James Grant

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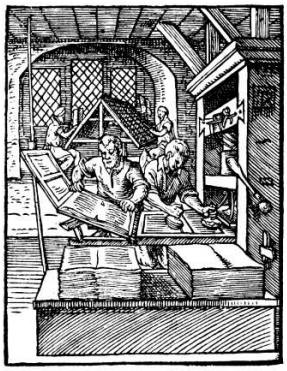

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CHAPTER I.

THE PRETTY MASK.

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It was about the end of April, 1634—twelve had tolled from the huge dark towers of Notre Dame, and the night was dark and gusty.

I found myself bewildered among the intricate and gloomy streets of old Paris; having lost the way to my hotel, the *Golden Fleur de Lys*, in the ancient Rue d'Ecosse. In my ignorance of the thoroughfares and of their names, having been repeatedly misled by wicked gamins and practical jokers, midnight found me completely entangled among the narrow alleys that bordered on the terrible locality of the Place de la Grève, the lofty, quaint and peculiar mansions of which towered on three sides, while on the fourth, lay the Seine, whose muddy waters have hidden the gashed corpse of many a murdered man—have swept away the red débris of many a massacre, and been the last refuge of many a desperate and despairing heart.

Against the dark sky, I could distinguish the darker outlines of the steep sharp gables that overhung the Place, with their fronts covered by grotesque sculptures in wood and stone. A few lights twinkled feebly amid the masses of that great pillared edifice of the days of Charles V., named from him. the Maison au Dauphin; and the flickering oil lamps that swung mournfully to and fro, at the ends of the dark alley, cast a sickly light upon the fantastic projections

of the houses, and on the whitewashed turret of the ancient pillory and stone gibbet, whereon so many thousands of human beings, during ages past, have died in agony and disgrace.

Here then, in this place of pleasant associations, I—who had arrived in Paris but the night before—found myself alone, wandering in ignorance of the way, at midnight—I, a Scot and stranger, with my whole worldly possessions about me, to wit, ten of those gay louis d'ors (first coined by Louis XIII.), a good suit of black velvet, a fair cloak of serge de Berri, worth about ten pistoles; but having a good sword, that had notched more than one crown in its time, with a pair of steel Scottish pistols in my girdle engraved with my coat of arms and the significant legend,

"He who gives *quickly*, gives *twice*."

Moreover I was only twenty years of age—active, determined even to recklessness, and at all times master of my weapons, if not of my temper.

In a secret pocket of my doublet, I carried a letter of recommendation from Esme Stuart, who was Lord of Aubigne, Duke of Lennox, Lord High Admiral and Great Chamberlain of Scotland, to Madame Clara, the mistress of Louis XIII., who had created her Comtesse d'Amboise. In wit and beauty she was the rival of Ninon de l'Enclos, and the superior of the lovely Marion de l'Orme, being one of those bold, artful, and beautiful women who in all ages have entangled the politics and swayed the destinies of France; and on this missive from the duke, who had known Madame Clara in her girlish days, when she was a dame d'honneur,

and he a gay captain of the Scottish archers—and had known her more intimately, perhaps, than the most Christian king could have relished—all my hope of success in the French service depended; for by the ruin and misfortunes which their own patriotism had brought upon my family, I was landless, homeless, all but penniless and an outcast from my country—a country where it is ever the doom and curse of patriotism and purity of spirit to be stifled and crushed under the heels of envy, calumny, avarice, and sectarianism.

The last note of the vast bell of Notre Dame de Paris, had pealed away over the darkened city, when I paused and looked about me.

The ends of the streets and alleys were closed by iron chains, over which I had fallen more than once. None of the city watch were visible, and save myself no one seemed abroad, for I heard no sound save the mournful creaking of the oil lamps, which swung, few and far between, in the centre of the way, or the murmur of the river as it chafed against the wooden abutments of the quay and poured through the arches of the Pont de Notre Dame.

While surveying the river on one side, and the pillared recesses of the Maison au Dauphin on the other, espying a fancied lurker in every shadowy depth, all the old stories I had heard of Paris floated through my mind; for I had been told that there were quarters of the city, such as the infamous Cour des Miracles, into which neither the sergeants of the Provost, nor the officers of the Chatelet dared to venture—strongholds of vice and villany, where mohawks, midnight assassins, house-breakers, cloak-

snatchers, cut-purses, Spanish gypsies, Italian musicians, German mountebanks, Jew vendors of quack medicine, and women whose fall, like that of angels, had brought them far from heaven, repaired by day; and from whence, like a living and pestilent flood, they issued by night to ensnare, and waylay the unwary and the wandering.

