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THE BATTLE OF THE STRONG

[A ROMANCE OF TWO KINGDOMS]

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

CHAPTER XVI

The night and morning after Guida's marriage came and went. The day drew on to the hour fixed for the going of the Narcissus. Guida had worked all forenoon with a feverish unrest, not trusting herself, though the temptation was sore, to go where she might see Philip's vessel lying in the tide-way. She had resolved that only at the moment fixed for sailing would she go to the shore; yet from her kitchen door she could see a wide acreage of blue water and a perfect sky; and out there was Noirmont Point, round which her husband's ship would go, and be lost to her vision thereafter.

The day wore on. She got her grandfather's dinner, saw him bestowed in the great arm-chair for his afternoon sleep, and, when her household work was done, settled herself at the spinning wheel.

The old man loved to have her spin and sing as he drowsed. To-day his eyes had followed her everywhere. He could not have told why it was, but somehow all at once he seemed to deeply realise her--her beauty, the joy of this innocent living intelligence moving through his home. She had always been necessary to him, but he had taken her presence as a matter of course. She had always been to him the most wonderful child ever given to comfort an old man's life, but now as he abstractedly took a pinch of snuff from the silver box and then forgot to put it to his nose, he seemed suddenly to get that clearness of sight, that perspective, from which he could see her as she really was. He took another pinch of snuff, and again forgot to put it to his nose, but brushed imaginary dust from his coat, as was his wont, and whispered to himself:

"Why now, why now, I had not thought she was so much a woman. Flowers of the sea, but what eyes, what carriage, and what an air! I had not thought--h'm--blind old bat that I am--I had not thought she was grown such a lady. It was only yesterday, surely but yesterday, since I rocked her to sleep. Francois de Mauprat"--he shook his head at himself--"you are growing old. Let me see--why, yes, she was born the day I sold the blue enamelled timepiece to his Highness the Duc de Mauban. The Duc was but putting the watch to his ear when a message comes to say the child there is born. 'Good,' says the Duc de Mauban, when he hears, 'give me the honour, de Mauprat,' says he, 'for the sake of old days in France, to offer a name to the brave innocent--for the sake of old associations,' says de Mauban. 'You knew my wife, de Mauprat,' says he; 'you knew the Duchesse Guida-Guidabaldine. She's been gone these ten years, alas! You were with me when we were married, de Mauprat,' says the Duc; 'I should

care to return the compliment if you will allow me to offer a name, eh?'
'Duc,' said I, 'there is no honour I more desire for my grandchild.'
'Then let the name of Guidabaldine be somewhere among others she will carry, and--and I'll not forget her, de Mauprat, I'll not forget her.'...
Eh, eh, I wonder--I wonder if he has forgotten the little Guidabaldine there? He sent her a golden cup for the christening, but I wonder--I wonder--if he has forgotten her since? So quick of tongue, so bright of eye, so light of foot, so sweet a face--if one could but be always young! When her grandmother, my wife, my Julie, when she was young--ah, she was fair, fairer than Guida, but not so tall--not quite so tall.
Ah! . . . "

He was slipping away into sleep when he realised that Guida was singing

"Spin, spin, belle Mergaton!
The moon wheels full, and the tide flows high,
And your wedding-gown you must put it on
Ere the night hath no moon in the sky--
Gigoton Mergaton, spin!"

"I had never thought she was so much a woman," he said drowsily; "I--I wonder why--I never noticed it."

He roused himself again, brushed imaginary snuff from his coat, keeping time with his foot to the wheel as it went round. "I--I suppose she will wed soon. . . . I had forgotten. But she must marry well, she must marry well--she is the godchild of the Duc de Mauban. How the wheel goes round! I used to hear--her mother--sing that song, 'Gigoton, Mergaton spin-spin-spin.'" He was asleep.

Guida put by the wheel, and left the house. Passing through the Rue des Sablons, she came to the shore. It was high tide. This was the time that Philip's ship was to go. She had dressed herself with as much care as to what might please his eye as though she were going to meet him in person. Not without reason, for, though she could not see him from the land, she knew he could see her plainly through his telescope, if he chose.

She reached the shore. The time had come for him to go, but there was his ship at anchor in the tide-way still. Perhaps the Narcissus was not going; perhaps, after all, Philip was to remain! She laughed with pleasure at the thought of that. Her eyes wandered lovingly over the ship which was her husband's home upon the sea. Just such another vessel Philip would command. At a word from him those guns, like long, black, threatening arms thrust out, would strike for England with thunder and fire.

A bugle call came across the still water, clear, vibrant, and compelling. It represented power. Power--that was what Philip, with his ship, would stand for in the name of England. Danger--oh yes, there would be danger, but Heaven would be good to her; Philip should go safe through storm and war, and some day great honours would be done him. He should be an admiral, and more perhaps; he had said so. He was going to do it as much

for her as for himself, and when he had done it, to be proud of it more for her than for himself; he had said so: she believed in him utterly. Since that day upon the Ecrehos it had never occurred to her not to believe him. Where she gave her faith she gave it wholly; where she withdrew it--

The bugle call sounded again. Perhaps that was the signal to set sail. No, a boat was putting out from the Narcissus. It was coming landward. As she watched its approach she heard a chorus of boisterous voices behind her. She turned and saw nearing the shore from the Rue d'Egypte a half-dozen sailors, singing cheerily:

"Get you on, get you on, get you on,
Get you on to your fo'c'stle'ome;
Leave your lassies, leave your beer,
For the bugle what you 'ear
Pipes you on to your fo'c'stle 'ome--
'Ome--'ome--'ome,
Pipes you on to your fo'c'stle 'ome."

Guida drew near.

"The Narcissus is not leaving to-day?" she asked of the foremost sailor.

The man touched his cap. "Not to-day, lady."

"When does she leave?"

"Well, that's more nor I can say, lady, but the cap'n of the main-top, yander, 'e knows."

She approached the captain of the main-top. "When does the Narcissus leave?" she asked.

He looked her up and down, at first glance with something like boldness, but instantly he touched his hat.

"To-morrow, mistress--she leaves at 'igh tide tomorrow."

With an eye for a fee or a bribe, he drew a little away from the others, and said to her in a low tone: "Is there anything what I could do for you, mistress? P'r'aps you wanted some word carried aboard, lady?"

She hesitated an instant, then said: "No-no, thank you."

He still waited, however, rubbing his hand on his hip with mock bashfulness. There was an instant's pause, then she divined his meaning.

She took from her pocket a shilling. She had never given away so much money in her life before, but she seemed to feel instinctively that now she must give freely--now that she was the wife of an officer of the navy. Strange how these sailors to-day seemed so different to her from ever before--she felt as if they all belonged to her. She offered the

shilling to the captain of the main-top. His eyes gloated, but he said with an affected surprise:

"No, I couldn't think of it, yer leddyship."

"Ah, but you will take it!" she said. "I--I have a r-relative"--she hesitated at the word--" in the navy."

"'Ave you now, yer leddyship?" he said. "Well, then, I'm proud to 'ave the shilling to drink 'is 'ealth, yer leddyship."

He touched his hat, and was about to turn away. "Stay a little," she said with bashful boldness. The joy of giving was rapidly growing to a vice. "Here's something for them," she added, nodding towards his fellows, and a second shilling came from her pocket. "Just as you say, yer leddyship," he said with owlish gravity; "but for my part I think they've 'ad enough. I don't 'old with temptin' the weak passions of man."

A moment afterwards the sailors were in the boat, rowing towards the Narcissus. Their song came back across the water:

". . . O you A.B. sailor-man,
Wet your whistle while you can,
For the piping of the bugle calls you 'ome!
'Ome--'ome--'ome,
Calls you on to your fo'c'stle 'ome!"

The evening came down, and Guida sat in the kitchen doorway looking out over the sea, and wondering why Philip had sent her no message. Of course he would not come himself, he must not: he had promised her. But how much she would have liked to see him for just one minute, to feel his arms about her, to hear him say good-bye once more. Yet she loved him the better for not coming.

By and by she became very restless. She would have been almost happier if he had gone that day: he was within call of her, still they were not to see each other.

She walked up and down the garden, Biribi the dog by her side. Sitting down on the bench beneath the appletree, she recalled every word that Philip had said to her two days before. Every tone of his voice, every look he had given her, she went over in her thoughts. There is no reporting in the world so exact, so perfect, as that in a woman's mind, of the words, looks, and acts of her lover in the first days of mutual confession and understanding.

It can come but once, this dream, fantasy, illusion--call it what you will: it belongs to the birth hour of a new and powerful feeling; it is the first sunrise of the heart. What comes after may be the calmer joy of a more truthful, a less ideal emotion, but the transitory glory of the love and passion of youth shoots higher than all other glories into the sky of time. The splendour of youth is its madness, and the splendour of

that madness is its unconquerable belief. And great is the strength of it, because violence alone can destroy it. It does not yield to time nor to decay, to the long wash of experience that wears away the stone, nor to disintegration. It is always broken into pieces at a blow. In the morning all is well, and ere the evening come the radiant temple is in ruins.

At night when Guida went to bed she could not sleep at first. Then came a drowsing, a floating between waking and sleeping, in which a hundred swift images of her short past flashed through her mind:

A butterfly darting in the white haze of a dusty road, and the cap of the careless lad that struck it down.... Berry-picking along the hedges beyond the quarries of Mont Mado, and washing her hands in the strange green pools at the bottom of the quarries. . . . Stooping to a stream and saying of it to a lad: "Ro, won't it never come back?" . . . From the front doorway watching a poor criminal shrink beneath the lash with which he was being flogged from the Vier Marchi to the Vier Prison. . . Seeing a procession of bride and bridegroom with young men and women gay in ribbons and pretty cottons, calling from house to house to receive the good wishes of their friends, and drinking cinnamon wine and mulled cider--the frolic, the gaiety of it all. Now, in a room full of people, she was standing on a veille flourished with posies of broom and wildflowers, and Philip was there beside her, and he was holding her hand, and they were waiting and waiting for some one who never came. Nobody took any notice of her and Philip, she thought; they stood there waiting and waiting--why, there was M. Savary dit Detricand in the doorway, waving a handkerchief at her, and saying: "I've found it--I've found it!"--and she awoke with a start.

Her heart was beating hard, and for a moment she was dazed; but presently she went to sleep again, and dreamed once more.

This time she was on a great warship, in a storm which was driving towards a rocky shore. The sea was washing over the deck. She recognised the shore: it was the cliff at Plemont in the north of Jersey, and behind the ship lay the awful Paternosters. They were drifting, drifting on the wall of rock. High above on the land there was a solitary stone hut. The ship came nearer and nearer. The storm increased in strength. In the midst of the violence she looked up and saw a man standing in the doorway of the hut. He turned his face towards her: it was Ranulph Delagarde, and he had a rope in his hand. He saw her and called to her, making ready to throw the rope, but suddenly some one drew her back. She cried aloud, and then all grew black. . . .

And then, again, she knew she was in a small, dark cabin of the ship. She could hear the storm breaking over the deck. Now the ship struck. She could feel her grinding upon the rocks. She seemed to be sinking, sinking--There was a knocking, knocking at the door of the cabin, and a voice calling to her--how far away it seemed! . . . Was she dying, was she drowning? The words of a nursery rhyme rang in her ears distinctly, keeping time to the knocking. She wondered who should be singing a nursery rhyme on a sinking ship:

"La main morte,
La main morte,
Tapp' a la porte,
Tapp' a la porte."

She shuddered. Why should the dead hand tap at her door? Yet there it was tapping louder, louder. . . . She struggled, she tried to cry out, then suddenly she grew quiet, and the tapping got fainter and fainter--her eyes opened: she was awake.

For an instant she did not know where she was. Was it a dream still? For there was a tapping, tapping at her door--no, it was at the window. A shiver ran through her from head to foot. Her heart almost stopped beating. Some one was calling to her.

"Guida! Guida!"

It was Philip's voice. Her cheek had been cold the moment before; now she felt the blood tingling in her face. She slid to the floor, threw a shawl round her, and went to the casement.

The tapping began again. For a moment she could not open the window. She was trembling from head to foot. Philip's voice reassured her a little.

"Guida, Guida, open the window a moment."

She hesitated. She could not--no--she could not do it. He tapped still louder.

"Guida, don't you hear me?" he asked.

She undid the catch, but she had hardly the courage even yet. He heard her now, and pressed the window a little. Then she opened it slowly, and her white face showed.

"O Philip," she said breathlessly, "why have you frightened me so?"

He caught her hand in his own. "Come out into the garden, sweetheart," he said, and he kissed the hand. "Put on a dress and your slippers and come," he urged again.

"Philip," she said, "O Philip, I cannot! It is too late. It is midnight. Do not ask me. Why, why did you come?"

"Because I wanted to speak with you for one minute. I have only a little while. Please come outside and say good-bye to me again. We are sailing to-morrow--there's no doubt about it this time."

"O Philip," she answered, her voice quivering, "how can I? Say good-bye to me here, now."

