Marguerite de Valois

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CHAPTER I.

MONSIEUR DE GUISE'S LATIN.

On Monday, the 18th of August, 1572, there was a splendid festival at the Louvre.

The ordinarily gloomy windows of the ancient royal residence were brilliantly lighted, and the squares and streets adjacent, usually so solitary after Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had struck the hour of nine, were crowded with people, although it was past midnight.

The vast, threatening, eager, turbulent throng resembled, in the darkness, a black and tumbling sea, each billow of which makes a roaring breaker; this sea, flowing through the Rue des Fossés Saint Germain and the Rue de l'Astruce and covering the quay, surged against the base of the walls of the Louvre, and, in its refluent tide, against the Hôtel de Bourbon, which faced it on the other side.

In spite of the royal festival, and perhaps even because of the royal festival, there was something threatening in the appearance of the people, for no doubt was felt that this imposing ceremony which called them there as spectators, was only the prelude to another in which they would participate a week later as invited guests and amuse themselves with all their hearts.

The court was celebrating the marriage of Madame Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Henry II. and sister of King Charles IX., with Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre. In truth, that very morning, on a stage erected at the entrance to Notre-Dame, the Cardinal de Bourbon had united the young couple with the usual ceremonial observed at the marriages of the royal daughters of France.

This marriage had astonished every one, and occasioned much surmise to certain persons who saw clearer than others. They found it difficult to understand the union of two parties who hated each other so thoroughly as did, at this moment, the Protestant party and the Catholic party; and they wondered how the young Prince de Condé could forgive the Duc d'Anjou, the King's brother, for the death of his father, assassinated at Jarnac by Montesquiou. They asked how the young Duc de Guise could pardon Admiral de Coligny for the death of his father, assassinated at Orléans by Poltrot de Méré.

Moreover, Jeanne de Navarre, the weak Antoine de Bourbon's courageous wife, who had conducted her son Henry to the royal marriage awaiting him, had died scarcely two months before, and singular reports had been spread abroad as to her sudden death. It was everywhere whispered, and in some places said aloud, that she had discovered some terrible secret; and that Catharine de Médicis, fearing its disclosure, had poisoned her with perfumed gloves, which had been

made by a man named Réné, a Florentine deeply skilled in such matters. This report was the more widely spread and believed when, after this great queen's death, at her son's request, two celebrated physicians, one of whom was the famous Ambroise Paré, were instructed to open and examine the body, but not the skull. As Jeanne de Navarre had been poisoned by a perfume, only the brain could show any trace of the crime (the one part excluded from dissection). We say crime, for no one doubted that a crime had been committed.

This was not all. King Charles in particular had, with a persistency almost approaching obstinacy, urged this marriage, which not only reëstablished peace in his kingdom, but also attracted to Paris the principal Huguenots of France. As the two betrothed belonged one to the Catholic religion and the other to the reformed religion, they had been obliged to obtain a dispensation from Gregory XIII., who then filled the papal chair. The dispensation was slow in coming, and the delay had caused the late Queen of Navarre great uneasiness. She one day expressed to Charles IX. her fears lest the dispensation should not arrive; to which the King replied:

"Have no anxiety, my dear aunt. I honor you more than I do the Pope, and I love my sister more than I fear him. I am not a Huguenot, neither am I a blockhead; and if the Pope makes a fool of himself, I will myself take Margot by the hand, and have her married to your son in some Protestant meeting-house!"

This speech was soon spread from the Louvre through the city, and, while it greatly rejoiced the Huguenots, had given the Catholics something to think about; they asked one another, in a whisper, if the King was really betraying them or was only playing a comedy which some fine morning or evening might have an unexpected ending.

Charles IX.'s conduct toward Admiral de Coligny, who for five or six years had been so bitterly opposed to the King, appeared particularly inexplicable; after having put on his head a price of a hundred and fifty thousand golden crowns, the King now swore by him, called him his father, and declared openly that he should in future confide the conduct of the war to him alone. To such a pitch was this carried that Catharine de Médicis herself, who until then had controlled the young prince's actions, will, and even desires, seemed to be growing really uneasy, and not without reason; for, in a moment of confidence, Charles IX. had said to the admiral, in reference to the war in Flanders,

"My father, there is one other thing against which we must be on our guard—that is, that the queen, my mother, who likes to poke her nose everywhere, as you well know, shall learn nothing of this undertaking; we must keep it so quiet that she will not have a suspicion of it, or being such a mischief-maker as I know she is, she would spoil all."

Now, wise and experienced as he was, Coligny had not been able to keep such an absolute secret; and, though he had come to Paris with

great suspicions, and albeit at his departure from Chatillon a peasant woman had thrown herself at his feet, crying, "Ah! sir, our good master, do not go to Paris, for if you do, you will die—you and all who are with you!"—these suspicions were gradually lulled in his heart, and so it was with Téligny, his son-in-law, to whom the King was especially kind and attentive, calling him his brother, as he called the admiral his father, and addressing him with the familiar "thou," as he did his best friends.

The Huguenots, excepting some few morose and suspicious spirits, were therefore completely reassured. The death of the Queen of Navarre passed as having been caused by pleurisy, and the spacious apartments of the Louvre were filled with all those gallant Protestants to whom the marriage of their young chief, Henry, promised an unexpected return of good fortune. Admiral Coligny, La Rochefoucault, the young Prince de Condé, Téligny,—in short, all the leaders of the party,—were triumphant when they saw so powerful at the Louvre and so welcome in Paris those whom, three months before, King Charles and Queen Catharine would have hanged on gibbets higher than those of assassins.

The Maréchal de Montmorency was the only one who was missing among all his brothers, for no promise could move him, no specious appearances deceive him, and he remained secluded in his château de l'Isle Adam, offering as his excuse for not appearing the grief which he still felt for his father, the Constable Anne de Montmorency, who had been killed at the battle of Saint Denis by a pistol-shot fired by Robert Stuart. But as this had taken place more than three years before, and as sensitiveness was a virtue little practised at that time, this unduly protracted mourning was interpreted just as people cared to interpret it.

However, everything seemed to show that the Maréchal de Montmorency was mistaken. The King, the Queen, the Duc d'Anjou, and the Duc d'Alençon did the honors of the royal festival with all courtesy and kindness.

The Duc d'Anjou received from the Huguenots themselves well-deserved compliments on the two battles of Jarnac and Montcontour, which he had gained before he was eighteen years of age, more precocious in that than either Cæsar or Alexander, to whom they compared him, of course placing the conquerors of Pharsalia and the Issus as inferior to the living prince. The Duc d'Alençon looked on, with his bland, false smile, while Queen Catharine, radiant with joy and overflowing with honeyed phrases, congratulated Prince Henry de Condé on his recent marriage with Marie de Clèves; even the Messieurs de Guise themselves smiled on the formidable enemies of their house, and the Duc de Mayenne discoursed with M. de Tavannes and the admiral on the impending war, which was now more than ever threatened against Philippe II.

In the midst of these groups a young man of about nineteen years of age was walking to and fro, his head a little on one side, his ear open to all that was said. He had a keen eye, black hair cut very close, thick eyebrows, a nose hooked like an eagle's, a sneering smile, and a growing mustache and beard. This young man, who by his reckless daring had first attracted attention at the battle of Arnay-le-Duc and was the recipient of numberless compliments, was the dearly beloved pupil of Coligny and the hero of the day. Three months before—that is to say, when his mother was still living—he was called the Prince de Béarn, now he was called the King of Navarre, afterwards he was known as Henry IV.

