

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE KNIGHT OF
MALTA

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The Knight of Malta

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Eugène Sue

The Knight of Malta

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The travellers who now sail along the picturesque coasts within the district of the Bouches-du-Rhone – the peaceable inhabitants of shores perfumed by the orange-trees of Hyères, or the curious tourists, whom steamboats are continually transporting from Marseilles to Nice or to Gênes – are perhaps ignorant of the fact that two hundred years ago, under the flourishing administration of Cardinal Richelieu, the seashore of Provence was, almost every day, plundered by Algerian pirates, or other robbers from Barbary, whose audacity knew no bounds. Not only did they capture all the merchant vessels leaving port, – although these ships were armed for war, – but they landed under the cannon even of the forts, and carried away with impunity the inhabitant whose dwellings were not adequately armed and fortified.

These depredations increased to such a degree that in 1633 Cardinal Richelieu instructed M. de Séguiran, one of the most eminent men of that time, to visit the coast of Provence, for the purpose of ascertaining the best means of protecting them from the invasion of pirates.

We will quote a passage from the memoir of M. de Séguiran in order to give to the reader an exact idea of the scenes which are to follow.

“There is,” says he, “in the town of La Ciotat, a sentry-box which the consuls have had built on one of the points of the rock of Cape l’Aigle, in which they keep a man, very expert in navigation, on guard night and day, to watch for pirate vessels.

“Every evening, toward nightfall, the guard in the sentry-box of La Ciotat kindles his fire, which is continued by all the other similar sentry-boxes to the lighthouse of Bouc.

“This is a certain signal that there is not a corsair in the sea.

“If the said guard in the sentry-box has, on the contrary, recognised one, he makes two fires, as do all the others from Antibes to the lighthouse of Bouc, and this is accomplished in less than a half-hour of time.

“The inhabitants of La Ciotat confess that commerce has been better during the last few years. But as far as can be learned, it is ruined.

“The corsairs from Barbary in one year seized eighty vessels and put about fifty of their best sailors in chains.”

As we have said, so great was the terror that these Barbary pirates inspired along the coast that every house was transformed into a fortress.

“Continuing our way,” says M. de Séguiran, “we arrived at the house of the lord of Boyer, gentleman of the king’s chamber, which house we found in a state of defence, in case of a descent of the corsairs, – having a terrace in front, facing the port, and on it twelve pieces of cast iron, several pieces of less calibre, and two swivel-guns, and in the said house four hundred pounds of powder, two hundred balls, two pairs of armour, and twelve muskets and short pikes.

“At Bormez and at St. Tropez,” says M. de Séguiran, further on, “commerce is so seriously injured that it cannot amount to ten thousand pounds, which is a consequence not only of the poverty of the inhabitants, but also of the invasions made by pirates, who enter their ports almost every day, so that very often vessels are compelled to touch port, in order that the men who man them may escape, or the inhabitants of the place arm themselves.

“At Martignes, a community which has suffered great losses in the persons of its inhabitants, – esteemed the best and most courageous seamen on the Mediterranean, – many of them have been

made slaves by the corsairs of Algiers and Tunis, who practise their piracies more than ever, in the sight of the forts and fortresses of that province.”

The reader can imagine the contempt of these Barbary pirates for the forts on the coast, when he knows that the seashore was in such a deplorable state of defence that M. de Séguiran says, in another passage of his report to Cardinal Richelieu:

“The next day, January 24th, at seven o'clock in the morning, we went to the fortified castle named Cassis, belonging to the Lord Bishop of Marseilles, where we found that the entire garrison consisted of a porter only, a servant of the said bishop, who showed us the place, and where there were only two small pieces of ordnance, one of which had been emptied.”

Later, the Archbishop of Bordeaux made the same remark in reference to one of the strongest positions of Toulon.

“The first and most important of these forts,” says the warrior prelate in his report, “is an old tower where there are two batteries, in which fifty cannon and two hundred soldiers could be placed; there are good cannon within, but all are dismounted, and no ammunition, except what was sent by order of your Eminence [Cardinal Richelieu] fifteen days ago. The commandant is a simple, good man, who has for garrison only his wife and her servant, and, according to what he says, he has not received a farthing in twenty years.”

Such was the state of things a few years before Cardinal Richelieu was invested by Louis XIII. with the office of grand master in chief and general superintendent of the navigation and commerce of France.

In studying attentively the aim, the progress, the methods, and results of the government of Richelieu, – in comparing, in a word, the point of departure of his administration with the imperious conclusion of absolute centralisation toward which it always tended, and which he attained so victoriously, – one is especially impressed by the character of the navy, by the incredible confusion and multiplicity of powers or rival rights which covered the seashore of the kingdom with their inextricable network.

When the cardinal was entrusted with the maritime interests of France, he could count but little upon the support of a weak, timid, restless, and capricious king; besides, he felt that France was secretly agitated by profound political and religious discords. Alone, opposing the exorbitant pretensions represented by the most powerful houses of France, – haughty and jealous guardians of the last traditions of feudal independence, – it was essential that the will of Richelieu should be indomitable, even obstinate, in order to crush beneath the level of administrative unity interests so numerous, so tenacious, and so rebellious! Such was, however, the work of this great minister.

There is no doubt that the ardent and sacred love of the general good, the noble, instinctive perception of the needs and progress of humanity, – those pure and serene aspirations of a DeWitt or a Franklin, – would not have sufficed the cardinal in undertaking and sustaining so fierce a struggle; perhaps, too, it was essential that he should feel himself animated by an unbridled, insatiable ambition, in order to cope with so many formidable antagonisms, to despise so many outcries, to prevent or punish so many dangerous revolts by prison, exile, or the scaffold, and at last achieve the end of gathering in his dying and sovereign hand all the resources of the state.

It was by this means – we think so, at least – that the genius of Richelieu, exalted by an unconquerable personality, succeeded in consummating this admirable centralisation of conflicting powers, – the constant aim and glorious end of his administration.

Unfortunately, he died at the time he was beginning to organise this authority so valiantly conquered.

If France, at the time of the cardinal's death, presented still upon her surface the distinct evidences of a complete social overthrow, the soil was at least beginning to be freed from the thousand parasitical and devouring forces which had so long exhausted her strength.

So, one might say that almost always eminent men, although of diverse genius, are born in time to achieve the great labours of governments.

To Richelieu, that resolute and indefatigable clearer of untilled ground, succeeds Mazarin, who levelled the earth so profoundly ploughed, – then Colbert, who sowed it, and made it fruitful.

The imperial will of Richelieu appeared under one of its most brilliant aspects in the long struggle he was obliged to sustain, when he was entrusted with the organisation of the navy.

Up to that time, the governor-generals of Provence had always challenged the orders of the admiralty of France, styling themselves the “born admirals” of the Levant.

As such, they pretended to the maritime authority of the province; a few of these governors, such as the Counts of Tende and of Sommerives, and, at the period of which we speak, the Duke of Guise, had received from the king special letters which conferred upon them the title of admiral. These concessions, drawn from the weakness of the monarch, far from supporting the pretensions of the governor-generals, protested, on the contrary, against their usurpation, since these titles proved clearly that the command of sea and land ought to be separate.

Thus we see how divided and antagonistic were these rival powers, that the cardinal, in performing the functions of his office as grand master of navigation, wished imperiously to unite and centralise.

It can be seen by this rapid and cursory view, and by the extracts which we have borrowed from the report of M. de Séguiran, that a frightful disorder reigned in every department of power.

This disorder was the more increased by the perpetually recurring conflicts of jurisdiction, either through the governors of the province, or through the admiralties, or through the feudal claims of many gentlemen whose estates commanded a forest or a river.

In a word, abandonment or disorganisation of fortified places, ruin of commerce, robbery of the treasury, invasion of the seashore, terror of populations retiring into the interior of the country, in the hope of flying from the attacks of these Barbary pirates, – such was the grievous picture presented by Provence at the period in which this story opens, – a story of incredible facts which seem rather to belong to the barbarity of the middle ages than to the seventeenth century.

CHAPTER II. MISTRAON

About the end of the month of June, 1633, three distinguished travellers, arriving at Marseilles, established themselves in the best inn of the city. Their dress and accent were foreign. It was soon known that they were Muscovites, and although their attendants were not numerous, they lived in magnificent style. The eldest of the three travellers had called upon the Marshal of Vitry, Governor of Provence, then residing in Marseilles, and the marshal had returned his visit, a circumstance which greatly enhanced the dignity of the foreigners.

They employed their time in visiting the public build-ings, the port, and the docks. The preceptor of the youngest of these travellers, with the permission of the Marshal of Vitry, made careful inquiry of the consuls concerning the productions and commerce of Provence, the condition of the merchant service, its equipment and destination, evidently anxious, for the benefit of his pupil, to make a comparison between the growing navy of the North and the navy of one of the most important provinces of France.

One day these Muscovites directed their journey toward Toulon.

The eldest of the three foreigners appeared to be fifty years old. His countenance presented a singular union of pride and severity. He was attired in black velvet; a long red beard covered his breast, and his hair, of the same colour, mingled with a few silver locks, showed beneath a Tartar cap trimmed with costly fur. His sea-green eyes, his sallow complexion, his hooked nose, his heavy eyebrows, and his thin lips gave him a hard and ironical expression.

He walked at some distance from his companions, and seldom spoke, and when he did it was only to hurl at them some bitter sarcasm.

The age and appearance of the two other Muscovites presented a striking contrast.

One, who seemed to be the preceptor of the younger, was about forty-five years old. He was short and fat, almost to obesity, although he seemed to have a vigorous constitution.

He wore a long robe of coarsely woven brown silk, after the manner of the Orientals, and an Asiatic cap; a Persian dagger of rare workmanship ornamented his girdle of orange-coloured silk. His fat, ruddy face, covered with a thick brown beard, and his thick lips breathed sensuality; his small, gray eyes sparkled with malice. Sometimes, in a shrill voice, he gave vent to some jest of audacious cynicism, frequently in Latin, and always borrowed from Petronius or Martial; so that the other two travellers, with allusion to the taste of their companion for the works of Petronius, had given him the name of one of the heroes of this writer, and called him Trimalcyon.

The pupil of this singular preceptor seemed at the most to be only twenty years of age. His person was of the ordinary size, but most elegant; his dress, like that of the Muscovites of the age, was a happy union of the fashions of the North and the East, arranged with perfect taste. His long brown hair fell in natural curls from a black cap, flat and without brim, set on one side and ornamented with a gold and purple band; the two ends of this band, finely embroidered and fringed, fell over the collar of a black woollen jacket, embossed with designs in purple and gold, and fastened to the hips by a cashmere shawl; a second jacket with loose sleeves, made of rich black Venetian fabric, and lined with scarlet taffeta, reached a little below the knees; large, loose Moorish trousers, hanging over red morocco buskins, completed the picturesque attire.

An observer would have been embarrassed in assigning a certain character to the countenance of this young man. His features were of perfect regularity; a young, silky beard shaded his chin and lips; his large eyes shone like black diamonds, under his straight brown eyebrows; the dazzling enamel of his teeth scarcely equalled the deep carmine of his lips; his complexion was of a soft brown pallor, and his slender figure seemed to combine strength and elegance.

But this physiognomy, as charming as it was expressive and variable, reflected in turn the different impressions which the two companions of this young man made on his mind.

If Trimalcyon uttered some gross and licentious jest, the young man, whom we will call Erebus, applauded it with a mocking, sneering smile, or, perhaps, replied in words which surpassed the cynicism of his preceptor.

If the nobleman, Pog, a silent and morose man, made a remark of unusual bitterness, suddenly the nostrils of Erebus would dilate, his upper lip curl disdainfully, and his whole face express the most contemptuous sarcasm.

On the contrary, if Erebus did not come under these two fatal influences, or an absurd boasting did not make him appear the advocate of vice, his face would become sweet and serene, – an attractive dignity beamed from his beautiful features; for cynicism and irony only passed over his soul, – noble and pure instincts soon resumed their sway, as a pure fountain regains its clearness when the disturbing element no longer troubles its crystal waters. Such were these three distinguished persons.

They were walking, as we have said, from Marseilles to Toulon.

Erebus, silent and thoughtful, walked a few steps in front of his companions. The road plunged into the defiles of Ollioules, and hid itself in the midst of these solitary rocks.

Erebus had just reached a small open space, where he could overlook a great part of the route, which at this point was very steep and formed a sort of elbow around the eminence upon which the young man stood. Interrupted in his reverie by the sound of singing in the distance, Erebus stopped to listen.

The voice came nearer and nearer.

It was a woman's voice, with a resonance of wonderful power and beauty.

The air and the words she sang expressed an unaffected melancholy. Soon, at a sudden turn of the road, Erebus could see, without being seen, a company of travellers; they quietly accommodated themselves to the step of their saddle-horses, that climbed the steep road with difficulty.

If the coast of Provence was often desolated by pirates, the interior of the country was as little safe, for the narrow passes of Ollioules, solitudes almost impenetrable, had many times served as a refuge for brigands. Erebus was not astonished to see the little caravan advance with a sort of military circumspection.

The danger did not seem to be imminent, for the young girl continued to sing, but the cavalier who led the march took the precaution to adjust his musket on his left thigh, and at frequent intervals to test his firearms, leaving behind him a little cloud of bluish smoke.

This man, a military figure in the full strength of manhood, wore an old leather jerkin, a large gray cap, scarlet breeches, heavy boots, and rode a small white horse; a hanger or hunting-knife was fastened to his belt, and a tall black hound, with long hair and a leather collar bristling with iron points, walked in front of his horse.

About thirty steps behind this forward sentinel came an old man and a young girl.

The latter was mounted on an ambling nag, as black as jet, elegantly caparisoned with a silk net and a blue velvet cloth; the silver mounting of the bridle glittered in the rays of the setting sun; the reins, scarcely held by the young girl, fell carelessly upon the neck of the nag, whose gentle and regular step by no means interrupted the harmonious measure of the beautiful traveller's song.

She wore right royally the charming riding-habit so often reproduced by painters in the reign of Louis XIII. On her head was a large black hat with blue feathers, which fell backward on a wide collar of Flanders lace; her close-fitting coat of pearl-gray taffeta, with large, square basques, had a long skirt of the same material and colour, both skirt and waist ornamented with delicate lace-work of sky-blue silk, whose pale shade matched admirably the colour of the habit. If one ever doubted the fact that the Greek type had been preserved in all its purity among a few of the families of Marseilles and lower Provence, since the colonisation of the Phoenicians, – the rest of the population recalling more the Arabian and Ligurian physiognomy, – the features of this young girl would have presented a striking proof of the transmission of the antique beauty in all its original perfection.

Nothing could be more agreeable, more delicate, or purer than the exquisite lines of her lovely countenance; nothing more limpid than the blue of her large eyes, fringed with long black lashes; nothing whiter than the ivory of her queenly brow, around which played the light chestnut curls that contrasted beautifully with the perfect arch of eyebrows as black as jet, and soft as velvet; the proportions of her well-rounded form resembled Hebe, or the Venus of Praxiteles, rather than the Venus of Milo.

As she sang she yielded herself to the measured step of her steed, and every movement of her charming and graceful body revealed new treasures of beauty.

Her small, arched foot, encased in a boot of cordovan leather, laced to the ankle, appeared from time to time beneath the ample folds of her long skirt, while her hand, as small as that of a child, gloved in embroidered chamois-skin, carelessly played with the switch by which she urged the gait of her nag.

It would be difficult to picture the frankness which shone from the pure brow of this young girl, the serenity of her large blue eyes, bright with happiness and hope and youth, the unsophisticated sweetness of her smile, and, above all, the look of solicitude and filial veneration which she often directed toward the aged but robust father who accompanied her.

The eager, hardy, and joyous air of this old gentleman contrasted not a little with his white moustache, and the vinous colour of his cheeks announced the fact that he was not indifferent to the seductions of the generous wines of Provence.

