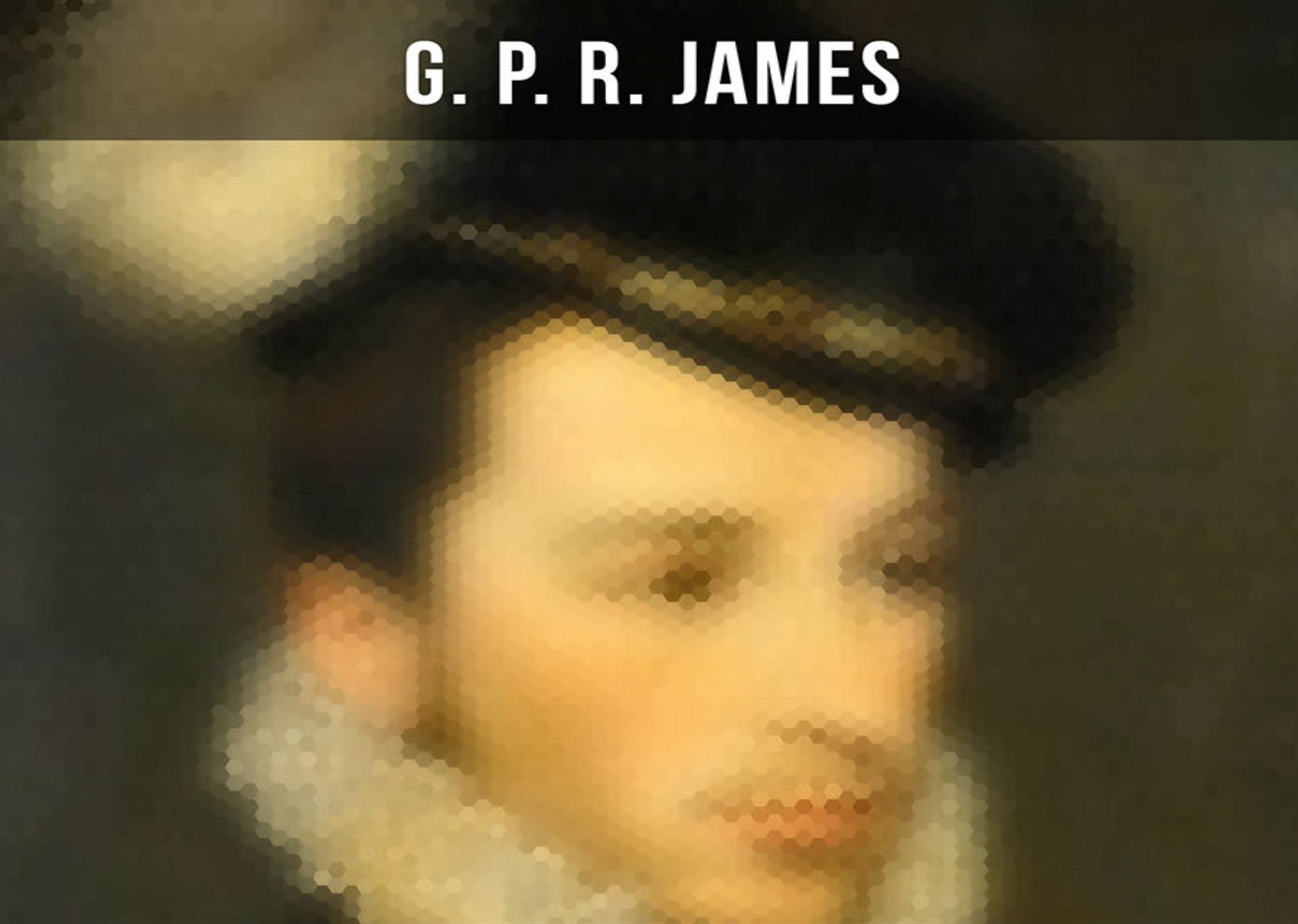


G. P. R. JAMES



HENRY OF GUISE

HISTORICAL NOVEL

G. P. R. James

Henry of Guise (Historical Novel)

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DEDICATION.

TO

THE HONOURABLE

FRANCIS SCOTT

MY DEAR SCOTT,

In dedicating to you the following work as the tribute of old friendship, and of sincere and well founded esteem, allow me to add a few words in explanation of the course I have pursued in the composition. I do this, it is true, more for the public than for yourself, as you were with me while it was in progress, and by your good judgment confirmed my opinion of the mode in which the subject ought to be treated.