From time to time a swift and gloomy cloud passed over his brow; unquestionably it was at the thought that scarce had two months elapsed since his mother's death, and he, less than any one, doubted that she had been poisoned. But the cloud was transitory, and disappeared like a fleeting shadow, for they who spoke to him, they who congratulated him, they who elbowed him, were the very ones who had assassinated the brave Jeanne d'Albret.

Some paces distant from the King of Navarre, almost as pensive, almost as gloomy as the king pretended to be joyous and open-hearted, was the young Duc de Guise, conversing with Téligny. More fortunate than the Béarnais, at two-and-twenty he had almost attained the reputation of his father, François, the great Duc de Guise. He was an elegant gentleman, very tall, with a noble and haughty look, and gifted with that natural majesty which caused it to be said that in comparison with him other princes seemed to belong to the people. Young as he was, the Catholics looked up to him as the chief of their party, as the Huguenots saw theirs in Henry of Navarre, whose portrait we have just drawn. At first he had borne the title of Prince de Joinville, and at the siege of Orléans had fought his first battle under his father, who died in his arms, denouncing Admiral Coligny as his assassin. The young duke then, like Hannibal, took a solemn oath to avenge his father's death on the admiral and his family, and to pursue the foes to his religion without truce or respite, promising God to be his destroying angel on earth until the last heretic should be exterminated. So with deep astonishment the people saw this prince, usually so faithful to his word, offering his hand to those whom he had sworn to hold as his eternal enemies, and talking familiarly with the son-in-law of the man whose death he had promised to his dying father.

But as we have said, this was an evening of astonishments.

Indeed, an observer privileged to be present at this festival, endowed with the knowledge of the future which is fortunately hidden from men, and with that power of reading men's hearts which unfortunately belongs only to God, would have certainly enjoyed the strangest spectacle to be found in all the annals of the melancholy human comedy.

But this observer who was absent from the inner courts of the Louvre was to be found in the streets gazing with flashing eyes and breaking out into loud threats; this observer was the people, who, with its marvellous instinct made keener by hatred, watched from afar the shadows of its implacable enemies and translated the impressions they made with as great clearness as an inquisitive person can do before the windows of a hermetically sealed ball-room. The music intoxicates and governs the dancers, but the inquisitive person sees only the movement and laughs at the puppet jumping about without reason, because the inquisitive person hears no music.

The music that intoxicated the Huguenots was the voice of their pride.

The gleams which caught the eyes of the Parisians that midnight were the lightning flashes of their hatred illuminating the future.

And meantime everything was still festive within, and a murmur softer and more flattering than ever was at this moment pervading the Louvre, for the youthful bride, having laid aside her toilet of ceremony, her long mantle and flowing veil, had just returned to the ball-room, accompanied by the lovely Duchesse de Nevers, her most intimate friend, and led by her brother, Charles IX., who presented her to the principal guests.

The bride was the daughter of Henry II., was the pearl of the crown of France, was MARGUERITE DE VALOIS, whom in his familiar tenderness for her King Charles IX. always called "*ma sœur Margot*," "my sister Margot."

Assuredly never was any welcome, however flattering, more richly deserved than that which the new Queen of Navarre was at this moment receiving. Marguerite at this period was scarcely twenty, and she was already the object of all the poets' eulogies, some of whom compared her to Aurora, others to Cytherea; she was, in truth, a beauty without rival in that court in which Catharine de Médicis had assembled the loveliest women she could find, to make of them her sirens.

Marguerite had black hair and a brilliant complexion; a voluptuous eye, veiled by long lashes; delicate coral lips; a slender neck; a graceful, opulent figure, and concealed in a satin slipper a tiny foot. The French, who possessed her, were proud to see such a lovely flower flourishing in their soil, and foreigners who passed through France returned home dazzled with her beauty if they had but seen her, and amazed at her knowledge if they had discoursed with her; for Marguerite was not only the loveliest, she was also the most erudite woman of her time, and every one was quoting the remark of an Italian scholar who had been presented to her, and who, after having conversed with her for an hour in Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek, had gone away saying:

"To see the court without seeing Marguerite de Valois is to see neither France nor the court."

Thus addresses to King Charles IX. and the Queen of Navarre were not wanting. It is well known that the Huguenots were great hands at addresses. Many allusions to the past, many hints as to the future, were adroitly slipped into these harangues; but to all such allusions and speeches the King replied, with his pale lips and artificial smiles:

"In giving my sister Margot to Henry of Navarre, I give my sister to all the Protestants of the kingdom."

This phrase assured some and made others smile, for it had really a double sense: the one paternal, with which Charles IX. would not load his mind; the other insulting to the bride, to her husband, and also to him who said it, for it recalled some scandalous rumors with which the chroniclers of the court had already found means to smirch the nuptial robe of Marguerite de Valois.

However, M. de Guise was conversing, as we have said, with Téligny; but he did not pay to the conversation such sustained attention but that he turned away somewhat, from time to time, to cast a glance at the group of ladies, in the centre of whom glittered the Queen of Navarre. When the princess's eye thus met that of the young duke, a cloud seemed to over-spread that lovely brow, around which stars of diamonds formed a tremulous halo, and some agitating thought might be divined in her restless and impatient manner.

The Princess Claude, Marguerite's eldest sister, who had been for some years married to the Duc de Lorraine, had observed this uneasiness, and was going up to her to inquire the cause, when all stood aside at the approach of the queen mother, who came forward, leaning on the arm of the young Prince de Condé, and the princess was thus suddenly separated from her sister. There was a general movement, by which the Duc de Guise profited to approach Madame de Nevers, his sister-in-law, and Marguerite.

Madame de Lorraine, who had not lost sight of her sister, then remarked, instead of the cloud which she had before observed on her forehead, a burning blush come into her cheeks. The duke approached still nearer, and when he was within two steps of Marguerite, she appeared rather to feel than see his presence, and turned round, making a violent effort over herself in order to give her features an appearance of calmness and indifference. The duke, then respectfully bowing, murmured in a low tone,

"*Ipse attuli.*"

That meant: "I have brought it, or brought it myself."

Marguerite returned the young duke's bow, and as she straightened herself, replied, in the same tone,

"*Noctu pro more.*"

That meant: "To-night, as usual."

These soft words, absorbed by the enormous collar which the princess wore, as in the bell of a speaking-trumpet, were heard only by the

person to whom they were addressed; but brief as had been the conference, it doubtless composed all the young couple had to say, for after this exchange of two words for three, they separated, Marguerite more thoughtful and the duke with his brow less clouded than when they met. This little scene took place without the person most interested appearing to remark it, for the King of Navarre had eyes but for one lady, and she had around her a suite almost as numerous as that which followed Marguerite de Valois. This was the beautiful Madame de Sauve.