Then there were lacqueys, pages, nobles, and gallants, who went about masked, muffled, and armed to the teeth, fighting the watch, insulting the peaceful, carrying off pretty girls, *sabre à la main*, and committing such outrages that in 1607 it was computed that since the accession of Henry IV the number of French gentlemen slain in duels alone amounted to *four thousand*.*

* Lomenie—Mém. Hist. de France.

I thought of these things, and keeping my cloak well about me with one hand, kept the other on the pommel of my sword.

Turning to quit the Place de la Grève (I have learned all the local names since that eventful night), I stood a moment irresolute whether to take the alley which leads into the Rue Coutellerie and from thence towards the Faubourg St. Martin, when a cry arrested my steps. It seemed to come from the shadow of Rolande's Tower, an old building half Roman and half Gothic, in a cell of which Madame de Rolande, the daughter of a French crusader, died of grief in the days of St. Louis, and which stands at the corner of the Place, near the Rue de la Tannerie and close to the river.

Then a woman rushed towards me exclaiming,

'Monsieur, if you are a gentleman you will protect me!'

'With my life, madame,' I replied.

'With your sword would be more to the purpose,' said she, as I took her hand; 'by your voice you are a Scottish archer?'

'Would to heaven I were! I am but a poor gentleman, forced to leave his own country and seek military service in France.'

'Your name—'

'Arthur Blane, of Blanerne,—but who are they that pursue you?' I asked, while endeavouring to make out her features, which were partly concealed by a black velvet mask, through the holes of which her eyes sparkled with no common animation. By her voice she seemed young; by her bearing noble; and by her gloveless hands, which were small, white, and soft, I was assured that she was beautiful. 'Lady,' I resumed; 'to where shall I conduct you?'

'On your honour, I charge you neither to conduct nor follow me.'

'But you were molested—'

'By two tipsy gallants who, deeming me a grisette, I presume, have pursued me all the way from the Logis de Lorraine; but hark! you hear them,—I must leave you—'

'Alone—alone and here!'

'Yes.'

'Oh, madame, think of the hour, the place—your beauty —'

'Enough; a carriage waits me at the Pont de Notre Dame.'

''Tis well,' said I, unsheathing my sword; 'your molesters shall not pass this way if I can prevent them.'

'Oh! a thousand thanks brave sir,' said she with a shudder on seeing the shining steel, and holding out her ungloved hand.

'Madame, I risk my life for you, and you give me but your hand to kiss!'

'What! do you too take me for a grisette?' she asked with a haughty smile as she lifted her little mask. I kissed her cheek, and in a moment she slipped from my arm and was gone! Her face was more than beautiful; but I had no time to think upon it, and stood sword in hand in the centre of the Quai de la Grève, barring the passage of two men, cloaked, masked, and armed, who came boldly up to me, singing with the brusque air of tipsy roisterers.

CHAPTER II.

A CASE OF RAPIERS.

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I dreaded being robbed and consequently of perchance losing the duke's letter to Madame d'Amboise—a letter which contained the destiny of my life. I had nothing valuable to lose besides but my life, and, strange to say, I valued it less than my letter. Wrapped in my cloak, I stood with rapier on guard right in the centre of the Quai, while the cavaliers came close up to me. Both were, as I have said, masked, armed, and cloaked; and moreover were taller and, to all appearance, stouter than I. One was singing that gay and lively song in which the people of Lower Normandy still remember the mother of the English conqueror—the wife of Herluin, the Comte de Conteville; and his companion joined vigorously in the gay chorus.

'De Guillaume-le-Conquérant
Chantons l'historiette;
Il nâquit cet illustre enfant
D'une simple amourette.
Le hazard fait souvent les grands:
Vive le fils d'Harlette!

Normands,
Vive le fils d'Harlette!'

'Fille d'un simple pelletier
Elle était gentilette:
Robert en galant chevalier,
Vint lui center fleurette;
L'amour égale tous les rangs:
Vive le fils d'Harlette!

Normands,
Vive le fils d'Harlette!'

Pausing in his song, the singer came scornfully up to me with one hand on his sword and the other on his moustache, saying,

'Pardieu—you saw one of the most inconstant of God's creatures pass this way?'

