

Crockett Samuel Rutherford

**The White Plumes of Navarre:
A Romance of the Wars
of Religion**



Samuel Crockett

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The White Plumes of Navarre: A Romance of the Wars of Religion

BEFORE THE CURTAIN RISES

The night was hot in Paris. Breathless heat had brooded over the city all Saturday, the 23rd of August, 1572. It was the eve of Saint Bartholomew. The bell of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had just clashed out the signal. The Louvre was one blaze of lights. Men with lanterns and poleaxes, as if going to the shambles to kill oxen, hurried along the streets.

Only in the houses in which were lodged the great Huguenot gentlemen, come to the city for the marriage of the King's sister Marguerite to the King of Navarre, there were darkness and silence. None had warned them – or, at least, they had taken no warning. If any suspected, the word of a King, his sworn oaths and multitudinous safe-conducts, lulled them back again into security.

In one chamber, high above the courtyard, a light burned faint and steady. It was that beside the bed of the great Admiral – Coligny. He had been treacherously wounded by the arquebuse of one of the guard of the King's brother – Monsieur de France, Henry Duke of Anjou, afterwards to be known to history as Henry III., the favourite son of Catherine de Medici, the cunningest, and the most ungrateful.

There watched by that bedside many grave men, holding grave discourse with each other and with the sick man, concerning the high mysteries of the religion, pure and reformed, of the state of France, and their hopes of better days for the Faith as it had been delivered to the saints.

And at the bed-foot, with towels, bandages, and water in a silver salver ready for service, one young lad, a student of Geneva, fresh from Calvin and Beza, held his tongue and opened wide his ears.

"Pray, Merlin de Vaux," said the wounded Admiral to his aged pastor, "pray for life if such be God's will, that we may use it better – for death (the which He will give us in any case), that the messenger may not find us unprepared."

And Merlin prayed, the rest standing up, stern, grave, prepared men, with bowed and reverent heads. And the Genevan Scot thought most of his dead master Calvin, whom, in the last year of his life, he had often seen so stand, while his own power rocked under him in the city of his adoption, and the kingdoms of the earth stormed about him like hateful waves of the sea.

And somewhat thus-wise prayed good Merlin.

"Thou, O Lord, hast put down the mighty from their seats and has exalted them of low degree! Clay are all men in Thy hands – potter's clay, broken shards or vessels fit for altar-service. Yet Thou has sent us, Thy servants, into the wild, where we have seen things, and thought things, and given us many warnings, so that when Thou standest at the door and knockest, we may be ready for Thy coming!"

Then at these words, prompt as an echo, the house leaped under the heavy noise of blows delivered upon the outer door. And the Admiral of France, sitting up in his bed, yet corpse-pale from his recent wound, lifted his hand and said, "Hush, be still – my Lord standeth without! For dogs and murderers, false kings and queens forsworn, are but instruments in His hand. It is God who calls us to His holy rest. For me, I have long been ready. I go with no more thought than if my chariot waited me at the door."

Then he turned to the Huguenot gentlemen who were grouped about his bed. This one and that other had tried to catch a glimpse of the assailants from the windows. But in vain. For the door was in a recess which hid all but the last of the guard which the King had set about the house.

"It is only Cosseins and his men," said one; "they will hold us safe. We have the King's word. He placed the guard himself."

"The hearts of Kings are unsearchable," said the Admiral. "Put not your trust in princes, but haste ye to the garret, where is a window that gives upon the roof. There is no need that young and valiant men should perish with a wounded man and an old. Go and fight for the remnant that shall be preserved. If it be the Lord's will, He shall yet take vengeance by your arms!"

"Ay, go," said Merlin the pastor, casting back his white hair; "for me, I am old, and I stay. Only yester-night I saw an angel stand in the sun, crying to all souls that did fly through the midst of heaven, 'Come, gather yourselves to the Supper of the Great God.' But when, thinking myself called, I would have drawn nearer, lo! between me and the table spread, on which was the wine ready poured out, I saw the Beast, the kings of the earth, and their warriors gathered together to make war against the Lamb. And I heard a voice that said, 'Nay, but first thou must pass through the portal of death ere it be given thee to eat of the marriage supper of the Lamb.' So to me it spake. The message was not for you – ye heard not the Voice. I will stay, for I am weary, and am minded to fall on sleep – to find rest after many years."

And to this Paré, the wise and skilled surgeon, who was ever beloved by Admiral Coligny, likewise adhered, saying, "I have not heard the voice of the angel. But I hear well enough that of false Cosseins who is sent by the King to murder us. I have looked from the window, and though I saw no vision of Beast, I saw clearly my Lord Duke of Guise stand without calling to them to slay and make an end! So I also will remain for the love I bear to my lord, and because it is my duty as a good physician so to do."

And the lad John Stirling, the Scot from Geneva, the pupil of Calvin, ventured no word, being young. But, though the others would have carried him with them, he shook them off, and abode where he was. For his vision, and the purpose of it, were yet to be.

And so it came to pass that this young man from Geneva saw the killing of the great Admiral, and heard the words in which he forgave his assassins, telling them how that he was ready to die, and that at the most they had but shortened his life by some short count of days or hours!

And ever through the brief turmoil of the killing, the voice of the Duke of Guise mounted impatiently up the stairway asking if the Admiral were not yet dead, and hounding on his dogs to make an end of that noble quarry.

And even when they assured him he would not believe, but desired to look on the face of his own and his father's enemy.

"Open the window and throw him down!" he cried.

So they cast him out. But the aged prince, with the life still in his body, clutched by instinct at the sill of the window as he fell. The young Duke, first ordering up a couple of flambeaux, deliberately wiped the blood from the face of his enemy with his kerchief, and cried out, "It is even he – I know him well. So perish all the enemies of the King and of the Catholic League!"

Then, as his men still called from the window, the Duke looked up, angry to be disturbed in his gloating over his arch-foe.

"There is also a lad here," they cried, "one from Geneva, who says he is of the Admiral's opinion. What shall we do with him?"

"What is that to me?" said the Duke of Guise haughtily; "throw him after his master."

And that is the reason why a certain John Stirling, a Scot of Geneva, went through life lame, wearing a countenance twisted like a mask at a fair, and – loved not the Duke Henry of Guise.

Moreover, though he saw the Duke spurn his dead enemy with his foot, the boy felt not at the time the kicks with which the scullions imitated their master, but lay in a swoon on the body of

Coligny. He came to himself, however, being cast aside as of no account, when they came to drag the Admiral's body to the gallows. After a while the spray of a fountain that played in the courtyard roused him. The lad washed his hands and crawled forth. He had lain all the terrible Sunday in the bloody court of Coligny's lodgings, under the shadow of the trembling acacias, which cast flecks of light and dark on the broad irregular stains of the pavement. But when the evening had come again, and the angry voices shouting "Kill! kill!" had died away, the lame boy hobbled painfully out. Somehow or other he passed through an unguarded gate, to find himself sustained by a fellow-countryman carrying a child, a little maid of four years. He must have been a strong man, that chance-met Scot, for he had an arm to spare for John Stirling. He spoke, also, words of hope and comfort to the boy. But these fell on deaf ears. For through the dull ache of his bones and the sharp nip of his wounds, undressed save for the blood that had dried upon them, the heart of the cripple remained with Henry of Guise.

"No," he said over and over to himself, repeating the Duke's words, "the work is not yet finished!" It had, indeed, scarce begun.

And he registered a vow.

CHAPTER I. THE DAY OF BARRICADES

"The good Duke! The sweet Prince! The Church's pillar! Guise! The good Guise!"

Through the open window the shouts, near and far, invaded the quiet class-room of the Sorbonne. It was empty, save for the Professor of Eloquence, one Dr. Anatole Long, and a certain vagrant bluebottle which, with the native perversity of its tribe, sought out the only shut square of glass (bottle-green, by way of distinction) and buzzed loudly all over it.

The Professor thumbed the discourse of the day on "Peace as the Characteristic Virtue of the Christian Faith." It was a favourite lecture with him. He had used it as exposition, homily, exhortation; and had even on one occasion ventured to deliver it before the Venerable the Conclave of the Sorbonne itself.

Professor Anatole sighed as he listened to the ringing shouts outside, the clatter of steel on peaceful educational stairways, and when through the open windows, by which the early roses ought to have been sending up their good smell, there came a whiff of the reek of gunpowder, the excellent Anatole felt that the devil was loose indeed.

It was the great Day of Barricades, and all Paris was in arms against the King, royal, long-descended, legitimate – and worthless.

"Rebellion – rank rebellion," groaned the Professor; "no good will come of it. Balafré, the Scarred One, will get a dagger in his throat one day. And then – then – there will be a great killing! The King is too ignorant to forgive!"

"Ah, what is that?"

A noise of guns crashed, spat, and roared beneath the window which gave on to the narrow street. Professor Anatole rose hastily and went to the casement, worried a moment with the bar-fastening (for the window on that side was never unhasped), opened it, and looked forth. Little darting, shifting groups of lads in their dingy student cloaks, were defending themselves as best they might against a detachment of the King's Royal Swiss, who, on the march from one part of the city to another, had been surprised at the head of the narrow Street of the University.

An old man had somehow been knocked down. His companion, a slim youth in a long, black cape, knelt and tried to hold up the failing head. The white beard, streaked with dark stains, lay across his knees. Now the Professor of Eloquence, though he lectured by preference concerning the virtues of peace, thought that there were limits even to these; so, grasping his staff, which had a sword concealed in the handle, of cunning Venice work, ran downstairs, and so found himself out on the street.

In that short period all was changed. The Royal Swiss had moved on. The battling clerks had also vanished. The narrow Street of the University was blank save for the old man who lay there wounded on the little, knobbed cobble-stones, and the slim, cloaked youth bending over him.

Professor Anatole does not remember clearly what followed. Certain it is that he and the lad must have carried the wounded man up the narrow stair. For when Anatole came a little to himself they were, all the three of them, in his wide, bare attiring-chamber, from which it was his custom to issue forth, gowned and solemn, in the midst of an admiring hush, with the roll of his daily lecture clasped in his right hand, while he upheld the long and troublesome academic skirts with the other.

But now, all suddenly, among these familiar cupboards and books of reference, he found himself with a dying man – or rather, as it seemed, a man already dead. And, what troubled him far more, with a lad whose long hair, becoming loosened, floated down upon his shoulders, while he wept long and continuously, "Oh – oh – oh – my father!" sobbing from the top of his throat.

Now Professor Anatole was a wise man, a philosopher even. It was the day of *mignons*. The word was invented then. King Henry III. had always half-a-dozen or so, not counting D'Epernon and La Joyeuse. That might account for the long hair. But even a *mignon* would not have cried "Ah – ah – ah!" in quick, rending sobs from the chest and diaphragm.

He, Anatole Long, Professor of Eloquence at the Sorbonne, was in presence of a great difficulty – the greatest of his life. There was a dead man in his robing-room, and a girl with long hair, who wept in tremulous contralto.

What if some of his students were minded to come back! A terrible thought! But there was small fear of that. The rascals were all out shouting for the Duke of Guise and helping to build the great barricades which shut in the Swiss like rats in a trap. They were Leaguers to a man, these Sorbonne students – for fun, however, not from devotion.

Yet when he went back to the big empty class-room to bethink himself a little (it was a good twenty years since he had been accustomed to this sort of thing), lo! there were two young fellows rooting about among the coats and cloaks, from the midst of which he had taken his sword-cane when he ran downstairs.

"What are you doing there?" he cried, with a sudden quick anger, as if students of eloquence had no right in the class-room of their own Professor. "Answer me, you, Guy Launay, and you, John d'Albret!"

"We are looking for – " began Guy Launay, the son of the ex-provost of the merchants, a dour, dark clod of a lad, with the fingers of a swordsman and the muscles of a wrestler. He was going to say (what was the truth) that they had come up to look for the Professor's sword-cane, which they judged might be useful against the King's folk, when, of instinct far more fine, his companion, called the Abbé John, nephew of the great Leaguer Cardinal, stopped him with a swift sidelong drive of the elbow in the ribs, which winded him completely.

"We have come to listen to your lecture, master!" he said, bowing low. "We are sorry indeed to be a little late. But getting entangled in the press, it was impossible for us to arrive sooner. We ask your pardon, dear master!"

Under his breath the Abbé John confided to his companion, "Evidently old Blessings-of-Peace has carried that sword-stick off into his retiring-room for safety. Let him begin his lecture. Then in five minutes he will forget about everything else, and you or I will sneak in and bag it!"

"You – you mean," said Launay; "I should move about as silently as a bullock on a pontoon bridge!"

With his eye ever on the carefully-shut door of his private chamber, and his ear cocked for the sound of sobbing, the Professor moved slowly to his reading-desk. For the first time in his life he regretted the presence of students in the class-room. Why – why could they not have stayed away and dethroned anointed kings, and set up most Catholic princes, and fought for the Holy League and the pleasure of clouting heads? That was what students of the Sorbonne seemed to be for in these latter days. But to come here, at the proper hour, to take notes of a lecture on the Blessings of Peace, with the gun-shots popping outside, and dead men – no, somehow he did not care to think of dead men, nor of weeping girls either! So at this point he walked solemnly across the uneven floor and turned the key in the door of his robing-room.

Instantly the elbow of Guy Launay sought the side of the Abbé John, called alternatively the Spaniard, and made him gasp.

"D'ye see that?" whispered Guy, "the old rascal has locked the door. He suspects. Come, we may as well trip it. We shan't get either the sword-cane nor yet the pistols and bullets on the top of the guard-robe. My milk-brother, Stephen, saw them there when he took his week of chamber-valeting Old Peace-with-Honour!"