The character of every person who plays a prominent part on the great stage of the world is of course lauded by friends and decried by adversaries at the time, and the mingled report comes down to after ages. But the mists of prejudice are wafted away by the breath of years. The character of the historian is considered in connexion with those of the personages he has depicted; and allowances are made for errors and wrong views on all sides: the greater facts remain, in general, clear and distinct; and from these, together with those small traits which are rather let fall accidentally than recorded, by contemporaries, the estimate of history is formed.

There are some characters, however, which from various causes remain obscure and doubtful through all time; and many which have points in them that are never satisfactorily explained, producing acts which cannot be accounted for; like those waters which have never been fathomed, though we know not whether it be some under current that we see not, or the profound depth itself, which prevents the plumbed line from reaching the bottom.

Amongst the many acts recorded in the annals of the world, the motives for which have never been ascertained, one of the most extraordinary is, that of Henry Duke of Guise, when, on the 12th of May, 1588, the famous day of the barricades, he had the crown of France within his grasp, and did not close his hand. Some have called it weakness, some virtue, some moderation, some indecision; and in fact, whatever view we take of it, there are points in which it is opposed to the general character of the Duke.

In the account of this transaction, which I have given in the following pages, I have rather attempted to narrate how the event took place, than to put forth a theory regarding the motives. My own opinion is, indeed, fixed, after diligent examination of every contemporary account, that the motives were mixed. I do not believe that the Duke's moderation proceeded from indecision, for I imagine that he had decided from the first not to dethrone the King; but I do believe that he might be, and was, much tempted to usurp the throne, as the events of the day proceeded. Opportunity could not be without its temptation to a bold and ambitious heart like his. Whether he would have remained master of his own conduct, whether he would have been able to struggle against his own desires and the wishes of the people, whether he would have maintained his resolution to the end of that day, had the King not escaped from Paris, is another question. Suffice it that he resisted the temptation as long as the temptation existed; and that he did so deliberately is proved, by his strictly prohibiting the people from surrounding the royal residence, "lest it should commit him too far." Upon this view of the case have I based my narration.

In regard to the death of the Duke of Guise, I had but little difficulty; for the event is so amply and minutely detailed by contemporaries, that no doubt can exist in regard to any of

the facts. In the treatment of the story, however, I had to choose between two courses. A French writer, or writer of the French school, in order to concentrate the interest upon the Guise, would most likely have brought into a prominent point of view his criminal passion for Madame de Noirmoutier, and would have wrought it up with sentiment till the feelings of the reader were enlisted in favour of herself and the Duke.

I did not do this for two reasons. In the first place, it would have been a violation of history to represent Madame de Noirmoutier as any thing but a mere abandoned woman, as her amours with Henry IV. and others clearly show. In the next place, I consider it an insult to virtue to endeavour to excite interest for vice. It was necessary, indeed, to introduce Madame de Noirmoutier, on account of the famous warning which she gave to Guise on the night before his death; but I have done so as briefly as possible for the reasons I have just stated.

I have only farther to say, that I know there is a French work bearing the same title, or very nearly the same title, as this. I have never seen that work, nor read any review of it, nor heard any part of its contents, and therefore have no idea whatsoever of how the story is there conducted. Doubtless very differently, and, perhaps, much better than in the following pages; but, nevertheless, I trust that the public will extend to them the same indulgence which has been granted to my other works, and for which I am most sincerely grateful.

To you, my dear Scott, I am also very grateful, for many a happy hour, and many a pleasant day, and for many a trait which, in our mutual intercourse, has given me the best view of human nature, and added one to the few whom in

this life we find to love and to respect. Accept, then, this very slight testimony of such feelings, and believe me ever,

Yours faithfully,

G. P. R. James.

CHAPTER I.

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It was as dark and sombre a morning, the sky was as gloomy, the earth as dry and parched, as earth, sky, and morning ever appear in the most northern climates. A dull grey expanse of leaden cloud shut out the blue heaven, a hard black frost pinched up the ground, the blades of grass stood stiff and rugged on the frozen soil, and vague grey mists lay in all the hollows of the ground. The forests, the manifold forests that then spread over the fair land of France, showed nothing but bare branches, except where here and there the yoke-elm or tenacious beech retained in patches its red and withered leaves, while beneath the trees again, the ground was thickly carpeted with the fallen honours of the past summer, mingled with hoar frost and thin snow. A chilliness more piercing than mere frost pervaded the air; and the aspect of the whole scene was cheerless and melancholy.