"No, no, Guida, you must come. I can't kiss you good-bye where you are."

"Must I come to you?" she said helplessly. "Well, then, Philip," she added, "go to the bench by the apple-tree, and I shall be there in a moment."

"Beloved!" he exclaimed ardently. She shut the window slowly.

For a moment he looked about him; then went lightly through the garden, and sat down on the bench under the apple-tree, near to the summer-house. At last he heard her footstep. He rose quickly to meet her, and as she came timidly to him, clasped her in his arms.

"Philip," she said, "this isn't right. You ought not to have come; you have broken your promise."

"Are you not glad to see me?"

"Oh, you know, you know that I'm glad to see you, but you shouldn't have come--hark! what's that?" They both held their breath, for there was a sound outside the garden wall. Clac-clac! clac-clac!--a strange, uncanny footstep. It seemed to be hurrying away--clac-clac! clac-clac!

"Ah, I know," whispered Guida: "it is Dormy Jamais. How foolish of me to be afraid!"

"Of course, of course," said Philip--"Dormy Jamais, the man who never sleeps."

"Philip--if he saw us!"

"Foolish child, the garden wall is too high for that. Besides--"

"Yes, Philip?"

"Besides, you are my wife, Guida!"

"No, no, Philip, no; not really so until all the world is told."

"My beloved Guida, what difference can that make?" She sighed and shook her head. "To me, Philip, it is only that which makes it right--that the whole world knows. Philip, I am so afraid of--of secrecy, and cheating."

"Nonsense-nonsense!" he answered. "Poor little wood-bird, you're frightened at nothing at all. Come and sit by me." He drew her close to him.

Her trembling presently grew less. Hundreds of glow-worms were shimmering in the hedge. The grass-hoppers were whirring in the mielles beyond; a flutter of wings went by overhead. The leaves were rustling gently; a fresh wind was coming up from the sea upon the soft, fragrant dusk.

They talked a little while in whispers, her hands in his, his voice soothing her, his low, hurried words giving her no time to think. But presently she shivered again, though her heart was throbbing hotly.

"Come into the summer-house, Guida; you are cold, you are shivering." He rose, with his arm round her waist, raising her gently at the same time.

"Oh no, Philip dear," she said, "I'm not really cold--I don't know what it is--"

"But indeed you are cold," he answered. "There's a stiff south-easter rising, and your hands are like ice. Come into the arbour for a minute. It's warm there, and then--then we'll say good-bye, sweetheart."

His arm round her, he drew her with him to the summer-house, talking to her tenderly all the time. There was reassurance, comfort, loving care in his very tones.

How brightly the stars shone, how clearly the music of the stream came over the hedge! With what lazy restfulness the distant All's well floated across the mielles from a ship at anchor in the tide-way, how like a slumber-song the wash of the sea rolled drowsily along the wind! How gracious the smell of the earth, drinking up the dew of the affluent air, which the sun, on the morrow, should turn into life-blood for the grass and trees and flowers!

CHAPTER XVII

Philip was gone. Before breakfast was set upon the table, Guida saw the Narcissus sail round Noirmont Point and disappear.

Her face had taken on a new expression since yesterday. An old touch of dreaminess, of vague anticipation was gone--that look which belongs to youth, which feels the confident charm of the unknown future. Life was revealed; but, together with joy, wonder and pain informed the revelation.

A marvel was upon her. Her life was linked to another's, she was a wife. She was no longer sole captain of herself. Philip would signal, and she must come until either he or she should die. He had taken her hand, and she must never let it go; the breath of his being must henceforth give her new and healthy life, or inbreed a fever which should corrode the heart and burn away the spirit. Young though she was, she realised it--but without defining it. The new-found knowledge was diffused in her character, expressed in her face.

Seldom had a day of Guida's life been so busy. It seemed to her that people came and went far more than usual. She talked, she laughed a little, she answered back the pleasantries of the seafaring folk who

passed her doorway or her garden. She was attentive to her grandfather; exact with her household duties. But all the time she was thinking--thinking--thinking. Now and again she smiled, but at times too tears sprang to her eyes, to be quickly dried. More than once she drew in her breath with a quick, sibilant sound, as though some thought wounded her; and she flushed suddenly, then turned pale, then came to her natural colour again.

Among those who chanced to visit the cottage was Maitresse Aimable. She came to ask Guida to go with her and Jean to the island of Sark, twelve miles away, where Guida had never been. They would only be gone one night, and, as Maitresse Aimable said, the Sieur de Mauprat could very well make shift for once.

The invitation came to Guida like water to thirsty ground. She longed to get away from the town, to be where she could breathe; for all this day the earth seemed too small for breath: she gasped for the sea, to be alone there. To sail with Jean Touzel was practically to be alone, for Maitresse Aimable never talked; and Jean knew Guida's ways, knew when she wished to be quiet. In Jersey phrase, he saw beyond his spectacles--great brass-rimmed things, giving a droll, childlike kind of wisdom to his red rotund face.

Having issued her invitation, Maitresse Aimable smiled placidly and seemed about to leave, when, all at once, without any warning, she lowered herself like a vast crate upon the veille, and sat there looking at Guida.

At first the grave inquiry of her look startled Guida. She was beginning to know that sensitive fear assailing those tortured by a secret. How she loathed this secrecy! How guilty she now felt, where, indeed, no guilt was! She longed to call aloud her name, her new name, from the housetops.

The voice of Maitresse Aimable roused her. Her ponderous visitor had made a discovery which had yet been made by no other human being. Her own absurd romance, her ancient illusion, had taught her to know when love lay behind another woman's face. And after her fashion, Maitresse Aimable loved Jean Touzel as it is given to few to love.

"I was sixteen when I fell in love; you're seventeen--you," she said. "Ah bah, so it goes!"

Guida's face crimsoned. What--how much did Maitresse Aimable know? By what necromancy had this fat, silent fisher-wife learned the secret which was the heart of her life, the soul of her being--which was Philip? She was frightened, but danger made her cautious.

"Can you guess who it is?" she asked, without replying directly to the oblique charge.

"It is not Maitre Ranulph," answered her friendly inquisitor; "it is not that M'sieu' Detricand, the vaurien." Guida flushed with annoyance. "It

is not that farmer Blampied, with fifty vergees, all potatoes; it is not M'sieu' Janvrin, that bat'd'lagoule of an ecrivain. Ah bah, so it goes!"

"Who is it, then?" persisted Guida. "Eh ben, that is the thing!"

"How can you tell that one is in love, Maitresse Aimable? "persisted Guida.

The other smiled with a torturing placidity, then opened her mouth; but nothing came of it. She watched Guida moving about the kitchen abstractedly. Her eye wandered to the racllyi, with its flitches of bacon, to the dreschiaux and the sanded floor, to the great Elizabethan oak chair, and at last back to Guida, as though through her the lost voice might be charmed up again.

The eyes of the two met now, fairly, firmly; and Guida was conscious of a look in the other's face which she had never seen before. Had then a new sight been given to herself? She saw and understood the look in Maitresse Aimable's face, and instantly knew it to be the same that was in her own.

With a sudden impulse she dropped the bashin she was polishing, and, going over quickly, she silently laid her cheek against her old friend's. She could feel the huge breast heave, she felt the vast face turn hot, she was conscious of a voice struggling back to life, and she heard it say at last:

"Gatd'en'ale, rosemary tea cures a cough, but nothing cures the love--ah bah, so it goes!"

"Do you love Jean?" whispered Guida, not showing her face, but longing to hear the experience of another who suffered that joy called love.

Maitresse Aimable's face grew hotter; she did not speak, but patted Guida's back with her heavy hand and nodded complacently.

"Have you always loved him?" asked Guida again, with an eager inquisition, akin to that of a wayside sinner turned chapel-going saint, hungry to hear what chanced to others when treading the primrose path.

Maitresse Aimable again nodded, and her arm drew closer about Guida. There was a slight pause, then came an unsophisticated question:

"Has Jean always loved you?"

A short silence, and then the voice said with the deliberate prudence of an unwilling witness:

"It is not the man who wears the wedding-ring." Then, as if she had been disloyal in even suggesting that Jean might hold her lightly, she added, almost eagerly--an enthusiasm tempered by the pathos of a half-truth:

"But my Jean always sleeps at home."

This larger excursion into speech gave her courage, and she said more; and even as Guida listened hungrily--so soon had come upon her the apprehensions and wavering moods of loving woman!--she was wondering to hear this creature, considered so dull by all, speak as though out of a watchful and capable mind. What further Maitresse Aimable said was proof that if she knew little and spake little, she knew that little well; and if she had gathered meagrely from life, she had at least winnowed out some small handfuls of grain from the straw and chaff. At last her sagacity impelled her to say:

"If a man's eyes won't see, elder-water can't make him; if he will--ah bah, glad and good!" Both arms went round Guida, and hugged her awkwardly.

Her voice came up but once more that morning. As she left Guida in the doorway, she said with a last effort:

"I will have one bead to pray for you, trejous." She showed her rosary, and, Huguenot though she was, Guida touched the bead reverently. "And if there is war, I will have two beads, trejous. A bi'tot--good-bye!"

Guida stood watching her from the doorway, and the last words of the fisher-wife kept repeating themselves through her brain: "And if there is war, I will have two beads, trejous."

So, Maitresse Aimable knew she loved Philip! How strange it was that one should read so truly without words spoken, or through seeing acts which reveal. She herself seemed to read Maitresse Aimable all at once--read her by virtue, and in the light, of true love, the primitive and consuming feeling in the breast of each for a man. Were not words necessary for speech after all? But here she stopped short suddenly; for if love might find and read love, why was it she needed speech of Philip? Why was it her spirit kept beating up against the hedge beyond which his inner self was, and, unable to see that beyond, needed reassurance by words, by promises and protestations?

All at once she was angry with herself for thinking thus concerning Philip. Of course Philip loved her deeply. Had she not seen the light of true love in his eyes, and felt the arms of love about her? Suddenly she shuddered and grew bitter, and a strange rebellion broke loose in her. Why had Philip failed to keep his promise not to see her again after the marriage, till he should return from Portsmouth? It was selfish, painfully, terribly selfish of him. Why, even though she had been foolish in her request--why had he not done as she wished? Was that love--was it love to break the first promise he had ever made to his wife?

Yet she excused him to herself. Men were different from women, and men did not understand what troubled a woman's heart and spirit; they were not shaken by the same gusts of emotion; they--they were not so fine; they did not think so deeply on what a woman, when she loves, thinks always, and acts upon according to her thought. If Philip were only here

to resolve these fears, these perplexities, to quiet the storm in her! And yet, could he--could he? For now she felt that this storm was rooting up something very deep and radical in her. It frightened her, but for the moment she fought it passionately.

She went into her garden; and here among her animals and her flowers it seemed easier to be gay of heart; and she laughed a little, and was most tender and pretty with her grandfather when he came home from spending the afternoon with the Chevalier.

In this manner the first day of her marriage passed--in happy reminiscence and in vague foreboding; in affection yet in reproach as the secret wife; and still as the loving, distracted girl, frightened at her own bitterness, but knowing it to be justified.

The late evening was spent in gaiety with her grandfather and the Chevalier; but at night when she went to bed she could not sleep. She tossed from side to side; a hundred thoughts came and went. She grew feverish, her breath choked her, and she got up and opened the window. It was clear, bright moonlight, and from where she was she could see the mielles and the ocean and the star-sown sky above and beyond. There she sat and thought and thought till morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

At precisely the same moment in the morning two boats set sail from the south coast of Jersey: one from Grouville Bay, and one from the harbour of St. Heliers. Both were bound for the same point; but the first was to sail round the east coast of the island, and the second round the west coast.

The boat leaving Grouville Bay would have on her right the Ecrehos and the coast of France, with the Dirouilles in her course; the other would have the wide Atlantic on her left, and the Paternosters in her course. The two converging lines should meet at the island of Sark.

The boat leaving Grouville Bay was a yacht carrying twelve swivel-guns, bringing Admiralty despatches to the Channel Islands. The boat leaving St. Heliers harbour was a new yawl-rigged craft owned by Jean Touzel. It was the fruit of ten years' labour, and he called her the Hardi Biaou, which, in plain English, means "very beautiful." This was the third time she had sailed under Jean's hand. She carried two carronades, for war with France was in the air, and it was Jean's whim to make a show of preparation, for, as he said: "If the war-dogs come, my pups can bark too. If they don't, why, glad and good, the Hardi Biaou is big enough to hold the cough-drops."

The business of the yacht Dorset was important that was why so small a boat was sent on the Admiralty's affairs. Had she been a sloop she might have attracted the attention of a French frigate or privateer wandering

the seas in the interests of Vive la Nation! The business of the yawl was quite unimportant. Jean Touzel was going to Sark with kegs of wine and tobacco for the seigneur, and to bring over whatever small cargo might be waiting for Jersey. The yacht Dorset had aboard her the Reverend Lorenzo Dow, an old friend of her commander. He was to be dropped at Sark, and was to come back with Jean Touzel in the Hardi Biaou, the matter having been arranged the evening before in the Vier Marchi. The saucy yawl had aboard Maitresse Aimable, Guida, and a lad to assist Jean in working the sails. Guida counted as one of the crew, for there was little in the handling of a boat she did not know.