A black cap with a red plume, a scarlet doublet trimmed with silver, and mantle of the same, a shoulder-strap of richly embroidered silk, supporting a long sword, and high boots of white sheepskin, with gilded spurs, testified to the quality of Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez, chief of one of the most ancient houses of Provence, and related or allied to the most illustrious baronial houses of Castellane, Baux, Frans, and Villeneuve.

The road which the little caravan followed was so narrow that it permitted two horses to walk abreast with difficulty; a third person rode a few steps behind the baron and his daughter. Two servants, well-mounted and well-armed, closed the march.

This third person, a young man of about twenty-five years, tall and well-made, with a handsome and amiable face, managed his horse with grace and ease. He wore a green hunting-habit, trimmed with gold lace.

His face expressed an indescribable delight in the contemplation of Mlle. Reine des Anbiez, who, without discontinuing her song, every now and then turned to him with a charming glance, to which the Chevalier Honorât de Berrol responded with all the ardour of an infatuated and betrothed lover.

The baron listened to his daughter's singing with joy and paternal pride; his genial and venerable countenance beamed with happiness.

His contemplative felicity was, nevertheless, not a little disturbed by the sudden jumps of his little horse, brought from the island of Camargne, – a bay stallion with long mane and a long black tail, a wicked eye and ferocious disposition, full of fire, and evidently possessed with a desire to unhorse his master and regain his liberty in the solitary swamps and wild heath where he was born.

Unfortunately for the designs of Mistraon, – named for the impetuous northwest wind, on account of the rapidity of his gait and his bad character, – the baron was an excellent horseman.

Although suffering from the consequences of a wound in the hip, received in the civil war, Raimond V., seated on one of those ancient saddles which in our day we call picket-saddles, answered these vicious caprices of the untamable animal with sound blows of whip and spur. Mistraon, with that patient and diabolical sagacity which horses carry to the point of genius, after several vain attempts, stolidly waited a more favourable occasion for dismounting his rider.

Reine des Anbiez continued to sing.

Like a child, she amused herself by waking the echoes in the gorges of Ollioules, making by turn loud and soft modulations, which would have put a nightingale to despair.

She had just made a most brilliant and musical arpeggio, when suddenly, anticipating the echo, a male voice, sweet and melodious, repeated the young girl's song with incredible exactness.

For some moments these two charming voices, meeting by chance in a marvellous union, were repeated by the many echoes of this profound solitude.

Reine stopped singing, and blushed as she looked up at her father.

The baron, astonished, turned to Honorât de Berrol, and said, with his habitual exclamation: "Manjour! chevalier, who in the devil is imitating the voice of an angel?"

In the first moment of surprise the baron had unfortunately let the reins fall on Mistraon's neck.

For some time the deceitful animal kept his step with a gravity and dignity worthy of a bishop's mule, then in two vigorous bounds, and before the baron had time to recover himself, he climbed up an escarpment which shut in the road.

Unhappily, the horse had made such an effort in ascending this steep acclivity, that he fell upon his head, the reins went over his ears, and floated at random. All this happened in less time than is required to write it.

The baron, an excellent master of horse, although not a little surprised by the adventure of Mistraon, reseated himself in the saddle; his first effort was to try to seize the reins, – he could not reach them. Then, notwithstanding his courage, he shuddered with horror, as he saw himself at the mercy of an unbridled horse that in his frenzy was trying to leap the precipitous edge of a torrent bed.

This deep and wide gulf lay parallel with the road, and was separated from it only by a space of fifty feet.

Seated in his saddle, and by reason of his wound unable to get out of it before the horse could plunge into the abyss, the old man gave his last thought to his God and his daughter, – made a vow of a weekly mass and an annual pilgrimage to the Chapel of Notre Dame de la Garde, and prepared to die.

From the height where he was standing, Erebus saw the danger of the baron; he saw that he was separated from him by the deep bed of the torrent, ten or twelve feet wide, toward which the horse was plunging.

With a movement more rapid than thought, and an almost desperate leap, Erebus cleared the abyss, and rolled under the animal's feet. The baron screamed with terror, – he believed his saviour would be carried over into the gulf, for, notwithstanding the pain and fright which this violent jerk had given him, Mistraon was not able to arrest the impetuosity of his spring, and dragged Erebus several steps.

The latter, endowed with extraordinary strength and admirable presence of mind, had, as he fell, wound the reins around his wrists, while the horse, overcome by the enormous weight which hung upon him, seated himself on his haunches, having exhausted the impulse which instigated such activity.

Scarcely ten steps separated the baron from the edge of the gulf, when Erebus slowly raised himself, seized the bloody bridle-bit with one hand, and with the other threw over the smoking neck of Mistraon the reins which he offered to the old man.

All this transpired so rapidly that Reine des Anbiez and her betrothed, climbing the escarpment, arrived near the baron without having suspected the frightful danger he had just escaped.

Erebus, having replaced the reins in the old man's hands, picked up his cap, shook the dust from his clothes, and readjusted his hair, and, save the unnatural flush upon his cheeks, nothing in his appearance revealed the part he had taken in this event.

"My God, father, why did you climb this steep? What imprudence!" cried Reine, excited but not frightened, as she bounded lightly from her nag, without seeing the unknown person standing on the other side of the baron's horse.

Then, seeing the pallor and emotion of the old man as he made a painful descent from his horse, the young girl perceived the danger which had threatened the baron, and throwing herself into his arms, she exclaimed:

“Father, father, what has happened to you?” “Reine, my darling child,” said the lord of Anbiez with a broken voice, embracing his daughter with effusion. “Ah, how frightful death would have been, – never to see you again!”

Reine withdrew herself suddenly from her father’s arms, put her two hands on the old man’s shoulders, and looked at him with a bewildered air.

“But for him,” said the baron, cordially pressing in his own hands the hand of Erebus, who had stepped forward, gazing with admiration on the beauty of Reine, “but for this young man, but for his courageous sacrifice, I should have been dashed to pieces in this gulf.”

In a few words the old man told his daughter and Honorât de Berrol how the stranger had saved him from certain death.

Many times during this recital the blue eyes of Reine met the black eyes of Erebus; if she slowly turned her glance away to fix it on her father with adoration, it was not because the manner of this young man was bold or presumptuous; on the contrary, a tear moistened his eyes, and his charming face expressed the most profound emotion. He contemplated this pathetic scene with a sublime pride. When the old man opened his arms to him with paternal affection, he threw himself into them with inexpressible delight, pressed him many times to his heart, as if he had been attracted to the old gentleman by a secret sympathy, as if this young heart, still noble and generous, had anticipated the throbs of another noble and generous heart.

Suddenly Trimalcyon and Pog, who, twenty steps distant, had witnessed this scene from the height of the rock where they were resting, cried out to their young companion some words in a foreign language.

Erebus started, the baron, his daughter, and Honorât de Berrol turned their heads quickly.

Trimalcyon looked at the baron’s daughter with a sort of vulgar and sneering admiration.

The strange physiognomy of these two men surprised the baron, while his daughter and Honorât regarded them with an instinctive terror.

A skilful painter would have found wealth of material in this scene. Imagine a profound solitude in the midst of tremendous rocks of reddish granite, whose summit only was lighted by the last rays of the sun. On the first plane, almost on the edge of the torrent bed, the baron with his left arm around Reine, grasping in his right hand the hand of Erebus, and fixing an anxious, surprised look on Pog and Trimalcyon.

These two, on the second plane, the other side of the golf, standing up side by side, with their arms crossed, outlining a characteristic silhouette upon the azure sky, distinctly perceptible across the ragged edges of the rocks.

Lastly, a few steps from the baron, stood Honorât de Berrol, holding his horse and Reine’s nag, and farther still the two servants, one of whom was occupied in readjusting the harness of Mистраон.

At the first words of the strangers, the beautiful features of Erebus expressed a sort of distressed impatience; he seemed to be undergoing an inward struggle; his face, which awhile ago was radiant with noble passions, gradually grew sombre, as if he were submitting to a mysterious and irresistible influence.

But when Trimalcyon, in a shrill and bantering voice, again uttered a few words, as he designated Reine by an insolent glance, when the lord Pog had added a biting sarcasm in the same language, unintelligible to the other actors in this scene, the features of Erebus completely changed their expression.

With an almost disdainful gesture, he roughly repulsed the hand of the old man, and fixed an impudent stare on Mlle, des Anbiez. This time the girl blushed and dropped her eyes.

This sudden metamorphosis in the manners of the stranger was so striking that the baron recoiled a step. Nevertheless, after a silence of a few seconds, he said to Erebus, in a voice deeply moved:

“How shall I acknowledge, sir, the service you have just rendered me?”

“Oh, sir,” added Reine, overcoming the peculiar emotion which the last look on the part of Erebus had inspired, “how shall we ever be able to prove our gratitude to you?”

“By giving me a kiss, and this pin as a remembrance of you,” replied the impudent young man.

He had scarcely uttered these words, when his mouth touched Reine’s virginal lips, and his bold hand tore away the little pin enamelled with silver, which was fastened in the young girl’s waist.

After this double larceny, Erebus, with wonderful agility, again cleared the gulf behind him, and rejoined his companions, with whom he soon disappeared behind a mass of rocks.

Reine’s fright and emotion were so violent that she turned deathly pale, her knees gave way, and she fell fainting in the arms of her father.

The next day after this scene, the three Muscovites took leave of the marshal, Duke of Vitry, departed from Marseilles with their attendants, and proceeded on their way to Languedoc.

CHAPTER III. THE WATCHMAN

The gulf of La Ciotat, equally distant from Toulon and Marseilles, lies in between the two capes of Alon and l'Aigle. The latter rises on the west of the bay.

By order of the council of the town of La Ciotat, a sentry-box for the use of a watchman had been erected on the summit of this promontory. It was the duty of this man to watch for the coming of pirates from Barbary, and to signal their approach by kindling a fire which could be seen all along the coast.

The scene we are about to describe occurred at the foot of this sentry-box about the middle of the month of December, 1633.

An impetuous northwest wind, the terrible *mistraon* of Provence, was blowing with fury. The sun, half-observed by great masses of gray clouds, was slowly sinking in the waves, whose immense dark green curve was broken by a wide zone of reddish light, which diminished in proportion as the black clouds extended over the horizon.

The summit of Cape l'Aigle, where the watchman's box was situated, commanded the entire circumference of the gulf; the last limestone spurs of the whitish mountains of Sixfours, and Notre Dame de la Garde, descending like an amphitheatre to the edge of the gulf, here joined themselves to little cliffs formed of fine white sand, which, lifted up by the south wind, invaded a part of the coast. A little farther, on the declivity of a series of hills, shone the lights of several quicklime ovens, whose black smoke increased the gloomy aspect of the sky. Almost at the foot of the cape of l'Aigle, at the entrance of the bay, backed up against the mountains, could be seen, as the crow flies, the island Verte and the little town La Ciotat, belonging to the diocese of Marseilles and the jurisdiction of Aix.

The town formed almost a trapezium, the base of which rested on the port. This port held a dozen small vessels, called polacres and caravels, laden with wines and oil, waiting for favourable weather to return to the coast of Italy. About thirty boats designed for sardine fishing, called *essanguis* by the inhabitants of Provence, were moored in a little bay of the gulf, named the cove of La Fontaine. The belfries of the churches and of the convent of the Ursulines were the only things which broke the monotony of the dwellings, almost entirely covered with tiles.

On the hillsides which commanded the town, fields of olive-trees could be seen, several clusters of green oak and hillocks of vines, and at the extreme horizon the pine-covered summits of the chain of Roquefort mountains.

At the eastern limit of the bay of La Ciotat, between the points Carbonières and Seques, the ancient Roman ruins, called Torrentum, could be distinguished, and farther and farther toward the north several windmills, thrown here and there upon the heights, served as seamarks to the vessels which came to anchor in the gulf.

Outside, and west of the cape of L'Aigle, almost upon the edge of the sea, rose a fortified mansion named Les Anbiez, of which we will speak later.

The summit of the cape of L'Aigle formed a tableland fifty feet in circumference. Almost everywhere was the same precipitous rock of yellowish sandstone, variegated with brown; sea-broom, heather, and clover crossed it here and there; the watchman's sentry-box was erected under the cover of two stunted oaks and a gigantic pine, which had braved the fury of the tempests for two or three centuries.

When the wind was very violent, although the promontory was more than three hundred feet above the level of the sea, one could hear the muttering thunder of the surf, as the waves broke themselves against its base.

The watchman's box, solidly built of large blocks of stone, was covered over with slabs taken from the same quarry, so that the massive construction was able to resist the most violent winds.

The principal opening of this cabin looked toward the south, and from it the horizon was completely in view.

Near the door was a wide and deep square kiln, made of iron grating placed on layers of masonry. This kiln was kept filled with vine branches and fagots of olive-wood, ready to produce a tall and brilliant flame, which could be seen at a great distance. The furniture of this cabin was very poor, with the exception of a carved ebony casket, ornamented with the coat of arms and the cross of Malta, which treasure contrasted singularly with the modest appearance of this little habitation. A walnut chest contained a few marine books, quite eagerly sought after by the learned of our day, among others "The Guide of the Old Harbour Pilot" and "The Torch of the Sea." From the rough lime-plastered walls hung a cutlass, a battle-axe, and a wheel-lock musket.

Two coarse, illuminated engravings, representing St. Elmo, the patron of mariners, and the portrait of the grand master of the hospitable order of St. John of Jerusalem, then existing, were nailed above the ebony casket. To conclude the inventory of furniture, on the floor near the fireplace, where a large log of olive wood was slowly burning, a rush matting, covered over with an old Turkish carpet, formed a moderately good bed, for the inhabitant of this isolated retreat was not wholly indifferent to comfort.

The watchman on the cape of L'Aigle was attentively examining all the points of the horizon, with the aid of a Galileo spy-glass, at that time known by the name of long-view. The setting sun pierced the thick curtain of clouds, and with its last rays gilded the red trunk of the tall pine, the rough ridges of the little cabin walls, and the corners of the brown rock upon which the watchman was leaning.

The calm, intelligent face of this man was now lighted with intense interest.

His complexion, burned by the wind and tanned by the sun, was the colour of brick, and here and there showed deep wrinkles. The hood of his long-sleeved mantle, hiding his white hair, shaded his black eyes and eyebrows; his long, gray moustache fell considerably below his lower lip, where it mingled with a heavy beard, which covered the whole of his chin.

A red and green woollen girdle fastened his sailor trousers around his hips; straps supported his leather gaiters above his knees; a bag of richly embroidered stuff, hanging from his belt by the side of a long knife in its sheath, contained his tobacco, while his cachim-babaou, or long Turkish pipe with an earthen bowl, lay against the outer wall of his cabin.

For ten years Bernard Peyrou had been watchman on the cape of L'Aigle. He had recently been elected assignee of the overseer fishers of La Ciotat, who held their session every Sunday when there was matter for consideration. The watchman had served as patron seaman on the galleys of Malta for more than twenty years, never in all his navigations having left the Commander Pierre des Anbiez, of the venerable nation of Provence, and brother of Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez, who lived on the coast in the fortified house of which we have spoken. On each of these voyages to France the commander never failed to visit the watchman. Their interviews lasted a long time, and it was observed that the habitual melancholy of the commander increased after these conversations.

Peyrou, a lifelong sufferer from serious wounds, and unfit for active service on the sea, had been, at the recommendation of his old captain, chosen watchman by the council of the town of La Ciotat. When on Sunday he presided at the consultation of the overseers, an experienced sailor supplied his place at the sentry-box. Naturally endowed with a sense of right and justice, and living ten years in solitude, between the sky and the sea, Peyrou had added much to his intelligence by meditation. Already possessing the nautical and astronomical knowledge necessary to an officer on a galley of the seventeenth century, he continued to learn by a constant study of the great phenomena of nature always before his eyes.