Such was the aspect of the day, though the scene was in the south of France, at a spot which we shall leave for the present nameless, when at about seven o'clock in the morning--an hour in which, at that period of the year, the sun's rays are weak and powerless--a tall, strong, florid man of about four-and-thirty years of age was seen upon the edge of a wide wood walking along cautiously step by step, carefully bending down his eyes upon the withered leaves that strewn his path, as if he had dropped something of value which he sought to find.

The wood, as we have said, was extensive, covering several miles of undulating ground, broken by rocks and

dingles, and interspersed by more than one piece of water. It contained various kinds of tree, as well as various sorts of soil; but at the spot of which we now speak the wood was low and thin, gradually increasing in volume as it rose along the slope of the adjacent hill, till it grew into a tangled thicket, from which rose a number of tall trees, waving their grey branches sadly in the wintry air. On a distant eminence, rising far above the wood itself, might be seen towers, and turrets, and pinnacles, the abode of some of the lords of the land; and at the end of a long glade, up which the man we have just mentioned was cautiously stealing, as we have described, appeared a little cottage with one or two curious outbuildings, not usually found attached to the abodes of the agricultural population.

The features of this early wanderer in the woods were good, the expression of his countenance frank; and though poring so intently upon the ground as he passed, there was nevertheless an air of habitual cheerfulness in his countenance, which broke out in the frequent smile, either at something passing in his own thoughts, or at something he observed amongst the withered leaves. He was dressed in a plain suit of dark brownish grey, with a cap and feather on his head, a sword by his side, and an immense winding horn slung under his left arm; and though at the present moment he was without either horses or dogs, his whole dress and appearance bespoke him one of the huntsmen of some neighbouring lord.

After having walked on for about three or four hundred yards, he suddenly stopped at some traces on the ground, turned into the wood, which in a particular line seemed disturbed and broken, and following the marks, which denoted that some large object of the chase had passed that way, he reached the thicker part of the wood, where, to

use his own expression, he felt sure that the boar was lodged.

It would be useless and tedious to accompany him in all the perquisitions that he made round the thicket, in order to ascertain that the animal had not again issued forth from its woody covert. He satisfied himself, however, completely, that such was not the case, and then paused, musing for a moment or two, till he was roused from his reverie by the distant sounds of human voices and of horses' feet, coming from the side of the glade in which we have first displayed him to the reader's eyes. He now hurried back as rapidly as possible, and in a minute or two after stood uncovered in the midst of a gay and glittering party, on which we must pause for a few minutes, ere we proceed to describe the events of that morning.

There were about twenty persons present, but the greater number consisted of various attendants attached to the household of all French noblemen of that period, under the names of grooms, piqueurs, valets de chiens, chefs de relais, &c. Three out of the group, however, are worthy of greater attention, not alone because they were higher in rank, but because with them we shall have to deal throughout the course of this tale, while most of the others may well be forgotten. The eldest of the three, bore the robe of an ecclesiastic, though in his deportment, as he sat a spirited, and somewhat fretful horse, he seemed fully as well suited to play the part of a gay cavalier as that of a sober churchman.

His features were fine, though not strongly marked; the nose straight and well cut; the chin rounded; the brow broad and high, and the mouth well formed. But with all these traits of beauty, there were one or two drawbacks, both in feature and expression, which rendered his aspect by no

means so prepossessing as it otherwise might have been. The eyes, which were remarkably fine, large, dark, and powerful, were sunk deep under the sharp cut, overhanging brow, looking keenly out from below their long fringed lids, as if in ambush for each unguarded glance or gesture of those with whom he conversed. The lips, though, as we have said, well formed, closed tight over the teeth, which were as white as snow, never suffering them to appear, except when actually speaking. Even then those lips parted but little, and gave one the idea of their being, as it were, the gates of imprisoned thoughts, which opened no farther than was necessary to give egress to those which they were forced to set at liberty. The nostril, though it was finely shaped, was even stiller and more motionless than the lips. No moment of eagerness, no excited passion of the bosom, made that nostril expand, and if it ever moved at all, it was but when a slight irrepressible sneer upon the lip drew it up with a scornful elevation, not the less cutting because it was but slight.