"Screw up your mouth – tight!" said the Abbé John politely; "a deal of nonsense will get spread about otherwise. I will attend to everything in the room of Old Blessings-of-Peace!"

"You!"

"Yes, I – wait and see. Get out your tablets and take notes – spread your elbows, man! Do as I do, and the blessing of Saint Nicholas of Padua be upon all thieves and rascals – of whom we are two choice specimens!"

"Speak for yourself, Spaniard!" spluttered the other, having accidentally sucked the wrong end of his pen; "my uncle is not a cardinal, and as to my father – "

"He sells hanks of yarn, and cheats in the measurement!"

"I dare you to say so, you left-hand prince, you grease-spot on the cardinal's purple – you – "

"That will do," said the Abbé John calmly; "to-morrow I will give you thwacks when and where you like. But now listen, mark, learn, and in any case keep our good Master Anatole from so frequently glancing at that door. One would think he had the devil shut up within!"

"Impossible – quite impossible; he is loose and exceedingly busy outside there! Listen to the shots," said Guy, inclining an ear to the window.

Crack – crack! Bang!

The windows rattled.

"Hurrah for the People's Duke! Down with the King! Death to the Huguenots! – to the Barbets! – to the English! Death! Death! Death!"

"Lively down there – I wish we were up and away!" mourned the son of the ex-provost of the merchants, "but without arms and ammunition, what can fellows do?"

"As sayeth the Wise Man" – the voice of the Professor of Eloquence began to quicken into its stride – "all her main roads are pleasant roads; and her very by-paths, her *sentiers*, lead to peace!"

"If we could only get at those pistols and things!" murmured Guy Launay. "I wager you a groat that the old man is mistaken! Oh, just hearken to them outside there, will you? Peace is a chafing-dish. War is the great sport!"

"Down with the King! Bring along those chains for the barricade! Students to the rescue!"

Then came up to their ears the blithe marching song, the time strongly marked:

"The Guises are good men, good men,
The Cardinal, and Henry, and Mayenne, Mayenne!
And we'll fight till all be grey —
The Valois at our feet to-day,
And in his grave the Bearnais —
Our chief has come – the Balafgré!"

"Keys of Sainted Peter!" moaned Guy Launay, "I cannot stand this. I am going down, though I have no better weapon than a barrel-stave."

And he hummed, rapping on the inscribed and whittled bench with his fingers, the refrain of the famous League song:

"For we'll fight till all be grey —
The Valois at our feet to-day,
In his deep grave the Bearnais —
Our chief has come – the Balafgré!"

But Professor Anatole did not hear. He was in the whirl of his exposition of the blessings of universal peace. The Church had always brought a sword, and would to the end. But Philosophy, Divine Philosophy, which was what Solomon meant – peace was within her walls, prosperity, etc.

And by this time the Spaniard, otherwise the Abbé John, was crawling stealthily towards the locked door. Guy Launay, on the contrary, was breathing hard, rustling leaves, taking notes for

two, both elbows working. The Master was in the full rush of his discourse. He saw nothing, knew nothing. He had forgotten the robing-room in the affirmation that, "In the midst of turmoil, the truly philosophic may, and often does, preserve the true peace – the truest of all, peace of mind, peace of conscience."

Bang!

There was a tremendous explosion immediately under the window.

"The King's men blowing up a barricade!" thought the Abbé John, with his hand on the great flat key, but drawing back a little. "If that does not wake him up, nothing will."

But the gentle, even voice went on, triumphing – the periods so familiar to the lecturer ringing out more clearly than ever. "Wars shall cease only when Wisdom, which is God, shall prevail. Philosophy is at one with Religion. The Thousand Years shall come a thousand times over and on the earth shall reign – "

The key gritted in the lock. The Abbé John disappeared behind the heavy curtain which hid the door of the robing-room.

The next moment he found himself in the presence of a man, lying rigidly on the Professor's table, all among the books and papers, and of the fairest young girl the Abbé John had ever seen, gently closing eyes which would never more look out upon the world.

Within, the Professor's voice droned on, discoursing of peace, righteousness, and eternal law. The great Day of the Barricades rattled and thundered without. Acrid blasts of sulphurous reek drove into the quiet room, and the Abbé John, speechless with amazement, looked into the wet eyes of this wonderful vision – the purest, the loveliest, the most forlorn maid in France.

CHAPTER II. CLAIRE AGNEW

A long moment they stood gazing at each other, the girl and the Abbé John. They might have been sister and brother. There was the same dark clustering hair, close-gripped in love-locks to the head. The same large, dark, wide-pupilled eyes looked each into each as they stood and gazed across the dead man.

For a moment nothing was said, but the Abbé John recovered himself first.

"He knows you are here?" he questioned, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

"Who?" The girl flung the question back.

"Our Professor of Eloquence, the Doctor Anatole Long?"

"Aye, surely," said the girl; "he it was brought us hither."

He pointed to the dead man.

"Your father?"

The girl put her hand to her breast and sighed a strange piteous affirmative, yet with a certain reserve in it also.

"What was he, and how came you here?"

She looked at him. He wore the semi-churchly dress of a scholar of the University. But youth and truth vouched for him, shining from his eyes. So, at least, she thought. Besides, the girl was in a great perplexity.

"I am Claire," she said, "the daughter of him who was Francis Agnew, secret agent from the King of Scots to his brother of Navarre!"

"A heretic, then!" He fell back a step. "An agent of the Bearnais!"

The girl said nothing. She had not even heard him. She was bending over her father and sobbing quietly.

"A Huguenot," muttered the young Leaguer, "an agent of the Accursed!"

He kept on watching her. There was a soft delicate turn of the chin, childish, almost babyish, which made the heart within him like water.

"Chut!" he said, "what I have now to do is to get rid of that ramping steer of a Launay out there. He and his blanket-vending father must not hear of this!"

He went out quietly, sinking noiselessly to the ground behind the arras of the door, and emerging again, as into another world, amid the hum and mutter of professorial argument.

"All this," remarked Doctor Anatole, flapping his little green-covered pulpit with his left hand, "is temporary, passing. The clouds in the sky are not more fleeting than –"

"Guise! Guise! The good Guise! Our prince has come, and all will now be well!"

The street below spoke, and from afar, mingling with scattered shots which told the fate of some doomed Swiss, he heard the chorus of the Leaguers' song:

"The Cardinal, and Henry, and Mayenne, Mayenne!
We will fight till all be grey —
Put Valois 'neath our feet to-day,
Deep in his grave the Bearnais —
Our chief has come – the Balafgré!"

Abbé John recovered his place, unseen by the Professor. He was pale, his cloak dusty with the wriggling he had done under the benches. He was different also. He had been a furious Leaguer.

He had shouted for Guise. He had come up the stairs to seek for weapons wherewith to fight for that Sole Pillar of Holy Church.

"Well?" said Guy Launay, looking sideways at him.

"Well, what?" growled the Abbé John, most unclerically. He had indeed no right to the title, save that his uncle was a cardinal, and he looked to be one himself some day – that is, if the influence of his family held. But in these times credit was such a brittle article.

"Did you get the weapons?" snapped his friend – "the pistol, the sword-cane? You have been long enough about it. I have worn my pencil to a stub!"

The Abbé John had intended to lie. But somehow, when he thought of the clear dark eyes wet with tears, and the dead Huguenot, within there – somehow he could not.

Instead he blurted out the truth.

"I forgot all about them!" he said.

The son of the ex-provost of the merchants looked at him once, furiously.

"I think you are mad!" he said.

"So do I!" said the Abbé John, nodding blandly.

"Well, what is the reason of it?" grumbled the other. "What has Old Blessings-of-Peace got in there – a hidden treasure or a pretty wench? By the milk-pails o' Mary, I will go and see for myself!"

"Stop," said the Abbé John, with sudden heat, "no more spying! I am sick of it. Let us go and get weapons at the Hotel of the Duke of Guise, if you like – but respect the privacy of our master – our good and kind master!"

Guy Launay eyed his companion a moment murkily.

He gritted his teeth viciously, as if he could gladly have bitten a piece out of his arm. He showed large flat teeth when angry, for all the world like a bad-tempered horse.

"Stop and take notes on the comforts of philosophy by yourself," he said; "I am off to do my duty like a man. You have turned soft at the moment of action, like all Spaniards – all the breed are alike, you and your master, the Demon of the South!"

"You lie!"

"And you! But wait till to-morrow!"

"Ah," cried the Abbé John, "like all Frenchmen, you would put off a fight till to-morrow. Come out now, and I will break your head with a quarter-staff!"

"Pshaw!" quoth Guy Launay, "quarter-staffs indeed, on the Day of Barricades. I am off to kill a King's man, or to help spit a Huguenot!"

And the next moment the Professor of Eloquence had but one auditor.

CHAPTER III. THE PROFESSOR OF ELOQUENCE

"My name," she said, "is Claire Agnew. But since we lived long in Provence and Spanish Roussillon, my father, being learned in that speech, called me most often Euphrasia or Euphra, being, as he said, 'the light of his eyes'!"

"Then you are English, and a heretic?" said the young man, while the Professor, having discharged his papers into the drawer of a cabinet, already full and running over, bent his ear to the breast of the old man.

"I am Scottish, and you are the heretic!" said the girl, with spirit.

"I am no heretic – I am of the Faith!" said the young man.

"The Faith of treaty-breakers and murderers!"

She knit her fingers and looked at him defiantly – perhaps, if the truth must be told, more in anger than in sorrow.

The voice of the Professor of Eloquence broke in upon them.

"Young man," he said, "you have surprised a secret which is not mine – much less yours. Be off at once to your uncle, the Cardinal d'Albret, and to your friend's father Launay, the ex-provost of the merchants. Get three passports – for me, for my daughter Claire, and – for my nephew – "

"What nephew?" said the youth, rubbing the ear which the Professor had pulled.

"One I have adopted recently!" said the Professor gravely, "a certain worthless loon, who came up hither seeking what was not his – a sword-cane and a pistol, and who found that which, God knows, belongs to neither of us – an uncomfortable possession in these days, a Huguenot maiden with eyes like a flame of fire!"

"They are more like pansies!" said the young man doggedly.

"How do you know? How dare you? Is she not my daughter?"

"Aye, master, she is, of course, your daughter if you say so" – the voice of the Abbé John was uncertain. He did not like the Professor claiming so much – and he beginning to be bald too. What have bald pates to do with pretty young girls? Even thus he growled low to himself.

"Eh, what's that?" the Professor caught him up. "Be off – it is to save her life, and you are a young blade who should never refuse an adventure, specially when at last it gives you a chance to be taken for the relative of a respectable man – "

"And the cousin of this fair maid, your – daughter?"

"Well, and have I not a good right to a daughter of my own? Once on a day I was married, bonds and bands, parchments and paperings. For ten years I endured my pain. Well might I have had a daughter, and of her age too, had it not been my hard lot to wed a woman without bowels – flint-heart – double-tongue – "

"I wager it was these ten years that taught him his eloquence!" said the young man under his breath. But aloud he answered otherwise, for the young girl had withdrawn into the small adjacent piece, leaving the men to talk.

"And this?" said the Abbé John, indicating the dead man – "what are we to do with this?"

The face of the Professor of Eloquence cleared.

"Luckily we are in a place where such accidents can easily be accounted for. In a twinkling I will summon the servitors. They will find League emblems and holy crosses all about him, candles burning at his head and feet. The fight still rumbles without. It is but one more good Guisard gone to his account, whom I brought hither out of my love for the Cause, and that the Sorbonne might not be compromised."

Almost for the first time the student looked at his master with admiration.

"Your love for the Cause – " he said. "Why, all the world knows that you alone voted against the resolution of the assembled Sorbonne that it was lawful to depose a king who refused to do his duty in persecuting heretics!"

"I have repented," said the Professor of Eloquence – "deeply and sorely repented. Surely, even in the theology of the Sorbonne, there is place for repentance?"

"Place indeed," answered the young man boldly, "but the time is, perhaps, a little ill-chosen."

However the Professor of Eloquence went on without heeding him.

"And in so far as this girl's goodwill is concerned, let that be your part of the work. Her father, though a heretic, must be interred as a son of the Church. It is the only course which will explain a dead man among the themes in my robing-room. He has been in rebellion against the King – but there is none to say against which king! It does not need great wisdom to know that in Paris to-day, and especially in the Sorbonne, to die fighting against the Lord's Anointed, and for the Duke of Guise, is to receive the saint's aureole without ever a devil's advocate to say you nay!"

"It is well known," commented the youth, "that you were ever of the King's party – a Politique! It was even spoken of in the Council of the Sixteen."

"Do you go seek your cousin, sirrah," said the Professor of Eloquence, "and with her be very politic indeed!"

The Abbé John accepted the duty indicated with brisk alertness.

"Mind you, no love-making," said Dr. Anatole. "That would be not only misplaced, but also exceedingly ill-suited to your ecclesiastical pretensions."

"Hear me before we go farther," cried the Abbé John; "I am a good Leaguer and a good Catholic, but I will not have it said that I am a churchman just because my uncle is!"

The Professor paid no heed. Instead, he went to a corner cupboard of ornate Spanish mahogany carved into dragons and gargoyles, and from it he took the medal of the League, the portraits of the Duke of Guise and of the King of Spain. Then, tying a white armlet of Alençon lace about the dead man's wrist, he bade the Abbé John summon the servants.

The Abbé John stood opened-mouthed watching the preparations.

"I had always thought – " he began.