Thanks to his experience, and his habit of comparing cause and effect, no one knew better than himself how to predict the beginning, the duration, and the end of the storms which prevailed on the coast.

He announced the calm and the tempest, the disastrous hurricanes of the *mistraon*, as the northwester was named in Provence, the gentle, fruitful rains of the *miegion*, or south wind, and the violent tornado of the *labechades*, or wind from the southwest; in fact, the form of the clouds, the soft or brilliant azure of the sky, the various colours of the sea, and all those vague, deep, and undefined noises which occasionally spring up in the midst of the silence of the elements were for him so many evident signs, from which he deduced the most infallible conclusions.

Never a captain of a merchantman, never a cockswain of a bark, put to sea without having consulted Master Peyrou.

Men ordinarily surround with a sort of superstitious reverence and halo those who live apart from the rest of the world.

Peyrou was no exception to the rule.

As his predictions about the weather were almost invariably realised, the inhabitants of La Ciotat and the environs soon persuaded themselves that a man who knew so much of the things in the sky could not be ignorant of the things on the earth.

Without passing exactly as a sorcerer, the hermit of the cape of L'Aigle, consulted in so many important circumstances, became the depositary of many secrets.

A dishonest man would have cruelly abused this power, but Peyrou took advantage of it to encourage, sustain, and defend the good, and to accuse, confound, and intimidate the wicked.

A practical philosopher, he felt that his opinion, his predictions, and his threats would lose much if their authority was not supported by a certain cabalistic display; hence, although he did so with reluctance, he accompanied each opinion with a mysterious formula.

The excellent spy-glass was a marvellous aid to his power of divination. Not only did he turn it to the horizon in order to discover the chebecs and piratical vessels of Barbary, but he directed it to the little town of La Ciotat, – on the houses, the fields, and the beach, – and thus surprised many secrets and mysteries, and by this means increased the reverence he inspired.

Peyrou, however, was altogether above the vulgar sorcerer by his entire disinterestedness. Had he some honest poverty to befriend, he ordered one of his wealthier clients to put a moderate offering in some secret spot which he indicated; the poor client, informed by Peyrou, went to the spot and found the mysterious alms.

Instigated by a blind zeal, the priests of the diocese of Marseilles wished to criminate the mysterious life of Peyrou, but the surrounding population immediately assumed such a menacing attitude, and the town council bore such testimony to the excellence of the watchman's character, that he was permitted to live his solitary life in peace.

His only companion in this profound retreat was a female eagle which, two years before, had come to lay her eggs in one of the hollows of the inaccessible rocks which bordered the coast. The male bird had no doubt been killed, as the watchman never saw him.

Peyrou gave food to the young eagles; by degrees the mother grew accustomed to the sight of him, and the year after, she returned in perfect confidence to lay in the nest which Peyrou had prepared for her in a neighbouring rock.

Often the eagle perched on the branches of the tall pine which shaded the watchman's house, and sometimes walked with a heavy and awkward step on the little platform.

Upon that day, Brilliant, for so the watchman had named the noble bird, seduced him from his reverie. She tumbled down from the topmost branch of the pine, and with half-open wings ran up to her friend with the ungraceful, waddling gait of a bird, of prey. Her plumage, black and brown on the wings, was ash-coloured and spotted with white on the body and neck; her formidable talons, covered with thick and shining scales, terminated in three claws and a sharp spur of smooth, black horn.

Brilliant looked up at the watchman, lifting high her flat, gray head, where glittered two bold round eyes, whose iris dilated in a transparent cornea, the colour of topaz.

Her beak, strong and bluish like burnished steel, disclosed, when it opened, a slender tongue of pale red.

To attract the watchman's attention, the eagle gently bit the end of his shoe, made of fawn leather.

Peyrou stooped and caressed Brilliant, who ruffled her feathers and uttered a discordant and broken cry.

But suddenly, hearing a step in the narrow foot-path which led to the cabin, the eagle lifted herself, uttered a long barking cry, stretched her powerful wings, hovered a moment over the colossal pine, and like an arrow shot into space. Soon nothing could be seen but a black spot on the deep blue sky.

CHAPTER IV. STEPHANETTE

A young girl with light complexion, black eyes, white teeth, and a bright and mischievous smile, appeared, and stopped a moment on the last step of the stair of rocks which led to the house of the watchman.

She wore the graceful and picturesque costume of the girls of Provence: a brown petticoat and red waist, with wide basques and tight sleeves. Her little felt hat left visible the beautiful nape of her neck and long tresses of black hair rolled under a scarlet silk net.

Orphan and foster-sister to Mlle. Reine des Anbiez, Stephanette served her in the duties of a companion, and was treated more as a friend than a servant.

Stephanette's heart was good, true, and grateful, her conduct irreproachable. Her only fault was a mischievous village coquetry, which was the despair of the fishers and captains of small craft in the gulf of La Ciotat, nor will we except from the number of these interesting victims her betrothed, Captain Luquin Trinquetaille, captain of the polacre, *Holy Terror to the Moors, by the Grace of God*, – a long and significant appellation, inscribed at full length on the stern of Captain Trinquetaille's boat.

Gallantly armed with six swivel-guns, it was the business of the polacre to escort vessels from La Ciotat which, forced by their commerce to have free intercourse with the coasts of Italy, dreaded the attacks of pirates.

Stephanette shared the veneration that the watchman on the cape of l'Aigle inspired among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. She trembled as she approached him with downcast eyes.

"May God keep you, my child!" said Peyrou, affectionately, for he loved her as he loved all who belonged to the family of his old captain, the Commander des Anbiez.

"May St. Magnus and St. Elzear aid you, Master Peyrou!" replied Stephanette, with her most beautiful curtsy.

"Thank you for your good wishes, Stephanette. How are monseigneur and Mlle. Reine, your young and beautiful mistress? Has she recovered from her fright of the other day?"

"Yes, Master Peyrou; mademoiselle is better, although she is still quite pale. But was ever such a miscreant seen? To dare kiss mademoiselle! and that, too, in the presence of monseigneur and her betrothed! But people say these Muscovites are barbarians. They are more savage and more of Antichrist than the Turks themselves, are they not, Master Peyrou? They will be damned twice in a doubly hot fire."

Without replying to Stephanette's theological argument, the watchman said to her: "Does not monseigneur resent this breach of good manners?"

"He! Why, Master Peyrou, as true as Rosseline is a saint in Paradise, the same day that monseigneur came so near falling into the chasm of Ollioules, he supped as merrily as if he had just returned from a patronal feast. Indeed, it is so, – and he drank two cups of Spanish wine to the health of the young miscreant! And would you believe it, Master Peyrou, he is never tired of boasting of the courage and agility of the Muscovite! Yes, he said: 'Manjour! instead of stealing the pin and kiss like a thief, why did he not ask for them, – my daughter Reine would have given him a kiss, and with a good heart too!' And ever since that day monseigneur is constantly saying, 'Really, these Muscovites are strange companions.' But for all that, M. Honorât de Berrol turns red with indignation whenever he hears this impudent fellow, who stole a kiss from his betrothed, mentioned. And another strange thing, Master Peyrou, is that monseigneur is not willing to get rid of that wicked little horse, Mistræon, that has been the cause of all the mischief; he rides it in preference to any other. Now say, Master Peyrou, don't you think that is tempting Providence?"

"Have these strangers departed from Marseilles?" asked the watchman, without replying to Stephanette.

“Yes, Master Peyrou, they say they have taken the route to Languedoc, after having made a visit to the Marshal of Vitry. They say, too, that this wicked duke is quite worthy of being acquainted with such rascals. Ah, if monseigneur had his way, the marshal would not be governor of Provence very long. The baron cannot hear him mentioned without flying into a passion, – such a passion! you have no idea of it, Master Peyrou.” “Yes, my child, I have seen the baron, at the time of the revolt of the Cascabeoux, act as his father did at the time of the revolt of the Razats, under Henry III., and again at the time of the rebellion of the Gascons against the Duke d’Epemon, under the last reign. Yes, yes; I know that Raimond V. hates his enemies as much as he loves his friends.”

“You are right, Master Peyrou, and monseigneur’s anger against the governor has increased since this recorder of the admiralty of Toulon, Master Isnard, who they say is so wicked, has been visiting the castles of the diocese by order of his Eminence, the cardinal. Monseigneur says these visits are an outrage upon the nobility, and that the Marshal of Vitry is a scoundrel. Between us, I am of the same opinion, since he protects shameless Muscovites who have the insolence to kiss young girls when they are not expecting it.”

“My opinion is, Stephanette, that you are very severe upon young men who kiss young girls,” said the old man with mock gravity, “which proves that you are naturally ferocious, – but what do you want of me?”

“Master Peyrou,” said the girl, with an air of embarrassment, “I want to know if the weather promises a good passage to Nice, and if one could leave this port with safety.”

“You wish, then, to go to Nice, my child?”

“No, not I exactly, but a brave and honest sailor who – who – ”

“Ah, I understand, I understand,” said the watchman, interrupting Stephanette’s stammering; “you mean young Bernard, patron of the tartan, the *Sacred Balm*.”

“No, no, Master Peyrou, I assure you I do not mean him,” said the girl, turning as red as a cherry.

“Come, come, you need not blush like that,” and the watchman added, in a lower tone: “Was the beautiful bouquet of green thyme, that he tied three days ago to your window bar with rose coloured ribbon, to your taste?”

“A bouquet of green thyme! What bouquet are you talking about, Master Peyrou?”

The watchman held up a threatening finger to Stephanette and said: “What! last Thursday, at daybreak, did not the patron Bernard carry a bouquet to your window?”

“Wait, – let me see, Master Peyrou,” said the young girl, with an air of recalling something to her memory; “was it then yesterday that, in opening my casement, I found something like a bundle of dried herbs?”

“Stephanette, Stephanette! you cannot deceive the old watchman. Listen; patron Bernard had hardly descended, when you came and untied the rose coloured ribbon, and put the bouquet in a pretty terra-cotta vase, and you have watered it every morning; yesterday was the only day you neglected it, and it has withered – ”

The young girl stared at the watchman in utter amazement. This revelation seemed like sorcery.

The old man looked at her with a mischievous expression, and continued:

“So it is not the patron Bernard who is going to Nice?”

“No, Master Peyrou.” “Then it must be the pilot Terzarol.”

“The pilot Terzarol!” cried Stephanette, clasping her hands, “may Our Lady help me, if I know anything about this pilot going to sea.”

“Well, well, my child, I was mistaken about Bernard, for it is true that you have allowed his bouquet to wither, but I am not mistaken about Terzarol, because yesterday, from the height of the castle turret, you passed more than two hours looking at the bold pilot throwing nets.” “I, Master Peyrou, I?”

“Your very self, Stephanette, and at each cast of the net, Terzarol waved his cap in triumph, and you waved your handkerchief in congratulation; he ought to have made a good haul, so enthusiastically did he labour, – you come then to ask me if Terzarol will have a good voyage to Nice?”

This time Stephanette began to feel afraid, as she realised how much the watchman knew.

“Ah, my faith, Master Peyrou, you know everything!” cried she, innocently.

The old man smiled, shook his head, and replied in the words of the Provencal proverb, “*Experienço passo scienço*, – experience passes science.”

The poor child, fearing that the watchman’s marvellous discoveries concerning her innocent coquetry might give him a bad opinion of her, cried, with tears in her eyes, as she clasped her hands:

“Ah, Master Peyrou, I am an honest girl!”

“I know it, my child,” said the watchman, pressing her hand affectionately. “I know that you are worthy of the protection and affection which your noble and kind mistress shows you. It is only girlish mischief and love of fun which tempts you to turn the heads of these young men, and make poor Luquin Trinquetaille jealous, Luquin, who loves you so much and so faithfully. But listen, Stephanette, you know the proverb of the vinedressers in our valleys: *Paou vignose ben tengudos*, – have few vines and cultivate them well. Instead of scattering your coquetries, concentrate all your charms upon your betrothed, who will prove a good and honest husband for you, – that would be far better, – and then, you see, my child, these young men are quick, inflammable, and courageous; self-love comes in, rivalry exasperates, a combat follows, blood flows, and then – ” “Ah, Master Peyrou, then I should die of despair. All of this is folly. I was wrong, I admit, to amuse myself with the admiring glances of Bernard and Terzarol, for I love Luquin and he loves me; we are going to be married the same day as Mlle, and M. Honorât de Berrol, – the baron desires it. Really, Master Peyrou, you, who find out everything, ought to know that I think of nobody but Luquin. It is about his voyage that I have come to consult you. Master Talebard-Talebardon, consul of La Ciotat, is about to send to Nice three tartans laden with merchandise. He has made a bargain with Luquin to escort them; do you think, Master Peyrou, the passage will be good? Can he put to sea with safety? Is there no pirate in sight? Oh, if a corsair is in sight, or a storm threatens, he will not depart!”

“Oh, so, so, my child, do you think you have so much influence over this bold artilleryman? You are mistaken, I think. What! keep him in port when there is danger in going out? You might as well try to anchor a ship with a thread from your distaff.”

“Oh, be quiet, Master Peyrou,” said Stephanette, regaining her composure; “to keep Luquin near me, I need not tell him of winds or tempests or of pirates. I will only tell him that I will give Bernard a ribbon to put on his lance at the next tilting-match, or that I will ask the pilot Terzarol for a good place at one of the windows of his mother’s house, that I may go with Dulceline, the housekeeper at Maison-Forte, to see the wrestling and leaping over the cross-bar in La Ciotat; then, I swear to you, Master Peyrou, Luquin will not go out of the gulf, not if the consul, Talebard-Talebardon, covered the deck of his polacre with pieces of silver.”

“Ah, what a cunning gipsy you are!” said the old man, smiling. “I would never have thought of such tricks. Alas, alas! *Buou viel fa rego drecho*, – the old ox makes a straight furrow. But come, now, Stephanette, make yourself easy; you need not rob your waist of a ribbon for Bernard nor ask for a window at the Terzarol house: the wind blows from the west, and if it does not change at sunset, and if Martin-Bouffo, the deep grotto of roaring waters in the gulf, says nothing tomorrow at daybreak Luquin will be able to go out of the gulf and sail for Nice without fear; as to the passage, I will answer for that; as to the pirates, I am going to give you a charm that is sure in its effect, if not to confuse them entirely, at least to prevent their carrying off the *Holy Terror to the Moors, by the Grace of God*.”

“Ah, how thankful I will be, Master Peyrou!” said the young girl, as she assisted him to rise, for he walked with considerable pain.

The old man went into his cabin, took a little bag covered with cabalistic signs and gave it to Stephanette, instructing her to order Luquin to conform scrupulously to the directions he would find in it.

“How good you are, Master Peyrou! How shall I reward – ”

“By promising me, my child, henceforth to allow Bernard’s bouquets to dry on the bars of your window, – then, believe me, there will be no more of them, because a bouquet that is watered makes many others grow. Ah! and you must promise me, too, not to encourage pilot Terzarol’s fishing, because to please you he would destroy all the fish in the bay, and he would finish by being called before the overseer fishers, and I would be obliged to condemn him. By the way, how goes on the discussion between monseigneur and the consuls, on the right of fishing in the cove, – does Raimond V. still keep his seines there?”

“Yes, Master Peyrou, and he will not take them away; he says that the right of fishing there belongs to him up to the rocks of Castrembaou, and that he will not yield that right to anybody.”

“Listen, Stephanette: your mistress has her father’s ear; do you persuade her to counsel him to arrange it amicably with the consuls: that will be the best for all parties.”

“Yes, Master Peyrou, make yourself easy about it, I will mention it to Mlle. Reine.”

“Very well, my child, – good-bye, and above all, no more coquetry, – do you promise me that?”

“Yes, Master Peyrou, only – only – ”

“Well, say it”

“Only, you see, Master Peyrou, I would not like to make Bernard and Terzarol despair entirely, – not on my own account, Our Lady, no, but on account of Luquin, because I must have some means of keeping him in port, in case of great danger, you see, Master Peyrou, – and for that purpose, jealousy is worth more than all the anchors of his ship.”