The age of this personage at the time we speak of might be about forty-five; and if one might judge by the clear paleness of his complexion, a considerable portion of his life had been spent in intense study. The marks of his age were visible, too, in his beard and mustachios, which had once been of the deepest black, but were now thickly grizzled with grey. No sign, however, of any loss of strength or vigour was apparent; and though still and quiet in his demeanour, he seemed not at all disinclined to show, by an occasional exercise of strength or agility, that stillness and quietude were with him matters of choice and not of necessity. He kept his horse a very small pace behind those of his two younger companions; but he so contrived it that this very act of deference should not have the slightest appearance of humility in it, but should rather seem an expression of

what he owed to his own age and character rather than to their superior rank.

The other two were both young men in the very early outset of life, and were so nearly of the same age, that it was difficult to say which was the elder. Both were extremely handsome, both were very powerfully and gracefully formed; and the most extraordinary similarity of features and of frame existed between them, so that it would have been difficult to distinguish the one from the other, had it not been that their complexions were entirely different. The one was dark, the other fair: in one the hair curled over the brow in large masses, as glossy as the wing of the raven; in the other, the same profuse and shining hair existed, but of a nut brown, with every here and there a gleam as if the sun shone upon it. The eyes of the one were dark, but flashing and lustrous; the eyes of the other of a deep hazel, and in them there mingled, with the bright bold glances of fearless courage, an occasional expression of depth and tenderness of feeling, which rendered the character of his countenance as different from that of his brother as was his complexion.

Notwithstanding the great similarity that existed between them, they were not, as may have been supposed, twins, the fairer of the two being a year younger than his brother. They were both, indeed, as we have said, in their early youth, but their youth was manly; and though neither had yet seen three-and-twenty years, the form of each was powerful and fully developed, and the slight pointed beard and sweeping mustachio were as completely marked as the custom of the day admitted.

On the characters of the two we shall not pause in this place, as they will show themselves hereafter; and it is sufficient to say that there was scarcely a little word, or

action, or gesture, which did not more or less display a strong and remarkable difference between the hearts and minds of the two. During their whole life, hitherto, notwithstanding this difference, they had lived in the utmost friendship and regard, without even any of those occasional quarrels which too often disturb the harmony of families. Perhaps the secret of this might be that the elder brother had less opportunity of domineering over the younger than generally existed in the noble families of France, for their mother had been an heiress of great possessions, and according to the tenour of her contract of marriage with their father, her feofs and riches fell on her death to her second son, leaving him, if any thing, more powerful and wealthy than his elder brother.

The fortune of neither, however, though each was large, was of such great extent as to place them amongst the few high and powerful families who at that time struggled for domination in the land of their birth. The territory of each could bring two or three hundred soldiers into the field in case of need: the wealth of each sufficed to place them in the next rank to the governor of the province which they inhabited; but still their names stood not on the same list with those of Epernon, Joyeuse, Montmorency, Guise, or Nemours; and, contented hitherto with the station which they enjoyed, neither they themselves, nor any of their ancestors, had striven to obtain for their house a distinction which, in those times, was, perhaps, more perilous than either desirable or honourable. Neither of them, indeed, was without ambition, though that ambition was, of course, modified by their several characters; but it had been controlled hitherto, perhaps, less by the powers of their own reason than by the influence of the personage who now accompanied them, and whom we have before described.

Not distantly connected with them by the ties of blood, the Abbé de Boisguerin had been called from Italy, where he had long resided, to superintend their education shortly after their mother's death. His own income, though not so small as that of many another scion of a noble house in France, had, nevertheless, proved insufficient through life to satisfy a man of expensive, though not very ostentatious, tastes and habits; and the large emoluments, offered to him, together with the prospects of advancement which the station proposed held out, induced him without hesitation to quit his residence in Rome, and revisit a country, the troublous state of which gave the prospect of advancement to every daring and unscrupulous spirit.

It may seem strange to say, as we have said, that the influence of an ambitious man had been directed to check their ambition: but he was ambitious only for the attainment of certain ends. He valued not power merely as power, but for that which power might command. Personal gratification was his object, though the pursuit of that gratification, as far as the objects of sense went, was also restrained, like his ambition, by other qualities and feelings. Thus, as an ambitious man, at the time we speak of, he was neither fierce nor grasping; as an epicurean, he was not coarse nor insatiable; and yet with all this apparent--nay, real, moderation--there lay within his breast, unexcited and undeveloped, passions as strong and fierce, desires as eager and as fiery, as ever burned within the heart of man. He controlled them by skill and habit, he covered them, as it were, with the dust and ashes of his profession, but it needed only an accidental breath to blow them into a flame, which, in turn, would have given fire to every other aspiration and effort of his mind.