Charlotte de Beaune Semblançay, granddaughter of the unfortunate Semblançay, and wife of Simon de Fizes, Baron de Sauve, was one of the ladies-in-waiting to Catharine de Médicis, and one of the most redoubtable auxiliaries of this queen, who poured forth to her enemies love-philtres when she dared not pour out Florentine poison. Delicately fair, and by turns sparkling with vivacity or languishing in melancholy, always ready for love and intrigue, the two great occupations which for fifty years employed the court of the three succeeding kings,—a woman in every acceptation of the word and in all the charm of the idea, from the blue eye languishing or flashing with fire to the small rebellious feet arched in their velvet slippers, Madame de Sauve had already for some months taken complete possession of every faculty of the King of Navarre, then beginning his career as a lover as well as a politician; thus it was that Marguerite de Valois, a magnificent and royal beauty, had not even excited admiration in her husband's heart; and what was more strange, and astonished all the world, even from a soul so full of darkness and mystery, Catharine de Médicis, while she prosecuted her project of union between her daughter and the King of Navarre, had not ceased to favor almost openly his amour with Madame de Sauve. But despite this powerful aid, and despite the easy manners of the age, the lovely Charlotte had hitherto resisted; and this resistance, unheard of, incredible, unprecedented, even more than the beauty and wit of her who resisted, had excited in the heart of the Béarnais a passion which, unable to satisfy itself, had destroyed in the young king's heart all timidity, pride, and even that carelessness, half philosophic, half indolent, which formed the basis of his character.

Madame de Sauve had been only a few minutes in the ballroom; from spite or grief she had at first resolved on not being present at her rival's triumph, and under the pretext of an indisposition had allowed her husband, who had been for five years secretary of state, to go alone to the Louvre; but when Catharine de Médicis saw the baron without his wife, she asked the cause that kept her dear Charlotte away, and when she found that the indisposition was but slight, she wrote a few words to her, which the lady hastened to obey. Henry, sad as he had at first been at her absence, had yet breathed more freely when he saw M. de Sauve enter alone; but just as he was about to pay some court to the charming creature whom he was condemned, if not to love, at least to treat as his

wife, he unexpectedly saw Madame de Sauve arise from the farther end of the gallery. He remained stationary on the spot, his eyes fastened on the Circe who enthralled him as if by magic chains, and instead of proceeding towards his wife, by a movement of hesitation which betrayed more astonishment than alarm he advanced to meet Madame de Sauve.

The courtiers, seeing the King of Navarre, whose inflammable heart they knew, approach the beautiful Charlotte, had not the courage to prevent their meeting, but drew aside complaisantly; so that at the very moment when Marguerite de Valois and Monsieur de Guise exchanged the few words in Latin which we have noted above, Henry, having approached Madame de Sauve, began, in very intelligible French, although with somewhat of a Gascon accent, a conversation by no means so mysterious.

"Ah, *ma mie*!" he said, "you have, then, come at the very moment when they assured me that you were ill, and I had lost all hope of seeing you."

"Would your majesty perhaps wish me to believe that it had cost you something to lose this hope?" replied Madame de Sauve.

"By Heaven! I believe it!" replied the Béarnais; "know you not that you are my sun by day and my star by night? By my faith, I was in deepest darkness till you appeared and suddenly illumined all."

"Then, monseigneur, I serve you a very ill turn."

"What do you mean, *ma mie*?" inquired Henry.

"I mean that he who is master of the handsomest woman in France should only have one desire—that the light should disappear and give way to darkness, for happiness awaits you in the darkness."

"You know, cruel one, that my happiness is in the hands of one woman only, and that she laughs at poor Henry."

"Oh!" replied the baroness, "I believed, on the contrary, that it was this person who was the sport and jest of the King of Navarre." Henry was alarmed at this hostile attitude, and yet he bethought him that it betrayed jealous spite, and that jealous spite is only the mask of love.

"Indeed, dear Charlotte, you reproach me very unjustly, and I do not comprehend how so lovely a mouth can be so cruel. Do you suppose for a moment that it is I who give myself in marriage? No, *ventre saint gris*, it is not I!"

"It is I, perhaps," said the baroness, sharply,—if ever the voice of the woman who loves us and reproaches us for not loving her can seem sharp.

"With your lovely eyes have you not seen farther, baroness? No, no; Henry of Navarre is not marrying Marguerite de Valois."

"And who, pray, is?"

"Why, by Heaven! it is the reformed religion marrying the pope—that's all."

"No, no, I cannot be deceived by your jests. Monseigneur loves Madame Marguerite. And can I blame you? Heaven forbid! She is beautiful enough to be adored."

Henry reflected for a moment, and, as he reflected, a meaning smile curled the corner of his lips.

"Baroness," said he, "you seem to be seeking a quarrel with me, but you have no right to do so. What have you done to prevent me from marrying Madame Marguerite? Nothing. On the contrary, you have always driven me to despair."

"And well for me that I have, monseigneur," replied Madame de Sauve.

"How so?"

"Why, of course, because you are marrying another woman!"

"I marry her because you love me not."

"If I had loved you, sire, I must have died in an hour."

"In an hour? What do you mean? And of what death would you have died?"

"Of jealousy!—for in an hour the Queen of Navarre will send away her women, and your majesty your gentlemen."

"Is that really the thought that is uppermost in your mind, *ma mie*?"

"I did not say so. I only say, that if I loved you it would be uppermost in my mind most tormentingly."

"Very well," said Henry, at the height of joy on hearing this confession, the first which she had made to him, "suppose the King of Navarre should not send away his gentlemen this evening?"

"Sire," replied Madame de Sauve, looking at the king with astonishment for once unfeigned, "you say things impossible and incredible."

"What must I do to make you believe them?"

"Give me a proof—and that proof you cannot give me."

"Yes, baroness, yes! By Saint Henry, I will give it you!" exclaimed the king, gazing at the young woman with eyes hot with love.

"Oh, your majesty!" exclaimed the lovely Charlotte in an undertone and with downcast eyes, "I do not understand—No! no, it is impossible for you to turn your back on the happiness awaiting you."

"There are four Henrys in this room, my adorable!" replied the king, "Henry de France, Henry de Condé, Henry de Guise, but there is only one Henry of Navarre."

"Well?"

"Well; if this Henry of Navarre is with you all night"—

"All night!"

"Yes; will that be a certain proof to you that he is not with any other?"

"Ah! if you do that, sire," cried Madame Sauve.

"On the honor of a gentleman I will do it!"

Madame de Sauve raised her great eyes dewy with voluptuous promises and looked at the king, whose heart was filled with an

intoxicating joy.

"And then," said Henry, "what will you say?"

"I will say," replied Charlotte, "that your majesty really loves me."

"*Ventre saint gris*! then you shall say it, baroness, for it is true."

"But how can you manage it?" murmured Madame de Sauve.

"Oh! by Heaven! baroness, have you not about you some waiting-woman, some girl whom you can trust?"

"Yes, Dariole is so devoted to me that she would let herself be cut in pieces for me; she is a real treasure."

"By Heaven! then say to her that I will make her fortune when I am King of France, as the astrologers prophesy."

Charlotte smiled, for even at this period the Gascon reputation of the Béarnais was already established with respect to his promises.

"Well, then, what do you want Dariole to do?"

"Little for her, a great deal for me. Your apartment is over mine?"

"Yes."

"Let her wait behind the door. I will knock gently three times; she will open the door, and you will have the proof that I have promised you."