“That is right,” said the watchman, with a significant smile, “you must think of Luquin above all things.”

The young girl dropped her eyes and smiled, then said: “Ah, I was about to forget, Master Peyrou, to ask you if you thought that monsieur, the commander, and the Reverend Father Elzear would arrive here for the Christmas holidays, as the baron hopes. He is so anxious to see his two brothers again – do you know that Christmas has been twice celebrated at Maison-Forte without them?”

At the mention of the commander, the face of the watchman took on an expression of profound melancholy.

“If God grants my most earnest prayers, my child, they will both come, but, alas, Father Elzear has gone to redeem captives in Algiers, as a worthy and courageous brother of mercy, and the faith of those Barbary people is perfidious!”

“Yes, Master Peyrou, as Father Elzear learned by experience when he was kept in the convict-prison among slaves for one year! At his age, too, to suffer so much!”

“And without a murmur, – without losing his adorable saintliness – ”

“Speaking of them, Master Peyrou, why is the commander’s galley, instead of being white and gold like the gallant galleys of the king, and of monseigneur, the Duke of Guise, always painted in black like a coffin? Why are its sails and masts black? Really, nothing looks more solemn, and his sailors and his soldiers, they look as hard and severe as Spanish monks; and then the commander himself looks so sad. I never saw a smile on his pale face but once, and that was when he arrived at Maison-Forte and embraced monseigneur and my mistress. Yet, my God, what a melancholy smile! Is it not strange, Master Peyrou, and all the more so because Luquin told me, the other day, that when he was artilleryman on board *La Guisarde*, the admiral’s galley, in the waters of the Levant, many a time he has seen the commanders and captains of Malta at Naples, and notwithstanding the severity of their order, they were as merry as other officers.”

The watchman for some moments seemed as if he no longer heard the girl; his head had fallen upon his breast, he was lost in profound meditation, and when Stephanette bade him farewell, he responded only by an affectionate gesture of the hand. Some time after the departure of the young girl, he went into his cabin, opened the carved ebony box he found there, sprung the secret lock of a double bottom, and took out of it a little casket chased with silver; an embossed Maltese cross ornamented its cover.

For a long time he gazed at this casket with sorrowful attention; the sight of it seemed to awaken the most bitter memories. Then, assuring himself that this mysterious trust was still intact, he shut the doors of the ebony chest and, like a dreamer, returned to his seat at the door of his cabin.

CHAPTER V. THE BETROTHED

Stephanette left the watchman with a light heart. She was just about to quit the esplanade, when she saw, on the last steps of the stairway, the tall figure of Captain Luquin Trinquetaille. With an imperative sign the young girl ordered him to return by the way he had come.

The sailor showed an exemplary submission; he stopped, made a right-about, with the quickness and precision of a German grenadier, and gravely descended the steps he had just mounted.

Had the meeting been arranged by the lovers? We do not know, but certain it was that Stephanette, preceded by her obedient adorer, descended the narrow, winding flight of steps which conducted to the watchman's cabin, with the lightness of a gazelle.

Many times Luquin turned his head, to catch a sight of the neat ankle and little foot, which cleared the rough rocks so nimbly, but Stephanette, with a threatening gesture, and queen-like dignity, arrested the curiosity of the ex-artilleryman, who was compelled to accelerate his gait in obedience to the oft-repeated words:

“Go on, Luquin, go on!”

While the lovers are descending the escarpment of the cape of l'Aigle, we will say a few words about Luquin Trinquetaille. He was a robust fellow of thirty years, brown and sunburnt. He had a manly figure, a frank, ingenuous manner, somewhat vain; he wore a costume which marked both the soldier and the sailor, – a military coat, and Provencal breeches, fastened around his waist by the belt which held his broadsword.

The air was cold, and over his coat he wore a mantle, the seams of which were braided in red and blue wool; the hood half covered his forehead, and under it could be seen a forest of black curls.

When they had reached the foot of the mountain, Stephanette, in spite, of her agility, felt the need of rest.

Luquin, delighted with an opportunity for conversation, carefully sought a spot where she could be comfortably seated.

When he had found it, he gallantly took off his mantle and spread it out on the rock, so that Stephanette could have a seat with a back; then, crossing his hands on the head of his cane, and leaning his chin on his hands, he contemplated Stephanette with a calm and happy adoration.

When she had recovered from the effects of her precipitous descent, Stephanette turned to Luquin, and said, with the air of a spoiled child, and a woman sure of her despotic domination:

“Why, Luquin, did you come to the watchman's cabin for me, when I told you to wait for me at the foot of the mountain?”

Luquin, preoccupied with admiration for Stephanette's fine colour, which the walk had imparted, did not reply.

“Did ever anybody see the like?” cried she, with an impatient stamp of her little foot. “Do you hear what I say to you, Luquin?”

“No,” said the captain, coming out of his reflective mood; “all that I know is that from Nice to Bayonne, from Bayonne to Calais, from Calais to Hambourg, from Hambourg to – ”

“Have you finished your European trip, Luquin?”

“Indeed, from one pole to the other there is not a prettier girl than you, Stephanette.”

“What! Did you make such an extensive voyage to arrive at that discovery, captain? I pity the privateers of the *Holy Terror to the Moors, by the Grace of God*, if the voyages of this poor old polacre have no better results!”

“Do not speak ill of my polacre, Stephanette; you will be glad to see its blue and white pavilion when I return from Nice, and how you will watch for my coming from the turret of Maison-Forte!”

Luquin's conceitedness disgusted Stephanette; she replied, with an ironical air:

“Well, well! I see that a watchman on the cape of L’Aigle is altogether unnecessary. All the young girls who wait impatiently for the return of Captain Trinque-taille, and all the jealous ones who watch his departure with their eyes fixed on the sea, will be sufficient to discover the pirates. There is nothing more to fear from corsairs.”

Luquin took on an air of modest triumph, and said:

“By St. Stephen, my patron, I am too sure of your love, and too happy in it, Stephanette, to care if I am expected or regretted by other girls; and although Rose, the daughter of the haberdasher in La Ciotat, – who resembles the flower whose name she bears, – often tells me – ”

“My faith! Thank you for your confidences, Luquin,” said Stephanette, with a jealous impatience she could not dissimulate. “If I told you all that the patron Bernard or Master Terzarol said to me, it would take till evening.”

Captain Luquin frowned when he heard the names of his rivals, and exclaimed:

“Thunder of heaven! If I knew that those two rascals dared even to look at your shoes as you pass, I would make a figurehead for my polacre of one, and a weather-cock for my mast of the other! But no! They know that Luquin Trinquetaille is your betrothed, and his name rhymes too well with battle for them to want an issue with me.”

“Well, well, my fine bully!” replied Stephanette, recalling the watchman’s advice, and fearing to excite the jealousy of the inflammable captain; “if Bernard and Terzarol talk to me ever so long, I shall reply that every one knows I am too much in love with the most wicked devil in La Ciotat. But wait, – see here what Master Peyrou gave me for you. Read that, and do everything he orders. It is late; the sun is setting, and it is getting cold. Let us go back to Maison-Forte; mademoiselle will be anxious.”

The two lovers hastened on their way, and, as they walked, Trinquetaille read the following instructions given by the watchman:

“Every morning at sunrise the captain will change the charge of his cannon, and will put on the ball one of the red flies affixed to this paper.

“After that, make a double cross on the ball with the thumb of the left hand. From sunrise to sunset, cabin-boys must relieve each other on the watch at the top of the mast; they will always look at the east and the south, and every five minutes repeat ‘St Magnus.’

“Set the swords in order on the stem, three by three, point downward.

“Set the muskets on the right of the deck, three by three.

“On the day of departure, at the rising of the moon, carry on deck a vase filled with oil; throw in it seven grains of salt, saying with each grain ‘St Elmo and St Peter.’

“Leave the vase on deck until the moon goes down. At that moment cover it over with a black veil, on which write in vermilion the word ‘Syrakoe.’ Every morning at sunrise, rub the arms and the locks of the muskets with this oil.”

At this point, Captain Trinquetaille stopped and said to Stephanette:

“By St. Elmo, Master Peyrou is a sorcerer. Three months ago, if I had had these flies of magic paper, my swivel-guns, instead of resting mute on their pivots when I applied the match, would have replied sharply to that Tunis chebec which surprised our convoy, and we did not see until it was almost on us – ”

“But, Luquin, do not your sentinels see at a distance?”

“No; and if, while they were watching, they had said ‘St. Magnus’ every five minutes, as Master Peyrou says in his sorcery, it is certain the virtue of St. Magnus would have prevented the pirates’ approach without being seen.”

“And would you have made use of this magic oil for the muskets, Luquin?”

“Without doubt, the day that my guns would not go off, I would have given all the oil which burns in the eternal lamp of the Chapel of Notre Dame de la Garde, for one drop of this oil with the seven grains of salt, and that formidable word ‘Syrakoe’ written on the cover.”

“Why so, Luquin?”

“My artillery was useless, and I wished to board the chebec with a grand reinforcement of musket-shot, but as wicked fate would have it, the arms were below, and the locks of the muskets were rusty; you see, then, Stephanette, if we had arranged the arms on deck, three by three, and had rubbed the musket locks with this magic oil of Syrakoe, we would have been able to resist, and perhaps capture this pirate chebec instead of flying before it, like a cloud of sparrows from a hawk!”

It is easy to see that, under these mysterious and cabalistic formulæ, the watchman on the cape of L’Aigle gave the best practical advice, and endeavoured to restore such nautical precautions and practices as had, through negligence or want of care, fallen into disuse.

The red flies, placed every morning on the balls with a sign of the cross, had no doubt a very negative virtue, but to perform this magical operation, it was necessary to change the charge of the artillery, often damaged by the water of the sea, which swept the deck, and thus the powder was kept dry and the guns ready for use.

The counsel of the watchman, followed exactly, prevented serious disaster, whether it pertained to the oil of Syrakoe, or the cries of “St Magnus,” or the arms arranged three by three on the deck.

In looking steadily toward the east and the south, points of crossing by the pirates, the sentinels of course could give warning of their approach.

In invoking St. Magnus every five minutes, they would not run the risk of sleeping at their posts.

In short, it was important to have always on deck arms in good condition and readiness. The watchman accomplished this by ordering them to be arranged in stacks of three, and carefully rubbed with oil, which would preserve them from the inclemency of the weather.

In formulating his recommendations in cabalistic phrase, he assured the execution of them.

After renewed praises of the watchman’s wisdom, Luquin and Stephanette arrived at Maison-Forte. Notwithstanding her air of gaiety, the young girl’s heart was deeply pained at the thought of her lover’s departure the next morning. Tears flowed down her cheeks; she extended her hand to Trinquetaille, and said, with a trembling voice:

“Good-bye, Luquin, every morning and evening I will pray God to keep you from meeting these wicked pirates. Oh, why do you not abandon this perilous calling, which gives me continual anxiety?”

“I will, when I have gained enough, so that Mlle. Trinquetaille” – only the nobility had the title of madame – “need not envy the richest citizen of La Ciotat.” “How can you talk so, Luquin?” said the young girl, reproachfully, as she wiped the tears from her eyes. “What matters finery and a little more comfort to me, when you are risking your life every day?”

“Do not be distressed, Stephanette, the watchman’s advice shall not be lost: with the help of St. Magnus, and the magic oil of Syrakoe, I can defy all the pirates of the regency. But, good-bye, Stephanette, good-bye, and think of Luquin.”

With these words, the worthy captain pressed Stephanette’s white hands, and hurried away, lest he should betray the emotion which filled his heart, as if it were a thing unworthy of him.

The young girl’s eyes followed her lover as long as possible, and at nightfall she entered Maison-Forte, the home of Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez.

CHAPTER VI. MAISON-FORTE

Maison-Forte, or Castle des Anbiez, stood upon the seashore. In the time of storm, the waves beat upon the terrace or rampart which stood out from the shore to protect the entrance into the port of La Ciotat, where were anchored a few fishing-boats, and the pleasure tartan of Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez.

The aspect of the castle presented nothing remarkable. Built in the middle of the fifteenth century, its architecture, or rather its construction, was massive. Two towers with pointed roof flanked the main body of the dwelling exposed to the south, and commanding a view of the sea. Its thick walls, built of sandstone and granite, were of reddish gray colour, and were irregularly cut by a few windows, which resembled loopholes for cannon.

The only framed windows of a gallery, which ran across the entire length of the castle, on the first floor, were large and bowed.

Three of them opened upon a balcony ornamented with a beautiful grating of hammered iron, in the middle of which was carved the baron's coat of arms. The same coat of arms showed upon the entablature of the principal door.

A short flight of steps descended to the terrace.

The necessities of civil and religious war, at the end of the last century, and the constant fear of pirates, had altered this terrace into an armed and embattled rampart, parallel with the façade of the castle, and joined to the foot of the turrets by two sides of a right angle.

A few old orange-trees with shining leaves testified to the ancient character of this esplanade, once a smiling flower garden, but two sentry-boxes for scouts, a few enclosures for cannon-balls, eight pieces of ordnance, two of which were mounted, and a long, turning culverin showed that Maison-Forte of the Baron des Anbiez was in a good state of defence.

The position of this castle was the more important as the little bay it commanded, as well as the Gulf of La Ciotat, offered the only place where vessels could anchor; the rest of the coast presenting a line of unapproachable rocks.

The façade of the Castle des Anbiez which looked north, and the surrounding land, were very picturesque.

Irregular buildings, added to the principal edifice according to the different requirements of successive proprietors, broke the monotony of its lines.

The stables, dog-kennels, sheepfolds, commons, and lodgings for labourers and farmers, formed the enclosure of an immense court, planted with two rows of sycamores. This court was reached by a drawbridge over a wide and deep ditch.

Every evening this bridge was removed, and a heavy door of oak, strongly supported on the inside, put the little colony in safely for the night.

Every window of these buildings opened upon the court, with the exception of a few dormer windows, solidly protected by iron grating, which looked out upon the plain.

Maison-Forte counted about two hundred persons among its dependents, – servants, farmers, labourers, and shepherds.

Among them were sixty men of from thirty to fifty years, accustomed to the use of arms during the civil wars in which the impetuous baron had taken part. Royalist and Catholic, Raimond V. had always mounted his horse when it was necessary to defend the ancient rights and possessions of Provence against governors or their deputies, for the kings of France were not kings of Provence, but counts.

The intendants of justice or presidents of courts, whose office it was to collect the taxes, and to announce to the assembled states the assessment of voluntary gifts which Provence owed to the

sovereign, were almost always the first victims of these revolts against royal authority, made with the cry of “Long live the king!”

Under such circumstances Raimond V. was among the first to rebel. In the last rebellion of Cascaveoux, – so named from the word *cascaveou*, the Provençal for little bell, which the insurgents fastened to the end of a leather strap, and rang as they cried, “Long live the king,” – none sounded the battle-cry, and shook his bell more violently, or made his dependents shake this signal of revolt, with more enthusiastic ardour than Raimond V.

In that, the baron showed himself the worthy son of his father, Raimond IV., one of the gentlemen most seriously compromised in the rebellion of the Razats, which name originated from the fact that the Provençals had been as spoiled of their possessions as if a razor had been employed. This rebellion broke out under Henry III., in 1578, and was suppressed with great difficulty by Marshal de Retz.

The baron looked with great impatience upon the growth of the power of Cardinal Richelieu, at the expense of the royal authority, and the disappearance of the sovereign beneath the shadow of the prime minister.

Similar movements of resistance manifested themselves in Languedoc and in Provence, in favour of Gaston of Orleans, brother of Louis XIII., whom the royalist faction opposed to the cardinal.

There is no doubt that the baron would never have taken an active part in these intrigues, but for the apprehension caused by the pirates along the coast, but, compelled to concentrate his forces in order to defend his house and estate, he declaimed violently against the cardinal, especially since the latter had given the government of Provence to the Marshal of Vitry.