He had found it in no degree difficult to obtain a complete ascendancy over the minds of the two young men he was

called upon to govern. Their father had plunged deeply, after his wife's death, into the wars and troubles of the times, and he left his two sons entirely to the care and direction of the Abbé de Boisguerin. Thus he had every opportunity that he could desire; and he brought to the task most extensive learning, which enabled him to direct in every thing the inferior teachers. His manners were graceful, polished, and captivating, his temper calm and unruffled: hiding his own thoughts and feelings under an impenetrable veil, never alluding to his past life or his future purposes, he skilfully, nay, almost imperceptibly, made himself master of the confidence of others, and gained every treasured secret of the hearts around him, without giving any thing in exchange. His learning, his wisdom, his acuteness, his impenetrability, won respect and reverence, and almost awe, from the two youths yet in their boyhood: his courtesy, his kindness, his consideration for the errors and the desires of their youth, gained greatly upon their regard; and their admiration and love was increased by some events which took place towards their seventeenth and sixteenth years.

It happened that about that time their master of arms was teaching them some of the exercises of the day in the tilt-yard of the castle; while their governor, with his arms folded on his breast, stood looking on. He usually, under such circumstances, refrained from making any observations; but, thrown for a moment off his guard on the present occasion, by what appeared to him an awkwardness on the part of the master in teaching some evolution, he said courteously enough, that he thought it might be executed better in another manner.

Conceited and rash, the master of arms replied with a show of contempt. The Abbé then persisted; and the other, with a sneer, begged that he might be experimentally

shown the new method of the governor. The churchman smiled slightly, threw off his gown, mounted one of the horses with calm and quiet grace, and with scarcely a change of feature, or any other appearance of unusual exertion, displayed his own superiority in military exercises, and foiled the master of arms with his own weapons. Ever after that, from time to time, he mingled in the sports and pastimes of the young men, never losing sight of his own dignity, but showing sufficient skill, address, and boldness to make them look up to him in the new course to which their attention was now directed by the customs of the age.

The Abbé de Boisguerin, however, did not suffer their whole attention to be occupied by those military exercises, which formed the chief subject of study with the young nobility of the day. He had caused them at an earlier period to be instructed deeply in the more elegant and graceful studies: he had endeavoured to implant in their minds a fondness for letters, for poetry, for music. Drawing, too, and painting, then rising into splendour from the darkness which had long covered it, were pointed out to their attention, as objects of admiration and interest for every fine and elevated mind; and while no manly sport or science was omitted, the many moments of unfilled time that then hung heavy on the hands of other youths in France were by them filled up with occupations calculated to polish, to expand, and to dignify their minds.

As far as this had gone, every thing that the Abbé de Boisguerin had done was calculated to raise him in the esteem of his pupils; and when, on the death of their father, they found that their preceptor had been appointed to remain with them till the law placed their conduct in their own hands, they both rejoiced equally and sincerely.

It may be asked, however, whether, of the two brothers, the Abbé had himself a favourite, and whether he was better beloved by the one than by the other? Still wise and cautious in all his proceedings, his demeanour displayed no great predilection to either. No ordinary eye could see: they themselves could not detect, by any outward sign, that one possessed a particle more of his regard than the other, and both were towards him equally attentive, affectionate, and respectful. But there was one peculiarity in his method of dealing with them, and in the effect that it produced upon either, which showed to himself, and unwittingly showed to one, which was the character best calculated to assimilate with his own.

It more than once happened, nay, indeed, it often happened, that in order to induce them to arrive at the same conclusion with himself, or to lead them to do that which their passions, prejudices, or weaknesses made them unwilling to do, he would address himself, not directly to their reason or to their heart, but to their vanity, their pride, their prejudices: he would politically combat one error with another: he would not exactly assail what he knew to be wrong, but would undermine it; and when he had conquered, and they were satisfied that he was right in the result, he would then point, with a degree of smiling and good-humoured triumph, to the subtle means which he had employed to lead them to his purpose.