Madame de Sauve kept silence for several seconds, and then, as if she had looked around her to observe if she were overheard, she fastened her gaze for a moment on the group clustering around the queen mother; brief as the moment was, it was sufficient for Catharine and her lady-in-waiting to exchange a look.

"Oh, if I were inclined," said Madame de Sauve, with a siren's accent that would have melted the wax in Ulysses' ears, "if I were inclined to make your majesty tell a falsehood"—

"*Ma mie*, try"—

"Ah, *ma foi*! I confess I am tempted to do so."

"Give in! Women are never so strong as after they are defeated."

"Sire, I hold you to your promise for Dariole when you shall be King of France."

Henry uttered an exclamation of joy.

At the precise moment when this cry escaped the lips of the Béarnais, the Queen of Navarre was replying to the Duc de Guise:

"*Noctu pro more*—to-night as usual."

Then Henry turned away from Madame de Sauve as happy as the Duc de Guise had been when he left Marguerite de Valois.

An hour after the double scene we have just related, King Charles and the queen mother retired to their apartments. Almost immediately the rooms began to empty; the galleries exhibited the bases of their marble columns. The admiral and the Prince de Condé were escorted home by four hundred Huguenot gentlemen through the middle of the crowd, which hooted as they passed. Then Henry de Guise, with the Lorraine gentlemen and the Catholics, left in their turn, greeted by cries of joy and plaudits of the people.

But Marguerite de Valois, Henry de Navarre, and Madame de Sauve lived in the Louvre.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUEEN OF NAVARRE'S BEDCHAMBER.

The Duc de Guise escorted his sister-in-law, the Duchess de Nevers, to her hôtel in the Rue du Chaume, facing the Rue de Brac, and after he had put her into the hands of her women, he went to his own apartment to change his dress, put on a night cloak, and armed himself with one of those short, keen poniards which are called "*foi de gentilhomme*," and were worn without swords; but as he took it off the table on which it lay, he perceived a small billet between the blade and the scabbard.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"*I hope M. de Guise will not return to the Louvre to-night; or if he does, that he will at least take the precaution to arm himself with a good coat of mail and a proved sword.*"

"Aha!" said the duke, addressing his valet, "this is a singular warning, Maître Robin. Now be kind enough to tell me who has been here during my absence."

"Only one person, monseigneur."

"Who?"

"Monsieur du Gast."

"Aha! In fact, methinks I recognize the handwriting. And you are sure that Du Gast came? You saw him?"

"More than that, monseigneur; I spoke with him."

"Very good; then I will follow his advice—my steel jacket and my sword."

The valet, accustomed to these changes of costume, brought both. The duke put on his jacket, which was made of rings of steel so fine that it was scarcely thicker than velvet; he then drew on over his coat of mail his small clothes and a doublet of gray and silver, his favorite colors, put on a pair of long boots which reached to the middle of his thighs, covered his head with a velvet toque unadorned with feathers or precious stones, threw over his shoulders a dark-colored cloak, hung a dagger by his side, handed his sword to a page, the only attendant he allowed to accompany him, and took the way to the Louvre.

As he went down the steps of the hôtel, the watchman of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois had just announced one o'clock in the morning.

Though the night was far gone and the streets at this time were very far from safe, no accident befell the adventurous prince on the way, and safe and sound he approached the colossal mass of the ancient Louvre, all the lights of which had been extinguished one after the other, so that it rose portentous in its silence and darkness.

In front of the royal château was a deep fosse, looking into which were the chambers of most of the princes who inhabited the palace. Marguerite's apartment was on the first floor. But this first floor, easily accessible but for the fosse, was, in consequence of the depth to which that was cut, thirty feet from the bottom of the wall, and consequently out of the reach of robbers or lovers; nevertheless the Duc de Guise approached it without hesitation.

At the same moment was heard the noise of a window which opened on the ground floor. This window was grated, but a hand appeared, lifted out one of the bars which had been loosened, and dropped from it a silken lace.

"Is that you, Gillonne?" said the duke, in a low voice.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied a woman's voice, in a still lower tone.

"And Marguerite?"

"Is waiting for you."

"'T is well."

Hereupon the duke made a signal to his page, who, opening his cloak, took out a small rope ladder. The prince fastened one end to the silk lace, and Gillonne, drawing it up, tied it securely. Then the prince, after having buckled his sword to his belt, ascended without accident. When he had entered, the bar was replaced and the window closed, while the page, having seen his master quietly enter the Louvre, to the windows of which he had accompanied him twenty times in the same way, laid himself down in his cloak on the grass of the fosse, beneath the shadow of the wall.

The night was extremely dark, and large drops of warm rain were falling from the heavy clouds charged with electric fluid.

The Duc de Guise followed his guide, who was no other than the daughter of Jacques de Matignon, maréchal of France. She was the especial confidante of Marguerite, who kept no secret from her; and it was said that among the number of mysteries entrusted to her incorruptible fidelity, there were some so terrible as to compel her to keep the rest.

There was no light left either in the low rooms or in the corridors, only from time to time a livid glare illuminated the dark apartments with a vivid flash, which as instantly disappeared.

The duke, still guided by his conductress, who held his hand, reached a staircase built in the thick wall, and opening by a secret and invisible door into the antechamber of Marguerite's apartment.

In this antechamber, which like all the other lower rooms was perfectly dark, Gillonne stopped.

"Have you brought what the queen requested?" she inquired, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied the Duc de Guise; "but I will give it only to her majesty in person."

"Come, then, and do not lose an instant!" said a voice from the darkness, which made the duke start, for he recognized it as Marguerite's.

At the same moment a curtain of violet velvet covered with golden fleurs-de-lis was raised, and the duke made out the form of the queen, who in her impatience had come to meet him.

"I am here, madame," he then said; and he passed the curtain, which fell behind him. So Marguerite de Valois herself now became the prince's guide, leading him into the room which, however, he knew already, while Gillonne, standing at the door, had raised her finger to her lips and reassured her royal mistress.

As if she understood the duke's jealous apprehensions, Marguerite led him to the bedchamber, and there paused.

"Well," she said, "are you satisfied, duke?"

"Satisfied, madame?" was the reply, "and with what?"

"Of the proof I give you," retorted Marguerite, with a slight tone of vexation in her voice, "that I belong to a man who, on the very night of his marriage, makes me of such small importance that he does not even come to thank me for the honor I have done him, not in selecting, but in accepting him for my husband."

"Oh! madame," said the duke, sorrowfully, "be assured he will come if you desire it."

"And do you say that, Henry?" cried Marguerite; "you, who better than any know the contrary of what you say? If I had that desire, should I have asked you to come to the Louvre?"

"You have asked me to come to the Louvre, Marguerite, because you are anxious to destroy every vestige of our past, and because that past lives not only in my memory, but in this silver casket which I bring to you."

"Henry, shall I say one thing to you?" replied Marguerite, gazing earnestly at the duke; "it is that you are more like a schoolboy than a prince. I deny that I have loved you! I desire to quench a flame which will die, perhaps, but the reflection of which will never die! For the loves of persons of my rank illumine and frequently devour the whole epoch contemporary with them. No, no, duke; you may keep the letters of your Marguerite, and the casket she has given you. She asks but one of these letters, and that only because it is as dangerous for you as for herself."