These important functions had, up to that time, been filled by the Duke of Guise, admiral of the Levant, who, to the great delight of the Provençals, after many obstacles, had replaced the Duke d’Epernon.

“The young lion has devoured the old bear,” said Cæsar of Nostradamus on this subject at the celebration of the nomination of the young Lorraine prince for this important post.

When the Marshal of Vitry was promoted to the position of Governor of Provence, the nobility gave vent to their indignation, because a member of the house of Lorraine was not considered worthy of this dignity, usually reserved for a prince of the blood.

When Louis Gallucio, marquis, was Duke of Vitry, it was remarked that the Cardinal de Retz, without otherwise blaming him for having been one of the murderers of the Marshal of Ancre, said simply of him: “He had little sense, but he was bold to temerity, and the part he had in the murder of the Marshal of Ancre gave him, in the eyes of the world, a certain air of business and execution.” This speech gives us an idea of the times and manners.

The Baron des Anbiez, notwithstanding his fondness for independence and rebellion, was the best and most generous of men.

Adored by the peasants of his domain, and revered by the inhabitants of the little town of La Ciotat, who always found him ready to direct their troops and aid them with all his power to defend themselves from the pirates, he exercised a powerful influence throughout the neighbourhood.

Finally, his vigorous opposition to several orders of the Marshal of Vitry, which seemed to him to aim a blow at the rights of Provence, had been highly and generally approved in the country.

When Stephanette returned to Maison-Forte, the sun was just setting. The first care of the young girl was to go to Mlle. Reine des Anbiez. Reine was accustomed to occupy a chamber situated on the first floor of one of the turrets of the castle.

This room was round in shape, serving her as a cabinet for study, and was furnished with great care and expense.

The baron, loving his daughter to idolatry, had devoted to the interior arrangement of this room a considerable sum. The circular walls were covered with rich Flemish tapestry of deep green, with designs of a darker shade, enwrought with threads of gold.

Among other pieces of furniture was a walnut bookcase, curiously carved in the style of the renaissance, and encrusted with Florentine mosaic. A rich, thick Turkey carpet covered the floor. The spaces separating the beams of the ceiling were of azure blue, studded with arabesques of gold of delicate workmanship.

A silver lamp was suspended from the main girder by a chain of silver. The form of these lamps, still used in some villages of Provence, was very simple. They were made of a square of metal, the edges of which, an inch in height, contained the oil, and formed a sort of beak at each angle from which issued the wicks.

On a table with curved legs placed in the embrasure of the window lay a lute, a theorbo, and some pieces of unfinished tapestry.

Two portraits, one of a woman, the other of a man, in the costume of the reign of Henry III., were placed above this table, and lit up by oblique rays through little windows in leaden frames, which were set in the long and narrow casement.

To supply the want of a chimney a large copper coal-pan, curiously carved, and supported by four massive claws, stood in a corner of the room. It contained a bed of ashes and some embers, upon which were smoking some sprigs of fragrant broom.

Reine des Anbiez wore a dress of heavy brown Tours silk, with a train, and tight waist and sleeves; her cheeks were flushed, and her features expressed not surprise only but fright.

She seized her waiting-woman by the hand, and conducted her to the table, and said to her: "Look!"

The object to which she called the attention of Stephanette was a little vase of rock crystal.

From its long and slender neck issued an orange-coloured lily, with an azure blue calyx, in which stood pistils of silvery whiteness. This brilliant flower exhaled a delicious odour which resembled the mingled perfume of vanilla, lemon, and jessamine.

"Oh, mademoiselle, what a beautiful flower! Is it a present from the Chevalier de Berrol?"

At the mention of her betrothed's name, Reine turned pale and red by turns; then, without replying to Stephanette, she took up the vase with a sort of fear, and showed her a beautifully enamelled figure which she had discovered there, and the representation of a white dove with a rose-coloured beak, and extended wings, holding in its purplish bronze feet a branch of olive.

"Our Lady!" screamed Stephanette in fright. "It is the very picture of the enamelled pin that young miscreant robbed you of in the rocks of Ollioules, after he had saved monseigneur's life."

"But who brought this vase and flower here?" asked Reine.

"You do not know, mademoiselle?"

Reine turned pale and made a sign in the affirmative. "Holy Virgin, this must be sorcery!" cried Stephanette, setting the vase back on the table as if it had burned her hand.

Reine could scarcely control her emotion, but said to her:

"A little while ago, when I went out to see my father mount his horse, I promenaded until nightfall in the great walk by the drawbridge, and when I returned I found this flower on this table. My first thought, like yours, was that Chevalier de Berrol had sent it or brought it, although such a flower in this season would be a miracle; I asked if the chevalier had arrived at Maison-Forte, and was told he had not; besides, I had the key of this apartment with me."

"Then, mademoiselle, it must be magic."

"I do not know what to think. In examining the vase more attentively, I see the enamelled likeness of the pin that –"

Reine could not say more.

Her face and form betrayed the violent emotion which the memory of that strange day caused her, the day when the foreigner had dared approach his lips to hers.

"We must consult the chaplain or the watchman, mademoiselle," exclaimed Stephanette.

“No, no, be silent. Do not noise abroad this mystery which frightens me in spite of myself. Let us examine this apartment well; perhaps we may discover something.”

“But this flower, this vase, mademoiselle!”

As a reply, Reine threw the flower in the coal-pan.

It almost seemed that the poor flower turned itself in pain upon the burning coals; the light hissing produced by the water which oozed out from the stem, seemed like plaintive cries.

Soon it was in ashes.

Then Reine opened the window which looked upon the esplanade, and threw out the crystal flagon. It broke with a noise upon the parapet, and its fragments fell into the sea.

At this moment sounded heavy steps, and click of spurs upon the flagstones of the staircase. The hoarse voice of Raimond V. called joyously to his daughter to come and see – that demon of a Mistraon!

“Not a word of this to my father,” said Reine to Stephanette, putting her finger on her lips.

And she descended to meet the good old gentleman.

CHAPTER VII. THE SUPPER

Reine, hiding her emotion, joined her father. Raimond V. kissed his daughter's brow tenderly, then, taking her arm, descended the last steps of the staircase which led from the tower. He wore an old green military coat, braided with gold, somewhat tarnished, scarlet breeches, great boots of sheepskin covered with mud, and long spurs of rusty iron.

He held his gray cap in his hand, and although the weather was quite cold, the wrinkled and sunburnt brow of Raimond V. was covered with sweat.

By the light of a torch, a valet, holding by the bridle the treacherous and obstreperous Mistræon, whose flanks were foaming with perspiration, could be seen in the court of the castle.

A great black hunting dog with long hair, and a little yellow and white spaniel, were lying at the feet of the stallion from Camargne.

The dog was panting; his ears lying on his head, his mouth open and filled with foam, his eyes half closed, and the feverish palpitation of his sides, all announced that he had just run a rapid race. The sight of Mistræon added to Reine's annoyance by recalling the scene on the rocks. But the baron, preoccupied by the success of the chase, had not the penetration to discover the agitation of his daughter.

He detached a leather strap which held a large hare to the bow of his saddle, and proudly presented the game to Reine, as he said:

"Would you believe it, Eclair," and at the name the dog lifted his fine intelligent head, "caught this hare in thirteen minutes on the marshes of Savenol. It was old Genêt," and at this name the little spaniel lifted his head, "that put him on the track. Mistræon is so fleet that I did not lose sight of Eclair from the time I began to climb the hill of black stones. I made, I am sure, more than a league and a half."

"Oh, father, why will you ride this horse, after the frightful experience you have had with him?"

"Manjour!" cried the old gentleman, with an air of mock gravity, "never shall it be said that Raimond V. succumbed to one of the indomitable sons of Camargne."

"But, father –"

"But, my daughter, I yield no more on land than on sea, and I say that, because I have just been visiting the seines that those rascals in La Ciotat wish to prevent my laying beyond the rocks of Castrembaou. Just now, too, I met the consul Talebard-Talebardon on his nag, and he talked about it. And he had the effrontery to threaten me with the tribunal of overseers, of which the watchman is the assignee! Manjour, I laughed so much, that this demon, Mistræon, took advantage of my distraction and flew like an arrow."

"More dangers, father; this horse will be the death of you!"

"Be easy, my child, although I have not such a vigorous fist as the half savage young Muscovite who so adroitly arrested Mistræon on the border of a precipice, the bridle and the spur and the whip know how to reason with a vicious horse and his pranks. But permit me, my beautiful lady of the castle, to offer you the foot of the animal that I have captured."

And the baron drew a knife from his pocket, cut off the right foot of the hare, and gallantly presented it to his daughter, who accepted, not without some repugnance, this trophy of the chase.

Mistræon was led back to the stable, but Eclair and Genêt, favourites of the baron, followed him side by side, as, leaning on the arm of his daughter, he made what he called his evening inspection, while waiting for the hour of supper.

The women and young girls were spinning at the wheel, the men mending their nets and cleaning implements of husbandry. Master Laramée, the old sergeant of the company raised by the baron during the civil troubles, and majordomo and commander of the castle garrison, exacted that all of

the baron's tenants, who, in turn, performed the service of sentinel on the terrace which bordered the sea, should be armed in military style.

Others were engaged in decorating long lances, destined for jousts on the water, or to be used in jumping the cross-bar, the usual Christmas amusements, in the colours of the baron, red and yellow. Some, more seriously occupied, prepared the seed for late sowing; some were weaving, with great care, baskets out of rushes, to hold presents of fruit, made at Christmas.

These occupations were enlivened by songs peculiar to the country, sometimes accompanied by some marvellous legend, or terrible recital of the cruelties of pirates.

In an upper hall filled with fruit, children and old men were busy in examining long garlands of grapes, which hung from the rafters of the ceiling, or packing in baskets sweet-smelling figs, dried upon layers of straw.

Farther on was the laundry, where the washerwomen, under the supervision of a gentlewoman, Dulceline, the housekeeper, were occupied in perfuming the linen of the castle, by putting between its folds, whiter than snow, the leaves of aromatic herbs.

Often the sharp voice of Dulceline rose above the songs of the washerwomen, as she reprimanded some idlers.

By the side of the laundry was the pharmacy of the castle, where the peasants of the neighbourhood found all their remedies. This pharmacy belonged to the department of the baron's chaplain, Abbé Mascarolus, an old and excellent priest of angelic piety and rare simplicity. The chaplain had an extensive acquaintance with medical men and their attainments, and firmly believed in the strange pharmacy of that time.

In spite of the continual apprehension of a visit from the pirates, all the inhabitants of Maison-Forte shared the traditional gaiety, so to speak, which the approach of Christmas, the most joyous and most important festival of the year, always brought to Provence.

Every evening before supper, the baron made, in company with his daughter, what he called his inspection; that is, he went through the whole theatre of the various occupations with which we have been entertaining the reader, chatting familiarly with everybody, listening to requests and complaints, often impatient and sometimes flying into a passion and scolding, but always full of justice and kindness, and so cordial in his good-humour that his bursts of irritation were soon forgotten.

Raimond V. kept a large part of his domain in good condition. He sat up a long time at night to talk with his principal shepherds, labourers, farmers, and vinedressers, convinced of the wisdom of the two Provençal proverbs, worthy of the watchman on the cape of l'Aigle: *Luci doou mestre engraisso lou chivaou*, – the eye of the master fattens the horse. *Bouen pastre, bouen ave*, – good shepherd, good flock.

The old gentleman usually completed his circuit by a visit to the pharmacy, where he found Abbé Mascarolus, who gave him a sort of hygienic statement of the health of the inhabitants of the domain Des Anbiez.

To-day, he passed by the laundry, going directly to the pharmacy, accompanied by Reine. Preparations for the Christmas holidays were going on all through the castle, but the most important solemnity of all was reserved for the care of the venerable Dulceline, who had entreated the abbé to enlighten her with his counsels.

This was the cradle or crib, a sort of picture placed every Christmas day in the most beautiful room of the habitation, – castle, cottage, or mansion.

This picture represented the birth of the infant Jesus; there were the stable, the ox, the ass, St Joseph, and the Virgin holding on her knees the Saviour of the world.

Every family, poor or rich, deemed it absolutely requisite to have a cradle as elegant as could be afforded, ornamented with garlands and tinsel, and illuminated with a circle of candles.

As Raimond V. passed the laundry, he was surprised not to see Dulceline, and asked where she was.

“Monseigneur,” said a young girl with black eyes and cheeks the colour of a pomegranate, “Mile. Dulceline is in the chamber of the philters, with the abbé and Thereson; she is at work on the cradle, and forbids us to enter.”

“The devil!” said the baron, “the supper-bell has rung, and the abbé must say grace for us.”

He advanced to the door; it was fastened on the inside; he knocked.

“Come, come, abbé, supper is ready, and I am as hungry as the devil.”

“One moment, monseigneur,” said Dulceline, “we cannot open, – it is a secret.”

“What, abbé, you have secrets with Dulceline?” said the old gentleman, laughing.

“Ah, monseigneur, God save us! Thereson is with us,” screamed the old lady, offended at the baron’s pleasantry. As she opened the door, she presented a pale, wrinkled face, framed in a ruff and cap, worthy of the pencil of Holbein.

The abbé, fifty years old, was dressed in a black robe and cap, which fit his head closely and displayed his gentle face to advantage.

Thereson, as soon as the baron entered, hid the cradle under a cloth. The baron approached, and was about to lift it, when Dulceline cried, in a beseeching tone:

“Oh, monseigneur! permit us the pleasure of surprising you; rest assured this will be the most beautiful cradle that has ever adorned the great hall of Maison-Forte, and it ought to be, by Our Lady, since the commander and Father Elzear are coming such a distance to assist at the Christmas festivity.”

“Manjour! I shall be unhappy indeed if they do not come,” said the baron: “two years have passed since my brothers have spent a night or a day in our father’s house, and by St. Bernard, my patron, who assists me, the Lord will grant us a reunion this time!”

“God will hear you, monseigneur, and I join my prayers to yours,” said the abbé. Then he added: “Monseigneur, did you have a successful hunt?”

“Very good, abbé, see for yourself!” and the baron took the hare’s foot that Reine held in her hand, and showed it to the abbé.

“If mademoiselle does not desire to keep this foot,” said the abbé, “I will ask her for it, for my pharmacy, and will monseigneur tell me if it is the right or the left foot of the animal?”

“And what are you going to do with it, abbé?”

“Monseigneur,” said the good Mascarolus, pointing to an open volume on the table, “I have just received this book from Paris. It is the journal of M. de Maucaunys, a very illustrious and learned man, and I read here, page 317: ‘Recipe for the gout. Lay against the thigh, between the trousers and the shirt, on the side affected, two paws of a hare killed between Lady Day of September and Christmas, but with the important restriction, that the hind left paw must be used if it is the right arm which is ailing, and the right fore paw if it is the leg or the left thigh which is ailing: on the instant the application is made, the pain will cease.’”

“Stuff!” cried the baron, laughing with all his might. “This is a wonderful discovery; now the poachers will claim to be apothecaries, and they will catch hares only to cure the gout.”

The good abbé, quite embarrassed by the sarcasms of the baron, continued to read to keep himself in countenance, and added: “I see, baron, on page 177, wood-lice, given to dropsical nightingales, will cure them entirely.”

Here the laughter of the good gentleman was more uproarious. Reine, notwithstanding her preoccupation, could not repress a smile, and finally laughed with her father.

The Abbé Mascarolus smiled softly, and bore these innocent railleries with Christian resignation, and no longer tried to defend an empiricism which, no doubt, may find analogies in medical books of the present day.

Raimond V. took leave of the pharmacy to find pleasure elsewhere, when Laramée, majordomo and master of ceremonies, came to announce that supper had been waiting a long time.