'To the point, monsieur,' said I, 'what do you mean?'

'A woman—you saw her?'

'Yes,' I replied, still barring the way with my sword.

'Pretty, and with a modest air which would have deceived the devil himself.'

'Perhaps so.'

'And which way went she?' demanded both imperiously.

'My sword is drawn to answer you,' I replied, considerably ruffled by the brusquerie of their bearing.

'Stay, chevalier,' said one, laughing; 'let the poor man alone—'tis only some bourgeois seized by a fit of valour.'

'Peste, monseigneur, I see by a glance that he is no bourgeois; and where is his lantern?'

'You have drunk like a Swiss to-night, chevalier, and cannot see it.'

'Which way did our little grisette go?' said the other, unsheathing his sword with a threatening air; 'say, say, or pardieu, I will spit you like a sparrow.'

'Right,' added the other, furiously; 'morbleu! this wearies me. Run him through the body if you will—he is only an Italian scaramouche by his patois. Be quick with your work; for, sabre de bois! it will not do for you or me, to be caught brawling at night in the capital of Louis XIII. as if we were at home in Lorraine.'

'I am no Italian,' said I, pressing my blade against his; 'I am a Scottish gentleman, and shall make you pay dearly for this fanfaronade.'

'Peste!' said he, dropping his point for a moment; 'a Garde de Manche?'

'No.'

'Pardieu, chevalier,' exclaimed, the other, who seemed bent on having mischief, ''tis only a Scottish Calvinist, who on his way to the devil, has visited our good city of Paris.

'Vive le fils d'Harlette!

'Then, have at you, monsieur!'

In a moment both our swords were engaged to the hilt; while he, whose title of monseigneur led me to infer that his rank was high, remained with his rapier drawn to see fair play—but he was so tipsy that he could scarcely stand.

Our duel was silent, desperate, and quiet on my part; for I was highly exasperated by the effrontery and daring with which these two wild ruffs, regardless of all consequences, had fastened a quarrel upon me; and I was resolved to punish them both severely; but my antagonist continued to

talk and sing while making all his lunges, and as his back was turned to a dim oil lamp that swung behind him, he had considerably the advantage of me, and took care to retain it; yet I had no fear, for the famous Count de Forgatz was not a better swordsman than I.

After all I had undergone in my own country—and this all, the reader shall know ere long—the reflection flashed upon my mind, that Fate would indeed deal hardly with me, if I should be slain, nameless and unknown, in a street brawl, and left dead among the offal of Paris, to be carried away to the Morgue by porters or the watch in the morning. The very thought gave new fury to my heart, and fresh nerve to my arm! The sword of the French chevalier was longer and heavier than mine; but thanks to my Scottish education I was no way his inferior in this desperate game; my slender blade, twisted and span round his like a serpent; and after an engagement of three minutes, every thrust he made was successfully parried.

'Tête Dieu! I came too late to the parry there,' said he, as my point tore up the lace on the breast of his crimson velvet pourpoint, and while the blades clashed and rasped on each other, striking fire in the dark, he sang the last verse of his song.

'Falaise dans sa vielle tour
Vit entrer la fillette,
Et c'est là que le Dieu d'amour
Finit l'historiette;
Anglais, honorez ces amans!
Vive le fils d'Harlette!

Normands,
Vive le fils d'Harlette!

'Diable! take care, monsieur, or I am through you—my sword is like a spit in the king's kitchen. Peste! take time, fellow—Death himself could not be more impatient than you. A devil of a thrust that—our little flash in the pan is really becoming quite serious!'

I pressed so close upon him, that once the bowl-hilts of our swords touched and rung; but at a moment, when this gay chevalier, who treated my fencing with such coolness and contempt, slipped his left foot, and consequently raised his guard a little, I lunged furiously within, and drove my sword nearly to the cross guard through his ribs on the right side.

Poor wretch! he uttered a sound something between a sob and a cry, while instinctively I drew back my blade to parry the return his hand could never give me now. His eyes glared and closed, the sword dropped from his fingers, and, deluged in blood, he sunk upon the causeway.

I found myself face to face with a dying man, and this cooled us all.

'Monsieur,' said his companion, hurriedly, 'we have been to blame; you are a stranger, fly!'

'Whither?' I asked, wildly; 'I have already lost my way.'

'Morbleu! you will find it soon enough; to the Bastille, if the watch overtake you!'