As the Hardi Biaou was leaving the harbour of St. Heliers, Jean told Guida that Mr. Dow was to join them on the return journey. She had a thrill of excitement, for this man was privy to her secret, he was connected with her life history. But before the little boat passed St. Brelade's Bay she was lost in other thoughts: in picturing Philip on the Narcissus, in inwardly conning the ambitious designs of his career. What he might yet be, who could tell? She had read more than a little of the doings of great naval commanders, both French and British. She knew how simple midshipmen had sometimes become admirals, and afterwards peers of the realm.

Suddenly a new thought came to her. Suppose that Philip should rise to high places, would she be able to follow? What had she seen--what did she know--what social opportunities had been hers? How would she fit with an exalted station?

Yet Philip had said that she could take her place anywhere with grace and dignity; and surely Philip knew. If she were gauche or crude in manners, he would not have cared for her; if she were not intelligent, he would scarcely have loved her. Of course she had read French and English to some purpose; she could speak Spanish--her grandfather had taught her that; she understood Italian fairly--she had read it aloud on Sunday evenings with the Chevalier. Then there were Corneille, Shakespeare, Petrarch, Cervantes--she had read them all; and even Wace, the old Norman trouvere, whose Roman de Rou she knew almost by heart. Was she so very ignorant?

There was only one thing to do: she must interest herself in what interested Philip; she must read what he read; she must study naval history; she must learn every little thing about a ship of war. Then Philip would be able to talk with her of all he did at sea, and she would understand.

When, a few days ago, she had said to him that she did not know how she was going to be all that his wife ought to be, he had answered her: "All I ask is that you be your own sweet self, for it is just you that I want, you with your own thoughts and imaginings, and not a Guida who has dropped her own way of looking at things to take on some one else's--even mine. It's the people who try to be clever who never are; the people who are clever never think of trying to be."

Was Philip right? Was she really, in some way, a little bit clever? She

would like to believe so, for then she would be a better companion for him. After all, how little she knew of Philip--now, why did that thought always come up! It made her shudder. They two would really have to begin with the A B C of understanding. To understand was a passion, it was breathing and life to her. She would never, could never, be satisfied with skimming the surface of life as the gulls out there skimmed the water. . . . Ah, how beautiful the morning was, and how the bracing air soothed her feverishness! All this sky, and light, and uplifting sea were hers, they fed her with their strength--they were all so companionable.

Since Philip had gone--and that was but four days ago--she had sat down a dozen times to write to him, but each time found she could not. She, drew back from it because she wanted to empty out her heart, and yet, somehow, she dared not. She wanted to tell Philip all the feelings that possessed her; but how dared she write just what she felt: love and bitterness, joy and indignation, exaltation and disappointment, all in one? How was it these could all exist in a woman's heart at once? Was it because Love was greater than all, deeper than all, overcame all, forgave all? and was that what women felt and did always? Was that their lot, their destiny? Must they begin in blind faith, then be plunged into the darkness of disillusion, shaken by the storm of emotion, taste the sting in the fruit of the tree of knowledge--and go on again the same, yet not the same?

More or less incoherently these thoughts flitted through Guida's mind. As yet her experiences were too new for her to fasten securely upon their meaning. In a day or two she would write to Philip freely and warmly of her love and of her hopes; for, maybe, by that time nothing but happiness would be left in the caldron of feeling. There was a packet going to England in three days--yes, she would wait for that. And Philip--alas! a letter from him could not reach her for at least a fortnight yet; and then in another month after that he would be with her, and she would be able to tell the whole world that she was the wife of Captain Philip d'Avranche, of the good ship Araminta--for that he was to be when he came again.

She was not sad now, indeed she was almost happy, for her thoughts had brought her so close to Philip that she could feel his blue eyes looking at her, the strong clasp of his hand. She could almost touch the brown hair waving back carelessly from the forehead, untouched by powder, in the fashion of the time; and she could hear his cheery laugh quite plainly, so complete was the illusion.

St. Ouen's Bay, l'Etacq, Plemont, dropped behind them as they sailed. They drew on to where the rocks of the Paternosters foamed to the unquiet sea. Far over between the Nez du Guet and the sprawling granite pack of the Dirouilles, was the Admiralty yacht winging to the nor'-west. Beyond it again lay the coast of France, the tall white cliffs, the dark blue smoky curve ending in Cap de la Hague.

To-day there was something new in this picture of the coast of France. Against the far-off sands were some little black spots, seemingly no

bigger than a man's hand. Again and again Jean Touzel had eyed these moving specks with serious interest; and Maitresse Aimable eyed Jean, for Jean never looked so often at anything without good reason. If, perchance, he looked three times at her consecutively, she gaped with expectation, hoping that he would tell her that her face was not so red to-day as usual--a mark of rare affection.

At last Guida noticed Jean's look. "What is it that you see, Maitre Jean?" she said.

"Little black wasps, I think, ma'm'selle-little black wasps that sting."

Guida did not understand.

Jean gave a curious cackle, and continued: "Ah, those wasps--they have a sting so nasty!" He paused an instant, then he added in a lower voice, and not quite so gaily: "Yon is the way that war begins."

Guida's fingers suddenly clinched rigidly upon the tiller. "War? Do--do you think that's a French fleet, Maitre Jean?"

"Steadee--steadee-keep her head up, ma'm'selle," he answered, for Guida had steered unsteadily for the instant. "Steadee--shale ben! that's right--I remember twenty years ago the black wasps they fly on the coast of France like that. Who can tell now?" He shrugged his shoulders. "P'rhaps they are coum out to play, but see you, when there is trouble in the nest it is my notion that wasps come out to sting. Look at France now, they all fight each other there, ma fuifre! When folks begin to slap faces at home, look out when they get into the street. That is when the devil have a grand fete."

Guida's face grew paler as he spoke. The eyes of Maitresse Aimable were fixed on her now, and unconsciously the ponderous good-wife felt in that warehouse she called her pocket for her rosary. An extra bead was there for Guida, and one for another than Guida. But Maltresse Aimable did more: she dived into the well of silence for her voice; and for the first time in her life she showed anger with Jean. As her voice came forth she coloured, her cheeks expanded, and the words sallied out in puffs:

"Nannin, Jean, you smell shark when it is but herring. You cry wasp when the critchett sing. I will believe war when I see the splinters fly--me!"

Jean looked at his wife in astonishment. That was the longest speech he had ever heard her make. It was also the first time that her rasp of criticism had ever been applied to him, and with such asperity too. He could not make it out. He looked from his wife to Guida; then, suddenly arrested by the look in her face, he scratched his shaggy head in despair, and moved about in his seat.

"Sit you still, Jean," said his wife sharply; "you're like peas on a hot griddle."

This confused Jean beyond recovery, for never in his life had Aimable spoken to him like that. He saw there was something wrong, and he did not know whether to speak or hold his tongue; or, as he said to himself, he "didn't know which eye to wink." He adjusted his spectacles, and, pulling himself together, muttered: "Smoke of thunder, what's all this?"

Guida wasn't a wisp of quality to shiver with terror at the mere mention of war with France; but ba su, thought Jean, there was now in her face a sharp, fixed look of pain, in her eyes a bewildered anxiety.

Jean scratched his head still more. Nothing particular came of that. There was no good trying to work the thing out suddenly, he wasn't clever enough. Then out of an habitual good-nature he tried to bring better weather fore and aft.

"Eh ben," said he, "in the dark you can't tell a wasp from a honey-bee till he lights on you; and that's too far off there"--he jerked a finger towards the French shore--"to be certain sure. But if the wasp nip, you make him pay for it, the head and the tail--yes, I think -me. . . . There's the Eperquerie," he added quickly, nodding in front of him.

The island of Sark lifted a green bosom above her perpendicular cliffs, with the pride of an affluent mother among her brood. Dowered by sun and softened by a delicate haze like an exquisite veil of modesty, this youngest daughter of the isles clustered with her kinsfolk in the emerald archipelago between the great seas.

The outlines of the coast grew plainer as the Hardi Biaou drew nearer and nearer. From end to end there was no harbour upon this southern side. There was no roadway, as it seemed no pathway at all up the overhanging cliffs-ridges of granite and grey and green rock, belted with mist, crowned by sun, and fretted by the milky, upcasting surf. Little islands, like outworks before it, crouched slumberously to the sea, as a dog lays its head in its paws and hugs the ground close, with vague, soft-blinking eyes.

By the shore the air was white with sea-gulls flying and circling, rising and descending, shooting up straight into the air; their bodies smooth and long like the body of a babe in white samite, their feathering tails spread like a fan, their wings expanding on the ambient air. In the tall cliffs were the nests of dried seaweed, fastened to the edge of a rocky bracket on lofty ledges, the little ones within piping to the little ones without. Every point of rock had its sentinel gull, looking-looking out to sea like some watchful defender of a mystic city. Piercing might be the cries of pain or of joy from the earth, more piercing were their cries; dark and dreadful might be the woe of those who went down to the sea in ships, but they shrilled on unheeding, their yellow beaks still yellowing in the sun, keeping their everlasting watch and ward.

Now and again other birds, dark, quick-winged, low-flying, shot in among the white companies of sea-gulls, stretching their long necks, and turning their swift, cowardly eyes here and there, the cruel beak extended, the body gorged with carrion. Black marauders among blithe

birds of peace and joy, they watched like sable spirits near the nests, or on some near sea rocks, sombre and alone, blinked evilly at the tall bright cliffs and the lightsome legions nestling there.

These swart loiterers by the happy nests of the young were like spirits of fate who might not destroy, who had no power to harm the living, yet who could not be driven forth: the ever-present death-heads at the feast, the impressive acolytes by the altars of destiny.

As the Hardi Biaou drew near the lofty, inviolate cliffs, there opened up sombre clefts and caverns, honeycombing the island at all points of the compass. She slipped past rugged pinnacles, like buttresses to the island, here trailed with vines, valanced with shrubs of unnameable beauty, and yonder shrivelled and bare like the skin of an elephant.

Some rocks, indeed, were like vast animals round which molten granite had been poured, preserving them eternally. The heads of great dogs, like the dogs of Ossian, sprang out in profile from the repulsing mainland; stupendous gargoyles grinned at them from dark points of excoriated cliff. Farther off, the face of a battered sphinx stared with unheeding look into the vast sea and sky beyond. From the dark depths of mystic crypts came groanings, like the roaring of lions penned beside the caves of martyrs.

Jean had startled Guida with his suggestions of war between England and France. Though she longed to have Philip win glory in some great battle, yet her first natural thought was of danger to the man she loved--and the chance too of his not coming back to her from Portsmouth. But now as she looked at this scene before her, there came again to her face the old charm of blitheness. The tides of temperament in her were fast to flow and quick to ebb. The reaction from pain was in proportion to her splendid natural health.

Her lips smiled. For what can long depress the youthful and the loving when they dream that they are entirely beloved? Lands and thrones may perish, plague and devastation walk abroad with death, misery and beggary crawl naked to the doorway, and crime cower in the hedges; but to the egregious egotism of young love there are only two identities bulking in the crowded universe. To these immensities all other beings are audacious who dream of being even comfortable and obscure--happiness would be a presumption; as though Fate intended each living human being at some one moment to have the whole world to himself. And who shall cry out against that egotism with which all are diseased?

So busy was Guida with her own thoughts that she scarcely noticed they had changed their course, and were skirting the coast westerly, whereby to reach Havre Gosselin on the other side of the island. There on the shore above lay the seigneurie, the destination of the Hardi Biaou.

As they passed the western point of the island, and made their course easterly by a channel between rocky bulwarks opening Havre Gosselin, they suddenly saw a brig rounding the Eperquerie. She was making to the south-east under full sail. Her main and mizzen masts were not visible,

and her colours could not be seen, but Jean's quick eye had lighted on something which made him cast apprehensive glances at his wife and Guida. There was a gun in the stern port-hole of the vanishing brig; and he also noted that it was run out for action.

His swift glance at his wife and Guida assured him that they had not noticed the gun.

Jean's brain began working with unusual celerity. He was certain that the brig was a French sloop or a privateer. In other circumstances, that in itself might not have given him much trouble of mind, for more than once French frigates had sailed round the Channel Isles in insulting strength and mockery; but at this moment every man knew that France and England were only waiting to see who should throw the ball first and set the red game going. Twenty French frigates could do little harm to the island of Sark; a hundred men could keep off an army and navy there; but Jean knew that the Admiralty yacht Dorset was sailing at this moment within half a league of the Eperquerie. He would stake his life that the brig was French and hostile and knew it also. At all costs he must follow and learn the fate of the yacht.

If he landed at Havre Gosselin and crossed the island on foot, whatever was to happen would be over and done, and that did not suit the book of Jean Touzel. More than once he had seen a little fighting, and more than once shared in it. If there was to be a fight--he looked affectionately at his carronades--then he wanted to be within seeing or striking distance.