Laramée, the advance guard of the baron's escort through the gorges of Ollioules, had the physiognomy of a real pandour; his complexion reddened by wine-drinking, his rough voice, his white and closely cut hair, his long gray moustache, and his continual swearing, were by no means to the taste of Dulceline.

She received the entrance of the majordomo into the sanctuary of the abbé with a sort of muttered remonstrance, which at last changed to sharp and loud complaint, when she saw that Laramée had the indiscretion to approach the veil which covered the mysterious cradle and try to lift it.

"Well, well, Laramée," said the baron, "Manjour, do you claim more privileges than your master, and insist upon seeing the wonders that Dulceline is hiding from our eyes? Come, come, take this lamp and light our way."

Then, turning to Mascarolus, Raimond V. said humorously: "Since, according to your fine book, wood-lice will cure dropsy in nightingales, you ought to try your remedy on this old scoundrel, who surely is threatened with dropsy, for he is a veritable old bottle, swollen with wine, ready to burst; as for the rest, like the nightingale, he will sing at night, – and the devil knows what songs!"

"Yes, monseigneur, and with a voice loud enough to wake the whole castle, and make the owls fly from the top of the old tower," added Dulceline.

"And just as true as I drank two glasses of Sauvechrétien wine this morning, screech owls know the owls, Dulceline, my dear," said the majordomo with a jocose manner as he passed, lamp in hand, before the superintendent of the laundry.

"Monseigneur," cried she, "do you hear the insolence of Master Laramée?"

"And you shall be avenged, my dear, for I will make him drink a pint of water to your health. Come, come, go on, majordomo, the soup will get cold."

The baron, Reine, and the abbé left the pharmacy and descended the stairs, and crossed the long and dark gallery which united the two wings of Maison-Forte; they entered a large dining-room, brilliantly lighted by a good fire of beech, olive roots, and fir-apples, which shed through the whole room the odour of balsam.

The immense chimney, with a large stone mantel, and andirons of massive iron, smoked a little, but by way of compensation, the windows latticed with lead, and the heavy doors of oak were not hermetically sealed, and the smoke found a way of escape through the numerous openings.

The north wind, entering these cracks, made a shrill whistle, which was victoriously combatted by the merry crackling of the beech and olive logs which burned in the fireplace.

The walls, simply plastered with lime, as well as the ceiling with its great projecting girders of black oak, had no other ornament than the skins of foxes and badgers and wolves, nailed at symmetrical distances by the careful hand of the majordomo.

In the spaces between the skins hung fishing-lines, weapons of the chase, whips, and spurs; and as curiosities, a Moorish bridle with its two-edged bit and top-not of crimson silk.

On an oak dresser, with a beautifully bowed front, stood an ancient and massive silver plate, whose richness contrasted singularly with the almost savage rusticity of the hall.

Great bottles of white glass were filled with the generous wines of Provence and Languedoc; smaller flagons contained Spanish wines, easily and promptly brought from Barcelona by coasting ships.

A few rustic valets, attired in cassocks of brown serge, served the table under the orders of the major-domo, the liveries with the colours of the baron never leaving the wardrobe except on feast-days.

The oblong table placed near the fireside rested on a thick carpet of Spanish broom or esparto. The rest of the hall was paved with flags of sandstone.

At the head of the table was the armorial chair of Raimond V.; at his right, the cover for his daughter, at his left, the cover for the stranger, – a custom of touching hospitality.

Below this place was the cover for the chaplain.

The table was delicately and abundantly served.

Around an enormous tureen of soup, made of the excellent sea eels of La Ciotat, and fragments of swordfish and sea dates, were fowls from the Pyrenees, which surrounded a perfectly roasted goose; on the other side, a saddle of lamb three months old, and the half of a kid one month old, justified by their appetising odour the culinary proverb: *Cabri d'un mes, agneau de tres*, – kid of one month, lamb of three; shell-fish of all kinds, such as oysters and mussels, having above all the flavour of the rock, as the Provençals say, filled the spaces left between substantial viands.

Side-dishes strongly salted and spiced, such as shrimps, lobsters, artichokes, celery, and tender fennel, formed a formidable reserve which Raimond V. called to his aid, when his appetite showed signs of exhaustion.

This profusion, which at first glance seemed so prodigal, was easily explained by the abundant resources of the country, the customary hospitality of the time, and the great number of persons a lord was expected to entertain.

Grace being said by the worthy Abbé Mascarolus, the baron, his daughter, and the chaplain sat down to the table, and Laramée took his usual post behind the chair of his master.

CHAPTER VIII. THE LOVER

The baron was scarcely seated, when he said:

“What in the devil is the matter with my head? Is Honorât not going to take supper with us?”

“He promised yesterday to do so,” said Reine.

“And do you allow your betrothed to break his word? What o’clock is it, Laramée?”

“Monseigneur, I have just posted the two sentinels on the rampart.”

“That is to say it is eight o’clock, is it not, captain?” merrily answered the baron to the majordomo, tending his glass.

“Yes, monseigneur, somewhat past eight.”

“Ah, that!” replied the old gentleman, replacing his glass on the table, not without having emptied it. “I hope nothing has happened to Honorat.”

“Father, why not send a messenger on horseback to Berrol at once?” said Reine, with keen interest.

“You are right, my child; at any rate, we would feel assured: there is not much to fear, but at night the road through the morasses of Berrol is not safe.”

“Whom shall I send for the chevalier, monseigneur?” said Laramée.

The baron was about to reply when the Chevalier de Berrol appeared, preceded by a valet who carried a lamp.

“Where in the devil do you come from, my son?” said the Baron des Anbiez, extending his hand to Honorat, whom he called son since he was to marry his daughter. “Did you meet the fairies in the quagmires of Berrol?”

“No, my father, I was at the house of Seigneur de Saint-Yves, and then – ” Suddenly he approached the young girl, and said, “Excuse me, I pray, Reine, for being late.”

She extended her hand to him with charming grace, and said, with a penetrating, almost serious tone:

“I am happy, very happy to see you, Honorât, for we were anxious.”

There was in these few words, and in the look which accompanied them, such an expression of confidence, tenderness, and solicitude, that the chevalier started with delight.

“Come, come, sit down to the table, and as you have made your peace with Reine, tell us what detained you at the house of Seigneur de Saint-Yves.”

The chevalier handed his sword and cap to Laramée, and taking a seat by the side of the baron, replied: “The recorder of the admiralty of Toulon, who is making a tour of the province, accompanied by a scribe and two guards of the governor, has come by order of the latter to visit the castle of Seigneur de Saint-Yves.”

“Manjour!” cried the impetuous baron, “I am sure that it concerns some insolent command! This marshal, murderer of our favourites, never means to give us another; and they say this recorder is the most arrant knave that ever announced a decree.”

“Oh, father, control yourself,” said Reine.

“You are right; Vitry does not deserve a generous anger. But it is hard, nevertheless, for the Provençal nobility to see such a man hold functions which, heretofore, have always been given to princes of the blood. But we live in strange times. Kings are asleep, cardinals reign, and bishops wear the cuirass and the belt. Do you think that is very canonical, abbé?”

The good Mascarolus never liked to give a decided opinion, and he replied, humbly:

“Without doubt, monseigneur, the canons of Jean VIII. and the text of St. Ambrose forbid prelates to bear arms; but on the other hand the literal interpretation of the Council of Worms authorises them to do so – with the Pope’s approbation – when they possess domains independent of the Crown. Under Louis the Young, the Bishops of Paris went to battle. Hinemar and Hervien, Archbishops of Reims, led their troops under Charles the Bald, and under Charles the Simple; Tristan de Salazar, Archbishop of Reims, thoroughly armed, mounted on a good charger, a javelin in his hand – ”

“Well, well, abbé,” interrupted the baron, “by the grace of the cardinal, we shall grow accustomed to the sight of bishops equipped as soldiers, with a helmet for mitre, a military coat as a stole, a lance instead of a cross, and shedding blood in the place of sprinkling holy water, – it is altogether proper. Some wine, Laramée! And you, Honorât, finish your story.”

“The fact is,” said the chevalier, “the recorder Isnard, who they say has no pity for poor people, came, in the company of lawyers, to inform himself of the number of arms and quantity of ammunition that Seigneur de Saint-Yves kept in his castle, – in short, to draw up an account of it, according to the orders of the Marshal of Vitry.”

The baron had just emptied his glass gloriously. He still held it between his thumb and the index finger of his right hand. When he heard these words he remained motionless, looking at Honorât with a bewildered expression, and wiping mechanically, with the back of his left hand, his white moustache, which was soaked in wine.

The chevalier, without remarking the baron’s astonishment, continued: “As the Seigneur de Saint-Yves hesitated to comply with the demand of the recorder, who insisted almost with threats, saying that he acted by order of the governor of the province, in the name of the cardinal, I wished to interpose between them, and – ”

“What! Saint-Yves did not nail these crows by the feet and hands to the door of his manor, to serve as a scarecrow to the others!” cried the baron, purple with indignation, and setting his glass on the table so violently that it broke in pieces.

“Father!” said Reine, alarmed, as she saw the veins which furrowed the baron’s bald forehead, swollen to bursting, “Father, what does it matter to you? No doubt the Seigneur de Saint-Yves has acceded to the governor’s demands.”

“He! obey such orders!” shouted Raimond V., “he! if he could be guilty of such cowardice, and dared appear again at the next assembly of the nobility of Aix, I would seize him by the collar, and chase him out of the hall with blows of my sword-belt. What! a recorder must enter our houses to take account of our arms, our powder, and our balls, as a bailiff takes account of a merchant’s goods! Manjour! if it were the express and signed order of the King of France, our count, I would reply to such an order with good shots from musket and cannon.”

“But, sir, – ” said Honorât.

“Visit our castles!” cried the baron, more and more exasperated. “Ah, it is not enough to have placed at the head of the old nobility of Provence a Vitry! – a hired assassin, – but this cardinal – may hell confound him; pray for him, abbé, for he has devilish need of it – must impose upon us the most humiliating obligations! Visit our houses, forsooth! Ah, Vitry, you wish to know how we can fire our muskets and cannon, and, by God’s death, come and lay siege to our castles and you shall know!” Then turning with eagerness to Honorât, he asked: “But what has Saint-Yves done?”

“Sir, at the time I left him, he was proposing to enter into an agreement to draw up, himself, the inventory demanded, and send it directly to the marshal.”

“Laramée,” said the baron, rising abruptly from the table, “have Mistræon saddled, mount five or six of my men and arm them well, and get ready yourself to follow me.”

“In the name of Heaven, father, what are you going to do?” cried Reine, taking one of the baron’s hands in her own.

“Prevent that good man, Saint-Yves, committing a cowardice which would dishonour the nobility of Provence. He is old and feeble, and he has not many persons around him; he will suffer himself to be intimidated. Laramée, my arms, and to horse, to horse!”

“This black night, over such bad roads – surely you will not dream of it,” said Honorât, taking the other hand of the baron.

“Did you hear me, Laramée!” shouted Raimond V.

“But, sir, – ” said Honorât.

“Eh, Manjour, my young master, I do what you ought to have done! At your age, I would have thrown the recorder and his guards out of the window. God’s death! the blood of your fathers does not run in the veins of you young men! Laramée, my arms, and to horse!”

Honorât made no response to the baron’s reproaches. He looked at Reine and shook his head to make her understand her father’s injustice to his conduct.

The young girl understood the situation, and while Laramée was occupied in taking down his master’s arms from one of the panoplies which ornamented the dining-hall, she said:

“Laramée, have my nag saddled too; I will accompany monseigneur.”

“To the devil with such folly!” said the baron, shrugging his shoulders.

“Folly or not, I intend to accompany you, father.”

“No, no, a hundred times no. You shall not go with me; such roads, and at such an hour!”

“I will follow you, father. You know I am wilful and obstinate.”

“Certainly, as a goat, when you set your mind to it; but this time I hope you will yield to me.”

“I am going down-stairs to prepare for my departure,” said Reine. “Come, Honorât.”

“To the devil with such nonsense! She is capable of doing it as well as saying it Ah, there it is, I have been too good; I have been too indulgent to her; she abuses it!” cried the old gentleman, stamping his foot with anger. Then taking a milder tone, he said: “Let us see, Reine, my daughter, my dear daughter, be reasonable; just one dash of a gallop, and I am with Saint-Yves in time to drive away these wretches with blows of my whip, and I return.”

Reine made a step toward the door.

“But you may join me, Honorât; you are as unmoved as a worm.”

“Ah, father, do you forget that just now you stigmatised as cowardice his firm and prudent conduct in this affair?”

“He, Honorât, my son, a coward? I would cut anybody in the face who would dare say it If I said that, I was wrong, – it was anger that carried me away. Honorât, my son – ”

Raimond V. opened his arms to Honorât, who embraced him, and said:

“Believe, me, sir, do not undertake this journey. My God! you will see these people only too soon.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“To-morrow morning, without doubt, they will be here, – not one house of the nobility will be exempt from this measure.”

“They will be here to-morrow!” cried the baron, with an expression of joy difficult to portray. “Ah, the recorder will be here to-morrow, he who has condemned poor devils to the galleys for the crime of smuggling. Ah, he will be here to-morrow! As God lives, it fills my heart with joy. Laramée, do not have the horses saddled, no, no, only to-morrow at daybreak prepare twenty good poles from hazel-trees, because I hope we will break a good many; then arrange a seesaw above the moat, and – but I will tell you to-night when I go to bed. Some wine, Laramée, some wine; give me my father’s cup and Spanish wine, I must drink with solemnity to such a piece of news; some wine of Xeres, I tell you, – wine of Lamalgue to the devil! since the minions of the petty tyrant of Provence will be here to-morrow, and we will be able to lash them soundly with the straps that ought to be laid on Vitry.”

Having said this, the baron sat down again in his armchair; each one took his place, to the great delight of the poor abbé, who, during this scene, had not dared to utter a word.

The supper, interrupted by this incident, was finished with a certain constraint.

Raimond V., preoccupied with the reception that he was preparing for the agents, stopped every few moments to whisper something in Laramée's ear; it was easy to guess the subject of these secret conferences, by the air of profound satisfaction with which the old soldier received the instructions of his master.

Like all soldiers, Laramée cherished an instinctive hatred of men of the law, and he did not dissimulate his joy at the thought of the reception awaiting the recorder and his scribe the next day.

Reine and Honorât exchanged glances of distress; they knew the obstinate and irascible temper of the baron, his taste for rebellion, and aversion to Marshal of Vitry.

The young girl and her lover feared, not without reason, that the baron might become involved in some serious difficulty. Recent and terrible examples had proven that Richelieu desired to put an end to the independence of the lords, and absorb their feudal privileges in the power of the king.

Unfortunately, they could not dream of preventing Raimond V., when once he determined upon any course of action, and his dependents were only too willing to second his dangerous projects.

The good Abbé Mascarolus ventured to say a few words on obedience, – that the lords owed it to themselves to set the example; but a severe glance from the eye of the baron cut short the chaplain's moralising, and he dared not defend the marshal as he had defended the warlike bishops.

Reine was not a little frightened at the baron's extravagant bursts of merriment and laughter, as he talked aside with Laramée.

When supper was over, according to the ancient and invariable usage of hospitality, the baron took a lamp, and himself conducted Honorât de Berrol to the chamber he was to occupy.

As upon previous occasions, the young man wished to spare the baron this ceremonial, arguing that his position as a betrothed lover rendered it unnecessary, but the old gentleman replied that not until after the festivities of Christmas, when the marriage rite was to be celebrated, could he be treated with less formality; until then, he must receive all the attention due a gentleman who slept under his roof.

Reine entered her chamber, followed by Stephanette. Her apartment was near that of her father, and listening she discovered to her great regret that Laramée remained with him longer than was his habit, and that the baron continued to make plans for the discomfiture of the recorder and officers. At a late hour of the night, she heard the majordomo order some of the baron's servants to carry invitations.