"Of course you had – of course you did. You all do, you half-baked babies! You always take your instructors for ancient innocents, purblind, adder-deaf mumblers of platitudes. But you are wrong – you and Guy Launay, and all your like. A good professor is a man who has been a good student, who remembers the tricks of the animal, and is all ready fixed for them before the whisper has run along Bench One! I will conduct this necessary funeral in person. Please do you, since you can be of no other use, make it your business to explain matters to your cousin!"

The servants of the Sorbonne, Leaguers to a man, at last appeared, trickling upstairs half reluctantly. The Professor of Eloquence met them at the door with a grave face.

"This man has been slain – accidentally," he began, "I believe by the King's Swiss. I have brought him here myself. It will be as well for the Sorbonne that these matters go no further – good for you, as well as for myself, and for all the college of the Doctors, after the resolution of which we know. Let Father Gontier be called, and the dead man interred with all due ceremony in the private sepulchre of the faculty."

When the servitors of the Sorbonne had seen the half-hidden wristlet of the good Leaguer, the medals of the two great chiefs, they understood. After all, the King might win – and then – men might stay or flee, Guises rise and set, but it was clearly the destiny of the Sorbonne to go on for ever, if only to afford them a means of livelihood.

They were men with families, and the advantage of keeping a still tongue in each several head had often been pointed out to them. It was, indeed, a condition of their service at Sorbonne.

So the funeral of Francis the Scot took place in the strictest secrecy. As a mourner, close beside the bier, knelt the niece of good Dr. Anatole, the Professor of Eloquence. It was not thought

unusual, either that Doctors of the Sorbonne should have nieces, or that they should be overcome at the sight of war and dead men. Grave doctors' nieces were almost proverbially tender-hearted. The Abbé John, a cousin by the mother's side, and near relative of the great Leaguer Cardinal, ordered, explained, and comforted, according as he had to do with Sorbonne servitors, Jesuit fathers, or weeping girls.

He found himself in his element, this Abbé John.

CHAPTER IV. LITTLE COLETTE OF COLLIOURE

While the Abbé John was gone to seek the passports from his uncle, and from what remained of royal authority in a city now wholly given over to the League, Anatole Long, college professor, explained matters to his new charge.

"You saw but little of your father, I take it?" he began gently. The Sorbonnist was a large-framed, upstanding man, with an easy-going face, and manners which could be velvet soft or trampling, according to circumstances. They were generally the former.

"There is no use in wasting good anger," he would say, "at least, on a pack of cublings."

He was referring to the young men of his class, who thought themselves Platos for wisdom and Kings of Navarre in experience. For though they cursed "the Bearnais" in their songs and causeway-side shoutings, in their hearts they thought that there was none like him in the world – at once soldier, lover, and man.

"My father," said Claire Agnew, looking the Professor in the face, "was a brave gentleman. He owed that to his race. But he had long been in this service of politics, which makes a man's life like a precious glass in the hands of a paralytic. One day or another, as he takes his medicine, it will drop, and there is an end."

"You speak bitterly?"

The Professor's voice was very soft. It was a wonder that he had never married again, for all knew that his youth had been severely accidented.

"Bitterly," said the girl; "indeed, I may speak truly and yet without honey under my tongue. For my father made himself a hunted hare for the cause that was dear to him. Yet the King he served left him often without a penny or a crust. When he asked for his own, he was put off with fair words. He spent his own estate, which was all my portion, like water. Yet neither from King James of Scots, nor from Elizabeth of the English, did he get so much as a 'thank you' for the travail of years!"

"And from Henry of Navarre?" said the Professor of the Sorbonne.

"Why," said Claire Agnew, "I am shamed to own it. But though never a man needed money more than the King of Navarre, it is on his bounty that we have been living these four years. He is great and generous!"

"I have heard something less than that said of the Bearnais," answered the Professor; "yet he is a true Frenchman of the Gascon breed, great to men, generous to women, hail-fellow-well-met with all the world. But he loves the world to know it! And now, little lady," said Professor Anatole, "I must conduct you elsewhere. It is not seemly that a pretty one like you should be found in this dingy parchment den, counting the sparrows under the dome of the Sorbonne. Have you any friends in Paris to whose care I can commit you for the time being?"

"Not one!" cried the girl fiercely; "it is a city of murderers – Leaguers – our enemies!"

"Gently – fairly, little one," the Professor spoke soothingly; "there are good men and bad in Paris, as elsewhere; but since you have no friends here, I must conduct you to Havre de Grace, where we will surely find a captain biding for a fair wind to take him through Queen Bess's Sleeve into the North Sea, far on the way for Scotland."

The girl began to cry bitterly, for the first time.

"I have no friends in Scotland, not any more than in France," she said. "My father was a true man, but of a quick high temper, and such friends as he had he quarrelled with long ago. It began about his marrying my mother, who was a little maid out of Roussillon, come to Paris in the suite of the wife of some Governor of Catalonia who had been made Spanish ambassador. It was in the Emperor's time, when men were men – not fighting machines – and priests. My father,

Francis Agnew, was stiff-necked and not given to pardon-asking, save of his Maker. And though little Colette Llorient softened him to all the world else, she died too soon to soften him towards his kinsfolk."

The Professor meditated gravely, like one solving a difficult problem.

"What?" he said – "no, it cannot be. Your mother was never little Colette of the Llorients of Collioure?"

"I have indeed always believed so," said the girl; "but doubtless in my father's papers – "

"But they are Catholics of the biggest grain, those Llorients of Collioure, deep-dyed Leaguers, as fierce as if Collioure were in the heart of Lorraine!"

Claire bent her head and nodded sadly.

"Yes," she said, "for my father's sake my mother embroiled herself with her relatives. She became a Huguenot, a Calvinist like him. Then they had a family meeting about her. All the black brothers, mailed and gauntleted, they say, sat round a table and swore that my poor mother should be no more of their family!"

"Yes, I can fancy it – I see them; there was huge Bernard, weasel-faced Giles, subtle Philippe – "

"How," cried the girl, surprised in her turn; "you know them – my mother's people?"

"Well, I ought," said the Professor of the Sorbonne, with a young look flushing back into his face, "seeing that my mother has held a 'mas' from the family of Llorient of Collioure for more years than I can remember. When I was a lad going to the collegiate school at Elne, I remember your mother, Mademoiselle Colette, as a little maid, playing by herself among the sand-dunes. I looked up from my Greek grammar to watch her, till the nurse in the flat Limousin cap shook her fist at me, stopping her nursing to do it."

Here the Professor seemed to rouse himself as from a dream.

"That rascal John should be getting back by now," he said, "unless he has elbowed a way into the crowd to fight or fall for his great Duke!"

"You do not love the Duke of Guise?" said the girl.

"I have not your reasons for hating him," the Professor of Eloquence answered. "I am no Huguenot, by family or feeling. But I think it is a poor day for France when the valet chases the master out of house and home. The King is the King, and all the Guises in the world cannot alter that. Also, since the King has departed, and I have been left, alone loyal of all the faculty of the Sorbonne, it is time that I too made my way to see my mother among the sand-hills of Collioure. Ah, John, you rascal, what has kept you so long?"

"The porter at my uncle's would give me no satisfaction – swore I had come again to borrow money. A manifest falsehood! As, indeed, I proved on the spot by pulling him out of his lodge and thumping him well. A varlet – to dare to suppose, because a gentleman comes twice to borrow money from a rich and loving relative, that he has returned a third time upon the same errand! But I got the passports, and they are countersigned and stamped by Merlan at the Secretary's office, which will do no harm if we come across King's men!"

"As for the Bearnais and his folk," said the Professor to Claire, "I suppose you have your father's papers safe enough?"

The girl blushed and murmured something indefinite. As a matter of fact, she had made sure of these while he yet lay on the ground, and the Royal Swiss were firing over her head. It was the instinct of her hunted life.

They left the Sorbonne together, all cloaked and hooded "like three carrion crows," said the Abbé John. None who saw them would have supposed that a young maid's face lurked beneath the sombre muffling. Indeed, beneath that of the Abbé John, curls of the same hue clustered just as tightly and almost as abundantly.

The street were silent all about the quarter of the University. But every hundred yards great barricades of barrels and paving-stones, earth and iron chains, had to be passed. Narrow alleys, the breadth of a man and no more, were generally left, zig-zagging among the defences. But almost as often the barricades had to be surmounted, after discovery of identity, by the aid of friendly pushes and hauls. In all cases, however, the examination was strict.

At every barricade they were stopped and called upon to declare their mission. However, the Doctor Anatole was generally recognised by some scapegrace runaway student, at scrambling horse-play among the pavement cobbles. At any rate, the Abbé John, who had been conspicuous at the meetings of the Elect Leaguers as the nephew of the great Cardinal d'Albret, was universally hailed with favour.

He was also constantly asked who the lady in the hood might be, whom he was conveying away so secretly. He had but one reply to gentle and simple.

"Give me a sword, come down hither, and I will afford any three men of you satisfaction on the spot!"

For, in spite of the Abbé John's peaceful cognomen, his credit as a pusher of the unbuttoned foil was too good for any to accept his proposition. They laughed instead.

One of the Duke Guise's "mud-porters" called the pair an ugly name. But it was (happily) in the Latin quarter, and a score of eager hands propelled him down into the gutter, where, after having his nose rubbed in the mire, he was permitted (and even assisted) to retire to the rear. He rubbed himself as he went and regretted mournfully that these things had not happened near the street of Saint Antoine.

Altogether they escaped well. The Sorbonne, a difficult place to get into, is easy to get out of – for those who know how. And so the three, guided by the Abbé John, slipped into the great Rue St. Jacques by the little port St. Benoit, which the students and even the professors found so necessary, whenever their errands were of such a private nature as to disqualify them from crossing the square of the Sorbonne, with its rows on rows of enfiling windows.

It was up the narrow stair of the Abbé John's lodgings that they found a temporary shelter while the final arrangements were being made. Horses and a serving-man (provided for in the passports) were the most pressing of these.

It was in connection with the serving-man that Claire Agnew first found a tongue.

"I know a lad," she said, "a Scot, seemingly stupid, but cunning as a fox, who may be of service to us. His apparent simplicity will be a protection. For it will be evident that none bent on escaping would burden themselves with such a 'Cabbage Jock.' He is of my father's country and they were oftentimes in close places together. His name is – "

"No matter for his name – we will call him Cabbage Jock," cried the Abbé John. "Where is this marvel to be found?"

"Not far away, as I judge," said the girl, taking a silver whistle, such as ladies wore at that time to call their waiting-maids, from about her neck. She blew lightly upon it, first two long and then two short notes. And from the street corner, prompt as if he had been watching (which, indeed, he had been), came running the strangest object ever seen in a civilised land. He gave one glance at the window at which Claire's head appeared. Then, diving under the low door like a rat making for a hole, he easily evaded the shouting concierge, and in a moment more stood before them.

CHAPTER V. THE SPROUTING OF CABBAGE JOCK

Cabbage Jock was immensely broad at the shoulders. He stooped slightly, so that his long arms fell below his knees when he stood erect. His mouth was slightly open, but so large in itself that a banana could easily have been inserted sideways without touching the wicks. There was a look of droll simplicity on the lad's face (he was apparently about twenty) which reminded one of the pictures of Lob-Lie-by-the-Fire, or the Brownie of Scottish fireside tales.

Yet for one so simple he had answered with strange readiness. There was a quick flash of the eye as he took in the two men before him.

"What may you be?" demanded the Professor of Eloquence.

"A he-goat upon the mountains, comely in the going!" said the lout, in very good French. The learned man of the Sorbonne noted at once that he quoted (and mixed) words of the Genevan Version common among the Huguenots.

"He speaks French, this good lad?" he asked, turning to Claire.

"Yes, when it pleases him, which is not always – though indeed he always obeys me. Is it not so, Jock?"

"My name is not Jock! Nowise – as you well do know. I am called Blastus of the Zamzummims! Against all Armenians, Hussites, Papishers, Anabaptists, Leaguers, and followers of the high, the low, and the middle way, I lift up my heel. I am a bird of fair plumage on the mountains of Zepher. I fly – I mount – I soar –"

"Go and find four horses," said his mistress; "two of them good and strong, one Spanish jennet for me, one Flanders mare for yourself and the saddle-bags."

The Bird of Fair Plumage scratched his long reddish locks in a sort of comic perplexity.

"Am I to steal them or pay for them?" he said.

"Pay, of course," said his mistress, scandalised.

"That will leave our purse very light – the purse that was your father's. It were easier these days, and also more just to spoil the Egyptians. The lion-like man of Moab, which is the Duke of Guise, walketh about like the devil roaring (as sayeth Peter), and because of the barricades there are many good horses tied by their bridles at the gates of the city – masterless, all of them."

"Pay for them, do you hear?" said Claire; "do not stand arguing with your master's daughter. I thought you had learned that long ago."

Blastus of the Zamzummims went out grumbling to himself.

"At least she said nothing about cheating – or clipped money, or bad money – or money from the Pope's mint. I will buy, and I will pay for all. Yes – yes – but –"

It was obvious that Jock of the Cabbage's hope of spoiling Egypt had not been properly rooted out of his mind even by his mistress's commands.

A strange soul dwelt in this Jock of the Cabbage. He was the son of a reputable Scottish refugee at Geneva, from whom he had sucked in, as a frog does the autumn rains, the strongest and purest Calvinistic doctrine. He had, however, early perceived that his ludicrous personal appearance prevented him from obtaining eminence as a preacher.

He had therefore chosen another way of being useful.

