam, and no longer ago than this afternoon I have seen, much as I regretted the partial and hasty movement, that Jacques Bonhomme, tired of his burden of shame, misery and sufferings, is ripe for action. I shall now return to Paris with a heart full of hope. Therefore, patience! Friends, patience! Soon will be the hour of reprisals sound, the hour of inexorable justice. Then, death to our oppressors!"

"Yes," answered Caillet; "we shall settle the accounts of our ancestors ... and I shall settle the accounts of my daughter... Do you see my child? Do you?" and the old peasant pointed to Aveline who sat near Mazurec. Overcome with sorrow, mute, their eyes fixed on the floor and holding each other's hands the smitten couple presented a picture of unutterable woe.

"But coming to think of it," said Jocelyn. "Mazurec cannot remain in this territory."

"I have thought of that," rejoined Caillet. "To-night I shall return to Cramoisy with my daughter and her husband. I know a grotto in the thickest part of the forest. The hiding-place was long of service to Adam. I shall take Mazurec thither. Every night my daughter will take to him a share of our pittance. The poor child feels so desolate that to separate her entirely from her husband would be to kill her. He shall remain in hiding until the day of vengeance shall have arrived. You may rely on me, upon Adam and upon many others."

"But who will give the signal at which the towns and country folks are to rise?" asked Adam the Devil.

"Paris," responded Jocelyn. "Before long I shall have moneys brought to you, or I may bring them myself, with which to purchase arms. Be careful not to awaken the suspicions of the seigneurs. Buy your arms one by one in town ... at fairs, and hide them at home. If you know any safe blacksmiths, get them to turn out pikes ... town money will furnish you with iron ... and with iron you will be able to purchase revenge and freedom. Who has iron has bread!"

A prolonged neighing just outside the door interrupted the conversation. "It is Phoebus, my horse," cried Jocelyn, agreeably reminded that he had left the animal tied close to the tourney. "He must have grown tired of waiting for me, must have snapped the strap and returned to the tavern after me, where, however, he has been only once before. Brave Phoebus," Jocelyn added, proceeding to the door. "This is not the first proof of intelligence that he has given me." Hardly had Jocelyn opened

the upper part of the door than the head of Phoebus appeared; the animal neighed anew and licked the hands of his master, who said to him: "Good friend, you shall have a good supply of oats, and then we shall take the road."

"What, Sir, you intend to depart this very night?" asked Alison the Huffy, drying her tears that had not ceased to flow since the return of Mazurec. "Do you mean to depart, despite the dark and the rain? Remain with us at least until to-morrow morning."

"The royal messenger has brought tidings that hasten my return to Paris, my pretty hostess. Keep a corner for me in your heart, and ... we shall meet again. I expect to be soon back in Nointel."

"Before leaving us, Sir champion," insisted Alison, rummaging in her pocket, "take these three franks. I owe them to you for having won my case."

"Your case?.. I have not yet pleaded it!"

"You have gained my case without pleading it."

"How is that?"

"This forenoon, when you returned for your horse to ride to the tourney, Simon the Hirsute came out of his house as you passed by. 'Neighbor,' said I to him, 'I have not until now been able to find a champion. I now have one.' 'And where is that valiant champion?' answered Simon sneering. 'There,' said I, 'do you see him? It is that tall young man riding yonder on the bay horse.' Simon then ran after you, and after a careful inspection that took you in from head to foot, he came back crestfallen and said to me: 'Here, neighbor, I give you three florins, and let's be quits.' 'No, neighbor, you shall return to me my twelve florins, or you will have to settle with my champion, if not to-day, to-morrow.' A quarter of an hour later, Simon the Hirsute, who had now turned sweet as honey, brought me my twelve florins. Here are the three promised to you, Sir champion."

"I have not pleaded, and have nothing coming to me from you, my pretty hostess, except a kiss which you will let me have when you hold my stirrup."

"Oh, what a large heart you have, Sir champion!" cordially answered Alison. "One embraces his friends, and I am certain you now entertain some affection for me."

After Phoebus had eaten his fill and Jocelyn had thrown a thick traveling cloak over his armor, he returned to the room. Approaching Mazurec he said to him with deep emotion: "Courage and patience ... embrace me ... I know not why, but I feel an interest in you beside that which your misfortunes awaken ... I shall ere long have clarified my doubts"; and, then addressing Aveline: "Good-bye, poor child; your hopes are shattered; but at least the companion of your sorrows has been saved to you. Often will your tears mingle with his and they will seem less bitter"; turning finally to Caillet and Adam the Devil, whose horny hands he pressed in his own: "Good-bye, brothers ... remember your promises; I shall not forget mine; let us know how to wait for the great day of reprisal."

"To see that day and avenge my daughter, to exterminate the nobles and their tonsured helpers, is all I desire," answered Caillet; "after that I shall be ready to die."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

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