Instead of running into Havre Gosselin, he set for the Bec du Nez, the eastern point of the island. His object was to land upon the rocks of the Eperquerie, where the women would be safe whatever befell. The tide was running strong round the point, and the surf was heavy, so that once or twice the boat was almost overturned; but Jean had measured well the currents and the wind.

This was one of the most exciting moments in his life, for, as they rounded the Bec du Nez, there was the Dorset going about to make for Guernsey, and the brig, under full sail, bearing down upon her. Even as they rounded the point, up ran the tricolour to the brig's mizzen-mast, and the militant shouts of the French sailors came over the water.

Too late had the little yacht with her handful of guns seen the danger and gone about. The wind was fair for her; but it was as fair for the brig, able to outsail her twice over. As the Hardi Biaou neared the landing-place of the Eperquerie, a gun was fired from the privateer across the bows of the Dorset, and Guida realised what was happening.

As they landed another shot was fired, then came a broadside. Guida put her hands before her eyes, and when she looked again the main-mast of the yacht was gone. And now from the heights of Sark above there rang out a cry from the lips of the affrighted islanders: "War--war--war--war!"

Guida sank down upon the rock, and her face dropped into her hands. She

trembled violently. Somehow all at once, and for the first time in her life, there was borne in upon her a feeling of awful desolation and loneliness. She was alone--she was alone--she was alone that was the refrain of her thoughts.

The cry of war rang along the cliff tops; and war would take Philip from her. Perhaps she would never see him again. The horror of it, the pity of it, the peril of it.

Shot after shot the twelve-pounders of the Frenchman drove like dun hail at the white timbers of the yacht, and her masts and spars were flying. The privateer now came drawing down to where she lay lurching.

A hand touched Guida upon the shoulder. "Cheer thee, my dee-ar," said Maitresse Aimable's voice. Below, Jean Touzel had eyes only for this sea-fight before him, for, despite the enormous difference, the Englishmen were now fighting their little craft for all that she was capable. But the odds were terribly against her, though she had the windward side, and the firing of the privateer was bad. The carronades on her flush decks were replying valiantly to the twelve-pounders of the brig. At last a chance shot carried away her mizzenmast, and another dismounted her single great gun, killing a number of men. The carronades, good for only a few discharges, soon left her to the fury of her assailant, and presently the Dorset was no better than a battered raisin-box. Her commander had destroyed his despatches, and nothing remained now but to be sunk or surrender.

In not more than twenty minutes from the time the first shot was fired, the commander and his brave little crew yielded to the foe, and the Dorset's flag was hauled down.

When her officers and men were transferred to the Frenchman, her one passenger and guest, the Rev. Lorenzo Dow, passed calmly from the gallant little wreck to the deck of the privateer, with a finger between the leaves of his book of meditations. With as much equanimity as he would have breakfasted with a bishop, made breaches of the rubric, or drunk from a sailor's black-jack, he went calmly into captivity in France, giving no thought to what he left behind; quite heedless that his going would affect for good or ill the destiny of the young wife of Philip d'Avranche.

Guida watched the yacht go down, and the brig bear away towards France where those black wasps of war were as motes against the white sands. Then she remembered that there had gone with it one of the three people in the world who knew her secret, the man who had married her to Philip. She shivered a little, she scarcely knew why, for it did not then seem of consequence to her whether Mr. Dow went or stayed, though he had never given her the marriage certificate. Indeed, was it not better he should go? Thereby one less would know her secret. But still an undefined fear possessed her.

"Cheer thee, cheer thee, my dee-ar, my sweet dormitte," said Maitresse Aimable, patting her shoulder. "It cannot harm thee, ba su! 'Tis but a

flash in the pan."

Guida's first impulse was to throw herself into the arms of the slow-tongued, great-hearted woman who hung above her like a cloud of mercy, and tell her whole story. But no, she would keep her word to Philip, till Philip came again. Her love--the love of the young, lonely wife, must be buried deep in her own heart until he appeared and gave her the right to speak.

Jean was calling to them. They rose to go. Guida looked about her. Was it all a dream-all that had happened to her, and around her? The world was sweet to look upon, and yet was it true that here before her eyes there had been war, and that out of war peril must come to her.

A week ago she was free as air, happy as healthy body, truthful mind, simple nature, and tender love can make a human being. She was then only a young, young girl. To-day-she sighed.

Long after they put out to sea again she could still hear the affrighted cry of the peasants from the cliff-or was it only the plaintive echo of her own thoughts?

"War--war--war--war!"

IN FRANCE--NEAR FIVE MONTHS AFTER

CHAPTER XIX

"A moment, monsieur le duc."

The Duke turned at the door, and looked with listless inquiry into the face of the Minister of Marine, who, picking up an official paper from his table, ran an eye down it, marked a point with the sharp corner of his snuff-box, and handed it over to his visitor, saying:

"Our roster of English prisoners taken in the action off Brest."

The Duke, puzzled, lifted his glass and scanned the roll mechanically.

"No, no, Duke, just where I have marked," interposed the Minister.

"My dear Monsieur Dalbarade," remarked the Duke a little querulously, "I do not see what interest--"

He stopped short, however, looked closer at the document, and then lowering it in a sort of amazement, seemed about to speak; but, instead, raised the paper again and fixed his eyes intently on the spot indicated by the Minister.

"Most curious," he said after a moment, making little nods of his head

towards Dalbarade; "my own name--and an English prisoner, you say?"

"Precisely so; and he gave our fellows some hard knocks before his frigate went on the reefs."

"Strange that the name should be my own. I never heard of an English branch of our family."

A quizzical smile passed over the face of the Minister, adding to his visitor's mystification. "But suppose he were English, yet French too?" he rejoined.

"I fail to understand the entanglement," answered the Duke stiffly.

"He is an Englishman whose name and native language are French--he speaks as good French as your own."

The Duke peevishly tapped a chair with his stick. "I am no reader of riddles, monsieur," he said acidly, although eager to know more concerning this Englishman of the same name as himself, ruler of the sovereign duchy of Bercy.

"Shall I bid him enter, Prince?" asked the Minister. The Duke's face relaxed a little, for the truth was, at this moment of his long life he was deeply concerned with his own name and all who bore it.

"Is he here then?" he asked, nodding assent.

"In the next room," answered the Minister, turning to a bell and ringing. "I have him here for examination, and was but beginning when I was honoured by your Highness's presence." He bowed politely, yet there was, too, a little mockery in the bow, which did not escape the Duke. These were days when princes received but little respect in France.

A subaltern entered, received an order, and disappeared. The Duke withdrew to the embrasure of a window, and immediately the prisoner was gruffly announced.

The young Englishman stood quietly waiting, his quick eyes going from Dalbarade to the wizened figure by the window, and back again to the Minister. His look carried both calmness and defiance, but the defiance came only from a sense of injury and unmerited disgrace.

"Monsieur," said the Minister with austerity, "in your further examination we shall need to repeat some questions."

The prisoner nodded indifferently, and for a brief space there was silence. The Duke stood by the window, the Minister by his table, the prisoner near the door. Suddenly the prisoner, with an abrupt motion of the hand towards two chairs, said with an assumption of ordinary politeness:

"Will you not be seated?"

The remark was so odd in its coolness and effrontery, that the Duke chuckled audibly. The Minister was completely taken aback. He glanced stupidly at the two chairs--the only ones in the room--and at the prisoner. Then the insolence of the thing began to work upon him, and he was about to burst forth, when the Duke came forward, and politely moving a chair near to the young commander, said:

"My distinguished compliments, monsieur le capitaine. I pray you accept this chair."

With quiet self-possession and a matter-of-course air the prisoner bowed politely, and seated himself, then with a motion of the hand backward towards the door, said to the Duke: "I've been standing five hours with some of those moutons in the ante-room. My profound thanks to monseigneur."

Touching the angry Minister on the arm, the Duke said quietly:

"Dear monsieur, will you permit me a few questions to the prisoner?"

At that instant there came a tap at the door, and an orderly entered with a letter to the Minister, who glanced at it hurriedly, then turned to the prisoner and the Duke, as though in doubt what to do.

"I will be responsible for the prisoner, if you must leave us," said the Duke at once.

"For a little, for a little--a matter of moment with the Minister of War," answered Dalbarade, nodding, and with an air of abstraction left the room.

The Duke withdrew to the window again, and seated himself in the embrasure, at some little distance from the Englishman, who at once got up and brought his chair closer. The warm sunlight of spring, streaming through the window, was now upon his pale face, and strengthened it, giving it fulness and the eye fire.

"How long have you been a prisoner, monsieur?" asked the Duke, at the same time acknowledging the other's politeness with a bow.

"Since March, monseigneur."

"Monseigneur again--a man of judgment," said the Duke to himself, pleased to have his exalted station recognised. "H'm, and it is now June--four months, monsieur. You have been well used, monsieur?"

"Vilely, monseigneur," answered the other; "a shipwrecked enemy should never be made prisoner, or at least he should be enlarged on parole; but I have been confined like a pirate in a sink of a jail."

"Of what country are you?"

Raising his eyebrows in amazement the young man answered:

"I am an Englishman, monseigneur."

"Monsieur is of England, then?"

"Monseigneur, I am an English officer."

"You speak French well, monsieur."

"Which serves me well in France, as you see, monseigneur."

The Duke was a trifle nettled. "Where were you born, monsieur?"

There was a short pause, and then the prisoner, who had enjoyed the other's perplexity, said:

"On the Isle of Jersey, monseigneur."

The petulant look passed immediately from the face of the Duke; the horizon was clear at once.

"Ah, then, you are French, monsieur!"

"My flag is the English flag; I was born a British subject, and I shall die one," answered the other steadily.

"The sentiment sounds estimable," answered the Duke; "but as for life and death, and what we are or what we may be, we are the sport of Fate." His brow clouded. "I myself was born under a monarchy; I shall probably die under a Republic. I was born a Frenchman; I may die--"

His tone had become low and cynical, and he broke off suddenly, as though he had said more than he meant. "Then you are a Norman, monsieur," he added in a louder tone.

"Once all Jerseymen were Normans, and so were many Englishmen, monseigneur."

"I come of Norman stock too, monsieur," remarked the Duke graciously, yet eyeing the young man keenly.

"Monseigneur has not the kindred advantage of being English?" added the prisoner dryly.

The Duke protested with a deprecatory wave of the fingers and a flash of the sharp eyes, and then, after a slight pause, said: "What is your name, monsieur?"

"Philip d'Avranche," was the brief reply; then with droll impudence: "And monseigneur's, by monseigneur's leave?"

The Duke smiled, and that smile relieved the sourness, the fret of a face

which had care and discontent written upon every line of it. It was a face that had never known happiness. It had known diversion, however, and unusual diversion it knew at this moment.

"My name," he answered with a penetrating quizzical look, "--my name is Philip d'Avranche."

The young man's quick, watchful eyes fixed themselves like needles on the Duke's face. Through his brain there ran a succession of queries and speculations, and dominating them all one clear question-was he to gain anything by this strange conversation? Who was this great man with a name the same as his own, this crabbed nobleman with skin as yellow as an orange, and body like an orange squeezed dry? He surely meant him no harm, however, for flashes of kindliness had lighted the shrivelled face as he talked. His look was bent in piercing comment upon Philip, who, trying hard to solve the mystery, now made a tentative rejoinder to his strange statement. Rising from his chair and bowing, he said, with shrewd foreknowledge of the effect of his words:

"I had not before thought my own name of such consequence."

The old man grunted amiably. "My faith, the very name begets a towering conceit wherever it goes," he answered, and he brought his stick down on the floor with such vehemence that the emerald and ruby rings rattled on his shrunken fingers.

"Be seated--cousin," he said with dry compliment, for Philip had remained standing, as if with the unfeigned respect of a cadet in the august presence of the head of his house. It was a sudden and bold suggestion, and it was not lost on the Duke. The aged nobleman was too keen an observer not to see the designed flattery, but he was in a mood when flattery was palatable, seeing that many of his own class were arrayed against him for not having joined the army of the Vendee; and that the Revolutionists, with whom he had compromised, for the safety of his lands of d'Avranche and his duchy of Bercy, regarded him with suspicion. Between the two, the old man--at heart most profoundly a Royalist--bided his time, in some peril but with no fear. The spirit of this young Englishman of his own name pleased him; the flattery, patent as it was, gratified him, for in revolutionary France few treated him with deference now. Even the Minister of Marine, with whom he was on good terms, called him "citizen" at times.

All at once it flashed on the younger man that this must be the Prince d'Avranche, Duc de Bercy, of that family of d'Avranche from which his own came in long descent--even from the days of Rollo, Duke of Normandy. He recalled on the instant the token of fealty of the ancient House of d'Avranche--the offering of a sword.

"Your Serene Highness," he said with great deference and as great tact, "I must first offer my homage to the Prince d'Avranche, Duc de Bercy--" Then with a sudden pause, and a whimsical look, he added: "But, indeed, I had forgotten, they have taken away my sword!"