John Stirling had deliberately made himself Cabbage Jock – which is to say, "Jean-aux-Choux," and by that name was famous alike in the camps of Henri of Navarre, and in making sport for the "mignons" of the King of France. But it was not known to many alive that a mind clear and logical, a heart full of the highest determinations, were hidden away under the fool's motley and the tattered cloak of the gangrel man.

Only to Francis Agnew had the Fool talked equally and with unbound heart. Even Claire did not guess what lay beneath this folly of misapplied texts and mirth-provoking preachments. There can be no better mask for real fanaticism than the pretence of it. And whereas Francis Agnew had been a gentleman and a diplomat always, his henchman, Jock the Fool, was a fanatic of the purest strain, adding thereto a sense of humour and probably a strain of real madness as well.

"Come up hither, Jean-aux-Choux!" cried the lads on the barricades. "Turn a somersault for us, Cabbage Jock!" shouted a fellow-countryman, on his way to preferment in the Scots Guard, who in the meanwhile was filling up his time by fighting manfully against the King's troops.

"Lick the tip of your nose, Jock!" roared yet a third; "waggle your ears! Ah, well done! Now jest for us, and we will give you a good drink – Macon of the fourth year – as much as you can take down at a draught. This Guisarding is dry work."

The streets were full of excited men, cheering for Holy Faith and the Duke of Guise. They cried that they were going to kill the King, and make that most Catholic Prince, the Head of the League, King in his stead.

The Protestants in Paris had fled or hidden. There were great fears of a second St. Bartholomew. But those who remembered the first, said that if that had been intended, there would be a deal less noise and a deal more private whetting of daggers and sword-blades.

Once the Professor of Eloquence left them for a moment in order to run upstairs to tell his housekeeper and her husband that they were to hold his house against all authority save that of the King, and not yield too soon even to that. He might be away some time, he said.

The Abbé John, whose housekeeping was of a desultory sort – consisting chiefly in going to see his uncle, the Cardinal d'Albret, when he was in need of money or of the ghostly counsel of a prince of the Church – made no preparations for flight, save to feel in his breeches pocket to make sure that he had his gold safely there.

"My creditors can wait, or importune my uncle, who will have them thrown in the Seine for their pains," said the young student of the Sorbonne easily; "and as for my dear gossips, they will easily enough console themselves. Women are like cats. As often as they fall, they fall upon their feet!"

It was a strange Paris which they passed through that day – these four. The Professor of Eloquence went first, wearing the great green cloak of his learned faculty, with its official golden collar and cuffs of dark fur.

That day Paris was not only making the history of the present, but was unconsciously prophesying the future – her own future. Whenever, after that, the executive grew weak and the people strong, up came the paving-stones, and down in a heap went the barrels, *charettes*, scaffoldings, street-doors. It was not only the Day of the Barricades, but the first day of many barricades. Indeed, Paris learned the lesson of power so well, that it became her settled conviction that what she did to-day France would homologate to-morrow. It was only the victory of the "rurals" in the late May of 1871 which taught Paris her due place, as indeed the capital of France, but not France itself.

Dr. Anatole's cloak was certainly a protection to them as they went. Caps were doffed as to one of the Sixteen – that great council of nine from each of the sixteen districts of Paris, whose power over the people made the real Catholic League.

Dr. Anatole explained matters to Claire as they went.

"They have long wanted a figure-head, these shop-keepers and booth-hucksters," he said bitterly. "The Cardinal leads them cunningly, and between guile and noise they have so intoxicated Guise that he will put his head in the noose, jump off, and hang himself. This King Henry of Valois is a contemptible dog enough, as all the world knows. But he is a dog which bites without barking, and that is a dangerous breed. If I were Guise, instead of promenading Paris between the Queen-Mother's chamber and the King's palace of the Louvre, I would get me to my castle of Soissons with

all speed, and there arm and drill all the gentlemen-varlets and varlet-gentlemen that ever came out of Lorraine. There would I wait, with twenty eyes looking out every way across the meadows, and a hundred at least in the direction of Paris. I would have cannons primed and matches burning. I would lay in provisions to serve a year in case of siege. That is what I should do, were I Duke of Guise and Henry of Valois' enemy!"

At the Orleans gate Jean-aux-Choux, in waiting with the horses (bought, stolen, or strayed), heard the conclusion of the Professor's exposition.

"Let Wolf Guise eat Wolf Valois, or Wolf Valois dine off Wolf Guise – so much the better for the Sheep of the Fold," he commented freely, as became his cap-and-bells, which in these days had more liberty of prophecy than the wisdom of the wisest.

CHAPTER VI. THE ARCHER'S CLOAK

As they left Paris behind and rode down the Orleans road, it soon became evident that they had changed their surroundings. Men-at-arms, Scots Guards, with great white crosses on their blue tabards, glared at the four suspiciously. Cavaliers glanced suspiciously as they galloped past. Some halted, as if only prevented from investigating the circumstances by the haste of their mission. Gay young men, on passing horses, half drew their swords and growled unintelligible remarks, desisting only at the sight of Claire Agnew's pale face underneath her hood.

"What can be the matter?" they asked each other. "Why do we, who passed through swarming Paris in the flood-tide of rebellion, who scrambled on barricades and were given drink by the King's enemies – why should we now be looked askance at, riding peaceably Orleans-ward on our own hired beasts?"

None found an answer, but deep in every heart there was the conviction, universal in such a case, that somehow it was the other fellow's fault. It was Cabbage Jock who solved the mystery.

"In Rome you must do as the Romans," he said; "in Babylon's cursed city, though an abomination to do obeisance to the great whore (as sayeth the Scripture), I have found it of remarkable service to don her uniform occasionally – even as Paul did when he took shelter behind his Roman citizenship. It is that green furred gown of yours, Sir Professor! These be King's men, hasting after the Master of the Mignons. I'll wager the nest is empty and the bird flown from under the pents of the Louvre."

"And what shall I do?" said the Professor of the Sorbonne, looking regretfully at the fine Spanish cloth and rich fur. "Am I to cast away a matter of twenty good golden Henries?"

"By no means," said Cabbage Jock; "I came away somewhat hastily, to do you service. I have no saddle saving these two millers' bags. I will fold the good gown beneath the two, and so sit comfortable as on an ale-house couch, while you will ride safe –"

"And plumeless as a docked parrot," said the Abbé John, who was now sufficiently far from Paris to begin to laugh at his master – at least a little, and in an affectionate way.

The Professor looked disconsolate enough as he suffered his fine cloak to be stripped from his back.

"Ne'er mind," quoth Jean-aux-Choux, "we will soon right that. I know these King's men, and 'tis the Pope's own purgatory of a warm day. There are inns by the wayside, and wherever one is held by a well-made hostess, who lets poor puss come to the cream without so much 'Hist-a-cat-ing,' I'll wager they will leave their cloaks in the hall. So we will come by a coat of the King's colours, all scallops and Breton ermines in memory of poor Queen Anne."

"I will not have you steal a cloak, sirrah," said the Professor; "indeed, I am nowise satisfied in my mind concerning these horses we are riding."

"Steal – not I," cried the Fool; "not likely, and the Montfaçon gibbet at one's elbow yonder, with the crows a-swirling and pecking about it as in the time of naughty Clerk Francis. Nay, I thank you. I have money here to pay for a gross of cloaks!"

And Cabbage Jock slapped his pocket as he spoke – which indeed, thus interrogated, gave back a most satisfactory jingle of coin.

The Professor had first of all meant to point out to Jean-aux-Choux that to have the money in his pocket, and to pay it out, were two things entirely different, when it came to borrowing other men's cloaks, but something else leaped up in his mind, sudden as a trout in a pool. He turned upon Jean-aux-Choux.

"How do you know about Clerk Francis and the gallows at Montfaçon?" he demanded. For at first, with the ear of a man accustomed to talk only to men who pick up allusions as pigeons do scattered grain, he had accepted the words without question.

"How am I to know?" retorted Jean-aux-Choux. "One hears so many things. I do not know."

"But," said the Professor of Eloquence, pursuing his idea, "there are not many even at the Sorbonne, which is the grave of wisdom whence is no resurrection (I am of the Sadducean faction), who have heard tell of one Clerk François Villon, Master of Arts, and once an ornament of our University. How came you to know of him? Come now, out with it! You are hiding something!"

"Sir," said the Fool, "I have made sport for Kings of the Louvre and Kings of Bedlam; for Henry of yesterday, who is Henry of Valois; for Henry of to-day, who is Henry of Guise; and for Henry of to-morrow, who is – "

But the Professor of the Sorbonne was a man of sense, and he knew that the place for discussing such things was by no means on the Orleans highway.

So he commanded Jean-aux-Choux to trouble no more about royal Henries past, present, and especially Henries to come, but to be off and find him a cloak.

Then Cabbage Jock, in no haste, simply glanced at the ale-house doors as they came near Bourg-la-Reine, and at last with a wave of his hand signalled his three companions to ride on.

When he overtook them an hour afterwards, Bourg-la-Reine was hidden far behind among the wayside trees. Jean-aux-Choux saluted, and asked in a quiet man-servant's voice if the honourable Doctor would be pleased to put on his coat.

"Then, you gallows' rascal," said the Professor of the Sorbonne, "it was true, after all. You have stolen the cloak, and you would have me, a respectable citizen, reset the theft!"

Jean-aux-Choux held up his hand.

"Sir," he said, "I have often heard from my masters that it is the special function of a cook to make ready the soup, and of the Sorbonne to resolve cases of conscience?"

"Well, then," he went on, as Doctor Anatole did not answer, "here is one."

"In an ale-house were certain sons of Belial, whose very jesting was inconvenient, and their words not once to be named among us, as sayeth the apostle. Well, there came a certain braggart out of this foul poison-box. He had seen an honest man pass by, fleeing from Paris, with all his goods laden on a mule. Now this knave would have taken all and slain the honest merchant as well, had I not passed by, and so belaboured him that he will not rise from his bed for a fortnight. Then the good merchant (he was a Jew from the Quartier Saint Jacques) bade me choose what I would for my recompense. And so from his packages I chose this fine cloak, fit for the Provost of the Merchants himself, and with that he thanked me and went his way."

"And what," cried the Abbé John, hugely interested, "became of that rascal's companions? It is strange that, hearing the racket, they did not hive out to his assistance! Yesterday they hamstrung a man for less – an archer of the King's!"

"It would indeed have been somewhat strange," agreed Cabbage Jock, "if, before our little interview, I had not taken the liberty of locking both the outer and inner doors of the inn. But they have nothing to complain about, these good lads. They have a kindly hostess and a full cellar. E'en let them be content!"

And with no more words he took out of his pouch two keys, one large and rusty, the other small and glittering. These he tossed carefully, one after the other, into the Orge. They were just upon the famous bridge across which the postillion of Longjumeau so often took his way. The keys flashed a moment on the water as the drops rose and fell. Then Cabbage Jock turned on his companions and smiled his broad simpleton's smile as he waved his hand in the direction of the inn.

"Let there be peace," he said solemnly – "peace between Jew and Gentile. Will it please you to put on your coat now, Sir Professor?"

And as the air bit shrewdly, it pleased the Professor well enough.

CHAPTER VII. THE GREAT NAME OF GUISE

Claire had indeed seen little of her father. All her life she had been accustomed to be left in the charge of strangers while Francis Agnew went about his business of hole-and-corner diplomacy. Claire was therefore no whit astonished to find herself with two men, almost strangers to her, alone upon the crowded road to Orleans.

She mourned sincerely for her father, but after all she was hardly more than a child, and for years she had seen little of Francis Agnew. He had, it is true, always managed to take care of her, always in his way loved her. But it was most often from a distance, and as yet she did not realise the difference.

She might therefore be thought more cheerful than most maids of a quieter day in the expression of her grief. Then, indeed, was a man's life on his lip, and girls of twenty had often seen more killing than modern generals of three-score and ten. It was not that Claire felt less, but that an adventurous present so filled her life with things to do, that she had no time for thought.

Also, was there not Jean-aux-Choux, otherwise Cabbage Jock, but with an excellent right to the name of John Stirling, armiger, jester to three kings, and licentiate in theology in the Reformed (and only true) Church of Geneva? Jean-aux-Choux was a fatalist and a Calvinist. Things which were ordained to happen would happen, and if any insulted his master's daughter, it was obviously ordained that he, Jean-aux-Choux, should set a dagger between the shoulder-blades of the insulter. This in itself was no slight protection. For the fool's sinews were reputed so strong that he could take two vigorous men of the King's Guard, pin them with his arms like trussed fowls, and, if so it pleased him, knock their heads together.

So through the press the four made their way into Orleans, where they found the bearing of the people again changed, and that for the worse.

"It behoves your learned and professional shoulders to be decorated once more with the green cloth and fur trimmings of the Sorbonne," said Jean-aux-Choux. "I can smell a Leaguer a mile off, and this city is full of them. Our Scots Guards have turned off on the road to Blois. There are too many bishops and clergy here for honest men. Besides which, the King has a château at Blois. We had better change my saddle-cloth – though 'twill be to my disadvantage – inasmuch as an archer's tabard, all gold embroidering, makes noways so easy sitting as fox fur and Angoulême green."

So it chanced that when they rode up to the low door of the Hostelry of the Golden Lark, in the market-place of Orleans, the Professor of Eloquence was again clad in his official attire, and led the way as became a Doctor of the Sorbonne in a Leaguer town.