The elder brother would sometimes be angry at having been so led; but yet he took a certain pleasure in the skill with which it was done, and more than once endeavoured to give the Abbé back art for art. He strove to lead his younger brother by the same means, and more than once succeeded. The younger, however, on his part, showed no anger at having been led, if he were fully convinced that the object was right. He never attempted, however, to practise

the same; and as he grew up, when any act of the kind was particularly remarkable in the Abbé, or in his brother, it threw him into musings more serious than those which he usually indulged in. If it diminished his regard for either, he did not suffer that result to appear; and when he reached the period at which his mother's estates were given into his own hands, he eagerly besought the preceptor to remain with them, and insured to him an income far beyond that which any thing but deep affection and regard required him to bestow.

The interest of their father had before his death obtained for the Abbé de Boisguerin the office of a bishopric; but the Abbé had declined it--perhaps, as many another man has done, with more ambition than moderation in the refusal--and he had continued to remain with his pupils, increasing and extending his influence over them, up to the moment at which we have placed them before the reader. He had carefully withheld them, however; from mingling in that world of which they as yet knew little or nothing, and in which his influence was likely to be lost, looking forward to that period at which the circumstances of the times should--as he saw they were likely to do--render the support of the two young noblemen so indispensable to some one of the great parties then struggling for supreme power, that they might command any thing which he chose to dictate as the price of adhesion.

Such was their state at the period which we have chosen for opening this tale. But there was another point in their state which it may be necessary to mark. They were not themselves at all aware of their own characters and dispositions; nor was any one else, except the clear-sighted and penetrating man who had dwelt so long with them; and he could only guess, for all the world of passions within the bosoms of each had as yet slumbered in their youthful

idleness, like Samson in the lap of Delilah; but they were speedily to be roused.

The dress of each requires but little comment, as it was the ordinary hunting dress of the period, and was only remarkable for a good deal of ornament, denoting, perhaps, a little taste for finery, which might be passed over in youth. Of the two, perhaps the younger brother displayed less gold and embroidery upon his green doublet and riding coat. His boots, too, made, as usual, of untanned leather, displayed no gold tassels at the sides; though his moderation in these respects might be in some degree atoned by the length of the tall single feather in his riding cap.

Such were the principal persons of the group which rode into the green alley or glade that we have described in the wood; and the rest, amounting to some twenty in number, comprised attendants of all sorts in the glittering and many-coloured apparel of that time.

CHAPTER II.

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Did all that are hunted in this world--whether the chase be carried on by care, or villany, or sorrow, by our own passions, or by the malevolence of our fellow-men--did all that are hunted in this world obtain as loud and clear an intimation that the pursuit is up and stirring, as the wild boar which had been tracked to its covert then had, we might have a better chance than this world generally affords us of making our escape in time, or, at least, of preparing for defence.

Much was the noise, great the gingling and the tramp, the whining of impatient dogs, the chiding of surly foresters, the loud laugh and gay jest of their masters, in the glen of the wood within three or four hundred yards of the thicket in which the boar lay sleeping. He woke not with the sounds, however, or, at all events, he noticed them not, while the preparations went on for putting his easy life in the brown forest to a close.

"Well, Gondrin," exclaimed the elder of the two brothers, Gaspar, Marquis of Montsoreau--"Well, Gondrin, have you made sure of our beast? is he lodged safely?"

"As safe as an ox in his stall," replied the huntsman, whom we have seen tracking the steps of the wild boar over the crisp frost-covered leaves of winter. "He has his lair in the thicket there, my Lord, and, as near as I can guess, he is but a hundred yards in. If you go round by the back of the cottage, and station two relays, one on the hill of Dufay, and the other on the bank of the river by the bridge of

Neufbourg, you will have a glorious chase; for he can take no other way but down the glen, and then crossing the high road by the river, must run all the way up the valley, and stand at bay amongst the rocks at the end."

"Beautifully arranged, Gondrin, beautifully arranged," cried the younger brother, Charles of Montsoreau, Count of Logères; but his elder brother instantly interrupted him, exclaiming, "But have you not netted the thicket, Gondrin?"

"No, my Lord," replied the huntsman; "Count Charles said the other day he loved to give the beasts a chance, and lodged as the boar is, you would miss the run, for then he must turn at bay in the thicket and be killed immediately."

"It matters not, it matters not," replied Gaspar de Montsoreau. "If Charles like it, so let it be; and yet I love to see the huge beast darting from side to side, and floundering in the nets he did not think of. There is a pleasure in so circumventing him."

"It is not too late yet," said the fine rich musical voice of the Abbé de Boisguerin. "The nets can be speedily brought, and the thicket enclosed."

"Oh no," cried both brothers at once: "we have no such patience, you know, good friend. Send down the relays, Gondrin, and let us begin the sport at once."