"It is all yours," said the duke. "Take the one that you wish to destroy."

Marguerite searched anxiously in the open casket, and with a tremulous hand took, one after the other, a dozen letters, only the addresses of which she examined, as if by merely glancing at these she could recall to her memory what the letters themselves contained; but after a close scrutiny she looked at the duke, pale and agitated.

"Sir," she said, "what I seek is not here. Can you have lost it, by any accident? for if it should fall into the hands of"—

"What letter do you seek, madame?"

"That in which I told you to marry without delay."

"As an excuse for your infidelity?"

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders.

"No; but to save your life. The one in which I told you that the king, seeing our love and my exertions to break off your proposed marriage with the Infanta of Portugal, had sent for his brother, the Bastard of Angoulême, and said to him, pointing to two swords, '*With this slay Henry de Guise this night, or with the other I will slay thee in the morning.*' Where is that letter?"

"Here," said the duke, drawing it from his breast.

Marguerite almost snatched it from his hands, opened it anxiously, assured herself that it was really the one she desired, uttered an exclamation of joy, and applying the lighted candle to it, the flames instantly consumed the paper; then, as if Marguerite feared that her imprudent words might be read in the very ashes, she trampled them under foot.

During all this the Duc de Guise had watched his mistress attentively.

"Well, Marguerite," he said, when she had finished, "are you satisfied now?"

"Yes, for now that you have wedded the Princesse de Porcian, my brother will forgive me your love; while he would never have pardoned me for revealing a secret such as that which in my weakness for you I had not the strength to conceal from you."

"True," replied De Guise, "then you loved me."

"And I love you still, Henry, as much—more than ever!"

"You"—

"I do; for never more than at this moment did I need a sincere and devoted friend. Queen, I have no throne; wife, I have no husband!"

The young prince shook his head sorrowfully.

"I tell you, I repeat to you, Henri, that my husband not only does not love me, but hates—despises me; indeed, it seems to me that your presence in the chamber in which he ought to be is proof of this hatred, this contempt."

"It is not yet late, Madame, and the King of Navarre requires time to dismiss his gentlemen; if he has not already come, he will come soon."

"And I tell you," cried Marguerite, with increasing vexation,—"I tell you that he will not come!"

"Madame!" exclaimed Gillonne, suddenly entering, "the King of Navarre is just leaving his apartments!"

"Oh, I knew he would come!" exclaimed the Duc de Guise.

"Henri," said Marguerite, in a quick tone, and seizing the duke's hand, —"Henri, you shall see if I am a woman of my word, and if I may be relied on. Henri, enter that closet."

"Madame, allow me to go while there is yet time, for reflect that the first mark of love you bestow on him, I shall quit the cabinet, and then woe to him!"

"Are you mad? Go in—go in, I say, and I will be responsible for all;" and she pushed the duke into the closet.

It was time. The door was scarcely closed behind the prince when the King of Navarre, escorted by two pages, who carried eight torches of yellow wax in two candelabra, appeared, smiling, on the threshold of the chamber. Marguerite concealed her trouble, and made a low bow.

"You are not yet in bed, Madame," observed the Béarnais, with his frank and joyous look. "Were you by chance waiting for me?"

"No, Monsieur," replied Marguerite; "for yesterday you repeated to me that our marriage was a political alliance, and that you would never thwart my wishes."

"Assuredly; but that is no reason why we should not confer a little together. Gillonne, close the door, and leave us."

Marguerite, who was sitting, then rose and extended her hand, as if to desire the pages to remain.

"Must I call your women?" inquired the king. "I will do so if such be your desire, although I confess that for what I have to say to you I should prefer our being alone;" and the King of Navarre advanced towards the closet.

"No!" exclaimed Marguerite, hastily going before him,—"no! there is no occasion for that; I am ready to hear you."

The Béarnais had learned what he desired to know; he threw a rapid and penetrating glance towards the cabinet, as if in spite of the thick curtain which hung before it, he would dive into its obscurity, and then, turning his looks to his lovely wife, pale with terror, he said with the utmost composure, "In that case, Madame, let us confer for a few moments."

"As your Majesty pleases," said the young wife, falling into, rather than sitting upon the seat which her husband pointed out to her.

The Béarnais placed himself beside her. "Madame," he continued, "whatever many persons may have said, I think our marriage is a good marriage. I stand well with you; you stand well with me."

"But—" said Marguerite, alarmed.

"Consequently, we ought," observed the King of Navarre, without seeming to notice Marguerite's hesitation, "to act towards each other like good allies, since we have to-day sworn alliance in the presence of God. Don't you think so?"

"Unquestionably, Monsieur."

"I know, Madame, how great your penetration is; I know how the ground at court is intersected with dangerous abysses. Now, I am young, and although I never injured any one, I have a great many enemies. In

which camp, Madame, ought I to range her who bears my name, and who has vowed her affection to me at the foot of the altar?"

"Monsieur, could you think—"

"I think nothing, Madame; I hope, and I am anxious to know that my hope is well founded. It is quite certain that our marriage is merely a pretext or a snare."

Marguerite started, for perhaps the same thought had occurred to her own mind.

"Now, then, which of the two?" continued Henri de Navarre. "The king hates me; the Duc d'Anjou hates me; the Duc d'Alençon hates me; Catherine de Médicis hated my mother too much not to hate me."

"Oh, Monsieur, what are you saying?"

"The truth, madame," replied the king; "and in order that it may not be supposed that I am deceived as to Monsieur de Mouy's assassination and the poisoning of my mother, I wish that some one were here who could hear me."

"Oh, sire," replied Marguerite, with an air as calm and smiling as she could assume, "you know very well that there is no person here but you and myself."

"It is for that very reason that I thus give vent to my thoughts; this it is that emboldens me to declare that I am not deceived by the caresses showered on me by the House of France or the House of Lorraine."

"Sire, sire!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Well, what is it, *ma mie*?" inquired Henry, smiling in his turn.

"Why, sire, such remarks are very dangerous."

"Not when we are alone," observed the king. "I was saying"—

Marguerite was evidently distressed; she desired to stop every word the king uttered, but he continued, with his apparent good nature:

"I was telling you that I was threatened on all sides: threatened by the King, threatened by the Duc d'Alençon, threatened by the Duc d'Anjou, threatened by the queen mother, threatened by the Duc de Guise, by the Duc de Mayenne, by the Cardinal de Lorraine—threatened, in fact, by every one. One feels that instinctively, as you know, madame. Well, against all these threats, which must soon become attacks, I can defend myself by your aid, for you are beloved by all the persons who detest me."

"I?" said Marguerite.

"Yes, you," replied Henry, with the utmost ease of manner; "yes, you are beloved by King Charles, you are beloved" (he laid strong emphasis on the word) "by the Duc d'Alençon, you are beloved by Queen Catharine, and you are beloved by the Duc de Guise."

"Sire!" murmured Marguerite.

"Yes; and what is there astonishing in the fact that every one loves you? All I have mentioned are your brothers or relatives. To love one's brothers and relatives is to live according to God's heart."

"But what, then," asked Marguerite, greatly overcome, "what do you mean?"

"What I have just said, that if you will be—I do not mean my love—but my ally, I can brave everything; while, on the other hand, if you become my enemy, I am lost."

"Oh, your enemy!—never, sir!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"And my love—never either?"