It was a pretty pink-and-white woman who welcomed them with many courtesies and smiles to the Golden Lark – that is, so far as the men were concerned, while preserving a severe and doubtful demeanour towards the niece of the learned Professor of the Sorbonne. Madame Gillifleur loved single men, unaccompanied men, at her hostelry. She found that thus there was much less careful examination of accounts when it came to the hour of departure.

Still, all the same, it was a great thing to have in her house so learned a man, and in an hour, as was the custom of the town, she had sent his name and style to the Bishop's palace. Within two hours the Bishop's secretary, a smart young cleric dressed in the Italian fashion, with many frills to his soutane, was bearing the invitation of his master to the gentlemen to visit him in his study. This, of course, involved leaving Claire behind, for Anatole Long ordered the Abbé John to accompany him, while the girl declared that, with Jean-aux-Choux to keep her company, she had fear of nothing and nobody.

She had not, however, taken her account with the curiosity of Madame Celeste Gillifleur, who, as soon as the men were gone to the episcopal palace, entered the room where Claire was seated at her knitting, while Jean-aux-Choux read aloud the French Genevan Bible.

Cabbage Jock deftly covered the small quarto volume with a collection of songs published (as usual) at the Hague.

"The fairer the hostess the fouler the soup!" muttered Jean, as he retired into a corner, humming the refrain of a Leaguer song.

Madame Gillifleur saluted her enemy with the duck of a hen which has finished drinking. To her Claire bowed the slightest of acknowledgments.

"To what do I owe this honour?" she inquired, with dryness.

"I thought my lady, the Professor's niece, might be in need of some service – a tiring-maid perhaps?" began the landlady. "My own you would be heartily welcome to, but she is a fresh, foolish wench from the Sologne, and would sooner groom a nag of Beauce than pin aright a lady's stomacher! But I can obtain one from the town – not too respectable, I fear. But for my lady, and for one night, I suppose that does not matter."

"Ha, from the town!" grumbled Jean-aux-Choux out of his window-seat. Then he hummed, nodding his head and wagging his finger as if he had just found the words in his song-book:

"Eyes and ears, ears and eyes —
Who hires maids, lacks never spies!"

The landlady darted a furious look at the interrupter.

"Who may this rude fellow be, that is not afraid to give his tongue such liberty in my house?"

Jean-aux-Choux answered for himself, as indeed he was well able to do.

"I am philosopher-in-chief to the League; and as for that, when I am at home with his Grace of Guise, he and I wear motley day about!"

The face of the landlady changed. Remembering the learned Professor of the Sorbonne, who had gone to visit the bishop, she turned quickly to Claire and asked, "Does the fellow speak truth? Is he really the jester to the great Duke, the good Prince, the glory of the League?"

"I have reason to believe it," said Claire calmly; "but, for your complete satisfaction, you can ask my uncle the Professor upon his return."

"I trust they will not be long gone," grumbled Jean-aux-Choux. "I have an infallible clock here under the third button of my tunic, which tells me it is long past dinner-time. And if it be not a good worthy meal, I shall by no means advise His Grace to dismount at the Golden Lark when next he passes through Orleans!"

"Holy Saint Marthe!" cried the landlady; "I will go this minute, and see what they are doing in the kitchen. I will warm their scullion backs – "

"I think I smell burned meat!" continued Jean-aux-Choux.

"Faith, but is it true that the Duke of Guise is indeed coming this way?" Madame Celeste Gillifleur asked anxiously.

"True, indeed," affirmed Jean, with his nose in the air, "and before the year is out, too. But, Madame, my good hostess, there is nothing he dislikes so much as the smell of good meat spoiled in the basting."

"I will attend to the basting myself, and that forthwith!" cried the lady of the Golden Lark, darting kitchen-wards at full speed, and forgetting all the questions she had come up to ask of Claire in the absence of her legitimate protectors.

Jean-aux-Choux laughed as she went out, and inclined his ear. Sounds which indicated the basting of not yet inanimate flesh, arrived from the kitchen.

"Mistress, mistress," cried a voice, "I am dead, bruised, scalded – have pity on me!"

"Pity is it, you rascal?" – the sharp tones of Madame Celeste rose high – "have you not wasted my good dripping, burnt my meat, offended these gentlemen, spoiled their dinner, so that they will report ill things of the Golden Lark to his most noble Grace of Guise?"

"Pity – oh, pity!"

Followed a rapid rushing of feet to and fro in the kitchen. Furniture was overturned. Something of the nature of a basting-ladle struck sonorously on tables and scattered patty-pans on the floor. A door slammed, shaking the house, and a blue-clad kitchen boy fled down the narrow street, while Madame Celeste, basting-ladle in hand, fumed and gesticulated in his wake.

CHAPTER VIII. THE GOLDEN LARK IN ORLEANS TOWN

"Now," said Jean-aux-Choux, "unless I go down and help at the turning-spit myself, we are further off dinner than ever. I will also pump the lady dry of information in a quarter of an hour, which, in such a Leaguer town, is always a useful thing. But stay where you are, my lady Claire, and keep the door open. You will smell burnt fat, but the Fool of the Three Henries will be with you in as many jumps of a grasshopper whenever you want him. You have only to call, and lo, you have me!"

When Jean had disappeared to do double duty as spy and kitchen-drudge beneath, Claire went to the window which looked out upon the market-place. From beneath in the kitchen she could hear shouts of laughter climb up and die away. She knew that Jean-aux-Choux was at his tricks, and that, with five minutes' grace, he could get to windward of any landlady that ever lived, let alone such a merry plump one as Madame Celeste.

That dame indeed disliked all pretty women on principle. But she was never quite sure whether she preferred an ugly witty man who made her laugh, or a handsome dull man who only treated her as a gentleman ought. But women – young women and pretty women – pah, she could not abide them! And by this we can guess her age, for not so long ago she had been young and even pretty herself.

The tide that comes in the affairs of men is not nearly so marked as the ebb which comes in the affairs of women.

Claire stood a long while meditating, her eyes following the movement of the market-place vaguely, but without any real care for what was happening. She truly mourned her father, but she possessed much of that almost exclusively masculine temperament which says after any catastrophe, "Well, what is the next thing to be done?"

"I care nothing about my mother's people," she meditated to herself, "but I would see her home, her land, her country."

She had never seen her father's. But when he had spoken to her of the fresh winds, lashing rains, and driving snows, with nevertheless the rose blooming in the sheltered corners about the old house on Christmas Day, she had somehow known it all. But Collioure and its sand-dunes, the deep sapphire of the southern sea, cut across by the paler blue line of the sky – she could not imagine that, even when the Professor and the Abbé John, with tears glittering in their eyes, spoke together in the strange pathetic speech of *la petite patrie*.

But she would like to see it – the strand where the little Colette had played, the dunes down which she had slidden, and the gold and rose of the towers of Château Collioure, within which her mother was born.

A noise without attracted her attention. A procession was entering the square. In the midst was a huge coach with six mules, imported, equipage and all, from Spain. An outrider in the episcopal livery was mounted on each mule, while running footmen scattered the market-stalls and salad-barrows like the passage of a sudden strong wind.

There was also great excitement down below in the Golden Lark. The kitchen emptied itself, and Madame Celeste stopped hastily to pin a bow of ribbons to her cap, unconscious that a long smear of sooty grease decorated one side of her nose. The Bishop's carriage was coming in state to the Golden Lark! There could not be the least doubt of it. And the Bishop himself was within, that holy man who so much more willingly handled the sword-hilt than the crozier – Bishop Pierrefonds of Orleans, certain archbishop and possible cardinal, a stoop of the League in all the centre of France.

Yes, he was conveying home his guests in state. He stepped out and stood on the pavement in front of the house, a right proper prelate, giving them in turn his hand as they stooped to kiss his amethyst ring. Then, seeing over the Abbé John's bowed head the lady of the house, he called out heartily to her (for he was too great to be haughty with any), "Mistress Celeste, mind you treat these gentlemen well. It is not every day that our good town of Orleans holds at once the light of the Sorbonne, its mirror of eloquence, and also the nephew of my Lord Cardinal of the Holy League, John d'Albret, claimant at only twenty removes to the crown of France."

"Pshaw," muttered the Abbé John wearily, "I wish the old fool would go away and let us get to dinner!"

For, indeed, at the Palace he had listened to much of this.

The hostess of the Golden Lark conducted her two guests upstairs as if to the sound of trumpets. She gathered her skirts and rustled like the poplar leaves of an entire winter whisking about the little Place Royale of Orleans. The Professor of the Sorbonne had suddenly sunk into the background. Even the almighty Duke of Guise was no better than a bird in the bush. While here – well in hand, and hungry for an honest Golden Lark dinner – was a real, hall-marked, royal personage, vouched for by a bishop, and still more by the bishop's carriage and outriders! It was enough to turn the head of a wiser woman than Madame Celeste Gillifleur.

"And is it really true?" demanded Claire Agnew.

"Is what true, my dear lady?" said the Abbé John, very ungraciously for him. For he thought he would have to explain it all over again.

"That you are a near heir to the throne of France?"

The Abbé John clapped his hands together with a gesture of despair.

"Just as much as I am the Abbé John and a holy man," he cried; "it pleases them to call me so. Thank God, I am no priest, nor ever will be. And as for the crown of France – Henry of Valois is not dead, that ever I heard of. And if he were, I warrant his next heir and my valiant cousin, Henry of Navarre, would have a word to say before he were passed over!"

"But," said the Professor of Eloquence, smiling, "the Pope and our wise Sorbonne have loosed all French subjects from paying any allegiance to a heretic!"

"By your favour, sir," said the young man, "I think both made a mistake for which they will be sorry. Also I heard of a certain professor who voted boldly for the Bearnais in that Leaguer assembly, and who found it convenient to go see his mother next day, lest he should find himself one fine morning shortened by a head, all for the glory of God and the Holy League!"

Doctor Anatole laughed at his pupil's boldness.

"You are out of disciplinary bounds now," he said, "and as you are too old to birch, I must e'en let you chatter. But what is the meaning of the Bishop's sudden cordiality?"

"Oh," said the Abbé John, with a sigh of resignation, "these Leaguers are always getting maggots in their brains. If my mother had been my father – if I had been a Bourbon instead of a d'Albret – if Henry the Bearnais had been in my shoes and I in his – if – if – any number of 'ifs' – then there might be something in this heir-to-the-crown business. But the truth is, they are at their wits' end (which is no long distance to travel). The Demon of the South, our good, steady-going King of Spain, drives them hard. They dare not have him to rule over them, with his inquisitors, his blazing heretic fires, and the rest of it. Yet it is a choice between him and the Huguenot, unless they can find a true Catholic king. The Cardinal Bourbon is manifestly too old, though one day even he may serve to stop a gap. The Duke of Guise may be descended from the Merovingians or from Adam, but in either case his family-tree is not convincing. It has too many branches – too few roots! So the plotters – my good uncle among them – are looking about for some one – any one – that is, not a Guise nor yet a Huguenot, who may serve their turn. His Grace of Orleans thinks I may do as well as another. That is all – only one Leaguer maggot the more."

"And must we, then, always say 'Your Royal Highness' or 'Your Serenity' when we kiss your hand – which shall it be?" Claire asked the question gravely.

"I had much rather kiss yours," said the heir to a throne, bowing with equal gravity; "and as for a name – why, I am plain John d'Albret, at your service!"

He doffed his cap as he spoke, and the Professor noted for the first time, with a touch of jealousy, that he was a comely lad enough – that is, if he had not been so ludicrously young. The Professor (who was not a philosopher for nothing) noted the passing twinge of jealousy as a sign that he was growing old. Twenty years ago he might have been tempted to break his pupil's head for a presumptuous jackanapes, or challenge him to a bout at the small swords, but jealousy – pah, Anatole Long thought himself as good as any man – always excepting the Bearnais – where the sex was concerned.

It was a good and substantial supper to which they sat down. The cookery did credit to the handicraft of Madame Celeste, especially the salmon steaks done in parsley sauce, and the roast capon stuffed with butter, mint, and bread-crumbs. The wine, a white Côte Rotie, went admirably with the viands. The Professor and Claire had but little appetite, but the eyes of the landlady were now upon the Abbé John alone. His plate was scarce empty before it was mysteriously refilled. His wine-glass found itself regularly replenished by the fair plump hands of Madame Celeste herself. All went merry as a marriage-bell, and Jean-aux-Choux, seated a little way below the salt, and using his dagger as an entire table equipment, worked his way steadily through everything within his reach. For though the Fool of the Three Henriès held nothing in heaven or earth sacred from his bitter tongue when in the exercise of his profession, he equally let nothing in heaven or earth (or even under the earth) interfere with his appetite. He explained the matter thus:

"I have heard of men living from hand to mouth," he told Claire; "for twenty years I have lived from table to mouth – always the same mouth, seldom twice the same table. There was you, my little lady, to be served first. And a hundred times your father and I went hungry that you might eat your milk-sop hot-a-nights. While, if I could, I would cheat my master as to what remained, his being the greater need."

"Good Jean!" said Claire, gently reaching out to pat his shaggy head. The long-armed jester shook a little and went pale under her touch, which was the stranger, seeing that with a twist of his shoulders he could throw off the clutch of a strong man.

Such were the three with whom Claire travelled southward, in an exceeding safety, considering the disturbed time. For any of them would have given his life to shield her from harm, though as yet Jean-aux-Choux was the only one of the three who knew it. And with him it was a matter of course.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REBELLION OF HERODIAS' DAUGHTER

"And I suppose I am to bait the trap, as usual?"

"You forget, Valentine, that I am your uncle and a grandee of Spain."