"I will go round to the left of the thicket with my men," continued the younger brother, "and will keep the hill-side as well as if there were all the nets in the world. You, Gaspar, keep this side and the little lane behind the cottage."

"And what shall I do?" demanded the Abbé with a smile. "I must not show myself backward in your sports, Charles, so I

will go with Gondrin here, and some of the piqueurs, and force the grizzly monarch of the forest in his hold."

The matter being thus determined, the relays were sent down, and the parties separated for their several stations, Gondrin saying to his younger lord as they went round, "If I sound one mot on my horn, sir, the boar is making his rush towards you; if I sound two, he is taking towards the Marquis; but if I sound three, be sure that he is going down the valley, as I said, and must take to the rocks, for he has no chance any other way but by the ford, which he won't take, unless hard pressed."

"I will go straight round by the ford and turn him," replied his young lord. "Then we make sure of him altogether, Gondrin."

Thus saying, he rode quickly on and took his station on the hill, where an open space gave him room to plant his men around so as to meet the boar at any point of the ascent, in case the beast turned in that direction and endeavoured to plunge into the depths of the forest.

Some time was allowed to elapse, in order to give the relays time to reach their stations, and then, from the western side of the thicket, were heard the cries and halloos of the huntsmen, as they themselves plunged into the wood, and encouraged the dogs to attack the boar in his lair. For a short space, the hounds themselves were mute; but, in about five minutes, they seemed to have got upon the boar's scent, who had moved onward, roused by the cries of the hunters, and a loud long opening burst announced that they had come upon his track, A minute afterwards, a single note was heard from the horn of the huntsman, and the grey form of the boar glanced for a moment past one of the gaps in the wood where the

younger of the brothers had stationed himself; but the beast plunged in again immediately, and a piercing yell from one of the dogs seemed to show that he had passed through the midst of the hounds, taking vengeance upon them as he went for disturbing his quiet. Shortly after, the horn of Gondrin gave the signal that the boar was rushing down the valley. Charles of Montsoreau paused to be quite sure, but the three notes were sounded again after a moment's silence, and, setting spurs to his horse, he galloped on like lightning to interrupt the boar, and turn him at the ford. The loud cries of the dogs in full chase were sufficient to show him that he was right in the direction he had taken till he issued forth from the wood, and after that he could see with his own eyes the whole scene of the boar's flight, and the pursuit through the open country into which the beast was now driven.

Galloping on with all the eagerness and impetuosity of youth, he made at once for the ford; now catching wide views of the landscape as he passed over the side of some open hill, now losing the whole again as he plunged amidst the leafless vineyards or woods. The country around was thus hidden from his sight, and he could see nothing but the dull dry stems of the vines, in a low sloping hollow through which he passed, or a few mottled patches of darker cloud upon the dull grey sky overhead--when suddenly his ear caught the sound of distant fire-arms, and he drew up his horse in no small surprise.

The situation of the country, indeed--the wars that were taking place in almost every part of France--the general disorganisation of society, which throughout almost the whole land changed the peasant into the soldier, either for the purposes of plunder or self-defence--might be supposed to have rendered such sounds not at all unfamiliar to his ear; and, in truth, two years before he would have shown no

sign of astonishment to have heard a whole park of artillery roaring in the direction from which he now heard the sound of a few scattered shots. Since, then, however, the tide of warfare had been turned in another direction. In the secluded spot in which he dwelt, few visits from occasional marauders were to be apprehended: the peasantry had returned to their labours, and no news of any kind from the distant provinces had given reason to suppose that the scourge of civil war was again likely to afflict that part of the country. Some precautions, indeed, had been necessary to keep down petty feuds and plundering excursions amongst some of the inferior gentry and partisans in the neighbourhood; and the two young noblemen had been called upon to practise some of the most important duties of their station, in maintaining, as far as possible, peace and tranquillity around them.

After pausing, then, for a moment, to listen, Charles of Montsoreau, judging that the sounds he heard proceeded from some new infraction of the law, rode on, determined, as soon as he had finished the all-important business of the chase, to investigate the matter more thoroughly, and to punish the aggressors. All these fine resolutions, however, were changed in a moment; for almost as soon as they were formed he emerged from the vineyard through which he had been passing, entered upon the open side of the hill, and a scene was presented to his eyes which excited other and somewhat more painful feelings in his bosom.