"We shall see," answered the Prince, well pleased, "we shall see about that sword. Be seated." Then, after a short pause: "Tell me now, monsieur, of your family, of your ancestry."

His eyes were bent on Philip with great intentness, and his thin lips tightened in some unaccountable agitation.

Philip instantly responded. He explained how in the early part of the thirteenth century, after the great crusade against the Albigenses, a cadet of the house of d'Avranche had emigrated to England, and had come to place and honour under Henry III, who gave to the son of this d'Avranche certain tracts of land in Jersey, where he settled. Philip was descended in a direct line from this same receiver of king's favours, and was now the only representative of his family.

While Philip spoke the Duke never took eyes from his face--that face so facile in the display of feeling or emotion. The voice also had a lilt of health and vitality which rang on the ears of age pleasantly. As he listened he thought of his eldest son, partly imbecile, all but a lusus naturae, separated from his wife immediately after marriage, through whom there could never be succession--he thought of him, and for the millionth time in his life winced in impotent disdain. He thought too of his beloved second son, lying in a soldier's grave in Macedonia; of the buoyant resonance of that by-gone voice, of the soldierly good spirits like to the good spirits of the prisoner before him, and "his heart yearned towards the young man exceedingly." If that second son had but lived there would be now no compromising with this Republican Government of France; he would be fighting for the white flag with the golden lilies over in the Vendee.

"Your ancestors were mine, then," remarked the Duke gravely, after a pause, "though I had not heard of that emigration to England. However --however! Come, tell me of the engagement in which you lost your ship," he added hurriedly in a low tone. He was now so intent that he did not stir in his seat, but sat rigidly still, regarding Philip kindly.
Something in the last few moments' experience had loosened the puckered skin, softened the crabbed look in the face, and Philip had no longer doubt of his friendly intentions.

"I had the frigate Araminta, twenty-four guns, a fortnight out from Portsmouth," responded Philip at once. "We fell in with a French frigate, thirty guns. She was well to leeward of us, and the Araminta bore up under all sail, keen for action. The Frenchman was as ready as ourselves for a brush, and tried to get the weather of us, but, failing, she shortened sail and gallantly waited for us. The Araminta overhauled her on the weather quarter, and hailed. She responded with cheers and defiance--as sturdy a foe as man could wish. We lost no time in getting to work, and, both running before the wind, we fired broadsides as we cracked on. It was tit-for-tat for a while with splinters flying and neither of us in the eye of advantage, but at last the Araminta shot away the main-mast and wheel of the Niobe, and she wallowed like a tub in the trough of the sea. We bore down on her, and our carronades raked her like a comb. Then we fell thwart her hawse, and tore her up through her

bowline-ports with a couple of thirty-two-pounders. But before we could board her she veered, lurched, and fell upon us, carrying away our foremast. We cut clear of the tangle, and were making once more to board her, when I saw to windward two French frigates bearing down on us under full sail. And then--"

The Prince exclaimed in surprise: "I had not heard of this," he said. "They did not tell the world of those odds against you."

"Odds and to spare, monsieur le due! We had had all we could manage in the Niobe, though she was now disabled, and we could hurt her no more. If the others came up on our weather we should be chewed like a bone in a mastiff's jaws. If she must fight again, the Araminta would be little fit for action till we cleared away the wreckage; so I sheered off to make all sail. We ran under courses with what canvas we had, and got away with a fair breeze and a good squall whitening to windward, while our decks were cleared for action again. The guns on the main-deck had done good service and kept their places. On the quarter-deck and fo'castle there was more amiss, but as I watched the frigates overhauling us I took heart of grace still. There was the creaking and screaming of the carronade-slides, the rattling of the carriages of the long twelve-pounders amidships as they were shotted and run out again, the thud of the carpenters' hammers as the shot-holes were plugged--good sounds in the ears of a fighter--"

"Of a d'Avranche--of a d'Avranche!" interposed the Prince.

"We were in no bad way, and my men were ready for another brush with our enemies, everything being done that could be done, everything in its place," continued Philip. "When the frigates were a fair gunshot off, I saw that the squall was overhauling us faster than they. This meant good fortune if we wished escape, bad luck if we would rather fight. But I had no time to think of that, for up comes Shoreham, my lieutenant, with a face all white. 'For God's sake, sir,' says he, 'shoal water-shoal water! We're ashore.' So much, monsieur le prince, for Admiralty charts and soundings! It's a hateful thing to see--the light green water, the deadly sissing of the straight narrow ripple like the grooves of a wash-board: and a ship's length ahead the water breaking over the reefs, two frigates behind ready to eat us.

"Up we came to the wind, the sheets were let run, and away flew the halyards. All to no purpose, for a minute later we came broadside on the reef, and were gored on a pinnacle of rock. The end wasn't long in coming. The Araminta lurched off the reef on the swell. We watched our chance as she rolled, and hove overboard our broadside of long twelve-pounders. But it was no use. The swishing of the water as it spouted from the scuppers was a deal louder than the clang of the chain-pumps. It didn't last long. The gale spilled itself upon us, and the Araminta, sick and spent, slowly settled down. The last I saw of her"--Philip raised his voice as though he would hide what he felt behind an unsentimental loudness--"was the white pennant at the main-top gallant masthead. A little while, and then I didn't see it, and--and so good-bye to my first command! Then"--he smiled ironically--"then I was made

prisoner by the French frigates, and have been closely confined ever since, against every decent principle of warfare. And now here I am, monsieur le duc."

The Duke had listened with an immovable attention, the grey eyebrows twitching now and then, the arid face betraying a grim enjoyment. When Philip had finished, he still sat looking at him with steady slow-blinking eyes, as though unwilling to break the spell the tale had thrown round him. But an inquisition in the look, a slight cocking of the head as though weighing important things, the ringed fingers softly drumming on the stick before him--all these told Philip that something was at stake concerning himself.

The Duke seemed about to speak, when the door of the room opened and the Minister of Marine entered. The Duke, rising and courteously laying a hand on his arm, drew him over to the window, and engaged him in whispered conversation, of which the subject seemed unwelcome to the Minister, for now and then he interrupted sharply.

As the two stood fretfully debating, the door of the room again opened. There appeared an athletic, adventurous-looking officer in brilliant uniform who was smiling at something called after him from the antechamber. His blue coat was spick and span and very gay with double embroidery at the collar, coat-tails, and pockets. His white waistcoat and trousers were spotless; his netted sash of blue with its stars on the silver tassels had a look of studied elegance. The black three-cornered hat, broidered with gold, and adorned with three ostrich tips of red and a white and blue aigrette, was, however, the glory of his bravery. He seemed young to be a General of Division, for such his double embroideries and aigrette proclaimed him.

He glanced at Philip, and replied to his salute with a half-quizzical smile on his proud and forceful face. "Dalbarade, Dalbarade," said he to the Minister, "I have but an hour--ah, monsieur le prince!" he added suddenly, as the latter came hurriedly towards him, and, grasping his hand warmly, drew him over to Dalbarade at the window. Philip now knew beyond doubt that he was the subject of debate, for all the time that the Duke in a low tone, half cordial, half querulous, spoke to the new-comer, the latter let his eyes wander curiously towards Philip. That he was an officer of great importance was to be seen from the deference paid him by Dalbarade.

All at once he made a polite gesture towards the Duke, and, facing the Minister, said in a cavalier-like tone, and with a touch of patronage: "Yes, yes, Dalbarade; it is of no consequence, and I myself will be surety for both." Then turning to the nobleman, he added: "We are beginning to square accounts, Duke. Last time we met I had a large favour of you, and to-day you have a small favour of me. Pray introduce your kinsman here, before you take him with you," and he turned squarely towards Philip.

Philip could scarcely believe his ears. The Duke’s kinsman! Had the Duke then got his release on the ground that they were of kin--a kinship

which, even to be authentic, must go back seven centuries for proof?

Yet here he was being introduced to the revolutionary general as "my kinsman of the isles of Normandy." Here, too, was the same General Grandjon-Larisse applauding him on his rare fortune to be thus released on parole through the Duc de Bercy, and quoting with a laugh, half sneer and half raillery, the old Norman proverb: "A Norman dead a thousand years cries Haro! Haro! if you tread on his grave."

So saying, he saluted the Duke with a liberal flourish of the hand and a friendly bow, and turned away to Dalbarade.

A half-hour later Philip was outside with the Duke, walking slowly through the court-yard to an open gateway, where waited a carriage with unliveried coachman and outriders. No word was spoken till they entered the carriage and were driven swiftly away.

"Whither now, your Highness?" asked Philip.

"To the duchy," answered the other shortly, and relapsed into sombre meditation.

CHAPTER XX

The castle of the Prince d'Avranche, Duc de Bercy, was set upon a vast rock, and the town of Bercy huddled round the foot of it and on great granite ledges some distance up. With fifty defenders the castle, on its lofty pedestal, might have resisted as many thousands; and, indeed, it had done so more times than there were rubies in the rings of the present Duke, who had rescued Captain Philip d'Avranche from the clutches of the Red Government.

Upon the castle, with the flag of the duchy, waved the republican tricolour, where for a thousand years had floated a royal banner. When France's great trouble came to her, and the nobles fled, or went to fight for the King in the Vendee, the old Duke, with a dreamy indifference to the opinion of Europe, had proclaimed alliance with the new Government. He felt himself privileged in being thus selfish; and he had made the alliance that he might pursue, unchecked, the one remaining object of his life.

This object had now grown from a habit into a passion. It was now his one ambition to arrange a new succession excluding the Vaufontaines, a detested branch of the Bercy family. There had been an ancient feud between his family and the Vaufontaines, whose rights to the succession, after his eldest son, were to this time paramount. For three years past he had had a whole monastery of Benedictine monks at work to find some collateral branch from which he might take a successor to Leopold John, his imbecile heir--but to no purpose.

In more than a little the Duke was superstitious, and on the day when he met Philip d'Avranche in the chamber of M. Dalbarade he had twice turned back after starting to make the visit, so great was his dislike to pay homage to the revolutionary Minister. He had nerved himself to the distasteful duty, however, and had gone. When he saw the name of the young English prisoner--his own name--staring him in the face, he had had such a thrill as a miracle might have sent through the veins of a doubting Christian.

Since that minute he, like Philip, had been in a kind of dream; on his part, to find in the young man, if possible, an heir and successor; on Philip's to make real exalted possibilities. There had slipped past two months, wherein Philip had seen a new and brilliant avenue of life opening out before him. Most like a dream indeed it seemed. He had been shut out from the world, cut off from all connection with England and his past, for M. Dalbarade made it a condition of release that he should send no message or correspond with any one outside Castle Bercy. He had not therefore written to Guida. She seemed an interminable distance away. He was as completely in a new world as though he had been transplanted; he was as wholly in the air of fresh ambitions as though he were beginning the world again--ambitions as gorgeous as bewildering.

For, almost from the first, the old nobleman treated him like a son. He spoke freely to him of the most private family matters, of the most important State affairs. He consulted with him, he seemed to lean upon him. He alluded often, in oblique phrase, to adoption and succession. In the castle Philip was treated as though he were in truth a high kinsman of the Duke. Royal ceremony and state were on every hand. He who had never had a servant of his own, now had a score at his disposal. He had spent his early days in a small Jersey manor-house; here he was walking the halls of a palace with the step of assurance, the most honoured figure in a principality next to the sovereign himself. "Adoption and succession" were words that rang in his ears day and night. The wild dream had laid feverish hands upon him. Jersey, England, the Navy, seemed very far away.

Ambition was the deepest passion in him, even as defeating the hopes of the Vaufontaines was more than a religion with the Duke. By no trickery, but by a persistent good-nature, alertness of speech, avoidance of dangerous topics, and aptness in anecdote, he had hourly made his position stronger, himself more honoured at the Castle Bercy. He had also tactfully declined an offer of money from the Prince--none the less decidedly because he was nearly penniless. The Duke's hospitality he was ready to accept, but not his purse--not yet.

Yet he was not in all acting a part. He was sincere in his liking for the soured, bereaved sovereign, forced to endure alliance with a Government he loathed. He even admired the Duke for his vexing idiosyncrasies, for they came of a strong individuality which, in happier case, should have made him a contented and beloved monarch. As it was, the people of his duchy were loyal to him beyond telling, doing his bidding without cavil: standing for the King of France at his will, declaring for the Republic at his command; for, whatever the Duke was

to the world outside, within his duchy he was just and benevolent, if imperious.

All these things Philip had come to know in his short sojourn. He had, with the Duke, mingled freely, yet with great natural dignity, among the people of the duchy, and was introduced everywhere, and at all times, as the sovereign's kinsman--"in a direct line from an ancient branch," as his Highness declared. He had been received gladly, and had made himself an agreeable figure in the duchy, to the delight of the Duke, who watched his every motion, every word, and their effect. He came to know the gossip gone abroad that the Duke had already chosen him for heir. A fantastic rumour, maybe, yet who could tell?