It was the usual beginning of their quarrels, of which they had had many as they posted along the Bordeaux road Pariswards. The Marquis Osorio was travelling on a secret mission to Paris, a mission which had nothing to do with the crowned and anointed King of France, now in uncertain refuge at Blois.

King Philip had sent for him, and the Demon of the South had been in good humour when he gave the stout Leonese gentleman his instructions. He had just heard of the Day of the Barricades, and the success of the Duke of Guise.

The Marquis had stood up before the master of two worlds, bronzed, hale and bearded: not too clever, but just shrewd enough to please the King, and certainly indomitable in doing what he was told. He had very much the air of a free man and good subject, with his flat travelling cap in one hand and the fingers of the other gripped staunchly about his sword-hilt.

"The iron is hot on the anvil," said the King, "strike, Osorio! It is a good job that the Duke of Err is out of the way. The pressure of the times was too much for him. His poor old brain rocked. His Duchess has taken him off somewhere to feed with spoon-meat. Olivarez, whom I have sent to follow him, will give you no trouble. He will occupy himself with King Henri and the Medici woman. The League and Guise – these are your game – especially Guise. I suspect him to be a wind-bag, but put him under your arm, and the wind in him will bravely play our music, like a pair of Savoyard bagpipes. And hark ye, Osorio, listen to the Jesuit fathers, especially Mariana – a very subtle man, Mariana, after mine own heart. And also (here he sank his voice to something mysterious), above all take with you your – your niece – Valentine?"

"Valentine la Niña!" ejaculated the King's representative, with a quick, startled look at his master.

"Even so," said Philip, casting his eyes through the slit behind the high altar of the Escorial to see what the priests were doing; "even so; our Holy Mother Church is in danger, and if any love father or mother, son or daughter more than her, he is not worthy of her!"

So by royal command Valentine la Niña rode northward with her uncle, and though these two loved one another, they wrangled much by the way.

Claire and her cavalcade were reaching Blois, when the uncle and niece entered Angers by the Long Bridges of Cé.

The cause of the girl's outbreak of petulance had been a harangue of the envoy, in which he had explained, amongst other things, the reasons for keeping their mission a secret. The King of France must not hear of it, because their Philip did not want to show his hand. Henry of Navarre must not hear of it, or he might send men to harry the Cerdagne and Aran. Besides, what was the use of making a show in Paris, when the very shop-tenders and scullions there played King Philip's game? Was not the Sorbonne packed with wise doctors all arguing for Spain? Wild monks and fanatic priests proclaimed her as the only possible saviour of the Faith. At the back of Guise stood King Philip. Remained therefore (according to the envoy) to push Guise forward, to use him, to empty him, and then – let the Valois and the Medici have their will of him. There was no reason for Spain to appear in the matter at all. Guise must be induced to go to Blois, and – his enemies would do the rest.

It was then that Valentine la Niña burst forth in indignation.

She would not be the lure, she said, even for a king – a bait dangled before an honest man's eyes – no, not even for her uncle!

"I am an Osorio," the envoy answered her sternly, "the head of the family, you can surely trust me that nothing shall be asked of you which might cast a stain on the name – "

"Not more than was asked of my mother!" she retorted scornfully, "only to sacrifice herself and her children – a little thing for so good a king – his people's father!"

"And for the Faith!" said the Marquis, hastily, as if to escape discussion. "Listen, Valentine! The famous Father of the Gesù, Mariana, will be in Paris before us. He has been reporting to the King, and he it is who has asked for your presence. None can serve the Church so well as you."

"I know – I know," cried the girl, "fear not, I have been well drilled. My mother taught me that the whims of men were to be called either high policy or holy necessity. It little matters which; women have to be sacrificed in either case. Let us ride on to Paris, Uncle Osorio, and say no more about it!"

They lighted down in the empty courtyard of the Spanish ambassador's house, which was next to the hotel of the Duke of Guise. A shouting crowd had pursued them to their lodging. For the Spaniards were popular in the city, and the arrival of so fine a cavalcade had rightly enough been interpreted to mean the adherence of Philip of Spain to the new order of things.

"Had Spain been for the King, this envoy would have hied him to Blois," said De Launay, the old provost of the merchants. "But since Philip sends his ambassador direct to the good city of Paris, why, then, it follows that he is of the mind to put down Valois, to set aside Navarre, and to help us to crown our only true king, the King of Paris and of France, the King of the Faith, and of his people's hearts – Guise, the good Guise!"

Because, even thus early, the habit of municipal eloquence had been formed and its pattern set for all the ages. De Launay was considered a good practitioner.

The windows of Valentine Osorio's chambers looked on the garden of the Hotel of Guise – a shady orchard close where in the evening the Duke often walked with his gentlemen, and specially with his handsome young brother, the Duke of Bar.

On an evening of mackerel cloud, pearl-grey and flaky gold vaulting so high overhead that the sky above the small smokeless Paris of 1588 seemed infinite, Valentine sat gossiping with her maid Salome.

To them, with the slightest preface of knocking, light as a bird, entered a priestly figure in the sombre robes of the Society of Jesus – a little rosy-cheeked man, plump and dimpled with good living, and, as it seemed, good nature.

But at the sight of him a nervous shudder passed through the body of the young girl. So in a school, when the master returns before his time, playing scholars draw unwillingly with downcast, discontented eyes to sterner tasks. Yet the Jesuit was kindly and tolerant in manner, prodigal of smile and compliment. There was nothing of the Inquisitor about the famous father Mariana, historian and secret politician.

"Fairer than ever, Mistress Valentine," he murmured, after he had exchanged a glance with the maid Salome, "ah, the blessed thing which is beauty when used for sanctified ends! Seldom is it thus used in this world of foolish women! But you are wise. The Gesù are under deep obligations, and the King – the King – ah, he will not forget. He has sent you hither, and has commissioned me to speak with you. Your good, your excellent uncle, Osorio, knows some part of King Philip's plans, but not all – no, not all. He is too blunt an instrument for such fine work. But *you* can understand, and shall!"

The girl struck her hands together angrily and turned upon him.

"Again – again!" she said, "is it to be treachery again?"

"Not treachery, dear lady," cooed the father; "but when you go to tickle trout, you do not stand on the bank and throw in great stones. You work softly underneath, and so guide the fish to a place from which they cannot escape."

"Is it Guise?" demanded the girl, breaking fiercely through these dulcet explanations.

"As you say," smiled the Jesuit; "himself and no other."

"And what is to be my particular infamy?"

"Child, beware of your speech," said the Jesuit; "there is no infamy in the service of Holy Church, of the Society, and of your King."

"To a well-known air!" said the girl, sneeringly; "well, I will sing the song. I know the music."

And she went and placed herself by the window which overlooked the pleasaunce of the Duke of Guise.

"Salome," she said, "come hither and comb out my tresses!"

And with the graceful ease of strong young arms, she pulled out a tortoise-shell pin here and a mother-of-pearl fastening there till a flood of hair escaped, falling down her back, with dark, coppery lights striking out of the duskier coils, and the lingering sunset illuminating the ripples of fine-spun gold.

"Thus goes the exercise," she said with a cold anger, "the Holy Society trains us well. But for this, and all else, God will enter into judgment with you and your like!"

But, heedless of her words, the priest was already stooping and peering behind the curtain.

"There they go," he whispered eagerly, "Guise and Mayenne together, Bar and the Cardinal behind – ah, there, it takes! Gripped – netted – what did I tell the King? He has his kerchief out. Quick, Valentine, yours! What, you have left it behind? Here is mine. Twice – I tell you, twice – and your hand upon your heart. Ah, he salutes! He will soon call upon the envoy of the King of Spain now. I wager we shall have him here in the morning before breakfast! Ah, what news this will be to send by the courier to-night to your – to King Philip! He will sleep sound, I warrant. And remember, to-morrow, speak him fair when he comes. All depends on that. I shall not be far away. I shall know and report to the King. It shall not be well with you otherwise. Guise must go to Blois – to the King of France. He must take his gentlemen with him. No sulking in his own territories. To Blois, and face it out – like a man."

The girl rose from the window and came back into the chamber. She opened the door, and with a gesture of proud weariness indicated the dark corridor without.

"Your turn is served," she said, "now go!"

But Mariana, a cunning smile on his face, held out his hand.

"Give me first my kerchief!" he said.

The girl crushed the embroidered linen into a ball in her hand, holding it at her side and slightly behind. Then she threw it out of the window with a gesture of contempt. The next moment the door slammed unceremoniously in Father Mariana's face. But the church historian was not in the least put out. He laid his finger slowly to the side of his nose and smiled stilly.

He descended the stairs to the entresol, and there from a window which overhung the court he looked forth in time to see the Duke of Guise stooping to pick up something white from the ground.

He saw him kiss it and thrust it into the breast of his black velvet doublet.

And the worthy Jesuit chuckled softly, saying to himself, "There are things in this world which are cheap even at the loss of my best brodered kerchief!"

As Mariana had foretold, the Duke of Guise and his brother the young De Bar called upon the Marquis Osorio the following day. That morning the Duke had made the life of his valet a burden to him while dressing, and he now appeared gorgeous in a suit of dark blue velvet trimmed with gold lace. A cape of silk was over one arm, and he carried Mariana's embroidered kerchief carefully in his hand.

In his most stately fashion the Marquis Osorio received the head of the League. He presented his credentials as to a reigning monarch, and began to talk of revolutions of Holy Church, concerning the culpable laxness of the Pope in his own interests, and the fidelity of the King of Spain to his ideals and to his allies. It was evident, however, that Guise paid but scant heed. His ears were elsewhere. As for De Bar, he stared insolently about him, now at the ambassador, now at the tapestry on the walls, and again and most often out at the window. But his brother listened, almost without disguise, to a slight noise, which came occasionally into the room from without. There was, for instance, the rustling of a woman's silken robe in the passage. Voices also, that sounded faint, pleading, expostulatory, cut into the even rise and fall of Castilian diplomacy.

"For these reasons my royal master judged it expedient to send me as his representative, charged with – "

Guise twisted impatiently this way and that in his black oaken chair, in vain efforts to catch what was going on outside. De Bar observed his brother's uneasiness, and as the Lorraine princes went at that time in constant fear of assassination, it did not cost him two thoughts, even in the house of the Spanish ambassador, to rise and throw the door wide open.

Then through the wide Romanesque arch of the audience chamber Valentine Osorio entered, as a queen comes into a throne room.

At sight of her the envoy stayed his speech to make the presentation in form. Guise instantly dropped all interest in the goodwill of King Philip and his views upon state policy. He crossed over to the window-seat, where Valentine had seated herself.

Mariana had followed, and the next moment the Marquis resumed his interrupted speech, addressing himself to the Jesuit and De Bar, whose ears were rigid with listening to what was going on in the window, but who feared his brother so much that he dared not follow his movements with a single lift of his eyelids.

"My lady," said Guise, as he stood before Valentine, "I judge that I have the privilege of restoring to you a kerchief which you dropped by accident last night into my garden – we are neighbours, you know."

Valentine la Niña did not flush in the least. She said only, "It is none of mine. If you will throw it behind the curtain there, my maid Salome will see that it goes to the wash."

Guise stood staring at her, internally fuming at his own stupidity in thus attempting to force the situation.

Valentine la Niña was dressed in a vaporous greenish lawn, which added value to the clearness of her skin, the coiled wealth of her fair hair, and the honey-coloured eyes which looked past the great Duke as if he were no more than a pillar between her and the landscape.

Manifestly Guise was piqued. He was a man of good fortunes, and of late the Parisians had spoiled him. He was quite unaccustomed to be treated in this fashion.

"Countess," he said at last, after long searching for a topic, "I am from the north and you from the south. Yet to look at us, it is I who am the Spaniard and you the Frank!"

"My father was a Flamand!" said Valentine la Niña calmly.

"And, may I ask, of what degree?"

"Of a degree higher than your own!" said Valentine, turning her great eyes indolently upon him.

Guise looked staggered. He had not supposed that the world held any such.

"Then he must have been a reigning prince!" he stammered.

"Well?" said Valentine, looking at him with direct inquiry.

"I had not understood that even so ancient a house as the Osorios – "

"I never said that my father was an Osorio!"

"Ah!" said the Duke, "then I ask your pardon. I was indeed ignorant."

He scented mystery, and being a plain, hard-hearted, cruel man of the time, thrust into a commanding position by circumstances, he resented being puzzled, like a very justice of the peace.

"If you do not believe me – " Valentine began.

"Most noble princess," he protested, bending nearer to her as she sat on the low seat looking straight up at him; "not once have I dreamed – "

"Go to my native country of Leon and ask the first gentleman you meet whether Valentine la Niña be not the honest daughter of a king. Only do not, if you value your life, express such disbelief as you did just now, or the chances are that you will never again see fair Lorraine!"

She looked about her. What she had expected all along had happened. They were alone. By some art of the Jesuit father, subtly piloting the course of events, Osorio had gone to the private parlour to find certain papers. Mariana and De Bar had followed him.

Instantly the girl's demeanour changed. Half rising, she reached out her hand and clutched the astonished Guise by the cuff of his black velvet sleeve.

"Do not trust the King of France," she whispered, "do not put yourself in the power of the King of Spain. Do not listen to my uncle, Osorio, who does his bidding. Keep away from Blois. Make yourself strong in your own territories – I, who speak, warn you. There is but a hair's breadth between you and death. Above all, do not listen to Mariana the Jesuit. Do not believe him on his sworn oath. His Order seeks your death now that you have served their turn, and – I do not wish harm to come to a brave man."

Had Valentine's eyes been upon the door she would have seen it open slightly as if a breeze were pushing it.