Distressed by these indications, she dismissed Stephanette, and returned to her chamber.

A new object of astonishment, almost of terror, awaited her there.

CHAPTER IX. THE PICTURE

After having shut the door which communicated with her father's rooms. Reine walked mechanically to the table standing in the embrasure of the window. What was her astonishment to see on this table a little picture encased in a frame of filigree, set with precious stones.

Her heart beat violently; she recalled the crystal vase, and a secret presentiment told her that this picture had some mysterious connection with the adventure among the rocks of Ollioules.

She approached it, trembling.

The perfection of this picture, painted on vellum, in imitation of ancient manuscripts, was incredible.

It represented the scene in the gorges of Ollioules at the very moment when the baron, embracing his daughter, had extended his hand to the young stranger; at a distance on the rock, Pog and Trimalcyon, the two foreign personages of whom we have spoken, appeared to command the scene.

Although Reine had seen these two men but a moment, the likeness in the picture was so striking that she recognised them. She shuddered involuntarily at the sinister expression of Fog's face, easily known by his long red beard and the bitter smile which contracted his lips.

The features of the baron, as well as those of Reine, were rendered with surprising fidelity and perfect art, although the faces were scarcely larger than the nail of the little finger. They were drawn with a delicacy which was marvellous.

Notwithstanding the inimitable skill displayed in this ravishing picture, an odd, extravagant thing destroyed its harmony and effect.

The pose, person, and costume of Erebus – the strange young man – were perfectly portrayed; but his head disappeared beneath a small cloud, in the centre of which was represented the enamelled dove already portrayed on the crystal vase.

This omission was strange, and perhaps cleverly calculated, inasmuch as Reine, in spite of her fear and astonishment, could not help calling memory to her aid in order to complete the portrait of the stranger.

She saw it in her own mind, instead of on the vellum which she held in her hand.

There was, besides, on the part of the stranger, a sort of delicacy in thus effacing his own features under a symbol which represented to his mind the most precious memory of that day; or he may have adopted this means to quiet the scruples of the young girl, should she decide to keep the picture.

In order to comprehend the struggle between the desire to keep the picture and the resolve to destroy it, which rose in the young girl's mind, we must say a few words about Reine's love for Honorât de Berrol, and her own sentiments after the adventure in the gorges of Ollioules.

Honorât de Berrol was an orphan and distant relative of Raimond V. He had considerable fortune, his estates lying near those of the baron, and community of interest as well as other ties bound the chevalier and the old gentleman.

For two or three years Honorât came almost every day to Maison-Forte. The chevalier was the impersonation of rectitude, sincerity, and honour. His education, without being extraordinary, was superior to that of most young men of his age.

He was actively occupied in the management of his estates; his order and his economy were remarkable, although, when an opportunity presented itself, he knew how to be generous.

His mind was not unusual, but he had plenty of good sense and reason, and his character, naturally charming, could be firm and decided when circumstances demanded it.

His predominating characteristic was a love of justice. Little given to enthusiasm or exaggeration, and supremely happy in his position, he looked forward to his marriage with the baron's daughter with a pure and serene joy.

There was no romantic aspect to this love. Before allowing himself to fall in love with Reine, Honorât had frankly expressed his intentions to the baron, and asked him to learn his daughter's feelings.

The good gentleman, who never temporised or resorted to half-measures, replied to Honorât that the alliance would be agreeable to him, and at once told Reine of the chevalier's proposal.

Reine was then sixteen years old; she was pleased with the appearance and bearing of the Chevalier de Berrol, for the manners of most of the country gentlemen who visited Maison-Forte suffered much by comparison with those of her amiable relative.

Reine accepted the baron's plans, and the baron wrote at length to his brothers, the commander and Father Elzear, without whose advice he did nothing, concerning the happy betrothal.

Their response was favourable to Honorât, and the marriage was fixed for the Christmas celebration which would follow the young girl's eighteenth birthday.

Thus passed two years in the midst of sweet hopes and a pure, calm love.

Honorât, serious and gentle, began at once his part as mentor, and by degrees acquired a great ascendancy over the mind of Reine.

Raimond V. loved his daughter so foolishly and idolatrously, that the happy influence of Honorât saved her from her father's weakness.

The girl had lost her mother when she was in the cradle, and had been reared under the eyes of the baron by Stephanette's mother, an excellent woman, and, although happily endowed with good instincts, had been permitted to indulge her caprice at will.

Her lively imagination exaggerated sympathy and antipathy, and she often received the wise and reasonable suggestions of Honorât with mischievous irony and even resentment.

Legend and romance were the mental food she craved, and often in thought she pictured herself as the heroine of some strange adventure. Honorât would dissipate these fantastic visions by a breath, and not infrequently reproached Reine, with as much good-humour as gaiety, for these vagabond imaginations.

But these little differences were soon forgotten. Reine would confess her wrong-doing with adorable frankness, and the beautiful affection of the two lovers seemed only to increase.

Unconsciously, Reine began to feel the influence of Honorât more and more in her daily life, and instead of indulging herself in vague reveries and foolish imaginations, occupied her mind with graver thoughts. She recognised the nothingness of her former dreams, and every step of this wise and happy way served to establish her love for Chevalier de Berrol.

Her mind and character had undergone such a complete transformation under the influence of Honorât, that her father, sometimes, when he had gone beyond the limits of temperance, would say in jest that Reine was becoming insupportably serious.

The sentiment of Reine for Honorât was by no means a passionate love, nourished by difficulties and uncertainties, but a calm, sincere, and reasonable affection, in which the young girl recognised, with a sort of tender veneration, the superior reason of her betrothed.

Such were the sentiments of Mlle, des Anbiez when the fatal meeting in the rocks of Ollioules took place.

The first time that she saw Erebus, placed her under the influence of a profound sentiment of gratitude; he had just saved the baron's life.

Reine, perhaps, might never have observed the surprising beauty of the stranger, but for the startling circumstances by which he was presented to her.

The fact that he had just delivered her father from a frightful danger was the most powerful fascination that Erebus could offer.

No doubt the charm was broken when, after the few words uttered by his companions, his countenance and manner changed, and he had the audacity to press his lips to hers. The features of the stranger, that a moment before possessed a beauty so pure, and an amiability so lovely, seemed suddenly to disappear under the mask of an insolent libertine.

Since that day, Erebus appeared to her always under these two different physiognomies.

Sometimes she tried to banish from her memory all thought of an audacious stranger, who had insolently robbed her of what she would have given to her father's saviour with reluctance. Again, she would dream, with a deep sentiment of gratitude, that her father owed his life to this same stranger who at first seemed so courageous and so timid.

Unhappily for Reine's repose of mind, Erebus united and justified, so to speak, these two distinct natures, and in her thought she gave him sometimes her admiration, and sometimes her contempt.

So she wavered between these two sentiments.

Thus the natural exaggeration of her character, rather suppressed than destroyed, was excited by this singular adventure.

The unknown one seemed to her the genius of good and the genius of evil.

Involuntarily, her excitable mind tried to penetrate the secret of this double power.

Reine herself was made aware of her morbid mental condition only by the tender reproaches of Honorât, who accused her of distraction. For the first time, then, Reine realised with horror the empire that the unknown person had gained over her mind; she resolved to escape from it, but the resistance with which she endeavoured to drive Erebus from her mind, only made her think of him the more.

In her vexation she shed bitter tears, and sought refuge and diversion in the calm and wise conversation of Honorât.

Nothing could make her forget the past. Notwithstanding his goodness and kindness, her betrothed seemed to weary her, and even wound her.

She dared not open her heart to him. The baron, too, was the best of fathers, yet absolutely incapable of comprehending the unaccountable anguish of his daughter.

Concentrated by silence, and overexcited by solitude, a sentiment mingled with curiosity, admiration, and almost hatred, began to take deep root in the heart of Reine.

Many times she shuddered to see that the gravity of Honorât oppressed her. In her thought she reproached him for having nothing in his career that was adventurous or romantic.

She compared his peaceful and uniform life with the mystery which surrounded the stranger.

Then, ashamed of such thoughts, she sought to fix her hopes upon her approaching union with Honorât, – a union so sacred that, in the fulfilment of its duties, every foolish dream and imagination would be effaced.

Such was the state of Reine's heart when, by an inexplicable mystery, she found in the same day two objects, the sight of which redoubled her anguish and excited every power of her imagination.

This stranger, or one of his agents, was then near her, though invisible.

She could not suspect the servants within the walls of Maison-Forte of being in collusion with the stranger. All of them were old servants, grown gray in the service of Raimond V.

Reared, so to speak, by them, she was too well acquainted with their life and morality to believe them capable of underhand manoeuvres. The fact that the picture was placed on her praying-stool in her chamber, disquieted her above all.

She was on the point of going to her father and telling him all, but an instinctive love of the marvellous restrained her; she feared to break the charm. Her romantic character found a sort of pleasure, mingled with fear, in this mystery.

Inaccessible to superstition, of a firm and decided mind, and recognising the fact that, after all, there was nothing really dangerous in allowing this strange adventure to take its course, Reine reassured herself, after searching her chamber and the connecting one very carefully.

She took up the picture again, looked at it for some time, then, after dreaming awhile, she threw it into the fire.

She followed the destruction of this little masterpiece with a melancholy gaze.

By a strange chance the vellum, detached from the frame, caught first on both sides.

Thus the figure of Erebus burned the last and was outlined a moment on the burning embers, – then a light flame leaped upon it, and all disappeared.

Reine remained a long time gazing in the fireplace, as though she still saw there the picture which had been consumed.

The clock of Maison-Forte struck two in the morning; the young girl returned to her senses, went to bed, and, for a long time, tried to fall asleep.

CHAPTER X. THE RECORDER

The day after the occurrence of the events we have just related, a group of several persons, some on foot, and others on horseback, skirted the edge of the sea, and seemed to direct their course toward the Gulf of La Ciotat.

The most important personage of this little caravan was a man of considerable corpulence, with a solemn and formal countenance, wearing a travelling-cloak over his habit of black velvet.

He had a chain of silver around his neck, and rode a little horse with an ambling gait.

These personages were no other than Master Isnard, recorder of the admiralty of Toulon, and his clerk or scribe, who, mounted on an old white mule, carried behind enormous bags filled with bundles of papers, and two large registers in their boxes of black shagreen.

The clerk was a little middle-aged man, with a pointed nose, a pointed chin, high cheek-bones, and sharp eyes. This nose, this chin, and these cheek-bones, and these eyes were very red, thanks to the very keen wind from the north.

A valet, mounted on another mule, laden with wallets, and two halberdiers, dressed in green and orange-coloured cassocks trimmed with white lace, accompanied the recorder and his clerk.

It was evident that the two officers of justice did not enjoy an unmarred serenity.

Master Isnard, especially, betrayed his bad humour, from time to time, by imprecations upon the cold, the weather, the roads, and particularly upon his mission.

The clerk responded to these complaints with a humble and pitiful air.

“On my oath!” cried the recorder, “here I am only two days on my circuit, and it is far from promising anything agreeable. Hm! the nobility takes this census of arms ordered by the Marshal of Vitry very ill; they receive us in their castles like Turks – ”

“And we are happy to be received at all, Master Isnard,” said the clerk; “the lord of Signerol shut his door in our faces, and we were obliged to draw up our report by the light of the moon. The lord of Saint-Yves received us reluctantly.”

“And all these resistances, open or mute, to the orders of his Eminence, the cardinal, will be duly recorded, clerk, and bad intentions will be punished!”

“Fortunately, the reception given by the Baron des Anbiez will indemnify us for these tribulations, Master Isnard. They say the old lord is the best of men. His jovial nature is as well known throughout the country as the austerity of his brother, the commander of the black galley, or the charity of Father Elzear of the Order of Mercy, his other brother – ”

“Hm! Raimond V. does well to be hospitable,” growled the recorder; “he is one of those old strife-stirrers, always ready to draw his sword against any established power; but patience, clerk, good courage, the reign of men of peace and justice has come, thank God! All these arrogant disputants, with long rapiers and spurs, will keep as quiet in their strong castles as wolves in their dens, or, on my oath, we will rase their houses to the ground and sow salt on them. However,” added Master Isnard, as if he wanted to give himself artificial courage, “we are always sure of the support of the cardinal; just let them touch a hair of our heads, – why, you see, clerk, that it would be the same as pulling a hair out of the beard of his Eminence!”

“Which would be dreadfully injurious to the said Eminence, Master Isnard, as they say he has a regular cat’s beard, – thin and sharp.”

“You are an ass!” said the recorder, shrugging his shoulders, and giving his horse a thrust of the spur.

The clerk lowered his head, said no more, and blew through his fingers by way of keeping in countenance.

The little caravan followed the road for some time along the beach, the sea on the right, and interminable rocks on the left, when they were joined by a traveller modestly seated on a donkey.

The tawny complexion of this man, with his overcoat of leather, his red cap, from which escaped a forest of black hair, curled and standing on end, and a little portable forge, fastened to one side of the pack-saddle on the back of his donkey, proved him to be one of those strolling Bohemians who go from farm to village, offering their services to housekeepers as repairers of household utensils.

Notwithstanding the cold, the legs and feet of this man were naked. His delicate and nervous limbs, and his expressive face, scarcely shaded by a black and distinctly marked beard, presented the type peculiar to the men of his race.

His donkey was quiet and tractable, and had neither bit nor bridle, – he guided it by means of a stick which he held to the animal's left eye, if he wished to go to the right, and to the right eye if he wished him to go to the left. As he approached the recorder and his attendants, the Bohemian took the donkey by one of his long, pendent ears, and stopped him suddenly.

“Can you tell me, sir,” said the Bohemian to the recorder, respectfully, “if I am still far from La Ciotat?”

The recorder, thinking, doubtless, the man unworthy of a reply from him, made a disdainful gesture, and said to his scribe:

“Answer him, clerk,” and rode on.

“The mouth is the mistress, the ear is the slave,” said the Bohemian, bowing himself humbly before the clerk.

The clerk inflated his thin cheeks, assumed a haughty air, seated himself on his mule with triumphant dignity, and said to the valet who followed him, as he pointed to the Bohemian:

“Lackey, reply to him,” and passed on.

Little John, more compassionate, told the wanderer that he could follow the caravan, as it was on its way to a place quite near the town of La Ciotat.

The two halberdiers were a short distance in the rear, and, joining the principal group, all continued to move forward on the beach. The sun soon made its influence felt; although it was in the month of December, its rays became so warm that Master Isnard felt the need of relieving himself of his cloak. He tossed it to his clerk, saying:

“Are you sure, clerk, that you recognise the route to Maison-Forte, the castle of Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez? For we are to stop first at his dwelling. It is from that point that I will begin the census of arms in this diocese. Eh, eh, clerk, the morning air and salt odour of the beach gives me an appetite! They say the baron has the good cheer of an abbé, and the hospitality of the good King René. So much the better, on my oath! so much the better, clerk. Instead of putting up for fifteen days at some paltry hostelry of La Ciotat, eh, eh! I will make my winter quarters at Maison-Forte of Raimond V., and you will follow me, clerk,” said the recorder, giving himself airs. “Instead of your bacon with garlic and beans, and your codfish seasoned with oil for high days, you will only have to choose between fowl, venison, and the best fish of the gulf. Eh, eh! for a starved wretch like you, it is a rare windfall, so, clerk, you can get a big mouthful – ”

The poor scribe made no reply to these coarse pleasantries, by which he felt humiliated, and only said to the recorder: “I recognise the road easily, Master Isnard, because there is a post bearing the escutcheon of Raimond V., and a milestone which marks the land belonging to the house of Baux.”

“The lands of Baux!” cried the recorder, with indignation. “Another one of the abuses that his Eminence will destroy, on my oath! It is enough to make one insane to try to find his way out of this labyrinth of feudal privileges!” Then, passing from grave to gay, the recorder added, with a loud laugh, “Eh, eh! it would be as difficult a task as for you to distinguish the wine of Xeres from the wine of Malaga, accustomed as you are to drink the second pressing of the grape like a fish, and then taste a glass of Sauve-chrétien, to put a good taste in your mouth.”