This dreadful word *Bastille* gave me fresh resolution.

'Away, away, monsieur!' gasped the wounded man, half choked in his blood; 'take this ring—' he struggled to get it off his finger; 'oh, Monseigneur le Prince, give him this—my

ring; the lieutenant of the watch is my friend—away! I have known a man branded with the fleur de lys, and broken alive on the wheel, for less than this.'

'If taken, show the ring of the chevalier to the lieutenant, and you will be allowed to pass.'

'But we must see each other again—'

'Trust to heaven for that,' gasped the wounded man, adding generously, 'away! I hear footsteps—'tis the watch!'

'Forgive me, Chevalier,' said I, trembling with emotion, 'but this quarrel was not of my seeking.'

'From my soul I forgive you, but begone.'

'Farewell!'

And with this word I turned and fled, just as a mounted patrol of the watch turned the corner of the Rue de la Mortellerie, and entered the Place de la Grève.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHATEAU.

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'In the affairs of every one,' says a French writer, 'there is a moment which decides upon his future. It is almost always chance, which takes a man as the wind does a leaf, and throws him into some new and unknown path, where, once entered, he is obliged to obey a superior force, and where, while believing himself free, he is but *the slave of circumstances, and the plaything of events*.'

I have been much struck by the force and truth of this passage, which seems to bear directly upon my own career in life:—to resume.

A long, dark, and narrow street, lighted by only two lanterns that flickered like glow-worms at each end of it, led me towards the Rue St. Antoine; and heedless of everything but the desire to leave Paris, I hurried along the deserted thoroughfares, with a swimming head and a sickened heart.

The streets of Paris, like those of London, were then in a deplorable condition; unpaved, and encumbered by heaps of rubbish and cinders, the daily débris of the household, that festered in the stagnant gutters and watercourses, with the blood of the slaughter-booths, all matted and plashed by the feet of passengers, the hoofs of horses, and the wheels of waggons, carriages, and fiacres. Many of the tortuous and intricate alleys were literally dunghills. In the deep central gutters the swine revelled, and contested with kites and

crows, dogs and beggars, for the offal of Paris. A French prince of the royal blood was killed in the city by a privileged pig of St. Anthony running between the legs of his horse; the splendid rider was brought prone into the mud with a broken neck. Moreover, in this good city every variety of slops and utensils were emptied nightly over the windows, with the same warning cry that was used in Scottish towns, and which never failed to strike the belated with alarm—*Gardez l'eau!*

I dashed on, my sword still unsheathed, leaping the chains at the ends of the greater thoroughfares; on past the Porte St. Antoine, unseen by the watch, unchallenged by the sentinels, and leaving the town behind me, hurried along a country road, which afterwards proved to be the way to Vincennes. At length the fields, the trees, and solitude were around me, and I paused to draw breath, and look back to where the vastness of Paris, like a wilderness of stone, lay buried in sleep, and overtopped by the huge dark towers of Notre Dame.

Another black and frowning mass rose above the roofs and spires: it resembled the keep of a castle. I remembered the Bastille, that place of dreadful memories; and when recalling the rank of those I had so recently encountered, for one had been termed *chevalier*, and the other *monseigneur*, I felt more than one retrospective pang of anxiety or panic, and while endeavouring to imagine in what part of yonder wilderness my antagonist was lying, I turned my back upon it, and, with a glow of sad and fierce satisfaction, inhaled the free, pure breeze that came over the fallow fields. The sound of hoofs made me pause, listen eagerly, and then

hurriedly to pierce a hedge and leave the road; for a mounted party, to my consternation too evidently the night patrol bent in pursuit of me, galloped along the highway. I had the ring of the discomfited chevalier, but I cared not to test its virtue on the lieutenant of police.

After wandering for nearly an hour in a park or lawn, the smooth and grassy level of which was broken at intervals by thickets of trees and shrubbery, I found myself close to a large and handsome château. Its turreted façade cut the sky, and its numerous vanes of gilt copper were creaking in the wind, as I ascended the paved and balustraded terrace, which formed a broad plateau around the walls. The edifice formed three sides of a quadrangle; the centre was evidently appropriated to the principal inmates; but the whole was covered by rich carving, coats of arms, florid cornices and gablets. The wings were apparently the residence of servants, with the stables and offices. On the highest slate-roofed turret creaked a large swallow-tailed vane—in fact, a girouette, which, of old, was permitted only to those of the ancient French noblesse who had been foremost in entering a breach, or planting his pennon on a hostile rampart—hence the modern vane.