One day the Duke arranged a conference of the civil and military officers of his duchy. He chuckled to see how reluctant they all were at first to concede their homage to his favourite, and how soon they fell under that favourite's influence--all save one man, the Intendant of the duchy. Philip himself was quick to see that this man, Count Carignan Damour, apprehensive for his own selfish ends, was bitterly opposed to him. But Damour was one among many, and the Duke was entirely satisfied, for the common people received Philip with applause.

On this very day was laid before the Duke the result of the long researches of the monks into the genealogy of the d'Avranches, and there, clearly enough, was confirmation of all Philip had said about his ancestors and their relation to the ancient house of d'Avranche. The Duke was overjoyed, and thereupon secretly made ready for Philip's formal adoption and succession. It never occurred to him that Philip might refuse.

On the same afternoon he sent for Philip to come to him in the highest room of the great tower. It was in this room that, many years ago, the Duke's young and noble wife, from the province of Aquitaine, had given birth to the second son of the house of Bercy, and had died a year later, happy that she should at last leave behind a healthy, beautiful child, to do her honour in her lord's eyes.

In this same room the Duke and the brave second son had spent unnumbered hours; and here it had come home to him that the young wife was faultless as to the elder, else she had not borne him this perfect younger son. Thus her memory came to be adored; and thus, when the noble second son, the glory of his house and of his heart, was killed in Macedonia, the Duke still came to the little upper room for his communion of remembrance. Hour after hour he would sit looking from the great window out over the wide green valley, mourning bitterly, and feeling his heart shrivel up within him, his body grow crabbed and cold, and his face sour and scornful.

When Philip now entered this sanctuary, the Duke nodded and motioned him to a chair. In silence he accepted, and in silence they sat for a time. Philip knew the history of this little room--he had learned it first from Frange Pergot, the porter at the castle gates with whom he had made friends. The silence gave him opportunity to recall the whole story.

At length the motionless brown figure huddled in the great chair, not looking at Philip but out over the wide green valley, began to speak in a low, measured tone, as a dreamer might tell his dream, or a priest his vision:

"A breath of life has come again to me through you. Centuries ago our ancestors were brothers--far back in the direct line, brothers--the monks have proved it.

"Now I shall have my spite of the Vaufoutaines, and now shall I have another son--strong, and with good blood in him to beget good blood."

A strange, lean sort of smile passed over his lips, his eyebrows twitched, his hands clinched the arm of the chair wherein he sat, and he made a motion of his jaws as though enjoying a toothsome morsel.

"H'm, Henri Vaufontaine shall see--and all his tribe! They shall not feed upon these lands of the d'Avranches, they shall not carouse at my table when I am gone and the fool I begot has returned to his Maker. The fault of him was never mine, but God's--does the Almighty think we can forget that? I was ever sound and strong. When I was twenty I killed two men with my own sword at a blow; when I was thirty, to serve the King I rode a hundred and forty miles in one day--from Paris to Dracourt it was. We d'Avranches have been men of power always. We fought for Christ's sepulchre in the Holy Land, and three bishops and two archbishops have gone from us to speak God's cause to the world. And my wife, she came of the purest stock of Aquitaine, and she was constant, in her prayers. What discourtesy was it then, for God, who hath been served well by us, to serve me in return with such mockery: to send me a bloodless zany, whom his wife left ere the wedding meats were cold."

His foot tapped the floor in anger, his eyes wandered restlessly out over the green expanse. Suddenly a dove perched upon the window-sill before him. His quick, shifting gaze settled on it and stayed, softening and quieting.

After a slight pause, he turned to Philip and spoke in a still lower tone. "Last night in the chapel I spake to God and I said: 'Lord God, let there be fair speech between us. Wherefore hast Thou nailed me like a malefactor to the tree? Why didst Thou send me a fool to lead our house, and afterwards a lad as fine and strong as Absalom, and then lay him low like a wisp of corn in the wind, leaving me wifeless--with a prince to follow me, the by-word of men, the scorn of women--and of the Vaufontaines?"'

He paused again, and his eyes seemed to pierce Philip's, as though he would read if each word was burning its way into his brain.

"As I stood there alone, a voice spoke to me as plainly as now I speak to you, and it said: 'Have done with railing. That which was the elder's shall be given to the younger. The tree hath grown crabbed and old, it beareth no longer. Behold the young sapling by thy door--I have planted

it there. The seed is the seed of the old tree. Cherish it, lest a grafted tree flourish in thy house.'" . . . . His words rose triumphantly. "Yes, yes, I heard it with my own ears, the Voice. The crabbed tree, that is the main line, dying in me; the grafted tree is the Vaufontaine, the interloper and the mongrel; and the sapling from the same seed as the crabbed old tree"--he reached out as though to clutch Philip's arm, but drew back, sat erect in his chair, and said with ringing decision: "the sapling is Philip d'Avranche, of the Jersey Isle."

For a moment there was silence between the two. A strong wind came rushing up the valley through the clear sunlight, the great trees beneath the castle swayed, and the flapping of the tricolour could be heard within. From the window-sill the dove, caught up on the wave of wind, sailed away down the widening glade.

Philip's first motion was to stand up and say: "I dare not think your Highness means in very truth to make me your kinsman in the succession."

"And why not, why not?" testily answered the Duke, who liked not to be imperfectly apprehended. Then he added more kindly: "Why not--come, tell me that, cousin? Is it then distasteful?"

Philip's heart gave a leap and his face flushed. "I have no other kinsman," he answered in a low tone of feeling. "I knew I had your august friendship--else all the tokens of your goodness to me were mockery; but I had scarce let myself count on the higher, more intimate honour--I, a poor captain in the English navy."

He said the last words slowly, for, whatever else he was, he was a loyal English sailor, and he wished the Duc de Bercy to know it, the more convincingly the better for the part he was going to play in this duchy, if all things favoured.

"Tut, tut, what has that to do with it?" answered the Duke. "What has poverty to do with blood? Younger sons are always poor, younger cousins poorer. As for the captaincy of an English warship, that's of no consequence where greater games are playing--eh?"

He eyed Philip keenly, yet too there was an unasked question in his look. He was a critic of human nature, he understood the code of honour, none better; his was a mind that might be wilfully but never crassly blind. He was selfish where this young gentleman was concerned, yet he knew well how the same gentleman ought to think, speak, and act.

The moment of the great test was come.

Philip could not read behind the strange, shrivelled face. Instinct could help him much, but it could not interpret that parchment. He did not know whether his intended reply would alienate the Duke or not, but if it did, then he must bear it. He had come, as he thought, to the crux of this adventure. All in a moment he was recalled again to his real position. The practical facts of his life possessed him. He was standing between a garish dream and commonplace realities. Old feelings

came back--the old life. The ingrain loyalty of all his years was his again. Whatever he might be, he was still an English officer, and he was not the man to break the code of professional honour lightly. If the Duke's favour and adoption must depend on the answer he must now give, well, let it be; his last state could not be worse than his first.

So, still standing, he answered the Duke boldly, yet quietly, his new kinsman watching him with a grim curiosity.

"Monsieur le prince," said Philip, "I am used to poverty, that matters little; but whatever you intend towards me--and I am persuaded it is to my great honour and happiness--I am, and must still remain, an officer of the English navy."

The Duke's brow contracted, and his answer came cold and incisive: "The navy--that is a bagatelle; I had hoped to offer you heritage. Pooh, pooh, commanding a frigate is a trade--a mere trade!"

Philip's face did not stir a muscle. He was in spirit the born adventurer, the gamester who could play for life's largest stakes, lose all, draw a long breath--and begin the world again.

"It's a busy time in my trade now, as Monsieur Dalbarade would tell you, Duke."

The Duke's lips compressed as though in anger. "You mean to say, monsieur, that you would let this wretched war between France and England stand before our own kinship and alliance? What are you and I in this great shuffle of events? Have less egotism, less vanity, monsieur. You are no more than a million others--and I--I am nothing. Come, come, there is more than one duty in the life of every man, and sometime he must choose between one and the other. England does not need you"--his voice and manner softened, he leaned towards Philip, the eyes almost closing as he peered into his face--"but you are needed by the House of Bercy."

"I was commissioned to a warship in time of war," answered Philip quietly, "and I lost that warship. When I can, it is my duty to go back to the powers that sent me forth. I am still an officer in full commission. Your Highness knows well what honour claims of me."

"There are hundreds of officers to take your place; in the duchy of Bercy there is none to stand for you. You must choose between your trade and the claims of name and blood, older than the English navy, older than Norman England."

Philip's colour was as good, his manner as easy as if nothing were at stake; but in his heart he felt that the game was lost--he saw a storm gathering in the Duke's eyes, the disappointment presently to break out into wrath, the injured vanity to burst into snarling disdain. But he spoke boldly nevertheless, for he was resolved that, even if he had to return from this duchy to prison, he would go with colours flying.

"The proudest moment of my life was when the Duc de Bercy called me kinsman," he responded; "the best" (had he then so utterly forgotten the little church of St. Michael's?) "was when he showed me friendship. Yet, if my trade may not be reconciled with what he may intend for me, I must ask to be sent back to Monsieur Dalbarade." He smiled hopelessly, yet with stoical disregard of consequences, and went on: "For my trade is in full swing these days, and I stand my chance of being exchanged and earning my daily bread again. At the Admiralty I am a master workman on full pay, but I'm not earning my salt here. With Monsieur Dalbarade my conscience would be easier."

He had played his last card. Now he was prepared for the fury of a jaundiced, self-willed old man, who could ill brook being thwarted. He had quickly imagined it all, and not without reason, for surely a furious disdain was at the grey lips, lines of anger were corrugating the forehead, the rugose parchment face was fiery with distemper.

But what Philip expected did not come to pass. Rising quickly to his feet, the Duke took him by the shoulders, kissed him on both cheeks, and said:

"My mind is made up--is made up. Nothing can change it. You have no father, cousin--well, I will be your father. You shall retain your post in the English navy-officer and patriot you shall be if you choose. A brave man makes a better ruler. But now there is much to do. There is the concurrence of the English King to secure; that shall be--has already been--my business. There is the assent of Leopold John to achieve; that I shall command. There are the grave formalities of adoption to arrange; these I shall expedite. You shall see, Master Insolence--you, who'd throw me and my duchy over for your trade; you shall see how the Vaufontaines will gnash their teeth!"

In his heart Philip was exultant, though outwardly he was calm. He was, however, unprepared for what followed. Suddenly the Duke, putting a hand on his shoulder, said:

"One thing, cousin, one thing: you must marry in our order, and at once. There shall be no delay. Succession must be made sure. I know the very woman--the Comtesse Chantavoine--young, rich, amiable. You shall meet her to-morrow-to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXI

"The Comtesse Chantavoine, young, rich, amiable. You shall meet her to-morrow " . . . !--Long after Philip left the Duke to go to his own chamber, these words rang in his ears. He suddenly felt the cords of fate tightening round him. So real was the momentary illusion that, as he passed through the great hall where hung the portraits of the Duke's ancestors, he made a sudden outward motion of his arms as though to free himself from a physical restraint. Strange to say, he had never foreseen

or reckoned with this matter of marriage in the designs of the Duke. He had forgotten that sovereign dukes must make sure their succession even unto the third and fourth generation. His first impulse had been to tell the Duke that to introduce him to the Countess would be futile, for he was already married. But the instant warning of the mind that his Highness could never and would never accept the daughter of a Jersey ship-builder restrained him. He had no idea that Guida's descent from the noble de Mauprats of Chambery would weigh with the Duke, who would only see in her some apple-cheeked peasant stumbling over her court train.

It was curious that the Duke had never even hinted at the chance of his being already married--yet not so curious either, since complete silence concerning a wife was in itself declaration enough that he was unmarried. He felt in his heart that a finer sense would have offered Guida no such humiliation, for he knew the lie of silence to be as evil as the lie of speech.

He had not spoken, partly because he had not yet become used to the fact that he really was married. It had never been brought home to him by the ever-present conviction of habit. One day of married life, or, in reality, a few hours of married life, with Guida had given the sensation more of a noble adventure than of a lasting condition. With distance from that noble adventure, something of the glow of a lover's relations had gone, and the subsequent tender enthusiasm of mind and memory was not vivid enough to make him daring or--as he would have said--reckless for its sake. Yet this same tender enthusiasm was sincere enough to make him accept the fact of his marriage without discontent, even in the glamour of new and alluring ambitions.

If it had been a question of giving up Guida or giving up the duchy of Bercy--if that had been put before him as the sole alternative, he would have decided as quickly in Guida's favour as he did when he thought it was a question between the duchy and the navy. The straightforward issue of Guida or the duchy he had not been called upon to face. But, unfortunately for those who are tempted, issues are never put quite so plainly by the heralds of destiny and penalty. They are disguised as delectable chances: the toss-up is always the temptation of life. The man who uses trust-money for three days, to acquire in those three days a fortune, certain as magnificent, would pull up short beforehand if the issue of theft or honesty were put squarely before him. Morally he means no theft; he uses his neighbour's saw until his own is mended: but he breaks his neighbour's saw, his own is lost on its homeward way; and having no money to buy another, he is tried and convicted on a charge of theft. Thus the custom of society establishes the charge of immorality upon the technical defect. But not on that alone; upon the principle that what is committed in trust shall be held inviolate, with an exact obedience to the spirit as to the letter of the law.