“And happy when this grape-water does not fail us, Master Isnard,” said the poor clerk, with a sigh.

“Eh, eh! then the river never fails, and asses can drink at their ease,” replied the recorder, insolently.

His unhappy victim could only hang his head in silence, while the recorder, proud of his triumph, put his hand above his eyes, hoping to discover the roof of Maison-Forte des Anbiez, as his appetite was growing clamorous.

The Bohemian, who rode behind the two talkers, had heard their conversation.

Although his features were common, they showed much penetration and intelligence. His little, piercing, changing black eyes constantly moved from the recorder to the clerk with an expression by turns ironical and compassionate. When Master Isnard had finished conversation by his coarse witticism on asses, he contracted his eyebrows into a severe frown, and seemed about to speak, but whether he feared the recorder, or was afraid of saying too much, he remained silent.

“Tell me, clerk,” cried the recorder, stopping short before a post, painted with a coat of arms, which marked a division of the road, “is not this the route to Des Anbiez?”

“Yes, Master Isnard, but we must leave the shore. This is the road to Maison-Forte; it is about two hundred steps from here; this rock hides it from you,” answered the clerk, as he pointed to a sort of little promontory which thrust itself into the sea, and thus interfered with a view of the castle.

“Then, clerk, go on before,” said the recorder, checking his own horse, and giving a blow of his switch to the scribe’s mule.

The clerk rode on in advance, and the little band ventured into a precipitous road which wound its way across the rocks on the coast.

After a quarter of an hour’s travel, the road became level, and wooded hills, vines, olive-trees, and sown fields succeeded the rocks. Master Isnard at last saw, to his great joy, the imposing pile of Maison-Forte. It stood out at the end of an immense avenue, planted with six rows of beeches and sycamores, which conducted to the vast court of which we have spoken.

“Eh, eh!” said the recorder, expanding his nostrils, “it is about midday; it ought to be the dinner-hour of Raimond V., for these country lords follow the old Provençal custom: they take four meals; every four hours, – breakfast at eight o’clock, dine in the middle of the day, lunch at four o’clock, and sup at eight.” “Indeed, then they must eat nearly all day long,” said the clerk, with a sigh of envy, “for they often sit three or four hours at table.”

“Eh, eh! you are licking your lean lips already, clerk; but do you not see a thick smoke on the side of the kitchens?”

“Master Isnard, I do not know where the kitchens are,” said the clerk. “I have never been inside Maison-Forte, but I do see a thick smoke above the tower which looks toward the west.”

“And you do not detect the odour of fish-soup, or roast? On my oath, in the house of Raimond V. it ought to be Christmas every day. Come, can’t you scent something, man?”

The clerk held his nose in the air like a dog on the scent, and replied, with a shake of the head: “Master, I scent nothing.”

When the recorder had arrived a few steps from the court of Maison-Forte, he was astonished to see no one outside of this large habitation, at an hour when domestic duties always require so much commotion.

As we have said, the court formed a sort of parallelogram.

At the farther end of this parallelogram rose the main dwelling.

On each side could be seen its wings at right angles, and the buildings occupied by persons in the employ of the castle.

On the first plane rose a high wall, pierced with loopholes for cannon, in the middle of which opened a massive door. In front of this wall stretched a wide and deep ditch, filled with water, which was crossed by means of a movable bridge, built directly in front of the door.

The recorder and his retinue arrived at the entrance of the bridge, where they found Master Laramée.

The majordomo, solemnly clothed in black, bore in his hand a white rod, a distinctive mark of office.

The recorder descended from his horse with an important air, and, turning to Laramée, said: "In the name of the king, and his Eminence, the cardinal, I, Master Isnard, recorder, have come to take census and catalogue of the arms and ammunition of war, retained here in this castle of Maison-Forte, belonging to Sir Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez."

Then turning to his train, which the Bohemian had joined, he said: "All of you follow me."

Laramée made a profound bow, and with a sly expression of face said to the recorder, as he indicated the road: "If you will follow me, Master Recorder, I will show you our magazine of arms and artillery." Encouraged by this reception, Master Isnard and his retinue crossed the bridge, leaving their horses outside, tied to the parapet, according to the instruction of the majordomo.

As they entered the court planted with trees, the recorder said to Laramée: "Is your master at home? We are very hungry and very thirsty, friend."

The majordomo looked up at the recorder, lifted his cap, and replied: "You condescend, sir; you call me friend; you honour me too much, Master Recorder."

"Oh, go on! I am as kind as a prince. If the baron is not at table, conduct me first to him; if he is at table, conduct me to him all the sooner."

"Monseigneur has just been served, Master Recorder. I am going to open the door of honour for you, as is proper."

As he said these words, Laramée disappeared through a narrow passage.

The recorder, his clerk, his valet, the Bohemian, and the two halberdiers remained in the court, staring at the great portal of the castle, expecting every moment to see its massive doors open for their reception. They did not see that two men had removed the bridge, beyond the ditch, on the side of the fields, thus cutting off all retreat from the men of the law.

CHAPTER XI. TAKING THE CENSUS

On the side of the court, as on the side of the sea, three windows of the gallery, which extended the full length of the edifice, opened upon a balcony which was over the principal door of the castle.

The recorder began to realise that it required much ceremony to introduce him to the baron, when suddenly the windows were opened, and ten or twelve gentlemen, in handsome hunting-suits, booted and spurred, holding a glass in one hand and a napkin in the other, rushed out on the balcony, shouting and laughing at the top of their voices.

At their head was Raimond V.

It was easy to see by the flushed cheeks of these joyous companions that they had just arisen from the table, and had emptied more than one bottle of Spanish wine.

The convivial friends of Raimond V. belonged to the nobility of the neighbourhood, and were all known for their hatred of Marshal of Vitry, and open or secret opposition to Cardinal Richelieu.

Honorât de Berrol and Reine, utterly powerless to dissuade the baron from his dangerous projects, had retired into one of the apartments in the tower.

The recorder began to think he was mistaken in counting on a favourable reception from the baron; he even feared that he might be made the victim of some infernal trick, as he saw the clamorous gaiety of the guests of Maison-Forte, especially when he recognised among the number the old lord of Signerol, who had rudely refused him entrance into his castle.

However, he tried to put a good face on the matter, and followed by his clerk, who was trembling in every limb, he advanced to the balcony with his two halberdiers at his heels.

Addressing himself to Raimond V., who was leaning over the balcony railing and looking contemptuously on the company below, he said:

“In the name of the king and his Eminence, the cardinal – ”

“The cardinal to the devil! Let his infernal Eminence return to the place he came from!” shouted several gentlemen, interrupting the recorder’s speech.

“Beelzebub, at this moment, is making a red brass hat for his Eminence,” said the lord of Signerol.

“The girdles of his Eminence ought to be good rope for hanging!” said another.

“Let the recorder have his say, gentlemen,” said the baron, turning to his guests, “let him speak, my friends, – it is not by a single note that you recognise the bird of the night. Come on, Manjour! speak, recorder, speak, read out your scrawl!”

The clerk, completely demoralised, and doubtless meditating a retreat, turned his head away from the door, and discovered with dismay that the bridge had been withdrawn.

“Master Isnard,” whispered he, with broken voice, “we are caught in a mouse-trap; they have carried away the bridge.”

Notwithstanding the self-possession he affected, the recorder looked over his shoulder, and said, in a low voice: “Clerk, order the halberdiers to approach without attracting attention.”

The clerk obeyed; the little band concentrated in the middle of the court, with the exception of the Bohemian.

Standing at the foot of the balcony, he seemed to contemplate with curiosity the gentlemen gathered there.

Master Isnard, anxious to accomplish his task, and seeing that he had been mistaken in presuming upon the hospitality of Raimond V., read, not without hesitation, the judicial summary.

“In the name of his Majesty, our sire, King of France and of Navarre, and Count of Provence, and of his Eminence, the cardinal, I, Thomas Isnard, recorder of the admiralty of Toulon, sent by the king’s attorney to the seat of the said admiralty, make here in this Maison-Forte the census and catalogue of the arms and ammunitions of war therein enclosed, in order to draw up a statement,

on which statement his Excellence, the Marshal of Vitry, Governor of Provence, will decide to the end that we may be advised as to what quantity of arms and ammunition ought to be left in the said Maison-Forte; accordingly, I, Thomas Isnard, recorder of the admiralty of Toulon, here present myself in person to the said Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez, praying him of necessity to obey the orders signified. Made at Maison-Forte des Anbiez, dependent of the diocese of Marseilles, and the jurisdiction of Aix, December 17, 1632.” The old baron and his friends listened to the recorder with perfect calmness, exchanging frequent glances of contempt. When Master Isnard had concluded, Raimond V. leaned over the railing of the balcony and replied:

“Worthy recorder, worthy deputy of the worthy Marshal of Vitry, and of the worthy Cardinal Richelieu, – God save the king, our count, from his Eminence, – we, Raimond V., Baron des Anbiez, and master of this poor mansion, we authorise you to complete your mission. You see that door there on the left, on which is nailed the sign-board, ‘Arms and Artillery,’ – open it, and perform the duties of your office.”

As he said these words the old gentleman and his guests sat with their elbows on the balcony railing, as if they had prepared themselves for the enjoyment of an interesting and unusual spectacle.

Master Isnard had followed with his eyes the gesture of the baron, which indicated to him the mysterious magazine.

It was a door of medium size, on which could easily be read the newly painted words, “Arms and Artillery.” This door was situated in the middle of the left wing, which was largely made up of rooms for the servants.

Without being able to account for his repugnance, the recorder looked at the door of the magazine with suspicion, and said to Raimond V., with an air almost arrogant:

“Send some one of your people to open that door!” The old gentleman’s face became purple with anger; he was on the point of flying into a passion, but restrained himself and replied:

“One of my people, Master Recorder? Alas, I do not have them any longer. The good old man who received you is my only servant; the taxes imposed by your worthy cardinal, and the tribute he exacts from us, have reduced the Provençal nobility to beggary, as you see! You are accompanied by two companions with halberds, and a fellow with a serge mantle,” – here the clerk made a respectful bow, – “your own people are more than enough to put your orders in execution.”

Then, seeing the Bohemian at the foot of the balcony, Raimond called to him: “Eh, you man there with the red cap, who in the devil are you? What are you doing there? Do you belong to this band?”

The wanderer approached the balcony, and said: “Monseigneur, I am a poor travelling artisan, who lives by his work. I come from Bany. I was on my way to La Ciotat, and I entered to see if I could get work at the castle.”

“Manjour!” exclaimed the baron, “you are my guest; do not stay in the court.”

At this remarkable invitation, the men of the law looked frightened, and at the same instant the Bohemian, with a wonderful agility, climbed up one of the granite pillars which supported the balcony, as quick as a wildcat, and seated himself at the feet of the baron, outside of the balustrade, on a little slab projecting from the balcony floor.

The ascension of the Bohemian was so rapid, and done so cleverly, that it excited the admiration of the guests.

The baron, laughingly seizing one of his long black locks of hair, said to him: “You climb too well to travel in the main road; it is my opinion, fellow, that windows are your doors, and roofs serve you as a place to promenade. Come in the house, boy; Laramée will give you something to drink.”

With a light bound the Bohemian jumped over the railing of the balcony, and entered the gallery, which served as dining-room on important occasions, where he found the remains of the abundant dinner of which the baron’s guests had just partaken.

The recorder remained in the court with his escort, not knowing upon what course to resolve.

He looked at the unlucky door with a vague disquietude, while the old gentleman and his friends betrayed some impatience as they waited for the end of this scene.

Finally, Master Isnard, wishing to get out of an embarrassing position, turned to the baron and said, with a solemn air:

"I call to witness the people who accompany me if anything unbecoming happens to me, and you will answer, sir, for any dangerous and secret ambushade which could hurt the dignity of the law or of justice, or our honourable person."

"Eh, Manjour! what are you crowing about? Nobody here wishes to interfere with your office; my arms and my artillery are there: enter, examine, and count; the key is in the door!"

"Yes, yes, go in, the key is in the door," repeated the chorus of guests, with a sneer which seemed a sinister omen to the recorder. Exasperated beyond measure, but keeping himself at a respectful distance from the door, the recorder said to his scribe:

"Clerk, go and open this door; let us make an end of – "

"But, Master Isnard – "

"Obey, clerk, obey," said the recorder, still drawing back.

The poor scribe showed the register which he held in one hand, and the pen that he held in the other.

"My hands are not free. I must be ready to draw up an official report. If some sorcery bursts out of that door, ought I not, on the very instant, enter it upon my verbal process?"

These reasons appeared to make some impression on the recorder.

"Little John, open that door," said he to the lackey.

"Oh, master, I dare not," replied Little John, getting behind the recorder.

"Do you hear me, you wretch?"

"Yes, sir, but I dare not; there is some sorcery there."

"But, on my oath, if you – "

"If the salvation of my soul depended on it, sir, I would not open it," said Little John, in a resolute tone.

"Come, come!" said the recorder, overcome with vexation, as he addressed the halberdiers, "it will be said, my brave fellows, that you alone acted as men in this stupid affair! Open that door, and put an end to this ridiculous scene."

The two guards retreated a step, and one of them said:

"Listen, Master Isnard, we are here to give you assistance as far as we are able, if any one rebels against your orders, but no one forbids you to enter. The key is in the door; enter alone, if you wish to do so."

"What, an old pandour like you afraid!"

The halberdier shook his head, and said:

"Listen, Master Isnard, halberds and swords are worth nothing here; what we need is a priest with his stole, and a holy water sprinkler in his hand."

"Michael is right, Master Isnard," said the other guard; "it is my opinion that we will have to do what was done to exorcise the dolphins that infested the coast last year."

"If that dog of a Bohemian had not run away like a coward," said the recorder, stamping his foot with rage, "he might have opened the door."

Then, happening to turn his head, the recorder discovered several men and women standing at the windows of Maison-Forte; they were partially hidden by the basement, but were looking curiously into the court.

More from self-esteem than courage, Master Isnard, seeing that he was observed by so many persons, walked deliberately to the door, and put his hand on the key.

At that moment his heart failed him.

He heard in the magazine a rumbling noise and extraordinary excitement, which he had not detected before.

The sounds were harsh, with nothing human in them.

A magic charm seemed to fasten the recorder's hand to the key in the door.

"Come, recorder, my boy, go on! there you are! go on!" cried one of the guests, clapping his hands.

"I wager he is as warm as if it were the month of August, although the wind is blowing from the north," said another.

"Give him time to invoke his patron and make a vow," said a third.

"His patron is St. Coward," said the lord of Signerol; "no doubt he is making a vow never to brave another danger if he delivers him from this one."

Pushed to extremity by these jeers, and reflecting that, after all, Raimond V. was not so cruel as to force him into real danger, the recorder opened the door, and suddenly jumped back.

At that moment he was roughly overthrown by the onset of two Camargnan bulls, that rushed from the stable, head downward, and uttering a peculiar and stifled bellowing, for they were muzzled.

The two animals were not of very large size, but were full of vigour.

One was tawny, streaked with dark brown; the other was black as jet.

The first use they made of their liberty was to bound over the court, paw the earth with their fore feet, and try to divest themselves of their muzzles.

The appearance of the two bulls was greeted with hurrahs and bravos by the guests of the baron.

"Eh, well, recorder, your inventory?" cried Raimond V., holding his sides, and giving full vent to his hilarity. "Come, clerk, enter upon your official report my bulls, Nicolin and Saturnin. Ah! you demand the arms that I possess, – there they are. It is with the horns of these fellows from Camargne that I defend myself. Eh, Man-jour! I see by your fear that you recognise them as arms, serious and offensive. Come, recorder, label Nicolin, and draw up Saturnin."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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