"And pray, princess," said Guise, smiling, well content, "would it be the act of a brave man thus to shun danger?"

"The lion is not the braver for leaping into the prepared pit with his eyes open. He is only foolish!"

Guise laughed easily.

"If I were to take you at your word, princess," he said, "I should hear no more of you in my dull Lorraine. I could not carry you off to cheer me at Soissons. But here in Paris I may at least see you daily – hear your voice, or if no better, see you at the window as I walk in my garden – "

"Ah," cried Valentine, thrusting out her hand hastily, palm outward, "do not think of me. I am but the snare set, the trap baited. I am not my own. I can love no man – choose no man. I belong to Those Unseen – "

She cast her hand backward towards Spain, as if to indicate infinite malign forces at work there. "But I warn you – get hence quickly, avoid Blois. Do not trust the King, nor any king. Do not listen to my uncle Osorio, and, above all, do not listen to Mariana the Jesuit."

And with a rapid rustle of light garments she was gone. Guise attempted to take her hand in passing, but it easily evaded him. Valentine vanished behind the arras, where was a door which led directly to the women's apartments.

A moment Guise stood pulling at his moustache sourly enough, ruminating on the warning he had received and, in the sudden disappointment, half inclined to profit by it. To him entered the Jesuit, smiling and dimpled as ever.

"My Lord Duke, I find you alone," he began courteously, "this is ill treatment for an honoured guest. Permit me – "

"That lady," demanded Guise, brusquely, "who is she?"

"The niece of the Marquis Osorio," murmured the Jesuit, "my old scholar, dear to me as the apple of mine eye, almost a daughter."

"Is she of royal blood?" said Guise, who, though he had to be upon his manners with Valentine herself, saw no reason for mincing matters with a mere Jesuit scribbler.

"As to that it were well to consult her uncle," said Mariana, very softly, "we of the Society do not concern ourselves with matters purely secular. In any case, be assured that the family honour is quite safe in the Marquis's hands!"

"I did not doubt it," said Guise, tossing his silken cape over his arm and evidently about to take flight. Mariana accompanied him to the foot of the stairs, murmuring commonplaces, how that there would likely be a thunderstorm which would clear the air, and that he would take it upon him to make the adieux of his Grace of Guise to the Marquis Osorio, his good friend and kinsman.

But just at the last he glided in his dart.

"And by the way, we may not see you again, unless you too are going south. We start tomorrow for the Blois, where the Queen Mother holds her court. She has written most graciously to the Countess Valentine offering her hospitality, and the gaiety which young folk love, among her maids of honour!"

And as he tucked up his soutane in order to remount the stairs, the Jesuit chuckled to himself. "And that, I think, will do – if so be I know the blood of the breed of Guise!"

CHAPTER X. THE GOLDEN DUKE

The river flowed at their right hand, the water blue, the pebbly banks chased silver, green walls of wood framing the picture, and noble châteaux looking out here and there.

Almost audibly Claire's heart beat. She had seen the court of the King of Navarre, what time Margaret of Valois made Nerac gay for a whole year, as ever was Paris under the first Francis. But even there, betwixt the old grey château on the hill and the new summer pavilion in the valley, something of the warriors' camp had ever lingered about that Capua of the "Bearnais."

Besides, Claire had been young then, and many things she had not understood – which was perhaps the better for her and the happier. But now, she doubted not. The child was a woman, and all would now be made clear. Not Eve, looking up at the Eden apple-tree in the reserved corner of the orchard, had more of certainty that all happiness lay in the tasting of the first of these golden pippins.

Presently they began to mingle with the crowd, and from under his shaggy brows the Professor watched the gay young courtiers with unconcealed displeasure.

As he listened to the quick give-and-take of wit from this galliard to the other, he murmured to himself the words of the Wise Man, even the words of Jesus the son of Sirach, "There is a certain subtlety that is fine, but it is unrighteous."

And to his pupil he said, "Answer not these fools according to their folly. Your sword's point will make a better answer! Even I myself –"

But here he checked himself, as if he would have said something that became not a grave Professor of the Sorbonne in the habit of his order.

And even while saying so – lo! in a moment, the swords were out and flickering, his own first of all, the same little, thin, snaky sword-cane made in Toledo, supple as a reed, which the Abbé John and Guy Launay had returned to appropriate on the Day of the Barricades. John d'Albret stood on his defence with an Italian blade, having a small cup to protect the over-guard, which was just coming into fashion among the young bloods. While from the rear Jean-aux-Choux spurred his Flanders mare into the riot, waving over his head a huge two-handed sword of Italian pattern, like those with which the Swiss had harvested the armoured knights like ripe corn at Granson and at Morat.

And the reason of the pother was this.

A couple of gentlemen-cavaliers had approached from behind, and descending as suddenly as hawks into a courtyard full of doves fluttering and pacing each in his innocence, had deftly cut out the little jennet of Arab blood on which Claire was riding.

Her dark student's over-mantle, descending low as her spurs, had not concealed from these faithful stewards of their master that the younger and more delicately featured of the two clerks was no other than a pretty maiden.

"Our great Duke would speak with you, Mistress," was all the explanation they deigned to give. And in such troubled times even so much was frequently omitted.

But the hawks soon found out their mistake. Though the Professor's sword-cane might have been safely disregarded by the breast-plate wearers, it was otherwise with the huge bell-mouthed pistol which he carried in his left hand. It was also far otherwise with the snaky blade of the Abbé John, the daintiest sworder of all the *Pré des Clercs*. The man at the left of Claire's bridle-rein felt something sting him just at the coming together of the head-piece and shoulder-plates. Even less could the two captors afford to disregard Claire's last defender, when, all unexpectedly, with

a shrill war-cry of "Stirling Brig an' doon wi' the Papishers," Jean-aux-Choux whirled two-handed into the fray.

The first blow fell on the right-hand man. Fair on the boss of his shoulder-plate, heavy as a mace, fell that huge six foot of blade.

The armour was of proof, or that head would have been shorn from his body. As it was, the man fell senseless from his horse. Promptly his companion let go the rein of Claire's pony, crying, "Help there, my Lord Duke!" And so, wheeling his horse about, put speed to it, and rode in the direction of a group of gay knights and gentlemen who, as it now appeared, had been watching the fray with some amusement without caring to meddle with it.

Then from the midst of the little crowd there came one forth, the finest and properest man Claire had ever seen. He was tall and magnificently arrayed. The cloak over his light chain-armour was of dark crimson and gold, and the six enamelled lilies on his helmet marked him as next in rank to the princes of the blood.

The cavaliers about him drew their swords, and after saluting, asked if it were the will of their Lord Duke that they should punish these caitiffs who had so battered Goulard and Moulinet.

But "My Lord" put them aside with an impatient gesture of his glove.

"It would have served Goulard and Moulinet right if they had gotten twice as much!" he said. "They meddled in what did not concern them."

All the same, as he rode forward, his eyebrows, which were thick and barred across, twitched threateningly. He threw off his crimson cloak with an impatient gesture, and suddenly shone forth in a dazzling array of steel breast-plate and chain armour, all worked and damascened with gold.

"Epernon – Epernon – for my life, Epernon!" muttered the Abbé John under his breath to the Professor of Eloquence; "we could not have fallen on worse!"

The King's reigning favourite and boldest soldier rode straight up to them, with the careless ease which became the handsomest man in the kingdoms of France and Navarre.

"What have we here?" he demanded. "A pretty girl, two holy men, and a scarecrow! You are Genevists – Calvin's folk – Huguenots! This will not do; a fair maid's place is in a king's court. I will escort her thither. My wife will have great pleasure in her society, and will make her one of her own or of the Queen's maids-of-honour. From what I hear, her elder Majesty hath great need of such!"

"Not more than His Majesty has need of men of honour about him," cried the Abbé John fiercely – "aye, and has had all his life!"

"Hola, young cock-sparrow, clad in the habit of the hoodie-crow!" said D'Epernon, turning upon him, "from what stable-heap do you come that you chirp so loud?"

"From that same heap on which you serve as stable-boy, my Lord Duke!" said the Abbé John.

The Duke's brow darkened. He put his hand quickly to his gold-hilted rapier.

"Ah, pray do," sneered the Abbé John; "follow your inclination. Let the bright steel out. Get a man to hold our horses, and – have at you, my good Gascon!"

By this time the Duke d'Epernon's gentlemen were spurring angrily forward, but he halted them with a wave of his hand, without turning round in his saddle or taking his eyes off John's face.

"What is your name?" he demanded, his brows twitching so quickly that the eye could scarce follow their movements.

"I am John d'Albret, nephew of the Cardinal Bourbon and – "

"Cousin of the Bearnais?" sneered the Duke, his eye glittering.

"Student at the Sorbonne!" said the Abbé John firmly. "All the same, if clerk I am, I am no poor clerk, and so you will find me – if, waiving my royal blood, I consent to put my steel to yours upon the sword. Come, down with you – and fall on!"

Now the Duke d'Epernon was anything rather than a coward. He made a motion as if to dismount, and there is little doubt but that his intention was to match his long-trained skill and

success as a swordsman against the Abbé John's mastery of the latest science of sword-play learned in the Paris *salles*.

But suddenly D'Epernon checked himself. Then he laughed.

"No," he said; "after all, why should we fight? We may need each other one day, and there is no honour in killing a bantam, even if he hath a left-hand strain of kingly blood in him!"

"Left-hand!" cried the Abbé John: "you lie in your throat. My blood is infinitely more dexter than your own, and I make a better use of it! I am no mignon, at least."

Now this was a bitter taunt indeed, and even the tanned face of the King's warlike favourite flushed.

"As to mignons," he said, "you look much more like one yourself, young cockerel. I have overly many scars on my cheeks for the trade. And this is, I presume, your sister – to judge by the resemblance?" The Duke turned to Claire, who had been looking at him with a certain involuntary admiration. "What, no? Your niece, you say, my good Sorbonnist? I am not sure but that, as a strict Catholic, I must object. The age is scarce canonical!"

"I am no priest," said Doctor Anatole, roughly, for this touched him on the raw. "I am only the Professor of Eloquence attached to the faculty of philosophy. And I have the honour to inform you that I travel with my niece, to put her under the care of my mother at her house near to Collioure, in Roussillon."

"What!" cried the Duke, "now here is another of the suspicions which awake in the mind of the most guileless of men. Here we have a Bourbon, next-of-kin to the Cardinal himself, together with a Professor of the Sorbonne (that hotbed of sedition), travelling towards the dominions of the Demon of the South – of Philip of Spain! As a good subject, how am I to know that you are not on your way to stir up another rebellion against the King my master?"

It was then that Claire spoke for the first time.

"Sir," she said quietly, but looking full at the Duke with her eyes – dark green eyes the colour of jade, with little golden flashlets floating about in them, "I vouch for my friends. They are loyal and peaceful; I who speak am the only Huguenot. You can take and burn me if you like!"

The great Duke d'Epernon stood a moment aghast, as if the hunted hare had turned upon him in defiance. Then he slid off his helmet, and saluted, bareheaded.

"*Ma belle damoselle*," he said, "you may be the niece of a Doctor of the Sorbonne and at the same time a Huguenot. These are good reasons enough for carrying you to the castle of His Majesty. But be comforted – we are not as Philip of Spain, our enemy. We do not burn pretty brave maids such as you!"

It was then that Jean-aux-Choux forced himself forward on his big, blundering Spanish mare, driving between a couple of cavaliers, and sending them right and left like ninepins.

"Great Duke," he said, "you would do well to let us go on our way. You talk much of His Majesty – I ask you which. You have served the 'Bearnais' – you will serve him again. Even now you have cast an anchor to windward. It sticks firmly in the camp of the Bearnais, not far from that King's tent."

Duke d'Epernon turned on Jean-aux-Choux his fierce, dark eyes.

"It seems to me that I have seen you before, my churl of the carrotty locks," he said; "were you not at the King's last fooling in the Louvre?"

"Aye," said Jean, "that I was, and in a certain window-seat behind a certain curtain I gave your Dukeship a certain letter –"

"It is enough," muttered the Duke, waving his hand hastily. "I am on my way to Angoulême, which is my government. Come all of you with me to Blois, and there abide quietly in a house till I return to salute the King. The Estates meet in the late autumn, and if things go as it seems likely after this Day of the Barricades, we may need your blood royal, my excellent Clerk d'Albret – your best wisdom, my good and eloquent Professor – your rarest quips, my merry scarecrow – and, as

for you, little lady, my newly-wed wife Marguerite will not be sorry to have a companion so frank and charming among the fading blossoms and over-ripe fruit of the court of the Queen-mother!"

"My lord," said the Professor, "I fear that I have not time to wait upon the King. I must go to visit my mother, and carry this maid with me!"

The Duke smiled.

"I am not demanding your learned preferences, most eloquent Professor," he said; "I am taking you into safe keeping in the name of the King. After all, I am not an ignorant man, and I know well that it was a certain Doctor Anatole Long who, in the full concourse of the Sorbonne, voted alone for the rights of the Valois. Give the King, therefore, a chance of voicing his thanks. Also, since the King is at Chartres and I must speed to Angoulême, I will leave you at Blois in good and comfortable keeping with the young damsel, your niece, taking with me only this young man, that he may see some good Leaguer fighting. He hath been, I dare say, on the Barricades himself. It is permitted to his age to be foolish. But he has never yet seen a full-grown, raw-hide, unwashen Catholic Leaguer. Let him come to Angoulême with me, and I will warrant to improve his sword-play for him! Close up, gentlemen of my guard! To Blois! Ride, accommodating your pace to mine, as I shall do mine to that of the palfrey of the new lady companion of Marguerite of Foix, whom I have the honour to love!"