The issue did not come squarely to Philip. He had not openly lied about Guida: so far he had had no intention of doing so. He even figured to himself with what surprise Guida would greet his announcement that she was henceforth Princesse Guida d'Avranche, and in due time would be her

serene highness the Duchesse de Bercy. Certainly there was nothing immoral in his ambitions. If the reigning Prince chose to establish him as heir, who had a right to complain?

Then, as to an officer of the English navy accepting succession in a sovereign duchy in suzerainty to the present Government of France, while England was at war with her, the Duke had more than once, in almost so many words, defined the situation. Because the Duke himself, with no successor assured, was powerless to side with the Royalists against the Red Government, he was at the moment obliged, for the very existence of his duchy, to hoist the tricolour upon the castle with his own flag. Once the succession was secure beyond the imbecile Leopold John, then he would certainly declare against the present fiendish Government and for the overthrown dynasty.

Now England was fighting France, not only because she was revolutionary France, but because of the murder of Louis XVI and for the restoration of the overthrown dynasty. Also she was in close sympathy with the war of the Vendee, to which she would lend all possible assistance. Philip argued that if it was his duty, as a captain in the English navy, to fight against the revolutionaries from without, he would be beyond criticism if, as the Duc de Bercy, he also fought against them from within.

Indeed, it was with this plain statement of the facts that the second military officer of the duchy had some days before been sent to the Court of St. James to secure its intervention for Philip's freedom by exchange of prisoners. This officer was also charged with securing the consent of the English King for Philip's acceptance of succession in the duchy, while retaining his position in the English navy. The envoy had been instructed by the Duke to offer his sympathy with England in the war and his secret adherence to the Royalist cause, to become open so soon as the succession through Philip was secured.

To Philip's mind all that side of the case was in his favour, and sorted well with his principles of professional honour. His mind was not so acutely occupied with his private honour. To tell the Duke now of his marriage would be to load the dice against himself: he felt that the opportunity for speaking of it had passed.

He seated himself at a table and took from his pocket a letter of Guida's written many weeks before, in which she had said firmly that she had not announced the marriage, and would not; that he must do it, and he alone; that the letter written to her grandfather had not been received by him, and that no one in Jersey knew their secret.

In reading this letter again a wave of feeling rushed over him. He realised the force and strength of her nature: every word had a clear, sharp straightforwardness and the ring of truth.

A crisis was near, and he must prepare to meet it.

The Duke had said that he must marry; a woman had already been chosen for

him, and he was to meet her to-morrow. But, as he said to himself, that meant nothing. To meet a woman was not of necessity to marry her.

Marry--he could feel his flesh creeping! It gave him an ugly, startled sensation. It was like some imp of Satan to drop into his ear the suggestion that princes, ere this, had been known to have two wives--one of them unofficial. He could have struck himself in the face for the iniquity of the suggestion; he flushed from the indecency of it; but so have sinners ever flushed as they set forth on the garish road to Avernus. Yet--yet somehow he must carry on the farce of being single until the adoption and the succession had been formally arranged.

Vexed with these unbidden and unwelcome thoughts, he got up and walked about his chamber restlessly. "Guida--poor Guida!" he said to himself many times. He was angry, disgusted that those shameful, irresponsible thoughts should have come to him. He would atone for all that--and more --when he was Prince and she Princess d'Avranche. But, nevertheless, he was ill at ease with himself. Guida was off there alone in Jersey--alone. Now, all at once, another possibility flashed into his mind. Suppose, why, suppose--thoughtless scoundrel that he had been--suppose that there might come another than himself and Guida to bear his name! And she there alone, her marriage still kept secret--the danger of it to her good name. But she had said nothing in her letters, hinted nothing. No, in none had there been the most distant suggestion. Then and there he got them, one and all, and read every word, every line, all through to the end. No; there was not one hint. Of course it could not be so; she would have--but no, she might not have! Guida was unlike anybody else.

He read on and on again. And now, somehow, he thought he caught in one of the letters a new ring, a pensive gravity, a deeper tension, which were like ciphers or signals to tell him of some change in her. For a moment he was shaken. Manhood, human sympathy, surged up in him. The flush of a new sensation ran through his veins like fire. The first instinct of fatherhood came to him, a thrilling, uplifting feeling. But as suddenly there shot through his mind a thought which brought him to his feet with a spring.

But suppose--suppose that it was so--suppose that through Guida the further succession might presently be made sure, and suppose he went to the Prince and told him all; that might win his favour for her; and the rest would be easy. That was it, as clear as day. Meanwhile he would hold his peace, and abide the propitious hour.

For, above all else--and this was the thing that clinched the purpose in his mind--above all else, the Duke had, at best, but a brief time to live. Only a week ago the Court physician had told him that any violence or mental shock might snap the thread of existence. Clearly, the thing was to go on as before, keep his marriage secret, meet the Countess, apparently accede to all the Duke proposed, and wait--and wait.

With this clear purpose in his mind colouring all that he might say, yet crippling the freedom of his thought, he sat down to write to Guida. He had not yet written to her, according to his parole: this issue was

clear; he could not send a letter to Guida until he was freed from that condition. It had been a bitter pill to swallow; and many times he had had to struggle with himself since his arrival at the castle. For whatever the new ambitions and undertakings, there was still a woman in the lonely distance for whose welfare he was responsible, for whose happiness he had yet done nothing, unless to give her his name under sombre conditions was happiness for her. All that he had done to remind him of the wedded life he had so hurriedly, so daringly, so eloquently entered upon, was to send his young wife fifty pounds. Somehow, as this fact flashed to his remembrance now, it made him shrink; it had a certain cold, commercial look which struck him unpleasantly. Perhaps, indeed, the singular and painful shyness--chill almost--with which Guida had received the fifty pounds now communicated itself to him by the intangible telegraphy of the mind and spirit.

All at once that bare, glacial fact of having sent her fifty pounds acted as an ironical illumination of his real position. He felt conscious that Guida would have preferred some simple gift, some little thing that women love, in token and remembrance, rather than this contribution to the common needs of existence. Now that he came to think of it, since he had left her in Jersey, he had never sent her ever so small a gift. He had never given her any gifts at all save the Maltese cross in her childhood --and her wedding-ring. As for the ring, it had never occurred to him that she could not wear it save in the stillness of the night, unseen by any eye save her own. He could not know that she had been wont to go to sleep with the hand clasped to her breast, pressing close to her the one outward token she had of a new life, begun with a sweetness which was very bitter and a bitterness only a little sweet.

Philip was in no fitting mood to write a letter. Too many emotions were in conflict in him at once. They were having their way with him; and, perhaps, in this very complexity of his feelings he came nearer to being really and acutely himself than he had ever been in his life. Indeed, there was a moment when he was almost ready to consign the Duke and all that appertained to the devil or the deep sea, and to take his fate as it came. But one of the other selves of him calling down from the little attic where dark things brood, told him that to throw up his present chances would bring him no nearer and no sooner to Guida, and must return him to the prison whence he came.

Yet he would write to Guida now, and send the letter when he was released from parole. His courage grew as the sentences spread out before him; he became eloquent. He told her how heavily the days and months went on apart from her. He emptied out the sensations of absence, loneliness, desire, and affection. All at once he stopped short. It flashed upon him now that always his letters had been entirely of his own doings; he had pictured himself always: his own loneliness, his own grief at separation. He had never yet spoken of the details of her life, questioned her of this and of that, of all the little things which fill the life of a woman--not because she loves them, but because she is a woman, and the knowledge and governance of little things is the habit of her life. His past egotism was borne in upon him now. He would try to atone for it. Now he asked her many questions in his letter. But one

he did not ask. He knew not how to speak to her of it. The fact that he could not was a powerful indictment of his relations towards her, of his treatment of her, of his headlong courtship and marriage.

So portions of this letter of his had not the perfect ring of truth, not the conviction which unselfish love alone can beget. It was only at the last, only when he came to a close, that the words went from him with the sharp photography of his own heart. It came, perhaps, from a remorse which, for the instant, foreshadowed danger ahead; from an acute pity for her; or perchance from a longing to forego the attempt upon an exalted place, and get back to the straightforward hours, such as those upon the Ecrehos, when he knew that he loved her. But the sharpness of his feelings rendered more intense now the declaration of his love. The phrases were wrung from him. "Good-bye--no, a la bonne heure, my dearest," he wrote. "Good days are coming--brave, great days, when I shall be free to strike another blow for England, both from within and from without France; when I shall be, if all go well, the Prince d'Avranche, Duc de Bercy, and you my perfect Princess. Good-bye! Thy Philip, qui t'aime toujours."

He had hardly written the last words when there came a knocking at his door, and a servant entered. "His Highness offers his compliments to monsieur, and will monsieur descend to meet the Marquis Grandjon-Larisse and the Comtesse Chantavoine, who have just arrived."

For an instant Philip could scarce compose himself, but he sent a message of obedience to the Duke's command, and prepared to go down.

So it was come--not to-morrow, but to-day. Already the deep game was on. With a sigh which was half bitter and mocking laughter, he seized the pouncebox, dried his letter to Guida, and put it in his pocket. As he descended the staircase, the last words of it kept assailing his mind, singing in his brain: "Thy Philip, qui t'aime toujours!"

CHAPTER XXII

Not many evenings after Philip's first interview with the Comtesse Chantavoine, a visitor arrived at the castle. From his roundabout approach up the steep cliff in the dusk it was clear he wished to avoid notice. Of gallant bearing, he was attired in a fashion unlike the citizens of Bercy, or the Republican military often to be seen in the streets of the town. The whole relief of the costume was white: white sash, white cuffs turned back, white collar, white rosette and band, white and red bandeau, and the faint glitter of a white shirt. In contrast were the black hat and plume, black top boots with huge spurs, and yellow breeches. He carried a gun and a sword, and a pistol was stuck in the white sash. But one thing caught the eye more than all else: a white square on the breast of the long brown coat, strangely ornamented with a red heart and a cross. He was evidently a soldier of high rank, but not of the army of the Republic.

The face was that of a devotee, not of peace but of war--of some forlorn crusade. It had deep enthusiasm, which yet to the trained observer would seem rather the tireless faith of a convert than the disposition of the natural man. It was somewhat heavily lined for one so young, and the marks of a hard life were on him, but distinction and energy were in his look and in every turn of his body.

Arriving at the castle, he knocked at the postern. At first sight of him the porter suspiciously blocked the entrance with his person, but seeing the badge upon his breast, stood at gaze, and a look of keen curiosity crossed over his face. On the visitor announcing himself as a Vaufontaine, this curiosity gave place to as keen surprise; he was admitted with every mark of respect, and the gates closed behind him.

"Has his Highness any visitors?" he asked as he dismounted.

The porter nodded assent.

"Who are they?" He slipped a coin into the porter's hand.

"One of the family--for so his Serene Highness calls him."

"H'm, indeed! A Vaufontaine, friend?"

"No, monsieur, a d'Avranche."

"What d'Avranche? Not Prince Leopold John?"

"No, monsieur, the name is the same as his Highness's."

"Philip d'Avranche? Ah, from whence?"

"From Paris, monsieur, with his Highness."

The visitor, whistling softly to himself, stood thinking a moment.

Presently he said:

"How old is he?"

"About the same age as monsieur."

"How does he occupy himself?"

"He walks, rides, talks with his Highness, asks questions of the people, reads in the library, and sometimes shoots and fishes."

"Is he a soldier?"

"He carries no sword, and he takes long aim with a gun."

A sly smile was lurking about the porter's mouth. The visitor drew from

his pocket a second gold piece, and, slipping it into the other's hand, said:

"Tell it all at once. Who is the gentleman, and what is his business here? Is he, perhaps, on the side of the Revolution, or does he--keep better company?"

He looked keenly into the eyes of the porter, who screwed up his own, returning the gaze unflinchingly. Handing back the gold piece, the man answered firmly:

"I have told monsieur what every one in the duchy knows; there's no charge for that. For what more his Highness and--and those in his Highness's confidence know," he drew himself up with brusque importance, "there's no price, monsieur."

"Body o' me, here's pride and vainglory!" answered the other. "But I know you, my fine Pergot, I knew you almost too well years ago; and then you were not so sensitive; then you were a good Royalist like me, Pergot."

This time he fastened the man's look with his own and held it until Pergot dropped his head before it.

"I don't remember monsieur," he answered, perturbed.

"Of course not. The fine Pergot has a bad memory, like a good Republican, who by law cannot worship his God, or make the sign of the Cross, or, ask the priest to visit him when he's dying. A red Revolutionist is our Pergot now!"