"Perhaps"—

"And my ally?"

"Most decidedly."

And Marguerite turned round and offered her hand to the king.

Henry took it, kissed it gallantly, and retaining it in his own, more from a desire of investigation than from any sentiment of tenderness, said:

"Very well, I believe you, madame, and accept the alliance. They married us without our knowing each other—without our loving each other; they married us without consulting us—us whom they united. We therefore owe nothing to each other as man and wife; you see that I even go beyond your wishes and confirm this evening what I said to you yesterday; but we ally ourselves freely and without any compulsion. We ally ourselves, as two loyal hearts who owe each other mutual protection should ally themselves; 't is as such you understand it?"

"Yes, sir," said Marguerite, endeavoring to withdraw her hand.

"Well, then," continued the Béarnais, with his eyes fastened on the door of the cabinet, "as the first proof of a frank alliance is the most perfect confidence, I will now relate to you, madame, in all its details, the plan I have formed in order that we may victoriously meet and overcome all these enmities."

"Sire"—said Marguerite, in spite of herself turning her eyes toward the closet, whilst the Béarnais, seeing his trick succeed, laughed in his sleeve.

"This is what I mean to do," he continued, without appearing to remark his young wife's nervousness, "I intend"—

"Sire," said Marguerite, rising hastily, and seizing the king's arm, "allow me a little breath; my emotion—the heat—overpowers me."

And, in truth, Marguerite was as pale and trembling as if she was about to fall on the carpet.

Henry went straight to a window some distance off, and opened it. This window looked out on the river.

Marguerite followed him.

"Silence, sire,—silence, for your own sake!" she murmured.

"What, madame," said the Béarnais, with his peculiar smile, "did you not tell me we were alone?"

"Yes, sire; but did you not hear me say that by the aid of a tube introduced into the ceiling or the wall everything could be heard?"

"Well, madame, well," said the Béarnais, earnestly and in a low voice, "it is true you do not love me, but you are, at least, honorable."

"What do you mean, sire?"

"I mean that if you were capable of betraying me, you would have allowed me to go on, as I was betraying myself. You stopped me—I now know that some one is concealed here—that you are an unfaithful wife, but a faithful ally; and just now, I confess, I have more need of fidelity in politics than in love."

"Sire!" replied Marguerite, confused.

"Good, good; we will talk of this hereafter," said Henry, "when we know each other better."

Then, raising his voice—"Well," he continued, "do you breathe more freely now, madame?"

"Yes, sire,—yes!"

"Well, then," said the Béarnais, "I will no longer intrude on you. I owed you my respects, and some advances toward better acquaintance; deign, then, to accept them, as they are offered, with all my heart. Good-night, and happy slumbers!"

Marguerite raised her eyes, shining with gratitude, and offered her husband her hand.

"It is agreed," she said.

"Political alliance, frank and loyal?" asked Henry.

"Frank and loyal," was the reply.

And the Béarnais went toward the door, followed by Marguerite's look as if she were fascinated. Then, when the curtain had fallen between them and the bedchamber:

"Thanks, Marguerite," he said, in a quick low tone, "thanks! You are a true daughter of France. I leave you quite tranquil: lacking your love, your friendship will not fail me. I rely on you, as you, on your side, may rely on me. Adieu, madame."

And Henry kissed his wife's hand, and pressed it gently. Then with a quick step he returned to his own apartment, saying to himself, in a low voice, in the corridor:

"Who the devil is with her? Is it the King, or the Duc d'Anjou, or the Duc d'Alençon, or the Duc de Guise? is it a brother or a lover? is it both? I' faith, I am almost sorry now I asked the baroness for this rendezvous; but, as my word is pledged, and Dariole is waiting for me—no matter. Yet, *ventre saint gris*! this Margot, as my brother-in-law, King Charles, calls her, is an adorable creature."

And with a step which betrayed a slight hesitation, Henry of Navarre ascended the staircase which led to Madame de Sauve's apartments.

Marguerite had followed him with her eyes until he disappeared. Then she returned to her chamber, and found the duke at the door of the cabinet. The sight of him almost touched her with remorse.

The duke was grave, and his knitted brow bespoke bitter reflection.

"Marguerite is neutral to-day," he said; "in a week Marguerite will be hostile."

"Ah! you have been listening?" said Marguerite.

"What else could I do in the cabinet?"

"And did you find that I behaved otherwise than the Queen of Navarre should behave?"

"No; but differently from the way in which the mistress of the Duc de Guise should behave."

"Sir," replied the queen, "I may not love my husband, but no one has the right to require me to betray him. Tell me honestly: would you reveal the secrets of the Princesse de Porcian, your wife?"

"Come, come, madame," answered the duke, shaking his head, "this is very well; I see that you do not love me as in those days when you disclosed to me the plot of the King against me and my party."

"The King was strong and you were weak; Henry is weak and you are strong. You see I always play a consistent part."

"Only you pass from one camp to another."

"That was a right I acquired, sir, in saving your life."

"Good, madame; and as when lovers separate, they return all the gifts that have passed between them, I will save your life, in my turn, if ever the need arises, and we shall be quits."

And the duke bowed and left the room, nor did Marguerite attempt to retain him.

In the antechamber he found Gillonne, who guided him to the window on the ground floor, and in the fosse he found his page, with whom he returned to the Hôtel de Guise.

Marguerite, in a dreamy mood, went to the opened window.

"What a marriage night!" she murmured to herself; "the husband flees from me—the lover forsakes me!"

At that moment, coming from the Tour de Bois, and going up toward the Moulin de la Monnaie, on the other side of the fosse passed a student, his hand on his hip, and singing:

"SONG.

"Tell me why, O maiden fair,
When I burn to bite thy hair,
And to kiss thy rosy lips,
And to touch thy lovely breast,
Like a nun thou feign'st thee blest
In the cloister's sad eclipse?
"Who will win the precious prize

Of thy brow, thy mouth, thine eyes—
Of thy bosom sweet—what lover?
Wilt thou all thy charms devote
To grim Pluton when the boat
Charon rows shall take thee over?

"After thou hast sailed across,
Loveliest, then wilt find but loss—
All thy beauty will decay.
When I die and meet thee there
In the shades I'll never swear
Thou wert once my mistress gay!

"Therefore, darling, while we live,
Change thy mind and tokens give—
Kisses from thy honey mouth!
Else when thou art like to die
Thou 'lt repent thy cruelty,
Filling all my life with drouth!"

Marguerite listened with a melancholy smile; then when the student's voice was lost in the distance, she shut the window, and called Gillonne to help her to prepare for bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE POET-KING.

The next day and those that followed were devoted to festivals, balls, and tournaments.

The same amalgamation continued to take place between the two parties. The caresses and compliments lavished were enough to turn the heads of the most bigoted Huguenots. Père Cotton was to be seen dining and carousing with the Baron de Courtaumer; the Duc de Guise went boating on the Seine with the Prince de Condé. King Charles seemed to have laid aside his usual melancholy, and could not get enough of the society of his new brother-in-law, Henry. Moreover, the queen mother was so gay, and so occupied with embroidery, ornaments, and plumes, that she could not sleep.

The Huguenots, to some degree contaminated by this new Capua, began to assume silken pourpoints, wear devices, and parade before certain balconies, as if they were Catholics.