This stately château was nearly all sunk in gloom; one or two lights amid its sombre masses alone pierced the darkness; and, fearing to be taken for a robber, and perhaps fired on by the arquebuse of some pot-valiant butler or officious lacquey, I stood upon the paved terrace, irresolute whether to strike the bell at the porter's lodge, or retire altogether; but an end was put to my indecision, when a curtain was suddenly withdrawn at one of the large windows

on the ground-floor; a flood of light streamed across the terrace and lawn, and the figure of a handsome woman, richly dressed, was seen for a moment, as she peered inquiringly into the darkness without.

As she withdrew and the curtain fell from her hand, but without completely closing, I approached softly and peeped in, for in my present desperate emergency I was resolved to trust rather to the advice and protection of a woman than of a man.

The apartment was small, and richly decorated in the florid French taste: I took in the whole scene at a glance. The walls were hung with the finest specimen of Gobelin tapestry, representing the judgment of Solomon. The chairs were cushioned with pale-blue satin, fringed with silver, and, like the tables, they were richly gilt. On a buhl table stood a gorgeous silver lamp, the soft light of which fell on the figures of two ladies. One was tall, high-bosomed, and round-armed—full and ample every way, even to voluptuousness. She seemed to be about thirty-five years of age, and had magnificent eyes, with a bewitching droop in their long lashes, and an irresistible smile over all her face. Her complexion was brilliant, and her manner was full of vivacity. She wore a green silk dress, starred with gold; and carried in her jewelled hand a large fan of painted feathers. Her fingers, her chesnut hair, her bosom and taper arms were sparkling with diamonds; and by the richness of her costume, and the languid air that pervaded her manner, I supposed that she had just returned from some brilliant Parisian fête.

Her companion was a fair young girl with white shoulders, and a complexion of excessive delicacy; soft and pale, but it seemed the pallor of high birth and gentle breeding, rather than want of health. Her hair, which hung about her in great volume, was of the lightest auburn; thus her ringlets shone like clusters of gold in the lamplight; her eyes were a deep blue or violet colour, and their brows and lashes a dark-brown tint. Her attire was singularly plain; in one hand she carried a thick serge mantle; in the other a black velvet mask.

She was excited apparently, for she spoke in low and hurried tones, while delivering certain letters and papers to the taller lady, who might have passed for her aunt or elder sister; yet there was no resemblance in face or manner between them.

Unwilling to play the eavesdropper even for a moment, I tapped gently on the window.

The younger lady uttered a faint cry of alarm, and assumed her mask; but the elder thrust all the papers into her ample bosom, and coming resolutely forward, threw back the rich arras, and her eyes flashed with evident anger, astonishment, and perhaps alarm, when they met my figure immediately outside the window; but, with my broad beaver in my left hand, and my right pressed upon my heart, I bowed with the utmost respect, and muttered a few words, I know not what, by way of apology for my untimely appearance there.

Reassured by my aspect or my respectful bearing, she quickly opened the folding sash of the window, and from the

apartment and her presence a sense of perfume floated round me.

'Who are you, monsieur, and what seek you here?' she asked in a charming voice.

'Alas, madame!' said I, feeling that sad sinking of a proud heart, which all but prostrates every energy, for never until then had my utter friendlessness so oppressed me; 'I am an unfortunate gentleman,—a stranger who has lost his way, and knows not in which direction to turn.'

'This is the Château d'Amboise; the way to Paris lies yonder,—straight across the lawn you will find the high-road, and then pursue it to your left.'

'Thanks, madame—

'I have the honour to wish you a good night, monsieur.'

'Stay, madame, and pardon me—' I paused and cast down my eyes.

'Speak—what would you say?'

'Within this hour I have had to fly from Paris, pursued by the watch.'

'Ah—indeed!' she said, suspiciously.

'Having become involved in a brawl while protecting a fugitive female from two drunken gallants who were pursuing her, I was roughly set upon, and had the misfortune to—to—'

'To—what, monsieur?'

'Run one through the body.'

'And this was in the Place de la Grève, where the great pillory stands?' said the lady.

'It was close to the bridge of the Seine.'

'Ah! the Pont de Notre Dame?'

'Yes, madame.'