"I'm as good a Royalist as monsieur," retorted the man with some asperity. "So are most of us. Only--only his Highness says to us--"

"Don't gossip of what his Highness says, but do his bidding, Pergot. What a fool are you to babble thus! How d'ye know but I'm one of Fouche's or Barere's men? How d'ye know but there are five hundred men beyond waiting for my whistle?"

The man changed instantly. His hand was at his side like lightning. "They'd never hear that whistle, monsieur, though you be Vaufontaine or no Vaufontaine!"

The other, smiling, reached out and touched him on the shoulder kindly.

"My dear Frange Pergot," said he, "that's the man I knew once, and the sort of man that's been fighting with me for the Church and for the King these months past in the Vendee. Come, come, don't you know me, Pergot? Don't you remember the scapegrace with whom, for a jape, you waylaid my uncle the Cardinal and robbed him, then sold him back his jewelled watch for a year's indulgences?"

"But no, no," answered the man, crossing himself quickly, and by the dim

lanthorn light peering into the visitor's face, "it is not possible, monsieur. The Comte Detricand de Tournay--God rest him!--died in the Jersey Isle, with him they called Rullecour."

"Well, well, you might at least remember this," rejoined the other, and with a smile he showed an old scar in the palm of his hand.

A little later was ushered into the library of the castle the Comte Detricand de Tournay, who, under the name of Savary dit Detricand, had lived in the Isle of Jersey for many years. There he had been a dissipated idler, a keeper of worthless company, an alien coolly accepting the hospitality of a country he had ruthlessly invaded as a boy. Now, returned from vagabondage, he was the valiant and honoured heir of the House of Vaufontaine, and heir-presumptive of the House of Bercy.

True to his intention, Detricand had joined de la Rochejaquelein, the intrepid, inspired leader of the Vendee, whose sentiments became his own --"If I advance, follow me; if I retreat, kill me; if I fall, avenge me."

He had proven himself daring, courageous, resourceful. His unvarying gaiety of spirits infected the simple peasants with a rebounding energy; his fearlessness inspired their confidence; his kindness to the wounded, friend or foe, his mercy to prisoners, the respect he showed devoted priests who shared with the peasants the perils of war, made him beloved.

From the first all the leaders trusted him, and he sprang in a day, as had done the peasants Cathelineau, d'Elbee, and Stofflet, or gentlemen like Lescure and Bonchamp, and noble fighters like d'Antichamp and the Prince of Talmont, to an outstanding position in the Royalist army. Again and again he had been engaged in perilous sorties and leading forlorn hopes. He had now come from the splendid victory at Saumur to urge his kinsman, the Duc de Bercy, to join the Royalists.

He had powerful arguments to lay before a nobleman the whole traditions of whose house were of constant alliance with the Crown of France, whose very duchy had been the gift of a French monarch. Detricand had not seen the Duke since he was a lad at Versailles, and there would be much in his favour, for of all the Vaufontaines the Duke had reason to dislike him least, and some winning power in him had of late grown deep and penetrating.

When the Duke entered upon him in the library, he was under the immediate influence of a stimulating talk with Philip d'Avranche and the chief officers of the duchy. With the memory of past feuds and hatreds in his mind, and predisposed against any Vaufontaine, his greeting was courteously disdainful, his manner preoccupied.

Remarking that he had but lately heard of monsieur le comte's return to France, he hoped he had enjoyed his career in--was it then England or America? But yes, he remembered, it began with an expedition to take the Channel Isles from England, an insolent, a criminal business in time of peace, fit only for boys or buccaneers. Had monsieur le comte then spent

all these years in the Channel Isles--a prisoner perhaps? No? Fastening his eyes cynically on the symbol of the Royalist cause on Detricand's breast, he asked to what he was indebted for the honour of this present visit. Perhaps, he added drily, it was to inquire after his own health, which, he was glad to assure monsieur le comte and all his cousins of Vaufontaine, was never better.

The face was like a leather mask, telling nothing of the arid sarcasm in the voice. The shoulders were shrunken, the temples fallen in, the neck behind was pinched, and the eyes looked out like brown beads alive with fire, and touched with the excitement of monomania. His last word had a delicate savagery of irony, though, too, there could be heard in the tone a defiance, arguing apprehension, not lost upon his visitor.

Detricand had inwardly smiled during the old man's monologue, broken only by courteous, half-articulate interjections on his own part. He knew too well the old feud between their houses, the ambition that had possessed many a Vaufontaine to inherit the dukedom of Bercy, and the Duke's futile revolt against that possibility. But for himself, now heir to the principality of Vaufontaine, and therefrom, by reversion, to that of Bercy, it had no importance.

He had but one passion now, and it burned clear and strong, it dominated, it possessed him. He would have given up any worldly honour to see it succeed. He had idled and misspent too many years, been vaurien and ne'er-do-well too long to be sordid now. Even as the grievous sinner, come from dark ways, turns with furious and tireless strength to piety and good works, so this vagabond of noble family, wheeling suddenly in his tracks, had thrown himself into a cause which was all sacrifice, courage, and unselfish patriotism--a holy warfare. The last bitter thrust of the Duke had touched no raw flesh, his withers were unwrung. Gifted to thrust in return, and with warrant to do so, he put aside the temptation, and answered his kinsman with daylight clearness.

"Monsieur le duc," said he, "I am glad your health is good--it better suits the purpose of this interview. I am come on business, and on that alone. I am from Saumur, where I left de la Rochejaquelein, Stofflet, Cathelineau, and Lescure masters of the city and victors over Coustard's army. We have taken eleven thousand prisoners, and--"

"I have heard a rumour--" interjected the Duke impatiently.

"I will give you fact," continued Detricand, and he told of the series of successes lately come to the army of the Vendee. It was the heyday of the cause.

"And how does all this concern me?" asked the Duke.

"I am come to beg you to join us, to declare for our cause, for the Church and for the King. Yours is of the noblest names in France. Will you not stand openly for what you cannot waver from in your heart? If the Duc de Bercy declares for us, others will come out of exile, and from submission to the rebel government, to our aid. My mission is to beg you

to put aside whatever reasons you may have had for alliance with this savage government, and proclaim for the King."

The Duke never took his eyes from Detricand's.

What was going on behind that parchment face, who might say?

"Are you aware," he answered Detricand at last, "that I could send you straight from here to the guillotine?"

"So could the porter at your gates, but he loves France almost as well as does the Duc de Bercy."

"You take refuge in the fact that you are my kinsman," returned the Duke acidly.

"The honour is stimulating, but I should not seek salvation by it. I have the greater safety of being your guest," answered Detricand with dignity.

"Too premature a sanctuary for a Vaufontaine!" retorted the Duke, fighting down growing admiration for a kinsman whose family he would gladly root out, if it lay in his power.

Detricand made a gesture of impatience, for he felt that his appeal had availed nothing, and he had no heart for a battle of words. His wit had been tempered in many fires, his nature was non-incandescent to praise or gibe. He had had his share of pastime; now had come his share of toil, and the mood for give and take of words was not on him.

He went straight to the point now. Hopelessly he spoke the plain truth.

"I want nothing of the Prince d'Avranche but his weight and power in a cause for which the best gentlemen of France are giving their lives. I fasten my eyes on France alone: I fight for the throne of Louis, not for the duchy of Bercy. The duchy of Bercy may sink or swim for all of me, if so be it does not stand with us in our holy war."

The Duke interjected a disdainful laugh. Suddenly there shot into Detricand's mind a suggestion, which, wild as it was, might after all belong to the grotesque realities of life. So he added with deliberation:

"If alliance must still be kept with this evil government of France, then be sure there is no Vaufontaine who would care to inherit a duchy so discredited. To meet that peril the Duc de Bercy will do well to consult his new kinsman--Philip d'Avranche."

For a moment there was absolute silence in the room. The old nobleman's look was like a flash of flame in a mask of dead flesh. The short upper lip was arrested in a sort of snarl, the fingers, half-closed, were hooked like talons, and the whole man was a picture of surprise, fury, and injured pride. The Duc de Bercy to be harangued to his duty,

scathed, measured, disapproved, and counselled, by a stripling Vaufontaine--it was monstrous.

It had the bitterness of aloes also, for in his own heart he knew that Detricand spoke truth. The fearless appeal had roused him, for a moment at least, to the beauty and righteousness of a sombre, all but hopeless, cause, while the impeachment had pierced every sore in his heart. He felt now the smarting anger, the outraged vanity of the wrong-doer who, having argued down his own conscience, and believing he has blinded others as himself, suddenly finds that himself and his motives are naked before the world.

Detricand had known regretfully, even as he spoke, that the Duke, no matter what the reason, would not now ally himself with the Royalists; though, had his life been in danger, he still would have spoken the truth. So he had been human enough to try and force open the door of mystery by a biting suggestion; for he had a feeling that in the presence of the mysterious kinsman, Philip d'Avranche, lay the cause of the Duke's resistance to his prayer. Who was this Philip d'Avranche? At the moment it seemed absurd to him that his mind should travel back to the Isle of Jersey.

The fury of the Duke was about to break forth, when the door of the chamber opened and Philip stepped inside. The silence holding two men now held three, and a curious, cold astonishment possessed the two younger. The Duke was too blind with anger to see the start of recognition his visitors gave at sight of each other, and by a concurrence of feeling neither Detricand nor Philip gave sign of acquaintance. Wariness was Philip's cue, wondering caution Detricand's attitude.

The Duke spoke first. Turning from Philip, he said to Detricand with malicious triumph:

"It will disconcert your pious mind to know I have yet one kinsman who counts it no shame to inherit Bercy. Monsieur le comte, I give you here the honour to know Captain Philip d'Avranche."

Something of Detricand's old buoyant self came back to him. His face flushed with sudden desire to laugh, then it paled in dumb astonishment. So this man, Philip d'Avranche, was to be set against him even in the heritage of his family, as for one hour in a Jersey kitchen they had been bitter opposites. For the heritage of the Houses of Vaufontaine and Bercy he cared little--he had deeper ambitions; but this adventuring sailor roused in him again the private grudge he had once begged him to remember. Recovering himself, he answered meaningly, bowing low:

"The honour is memorable--and monstrous." Philip set his teeth, but replied: "I am overwhelmed to meet one whose reputation is known--in every taproom."

Neither had chance to say more, for the Duke, though not conceiving the cause or meaning of the biting words, felt the contemptuous suggestion in

Detricand’s voice, and burst out in anger:

"Go tell the prince of Vaufontaine that the succession is assured to my house. Monsieur my cousin, Captain Philip d’Avranche, is now my adopted son; a wife is chosen for him, and soon, monsieur le comte, there will be still another successor to the title."

"The Duc de Bercy should add inspired domestic prophecy to the family record in the ’Almanach de Gotha,"’ answered Detricand.

"God’s death!" cried the old nobleman, trembling with rage, and stretching towards the bell-rope, "you shall go to Paris and the Temple. Fouche will take care of you."

"Stop, monsieur le duc!" Detricand’s voice rang through the room. "You shall not betray even the humblest of your kinsmen, like that monster d’Orleans who betrayed the highest of his. Be wise: there are hundreds of your people who still will pass a Royalist on to safety."

The Duke’s hand dropped from the bell-rope. He knew that Detricand’s words were true. Ruling himself to quiet, he said with cold hatred:

"Like all your breed, crafty and insolent. But I will make you pay for it one day."

Glancing towards Philip as though to see if he could move him, Detricand answered: "Make no haste on my behalf; years are not of such moment to me as to your Highness."

Philip saw Detricand’s look, and felt his moment and his chance had come. "Monsieur le comte!" he exclaimed threateningly.

The Duke glanced proudly at Philip. "You will collect the debt, cousin," said he, and the smile on his face was wicked as he again turned towards Detricand.

"With interest well compounded," answered Philip firmly.

Detricand smiled. "I have drawn the Norman-Jersey cousin, then?" said he. "Now we can proceed to compliments." Then with a change of manner he added quietly: "Your Highness, may the House of Bercy have no worse enemy than I! I came only to plead the cause which, if it give death, gives honour too. And I know well that at least you are not against us in heart. Monsieur d’Avranche"--he turned to Philip, and his words were slow and deliberate--"I hope we may yet meet in the Place du Vier Prison --but when and where you will; and you shall find me in the Vendee when you please." So saying, he bowed, and, turning, left the room.

"What meant the fellow by his Place du Vier Prison?" asked the Duke.

"Who knows, monsieur le duc?" answered Philip. "A fanatic like all the Vaufontaines--a roysterer yesterday, a sainted chevalier to-morrow," said the Duke irritably. "But they still have strength and beauty--always!"

he added reluctantly. Then he looked at the strong and comely frame before him, and was reassured. He laid a hand on Philip’s broad shoulder, and said admiringly:

"You will of course have your hour with him, cousin: but not--not till you are a d’Avranche of Bercy."

"Not till I am a d’Avranche of Bercy," responded Philip in a low voice.

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

Egotism with which all are diseased
Egregious egotism of young love there are only two identities
Follow me; if I retreat, kill me; if I fall, avenge me
It’s the people who try to be clever who never are
Knew the lie of silence to be as evil as the lie of speech
People who are clever never think of trying to be

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