On every side there was such a reaction in favor of the Protestants that it seemed as if the whole court was about to become Protestant; even the admiral, in spite of his experience, was deceived, and was so carried away that one evening he forgot for two whole hours to chew on his toothpick, which he always used from two o'clock, at which time he finished his dinner, until eight o'clock at night, when he sat down to supper.

The evening on which the admiral thus unaccountably deviated from his usual habit, King Charles IX. had invited Henry of Navarre and the Duc de Guise to sup with him. After the repast he took them into his chamber, and was busily explaining to them the ingenious mechanism of a wolf-trap he had invented, when, interrupting himself,—

"Isn't the admiral coming to-night?" he asked. "Who has seen him to-day and can tell me anything about him?"

"I have," said the King of Navarre; "and if your Majesty is anxious about his health, I can reassure you, for I saw him this morning at six, and this evening at seven o'clock."

"Aha!" replied the King, whose eyes were instantly fixed with a searching expression on his brother-in-law; "for a new-married man, Harry, you are very early."

"Yes, sire," answered the King of Navarre, "I wished to inquire of the admiral, who knows everything, whether some gentlemen I am expecting are on their way hither."

"More gentlemen! why, you had eight hundred on the day of your wedding, and fresh ones join you every day. You are surely not going to invade us?" said Charles IX., smiling.

The Duc de Guise frowned.

"Sire," returned the Béarnais, "a war with Flanders is spoken of, and I am collecting round me all those gentlemen of my country and its neighborhood whom I think can be useful to your Majesty."

The duke, calling to mind the pretended project Henry had mentioned to Marguerite the day of their marriage, listened still more attentively.

"Well, well," replied the King, with his sinister smile, "the more the better; let them all come, Henry. But who are these gentlemen?—brave ones, I trust."

"I know not, sire, if my gentlemen will ever equal those of your Majesty, or the Duc d'Anjou's, or the Duc de Guise's, but I know that they will do their best."

"Do you expect many?"

"Ten or a dozen more."

"What are their names?"

"Sire, their names escape me, and with the exception of one, whom Téligny recommended to me as a most accomplished gentleman, and whose name is De la Mole, I cannot tell."

"De la Mole!" exclaimed the King, who was deeply skilled in the science of genealogy; "is he not a Lerac de la Mole, a Provençal?"

"Exactly so, sire; you see I recruit even in Provence."

"And I," added the Duc de Guise, with a sarcastic smile, "go even further than his majesty the King of Navarre, for I seek even in Piedmont all the trusty Catholics I can find."

"Catholic or Huguenot," interrupted the King, "it little matters to me, so they are brave."

The King's face while he uttered these words, which thus united Catholics and Huguenots in his thoughts, bore such an expression of indifference that the duke himself was surprised.

"Your Majesty is occupied with the Flemings," said the admiral, to whom Charles had some days previously accorded the favor of entering without being announced, and who had overheard the King's last words.

"Ah! here is my father the admiral!" cried Charles, opening his arms. "We were speaking of war, of gentlemen, of brave men—and *he* comes. It is like the lodestone which attracts the iron. My brother-in-law of Navarre and my cousin of Guise are expecting reinforcements for your army. That was what we were talking about."

"And these reinforcements are on their way," said the admiral.

"Have you had news of them?" asked the Béarnais.

"Yes, my son, and particularly of M. de la Mole; he was at Orléans yesterday, and will be in Paris to-morrow or the day after."

"The devil! You must be a sorcerer, admiral," said the Duc de Guise, "to know what is taking place at thirty or forty leagues' distance. I should like to know for a certainty what happened or is happening before Orléans."

Coligny remained unmoved at this savage onslaught, which evidently alluded to the death of François de Guise, the duke's father, killed before Orléans by Poltrot de Méré, and not without a suspicion that the admiral had advised the crime.

"Sir," replied he, coldly and with dignity, "I am a sorcerer whenever I wish to know anything positively that concerns my own affairs or the King's. My courier arrived an hour ago from Orléans, having travelled, thanks to the post, thirty-two leagues in a day. As M. de la Mole has only his own horse, he rides but ten leagues a day, and will not arrive in Paris before the 24th. Here is all my magic."

"Bravo, my father, a clever answer!" cried Charles IX.; "teach these young men that wisdom as well as age has whitened your hair and beard; so now we will send them to talk of their tournaments and their love-affairs and you and I will stay and talk of our wars. Good councillors make good kings, my father. Leave us, gentlemen. I wish to talk with the admiral."

The two young men took their departure; the King of Navarre first, then the Duc de Guise; but outside the door they separated, after a formal salute.

Coligny followed them with his eyes, not without anxiety, for he never saw those two personified hatreds meet without a dread that some new lightning flash would leap forth. Charles IX. saw what was passing in his mind, and, going to him, laid his hand on his arm:

"Have no fear, my father; I am here to preserve peace and obedience. I am really a king, now that my mother is no longer queen, and she is no longer queen now that Coligny is my father."

"Oh, sire!" said the admiral, "Queen Catharine"—

"Is a marplot. Peace is impossible with her. These Italian Catholics are furious, and will hear of nothing but extermination; now, for my part, I not only wish to pacify, but I wish to put power into the hands of those that profess the reformed religion. The others are too dissolute, and scandalize me by their love affairs and their quarrels. Shall I speak frankly to you?" continued Charles, redoubling in energy. "I mistrust every one about me except my new friends. I suspect Tavannes's ambition. Vieilleville cares only for good wine, and would betray his king for a cask of Malvoisie; Montmorency thinks only of the chase, and spends all his time among his dogs and falcons; the Comte de Retz is a Spaniard; the De Guises are Lorraines. I think there are no true Frenchmen in France, except myself, my brother-in-law of Navarre, and you; but I am chained to the throne, and cannot command armies; it is as much as I can do to hunt at my ease at Saint Germain or Rambouillet. My brother-in-law of Navarre is too young and too inexperienced; besides, he seems to me exactly like his father Antoine, ruined by women. There is but you, my father, who can be called, at the same time, as brave as Cæsar and as wise as Plato; so that I scarcely know what to do—keep you near me, as my adviser, or send you to the army, as its general. If you act as my counsellor, who will command? If you command, who will be my counsellor?"

"Sire," said Coligny, "we must conquer first, and then take counsel after the victory."

"That is your advice—so be it; Monday you shall leave for Flanders, and I for Amboise."

"Your Majesty leaves Paris, then?"

"Yes; I am weary of this confusion, and of these fêtes. I am not a man of action; I am a dreamer. I was not born to be a king; I was born to be a poet. You shall form a council which shall govern while you are at war, and provided my mother is not in it, all will go well. I have already sent word to Ronsard to join me; and yonder, we two together, far from all tumult, far from the world, far from evil men, under our mighty trees on the banks of the river, with the murmur of brooks in our ears, will talk about divine things, the only compensation which there is in the world for the affairs of men. Wait! Hear these lines in which I invite him to join me; I wrote them this morning."

Coligny smiled. Charles IX. rubbed his hand over his brow, yellow and shining like ivory, and repeated in a kind of sing-song the following couplets:

"Ronsard, I am full sure that if you see me not,
Your great King's voice by you will shortly be forgot.
But as a slight reminder—know I still persevere
In making skill of poesy my sole endeavor.
And that is why I send to you this warm appeal,
To fill your mind with new, enthusiastic zeal.