'Mon Dieu! how strange! Nicola, behold your preserver. Poor boy—for you are but a boy—how pale you look! Step in—quick my friend—tell me all this affair over again; and Nicola, hand him some wine; when I took you into my coach at the Pont de Notre Dame, how little we thought that one of your pursuers was being run through the body; but it served him right, the insolent—quite right!'

I entered by the window and the curtains were closed behind; and in the younger lady, who had so hastily assumed her disguise, and who tremblingly handed to me a glass of wine, I recognised my pretty friend, the mask of the Place de la Grève; and I remarked that the hand which gave me the glass, was small, white, and delicate as a lily leaf.

'You shall remain here until pursuit is over,' said the lady, approaching a hand-bell; but suddenly she paused; her brow clouded and her eyes sparkled. 'Oh, monsieur, if all this story be but the trick of a gallant, who may have followed us—'

'Madame!' I exclaimed, and drew myself up angrily.

'Enough, monsieur—forgive me; 'twas but the thought of a moment, and this Paris of ours is so full of tricks and tricksters. My house is yours—be assured, sir, it is large enough for us both.'

'May I ask to whom I have the honour of being indebted?'

She gave me one of her beautiful but inexplicable smiles, as she replied,

'I am Madame Clara d'Ische.'

'The Countess d'Amboise?

'Yes.'

'Oh, madame!' I exclaimed; 'this is a happy fatality! it is on you, and you only, that all my hopes in France depend.'

'On me?' she said, while her fine eyes dilated with astonishment, and I drew from my secret pocket the letter of the Duke of Lennox.

'Exiled from my own country, madame, for reasons which I can easily explain, I am most anxious to obtain military employment in one of the Scottish regiments of King Louis; and his Grace the Duke of Lennox favoured me with this letter of recommendation to you, saying that in Paris you were all powerful, and that Paris is France.'

She held out her hand, and as the trimmings of rich lace fell back to her elbow, she displayed an arm of dazzling whiteness, as with a proud and gratified smile she received and opened the letter of the duke. Its tenor and conception were no doubt complimentary and gallant; and perhaps it referred to old remembered days and passages of love between them in other times; for a half-repressed sigh escaped her; her fine eyelids drooped; a half blush flitted across her cheek with a soft smile of pleasure. Folding it hastily, she placed it in her bosom, and bending her bright hazel eyes upon me, said.

'Believe, monsieur, that all my little interest is wholly at your service.'

'Ah, Madame la Comtesse, how shall I thank you!'

'You will soon learn, monsieur,' and the eyelids drooped again to veil a cunning smile.

'The Duke informed me that you had but to express a wish, and his majesty King Louis would grant it—even were it to go to war with the empire.'

'His Grace of Lennox is almost right. Here at our French court the ladies guide the men, and have all their several departments in the science of government and intrigue.'

'So I have heard, madame.'

'Thus, the tender and pious Mademoiselle de Saujon has charge of Monseigneur le Duc d'Orleans; Madame de Chatillon, lively, tender, and black-eyed, has especial dominion over the Duc de Nemours and the great Prince of Condé; Mademoiselle de Chevreuse commands the amorous little Coadjutor Bishop of Paris; the tall, ample, fair, and dazzling Montbazon, with her snow-white shoulders, and bosom like a Juno, looks after the Duc de Beaufort; Madame de Longoville, with her saucy blue eyes, has charge of the Duc de Rochefoucault and le Marquis de Gordon, Captain of the Scottish guard; while that brilliant little blonde, the Duchesse de Bouillon, has a more terrible task than all assigned her—what is it, dear Nicola?'

'She actually looks after her own husband.'

'But, madame,' said I, 'in this catalogue of political beauties you forget yourself. You govern—'

'The King!' she replied with a triumphant smile that made her seem irresistibly beautiful; but the reply was whispered in my ear so closely that I started with confusion.

'So said the Duke of Lennox, adding, "she has but to smile, and the commander of the Scots will give you a pair of colours at once."'

'There M. le Duc de Lennox overrated my influence, for old M. de la Ferte Imbault, who has just been appointed Colonel-General des Ecossais, is a venerable military bear, who served under Henri Champernon and the Marshal de

Tavannes, and is so old that 'tis said he really remembers the last tournament in the Place de Carrousel; so on him my smiles would be lavished in vain. Yet, take courage—I am your friend, and you have this night done me a greater service than you are aware of. Take some more wine—you still look pale,' said she, passing her soft warm hand caressingly over my cheek and forehead; 'but now tell me—and pray excuse the question—have you ever—'

'What, madame?'