Although the point on which he stood was not particularly high, the view was extensive and uninterrupted by any very near object. The valley through which the stream wound was about a mile and a half in breadth, and five or six miles in length; along the whole extent of which the high road was visible, with the exception of a few hundred yards here and there, where a rock, or a peasant's house, or a water-mill by

the side of the stream, interrupted the view. At the distance of somewhat more than half a mile lay the bridge over the stream, and half way between it and the spot where the young gentleman stood, appeared one of the large, heavy, wide-topped carriages of the day, drawn by six horses, and driving along at a furious rate, as if in full flight. The driver was lashing his horses with furious eagerness; but ever and anon he turned his head to look behind towards the bridge, where a scene appeared, which showed his anxiety to quicken his pace to be not at all unnatural.

Half upon the bridge and half upon the road, on the nearer side of the stream, appeared a very small body of horsemen, apparently not more than seven or eight in number, contending fiercely with a larger body, as if to give time for the persons in the carriage to escape; and from that spot, rolling up in white wreaths amongst the yellow banks and cold green wintry slopes of scanty herbage, curled the white smoke, occasioned by the discharge of fire-arms. At the distance of about a mile and a half beyond, again, was seen coming up, with headlong speed, a still larger body of cavalry; and it was evident, that at the rate with which the latter were advancing, the carriage and its denizens, if such were the object of their pursuit, would not be very long before they were overtaken.

It is a pleasant weakness in young and generous minds to seek in all strifes the defence of the weaker, even when we do not know whether the cause that we thus espouse be or be not the just one. Charles of Montsoreau paused but for a moment, and then rode down towards the carriage as fast as possible, followed by his attendants. The coachman showed great unwillingness to stop; but he had no power of resisting the command which he received to do so, and accordingly, as soon as it was repeated, obeyed. But, at the same moment, the head of an elderly lady, apparently of

some rank, was thrust forth from between the curtains of the vehicle, uttering various not very coherent sentences, and displaying in every line and feature indubitable marks of great fear and trepidation.

Brought up in the habit of chivalrous courtesy, the young nobleman instantly raised his cap, and bowing low, asked if he could render her any service. His words were few and simple, but there was great encouragement in his air; and the lady replied, "Oh! for Heaven's sake, do not stop us, young gentleman. We have been basely betrayed by one of our servants into an ambush of the King of Navarre's reiters, who seek to make us prisoners, and Heaven only knows what may become of us if they succeed."

"If the reiters be those that are following you," said the young nobleman, "there is no earthly possibility of your escaping them, madam, except by taking refuge in the château of Montsoreau hard by. I will give your coachman directions, and then go down and help to disentangle your attendants, who seem to be contending gallantly with superior numbers on the bridge."

"A thousand and a thousand thanks, young gentleman," replied the lady. "But how," she added, with a look of uncertainty, "but how can we tell that we shall be kindly received at Montsoreau, and shall not, perhaps, be treated as prisoners there also?"

"By my promise, madam," replied the young gentleman with a smile, "I am Charles of Montsoreau, the Marquis's brother: will you trust yourself to my word?"

"Most willingly," she said; and turning to the coachman, the young gentleman added, "Drive on with all speed till the road divides, then take the left-hand road up the hill and

through the wood; demand admittance, in my name, at the castle, if I should not have come up in time. But I shall have overtaken you before then. Now, speed on, and spare not your beasts, for the way is not long, if you be diligent."

Thus saying, he again bowed low and rode on, and in a very few minutes had reached the spot where the contention was taking place between the party of light-armed servants attending upon the carriage and the heavy armed reiters.

The young nobleman was not unwilling to signalise himself by any deed of arms that might fall in his way; but on the present occasion no great opportunity was afforded him, for the numbers he brought to the assistance of the servants appeared so formidable in the eyes of the other party who were already engaged in the fray, that they hastened to draw back for the purpose of waiting in security the arrival of their comrades; and the only event which took place worth noting was the action of the commander of the reiters then present, who turned deliberately as he retreated, and fired his pistol at the head of the young nobleman with so true an aim as to send the bullet through his hunting cap, within an inch of his head.

Under any other circumstances, Charles of Montsoreau would not have failed to repay this sort of courtesy with something of the same kind; but recollecting the situation of the persons in the carriage, he showed more cool prudence than might have been expected from his years; and telling an elderly man, who seemed the principal attendant present, that the carriage was proceeding as fast as possible to the shelter of the château of Montsoreau, he bade him ride after it with all speed.