"No longer then amuse yourself with home distractions;
Past is the time for gardening and its attractions.
Come, follow with your King, who loves you most of all,
For that the sweet strong verses from your lips do fall.
And if Ardoise shall not behold you shortly present,
A mighty quarrel will break out and prove unpleasant!"

"Bravo! sire, bravo!" cried Coligny, "I am better versed in matters of war than in matters of poetry, but it seems to me that those lines are equal to the best, even written by Ronsard, or Dorat, or even Michel de l'Hôpital, Chancellor of France."

"Ah! my father!" exclaimed Charles IX.; "would what you said were true! For the title of poet, you see, is what I am ambitious, above all things, to gain; and as I said a few days ago to my master in poetry:

"'The art of making verse, if one were criticised,
Should ever be above the art of reigning prized.
The crowns that you and I upon our brows are wearing,
I as the King receive, as poet you are sharing.
Your lofty soul, enkindled by celestial beams,
Flames of itself, while mine with borrowed glory gleams.
If 'mid the gods I ask which has the better showing,

Ronsard is their delight: I, but their image glowing.
Your lyre, which ravishes with sounds so sweet and bold,
Subdues men's minds, while I their bodies only hold!
It makes you master, lifts you into lofty regions,
Where even the haughty tyrant ne'er dared claim allegiance.'"

"Sire," said Coligny, "I was well aware that your Majesty conversed with the Muses, but I did not know that you were their chief counsellor."

"After you, my father, after you. And in order that I may not be disturbed in my relations with them, I wish to put you at the head of everything. So listen: I must now go and reply to a new madrigal my dear and illustrious poet has sent me. I cannot, therefore, give you the documents necessary to make you acquainted with the question now debating between Philip II. and myself. There is, besides, a plan of the campaign drawn up by my ministers. I will find it all for you, and give it to you to-morrow."

"At what time, sire?"

"At ten o'clock; and if by chance I am busy making verses, or in my cabinet writing, well—you will come in just the same, and take all the papers which you will find on the table in this red portfolio. The color is remarkable, and you cannot mistake it. I am now going to write to Ronsard."

"Adieu, sire!"

"Adieu, my father!"

"Your hand?"

"What, my hand? In my arms, in my heart, there is your place! Come, my old soldier, come!"

And Charles IX., drawing Coligny toward him as he bowed, pressed his lips to his white hair.

The admiral left the room, wiping away a tear.

Charles IX. followed him with his eyes as long as he could see, and listened as long as he could catch a sound; then, when he could no longer hear or see anything, he bent his head over toward his shoulder, as his custom was, and slowly entered his armory.

This armory was the king's favorite apartment; there he took his fencing-lessons with Pompée, and his poetry lessons with Ronsard. He had gathered there a great collection of the most costly weapons he had been able to find. The walls were hung with axes, shields, spears, halberds, pistols, and muskets, and that day a famous armorer had brought him a magnificent arquebuse, on the barrel of which were inlaid in silver these four lines, composed by the royal poet himself:

"*Pour maintenir la foy,*
Je suis belle et fidèle.
Aux ennemis du Roi,
Je suis belle et cruelle."[1]

Charles, as we have said, entered this room, and after having shut the door by which he had entered, he raised the tapestry that masked a passage leading into a little chamber, where a woman kneeling before a *priedieu* was saying her prayers.

As this movement was executed noiselessly, and the footsteps of the king, deadened by the thick carpet, made no more noise than a phantom's, the kneeling woman heard no sound, and continued to pray. Charles stood for a moment pensively looking at her.

She was a woman of thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, whose vigorous beauty was set off by the costume of the peasants of Caux. She wore the high cap so much the fashion at the court of France during the time of Isabel of Bavaria, and her red bodice was embroidered with gold, like those of the *contadine* of Nettuno and Sora. The apartment which she had for nearly twenty years occupied was close to the King's bed-chamber and presented a singular mixture of elegance and rusticity. In equal measure the palace had encroached upon the cottage, and the cottage upon the palace, so that the room combined the simplicity of the peasant woman and the luxury of the court lady.

The *priedieu* on which she knelt was of oak, marvellously carved, covered with velvet and with gold fringes, while the Bible from which she was reading (for she was of the reformed religion) was very old and torn, like those found in the poorest cottages; now everything in the room was typified by the *priedieu* and the Bible.

"Eh, Madelon!" said the King.

The kneeling woman lifted her head smilingly at the well-known voice, and rising from her knees,—

"Ah! it is you, my son," said she.

"Yes, nurse; come here."

Charles IX. let fall the curtain, and sat down on the arm of an easy-chair. The nurse appeared.

"What do you want with me, Charlot?"

"Come near, and answer in a low tone."

The nurse approached him with a familiarity such as might come from that maternal affection felt by a woman for her nursling, but attributed by the pamphlets of the time to a source infinitely less pure.

"Here I am," said she; "speak!"

"Is the man I sent for come?"

"He has been here half an hour."

Charles rose, approached the window, looked to assure himself there were no eavesdroppers, went to the door and looked out there also, shook the dust from his trophies of arms, patted a large greyhound which followed him wherever he went, stopping when he stopped and moving when he moved,—then returning to his nurse:

"Very well, nurse, let him come in," said he.

The worthy woman disappeared by the same passage by which she had entered, while the king went and leaned against a table on which were scattered arms of every kind.

Scarcely had he done so when the portière was again lifted, and the person whom he expected entered.

He was a man of about forty, his eyes gray and false, his nose curved like the beak of a screech-owl, his cheek-bones prominent. His face tried to look respectful, but all that he could do was to wear a hypocritical smile on his lips blanched with fear.

Charles gently put his hand behind him, and grasped the butt of a pistol of a new construction, that was discharged, not by a match, as formerly, but by a flint brought in contact with a wheel of steel. He fixed his dull eyes steadily on the newcomer; meantime he whistled, with perfect precision and with remarkable sweetness, one of his favorite hunting-airs.

After a pause of some minutes, during which the expression of the stranger's face grew more and more discomposed,

"You are the person," said the King, "called François de Louvièrs Maurevel?"

"Yes, sire."

"Captain of petardeers?"

"Yes, sire."

"I wanted to see you."

Maurevel made a low bow.

"You know," continued Charles, laying a stress on each word, "that I love all my subjects equally?"

"I know," stammered Maurevel, "that your Majesty is the father of your people."

"And that the Huguenots and Catholics are equally my children?"

Maurevel remained silent, but his agitation was manifest to the King's piercing eyes, although the person whom he was addressing was almost concealed in the darkness.

"Does this displease you," said the King, "you who have waged such a bitter war on the Huguenots?"

Maurevel fell on his knees.

"Sire," stammered he, "believe that"—

"I believe," continued Charles, looking more and more keenly at Maurevel, while his eyes, which at first had seemed like glass, now became almost fiery, "I believe that you had a great desire at Moncontour to kill the admiral, who has just left me; I believe you missed your aim, and that then you entered the army of my brother, the Duc d'Anjou; I believe that then you went for a second time over to the prince's and there took service in the company of M. de Mouy de Saint Phale"—

"Oh, sire!"