'Been in love?'

The blood mounted to my temples as I almost quailed under the keen eye of the beautiful questioner, and felt my heart beat strongly—almost wildly, though she was my senior by at least fifteen years.

'In love—no, madame; but why that question?'

'Because to be successful now, in France, you must study the art, or rather theory of love as assiduously as that of war. You must learn to laugh at everything—to blush at nothing, and to fight with every man who affronts you; but pardon me, I am forgetting the proverb—*fier comme un Ecossais*! Among us in Paris, an assignation and a campaign are nearly of equal importance; and love sheds its divine halo over everything. As Cervantes says, a soldier without a mistress is like a ship without a rudder, or a pilot without his compass. Thus M. de Chatillon is so enamoured of the lovely Mademoiselle le Guerchi that he wears one of her silk garters round his right arm in battle; and should you fall in love with me, I will give you one of mine.'

'Oh, madame!' I murmured, overpowered by the beauty of the speaker and perplexed by the strange morality she

displayed—a code which I now heard for the first time.

'And Monseigneur le Duc de Bellegarde, Peer and Marshal of France, the declared lover of the Queen Regent, before taking leave of her Majesty, to command the army on the frontiers, prayed, that as a parting favour she would lay her beautiful hand but once on the hilt of his sword. Thus it is, we still foster the spirit of gallantry which Anne of Austria brought among us from old Castille and the cavaliers of Madrid. But while I am running on in this way, monsieur my friend, I am quite forgetting that the night has passed, that the morning draws on apace, and that, as you have never been in love, it could not be an affair of the heart which made you leave your country so young. What was it then?'

'An affair of the dagger, madame,' said I, with a bitter sigh.

'Drink again, refresh yourself, and collect your thoughts before you speak.'

And while doing so, I will here insert a little paragraph for my reader's information.

His Majesty, Louis XIII., though not very much of a lover, sometimes did take a liking to the fair sex. His regard for Mademoiselle de la Fayette, a maid of honour to his queen, was notoriously known, but he was a man at times religious, weak, bigoted, scrupulous by fits, and not over-voluptuous by nature; hence, save for the honour his royal regard was supposed to confer, and the magnificent gifts it drew forth, his gallantries were neither dangerous nor much in request. His confessor, the Jesuit Coussin, permitted his mild liaison for the charming Fayette to favour the queen-mother's rival, and mademoiselle being in the interest of the minister,

Cardinal Richelieu, smiled on the vapid love and clumsy gallantries of the most Christian king. But the tide of politics turned; and by desire of the Cardinal, and by the exordiums of Father Leslie, a Scot, who succeeded Coussin as keeper of the royal conscience, the beautiful Fayette was immured in a convent. Then his Majesty of France fell in love with Clara d'Ische, a lady of Lorraine, whom he created Countess d'Amboise; and on her, now, were the eagle eyes of Richelieu turned, to discover by what means she might be made subservient to himself or be crushed for ever. Thus, thanks to the secret agency of his familiar, Father Joseph du Tremblay, of terrible memory, nearly every servant in her château was the spy of the Cardinal Prime-minister, who, with what truth I say not, was at that moment accounted the lover of Anne of Austria and of Marion de l'Orme.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOND OF MANRENT.

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Madame, who never tired of prattling, spoke again:

'The letter of my dear old friend the Duke—by-the by, does he still curl his mustachios up to his ears?—says that your father was—'

'Blane of that ilk and of Blanerne, madame, in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, Bailie of Tungland Abbey, and Captain of Carlaveroc for John Earl of Nithsdale.'

'Ma foi! he has as many guttural titles as a Spanish grandee of the first class; but pray tell me, what does that ilk mean?'

'In the Scottish language it denotes, madame, that the holder has either given his name to the territory he possesses, or has taken his name from it; moreover, that he is the head of his surname. Our old baronial houses alone bear it, for it is a custom dating from the days of king Malcolm III., and consequently is more than six hundred years old. My father's office of captainrie under the Earl of Nithsdale was, in some measure, the cause of all our misfortunes and of my exile.'

'Proceed, pray, for I am all attention.'

'He was an old adherent of the house of Nithsdale, and with the present Earl, the Lord Torthorwald, and six other gentlemen of the surnames of Maxwell, Douglas, and Blane, signed, about six years ago, a *Bond of Manrent*—'