He lifted his gloved hand, and from the fingers blew a kiss in the direction of the north, daintily as a girl upon a high terrace to a lover over the sea.

And so by the river-side, in the golden light of the afternoon, they rode forward to Blois.

In the rear Jean-aux-Choux continued to mutter to himself, trudging heavily along on his Flanders mare, laden with cloaks and provend, "'Tis all very well – very well – but what does his golden dukeship propose to do with me? I will not leave my little mistress alone in a strange city, and with a man who, though ten times a professor at the Sorbonne, is no more kin to her than I am to this fat-fetlocked Flemish brute."

He pondered a little, dropping gradually behind. But as soon as they had passed the gates of the city, he guided his beast into the first little alley, letting the cavalcade go on, amid much craning of necks from the windows, towards the royal pavilion where D'Epernon was to lodge.

"I will seek out Anthony Arpajon, that good man of the Faith," he said. "He has a stable down by the water-side, and being a lover of the learned, he will give me bite and sup for teaching him some scraps of Greek wherewith to puzzle the wandering Lutheran pastors. For a Calvinist stark is Anthony, and only wants a head-piece like mine to be a clever man. But he hath an arm and a purse. And for the rest, I will load him up with the best of Greek, and also teach him to read the *Institutions of John Calvin*, my first and greatest master!"

So through the narrow streets of Blois he made his great mare push herself lumberingly, crying out whenever there was a crowd or a busy street to cross, "Hoo! hoo! hoo! Make way for the King's fool – for Jean-aux-Choux – for the fool – the King's fool!"

CHAPTER XI. THE BEST-KNOWN FACE IN THE WORLD

Jean-aux-Choux dismounted from his Flanders mare at the entrance of a wide courtyard, littered with coaches and carriages, the best of these being backed under a sort of penthouse, but the commoner sort set out in the yard to take the bitter weather with the sweet. Some had their "trams" pitifully uplifted to heaven in wooden protestation against such ill-treatment; some wept tears of cracked pitch because the sun had been too much with them. Leathern aprons of ancient diligences split and seamed with alternate rain and drought. Everywhere there was a musty smell of old cushion-stuffing. A keen whiff of stables wandered past. Not far off one heard the restless nosing of horses in their mangers, and from yet another side came the warm breath of kine.

For Master Anthony Arpajon was a *bien* man, a man of property, and so far the Leaguers of Blois had not been able to prevail against him. In the courtyard, stretched at length on sacks of chaff, their heads on their corn-bags, with which, doubtless, on the morrow they would entertain their beasts by the way, many carters and drivers of high-piled wine-chariots were asleep.

The lower part of Master Anthony's house was a sort of free hostel, like the caravanserai of the East. The upper, into which no stranger was permitted to enter on any pretext, was like a fortified town.

To the left of the entrance, a narrow oblong break in the wall made a sort of rude buffet. Sections of white-aproned, square-capped cooks could be seen moving about within. Through the gap they served the simpler hot meats, bottles of wine, bread, omelettes, and salads to the arriving guests. It was curious that each, on going first to the barrier, threw the end of his blue Pyrenean waist-band over his shoulder. A little silver cow-bell, tied like a tassel to the silk, tinkled as he did so.

For this was the chosen sign of the men of Bearn. All the warring Protestants, and especially the Calvinists of the south, had adopted it, because it was the symbol of the arms of Bearn. And wherever it was unsafe to wear the White Plume of the hero on the cap, as in the town of Blois, it was easy to tuck the silver cow-bell of King Henry under the silken sash, where its tinkling told no tales.

But among these wine-carriers and free folk of the roads there was scarcely one who did not know Jean-aux-Choux. Yet they did not laugh as he entered, but rather greeted him respectfully, as one who plays well his part, though he came in shouting at the top of his voice, "Way for the fool of fools – the fool of three kings – and not so great a fool as any one of them!"

One man came forward, speaking the drawling speech of Burgundy, all liquid "l's" and slurred "r's," and with a clumsy salute took the Jester's beast. Many of the others rose to their feet and made their reverences according to their kind, clumsy or clever. Others whispered quietly, passing round the news of his arrival.

For the fool had come to his own. He was no more Jean-aux-Choux, the King's fool, but Master John Stirling, a Benjamin of the Benjaminites, and pupil of John Calvin himself.

The white-capped man behind the bar opened carefully a little door, and as instantly closed it behind Jean.

He pointed up a narrow stair which turned and was lost to sight in the thickness of the wall.

"You will find them at prayers," he muttered. "He is there."

"Kings are in His hand," responded Jean-aux-Choux, setting a foot on the first worn step of the narrow stair-case; "the Lord of Battles preserve him from the curs that yelp about his feet."

There came to Jean a sound of singing – sweet, far away, wistful, a singing not made for the chanting of choirs or the clamour of organs, but for folk hiding on housetops, in dens and caves of

the earth – soft singing, with the enemy deadly and near at hand. The burden of their melody was that thirty-seventh Psalm which once on a time Clement Marot had risked his life to print.

"Wait on the Lord! Meekly thy burden bear;
Commit to Him thyself and thine affair!
In Him trust thou, and He will bring to pass
All that thou wouldst accomplish and compass.
Thy loss is gain – such is His equity,
Each of His own He guards eternally.
This lesson also learn —
He clasps thee closer as the days grow stern."

Jean opened the door. It was a long, black, oak-ceiled room into which he looked. There were perhaps a score of Huguenots present, all standing up, with Marot's little volume of the *Trente Psaumes* in their hands. A pastor in Geneva gown and bands stood at a table head, upon which a few great folios had been heaped to form a rude pulpit.

Beside him, not singing, but holding his psalter with a certain weary reverence, was a man with a face the best-known in all the world. And certainly Henry of Navarre never looked handsomer than in the days when pretty Gabrielle of the house of D'Estrees played with fire, calling her Huguenot warrior, "His Majesty of the Frosty Beard."

Such a mingling of kindness, of humour bland and finely tolerant, of temper quick and high, of glorious angers, of swift, proud sinnings and repentances as swift, of great eternal destinies and human frailties, never was seen on any man's face save this.

It was "The Bearnais" – it was Henry of Navarre himself.

So long as the singing went on Jean-aux-Choux stood erect like the rest. Then all knelt at the prayer – the King also with them – on the hard floor under that low, black pent-roof, while the pastor prayed to the God of Sabaoth for the long-hoped-for victory of "His Own."

Beside "His Own" knelt Jean-aux-Choux, a look of infinite solemnity on his face, while the grave Genevan "cult" went quietly on, as if there had not been a Catholic or an enemy within fifty miles. The minister ceased. The King, without lingering on his knees as did the others, rose rapidly, mechanically dusting his black cloth breeches and even the rough carter's stockings which covered his shapely calves.

He sighed sadly, as his keen, quick-glancing eyes passed over the kneeling forms of the Huguenots. He did not take very kindly to the lengthy services and plain-song ritual of those whom he led as never soldiers had been led before.

"Hal Guise hath the Religion,
While I need absolution."

The Bearnais hummed one of the camp songs made against himself by his familiar Gascons, which always afforded him the most amusement – next, that is, to that celebrated one which recounted his successes on other fields than those of war. They were bold rascals, those Gascons of his, but they followed him well, and, after all, their idea of humour was his own.

"Ha, long red-man," he called out presently, when all had risen decently from their knees, "you made sport for us at Nerac, I remember, and then went to my good brother-in-law's court in the suite of Queen Marguerite. What has brought you here?"

A tall man, dark and slim, leaned over and whispered in the King's ear.

"Ah," said the Bearnais, nodding his head, "I remember the reports. They were most useful. But the fellow is a scholar, then?"

"He is of Geneva," said the man at the King's ear, "and is learned in Latin and Greek, also in Hebrew!"

"No wonder he does his business with credit" – the King smiled as he spoke; "there is no fool like a learned fool!"

With his constant good humour and easy ways with all and sundry, Henry of Navarre stepped forward and clapped Jean-aux-Choux on the shoulder.

"Go and talk to the pastor, D'Aubigné," said the King to his tall, dark companion; "I and this good fellow will chat awhile. Sit down, man. I am not Harry of Navarre to-night, but Waggoner Henri in from Coutras with some barrels of Normandy cider. Do you happen to know a customer?"

"Ay, that do I," answered Jean-aux-Choux, fixing his eyes on the strong, soldierly face of the Bearnais, "one who has just arrived in this town, and may have some customs' dues to levy on his own liquor."

"And who may that be?" demanded the King.

"The Governor of Normandy," Jean answered – "he and no other!"

"What – D'Epernon?" cried the Bearnais, really taken by surprise this time.

"I have just left his company," said Jean; "he has with him many gentlemen, the Professor of Eloquence at the Sorbonne, the nephew of the Cardinal Bourbon – "

"What, my cousin John the pretty clerk?" laughed Henry.

"He drives a good steel point," said Jean-aux-Choux; "it were a pity to make him a holy water sprinkler. I was too ugly to be a pastor. He is too handsome for a priest!"

"We will save him," said the Bearnais; "when our poor old Uncle of the Red Hat dies, they will doubtless try to make a king of this springald."

"He vows he would much rather carry a pike in your levies," said Jean-aux-Choux. "It is a brave lad. He loves good hard knocks, and from what I have seen, also to be observed of ladies!"

The Bearnais laughed a short, self-contemptuous laugh. "I fear we shall quarrel then, Cousin John and I," he said; "one Bourbon is enough in a camp where one must ride twenty miles to wave a kerchief beneath a balcony!"

"Also," continued Jean-aux-Choux, "there is with them my dear master's daughter, Mistress Claire – "

"What, Francis Agnew's daughter?" The King's voice grew suddenly kingly.

Jean nodded.

"Then he is dead – my Scot – my friend? When? How? Out with it, man!"

"The Leaguers or the King's Swiss shot him dead the Day of the Barricades – I know not which, but one or the other!"

The fine gracious lines of the King's face hardened. The Bearnais lifted his "boina," or flat white cap, which he had resumed at the close of worship, as was his right.

"They shall pay for this one day," he said; "Valois, King, and Duke of Guise – what is it they sing? Something about

'The Cardinal and Henry and Mayenne, Mayenne!'

If I read the signs of the times aright, the King of France will do Henry of Guise's business one of these days, while I shall have Mayenne on my hands. At any rate, poor Francis Agnew shall not go unavenged, wag the world as it will."

These were not the highest ideals of the Nazarene. But they suited a warring Church, and Henry of Navarre only voiced what was the feeling of all, from D'Aubigné the warrior to the pastor who sat in a corner by himself, thumbing his little Geneva Bible. There was no truce in this war. The League or the Bearnais! Either of the two must rule France. The present king, Henry of Valois, was a merry, sulky, careless, deceitful, kindly, cruel cipher – the "man-woman," as they named him,

the "gamin" – king. He laughed and jested – till he could safely thrust his dagger into his enemy's back. But as for his country, he could no more govern it than a puppet worked by strings.

"And this girl?" said the King, "is she of her father's brood, strong for the religion, and so forth?"

"She is young and innocent – and very fair!"

The eyes of the Fool of the Three Henri's met those of the Bearnais boldly, and the outlooking black eyes flinched before them.

"These Scottish maids are not as ours," said the King, perhaps in order to say something, "yet I think she was with her father in my camp, and shared his dangers."

"To the last she held up his dying head!" said Jean-aux-Choux. And quite unexpectedly to himself, his eyes were moist.

"And where at this moment is Francis Agnew's daughter?" said the King. Then he added, without apparent connexion, "He was my friend!"

But his intimates understood the word, and so, though a poor fool, did Jean-aux-Choux. Instinctively he held out his hand, as he would have done to a brother-Scot of his degree.

The King clasped it heartily, and those who were nearest noticed that his eyes also had a shine in them.

"What a man!" whispered D'Aubigné to his nearest neighbour. "Sometimes we of the Faith are angry with him, and then, with a pat on the cheek, or a laugh, we are his children again. Or he is ours, I know not which! Guise shakes hands all day long to make his dukeship popular, but in spite of himself his lip curls as if he touched a loathsome thing. Valois presents his hand to be kissed as if it belonged to some one else. But our Bearnais – one would think he never had but one friend in the world, and – "

"That this Scots fool is the man!"

"Hush," whispered D'Aubigné, "he is no fool, this fellow. He was of my acquaintance at Geneva. In his youth he knew John Calvin, and learned in the school of Beza. The King does well to attach him! Listen!"

Jean-aux-Choux was certainly giving the King his money's-worth. Henry was pacing up and down, his fingers busily and unconsciously arranging his beard.

"I have not enough men to take him prisoner," he said; "this ex-mignon D'Epernon is a slippery fish. He will deal with me, and with another. But if he could sell my head to my Lord of Guise and these furious wool-staplers of Paris, he would think it better worth his while than the off-chance of the Bearnais coming out on top!"

He pondered a while, with the deep niche of thought running downward from mid-brow to the bridge of his nose, which they called "the King's council of war."

"The girl is to be left in Blois," he muttered, as if to sum up the situation, "with this Professor of the Sorbonne – an old man, I suppose, and a priest. Very proper, very proper! My cousin, John Jackanapes, the young ex-Leaguer, goes to Court. They will make a Politique of him, a Valois-divine-right man – good again, for after this Valois-by-right-divine (save the mark!) comes not Master John d'Albret, but – the Bearnais! Yet – I do not know – perhaps, after all, he had better come with me. Then I shall hold one hostage the more! Let me see – let me see!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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